



BSA SAFETY MOMENT

HOMESICKNESS



SUMMARY

Many of us can feel a bit out of sorts when away from familiar surroundings, and Scouts are no different. Many Scouts experience some symptoms of homesickness during campouts, and identifying these symptoms early and addressing them can help make the event a great experience for everyone.

GENERAL INFORMATION

According to the American Camp Association, most campers report at least some homesick feelings during one day of their camp stay. Common symptoms include mild depression, anxiety, withdrawn behavior, somatic—or physical—complaints, and misbehavior.

Homesickness Risk Factors

Younger Scouts usually are those affected the most. Those who experience homesickness typically have little experience with separation, are anxious or depressed before camp, and may feel they have little control over their situation. They may have no camping experience, feel forced to attend, have insecurities at home, or have overheard their parents express anxiety about them leaving.

Helpful Pre-Camp and Camp Strategies

Adult leaders can mitigate many of the potential problems of homesickness by planning ahead and taking the following steps:

- Take campers for a visit prior to camp starting. If not possible, show them material from the camp so that they can become more familiar.
- Make sure all Scouts are included in the planning phase, and discuss what camp life will be like.
- Address any fears of hazing or bullying.
- Make everyone feel a part of the group.

Once everyone is in camp, there are additional steps that can help minimize feelings of homesickness:

- Immediately get everyone integrated into the camp routine and inform them of what to expect.
- Provide social support to normalize their experience, e.g., asking an older Scout to help mentor a younger Scout who exhibits homesickness and to empathize with their feelings.
- Promote an appropriate connection with home, e.g., have them write a letter home.
- Assess the Scouts' needs and provide positive coping outlets. Some of these strategies might be to get them involved in fun activities, encouraging them to talk with other Scouts or a leader about their feelings, reminding them of the fun things that they have done or will do at camp, and providing special fun tasks to do each day.
- Encourage them and follow up regularly.

RESOURCES

- Camp Spirit: <https://drchristhurber.com/>
- American Psychological Association—Summer Camp Blues: Planning Ahead to Lessen Homesickness at Camp: www.apa.org/helpcenter/camp.aspx
- American Academy of Pediatrics—Help Your Child Avoid Homesickness at Camp with These Tips: www.aappublications.org/content/33/6/26.6
- Scouting.org—Bullying Prevention Guide: <https://filestore.scouting.org/filestore/training/pdf/bullyingpreventionguide.pdf>