**14 of the Seriously BEST Ways to Help Prevent Homesickness**

Courtesy of the January edition of Pediatrics by Thurber and Walton.

* Talk with kids about the upcoming separation.
* Tell kids that it's normal to feel homesick.
* Talk with kids about coping with homesickness (see Camper Packet).
* Involve kids in the decision to spend time away from home.
* Send kids on a "practice" trip, such as few days at a friend's or relative's house.
* Have kids practice writing letters before leaving.
* If possible, help kids meet at least one person (adult or child) from the new setting before leaving.
* Encourage kids to make friends and seek support from trusted adults when they're gone.
* Be enthusiastic and optimistic about your child's away-from-home experience.
* Nix negativity. Don't say things like, "I hope you'll be OK."
* Give kids pre-stamped, pre-addressed envelopes and notebook paper when they leave.
* Don't make a deal with kids to get them if they don't like being away.
* Don't use the experience as a drug holiday for kids on medications.
* If kids have special needs, confirm in advance that those needs will be met. (Fill out your forms completely, honestly and with details)

Dear Ranch Camp Families,

Sending your kids to camp each year is a big decision (and investment).  There are SO many ways you can spend your summer - a trip to Bali, Bar Mitzvah in Israel, summer with Grandma, lounging by the pool, advanced math classes....you name it, summer is your chance to get out there and do it.  But, though summer stretches out before you like a long, country road, there never seems to be enough weeks under the sun to get your kid through swim camp, art camp, baseball camp, theater camp, tennis camp, etc.  And then there is Jewish Camp.  Here we are, taking up 7, 10, 19 or more precious days of your summer!! That is a huge investment.  So I imagine that, as you are balancing us in to your travel dates, time off from work and that family reunion on the east coast, you want to know what we are going to give you and your camper to make all the trimming and organizing worthwhile.

Don't worry.  Camp is the best decision you make all year.

Ranch Camp is a place to experience community, specifically Jewish community. Together we stand each morning beneath the American and Israeli flags and sing Modei Ani.  We eat Kosher food for each meal, all of us, and we love it!  We draw the Star of David on our art projects, get super excited for Shabbat services, kiss our Sidurim when we accidentally drop them in the pine needles, go with our friends up to the Bima on Saturday morning and we talk about being Jewish with people who Totally Get It!  And even if you are not Jewish, it's totally cool because at camp, everything is about sharing, learning and having fun.

At camp, being Jewish is being in the mainstream which, unless you attend a Jewish Day School, is not something most kids experience in their day-to-day lives.  And the best part of this whole community? (Sorry for this, Mom and Dad) There are NO parents.

Instead there are caring, responsible and passionate adults committed to building a safe, positive and caring community.  Sound a bit Utopian?  That's alright....it kind of is!  Away from parental pressures, campers can make choices and discoveries, ask questions and explore their identities away from home in a SAFE, encouraging environment designed intentionally to help them become independent thinkers, problem solvers, creative geniuses and loyal, devoted friends.

Camp ripples.  Long after your child leaves camp and returns home, you will feel the effects of camp.  Prepare for car rides filled with camp songs (if you are a fan of 1970's classics, you might already know them), story after story after story, pieces of art or nature brought home that you ABSOLUTELY CANNOT THROW AWAY because they came from camp, and more stories.  Be prepared to memorize all their cabin mates and staff members names so you can request them next year, to dig out those Shabbat candles when your camper leads your family in singing in the Sabbath each week, stories re-told to each family member in turn so often you feel like you were actually there yourself and your camper coming home more independent and confident then when they left.

We often say that camp is a gift.  And it is.  Camp is one of the most long-lasting, impactful gifts you will give to your child.  Here I have only mentioned a few of the incredible moments and lessons your campers will bring home with them at the end of the summer (along with that bag of dirty clothes for you to wash).  So as we get ready for camp and you batten down the hatches to prepare for summer; we are so happy you will be joining us for the first time or the 5th time or the 10th time, on the journey that is Ranch Camp!

Have the Best Summer Ever!!

JCC Ranch Camp Staff