

Preparing your child for their first School Camp

For parents, the most heart-racing, adrenalin pumping moments happen when you let go and watch your child try something on his or her own. The moment the training wheels come off, the first trip down the driveway on the skateboard, the time our children ride the school bus – these are more than just memories, these are critical moments that define growth and change. For many families, the first time they send their child to camp is one of the biggest let go, hold your breath, and watch them soar moments in childhood.

In today's world of high-tech kids and families who have a constant connection to each other, it's essential to take the time to emotionally prepare for camp. As parents, it is important to focus on the positive aspects of camp. Remember that separation is natural, necessary, and inevitable – what better place to have that first experience than in a caring and nurturing environment designed specifically for children? Parents can also focus on the amazing benefits of camp – an experiential education like no other teaching valuable 21st century survival skills like leadership, teamwork, problem-solving, and interpersonal communication, these are all incredibly important to a child's transition into adolescence and the challenges of adulthood.

School camps typically expose children to outdoor recreation and learning activities in outdoor environments. Research suggests that these experiences have restorative benefits and a positive effect on stress reduction and the prevention of depression. Giving students a positive experience of an outdoor, active lifestyle has also been found to potentially harness children's use of the outdoors in their life beyond camps; increasing their levels of physical activity and contributing to a range of positive health outcomes.

Camp is an equal opportunity life-changer. By sending a child to camp, families are truly giving a gift that lasts a lifetime. By taking steps to mentally prepare for camp, families not only keep from getting “kid-sick” for their camper, but they can stay positive about the camp experience – which goes a long way toward helping first-time campers adjust to life at camp. And just like taking off the training wheels, the moment families see their camper radiating confidence and joy they will feel that burst of pride and gratitude that they allowed their child this experience.

Offer reassurance. Long before the bags have been packed, offer upbeat words of encouragement. Never discuss how much your child will be missed back home. Remain positive and use language that shows your child that you believe they're ready for school camp, and that they'll have a great time, this will help your child to believe it too.

3 ways to help your child sleep well at camp

- Ensure kids get a good sleep the night before. Being tired can make them more emotional and easily upset.
- Help them with the packing. Kids will feel more involved with the idea of going away if they've had to pack their stuff.
- Make sure that kids eat a good breakfast before setting off.

Kids, particularly those who are a little nervous, should be encouraged to pack a small and private memento to take with them – it could be a special photo, or a favourite rock or crystal, or even a teddy. Putting their favourite soft toy in the bottom of their sleeping bag means they have the comfort of knowing it's there without everyone else knowing about it too.

School camps are some of the most exciting, life building experiences that a child can have. Preparing your child through these simple steps is a great way to de-bunk any superficial fears or worries that may be preventing them from getting there, and reaping the immense developmental benefits that school camps have to offer.