**Parent Packet**

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| **HOW PARENTS CAN OVERCOME THEIR SEPARATION ANXIETY WHEN KIDS** **LEAVE HOME FOR SUMMER CAMP**

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*When children leave home for sleep away camp, sometimes it's the parents who struggle with separation anxiety. Here, the experts at the American Camp Association of New York and New Jersey offer tips for how to cope.* **Letting Go...**Going to summer camp is often a child's first step towards independence. The experience is a great way for children to develop self-reliance in a nurturing, safe, and supportive environment created just for them. While it's exciting for the child, parents often experience anxiety about letting their kids go to camp and navigate without them.Rossana De Stefano, mom of five including 12-year-old John-Luke (whose experience, described in his [personal essay](http://nymetroparents.com/newarticle.cfm?colid=42667), is representative of many first-time campers), remembers: "While dropping John-Luke off at camp my separation anxiety was at an all time high. As I watched the other moms kissing their kids goodbye I felt the tears welling up in my eyes. But I knew that I had to be strong for both of us."Children need to learn how to find their way through situations on their own, to learn to make decisions and problem-solve, independently of their parents. Only then will they be able to properly develop the confidence to become self-reliant adults.Although John-Luke's camp experience was ultimately empowering for him, his parents didn't know it would turn out that way when they were saying goodbye. "Luckily," recalls De Stefano, "my husband quickly put me in the car. Needless to say, it was a long ride home. So many thoughts were running through my head: Would he be able to sleep? Would he eat? Would he be happy? I so wanted him to have a great experience."The [American Camp Association of New York and New Jersey](http://www.aca-ny.org/) offers some tips that will help ease your concerns: **Research**Talk to the camp director. When you are choosing a camp, ask questions and get to know him or her. Ask about the camp's philosophy and how the staff implements it. Make sure the philosophy reflects your own families' value system. Find out about the camp director's background and the staff training, the age of the counselors, and the counselor to camper ratio. Learning about the program will ease some anxieties parents may have. **Self-Assure**Keep in mind that camp directors have your child's best interests in mind and the skill to guide your child towards an appropriate level of independence, self-confidence, and success."By participating in an organized schedule of exciting activities each day at camp, your child will develop new skills, build self-esteem, and gain confidence for future success," says Bob Budah, owner and director of [Park Shore Country Day Camp](http://www.parkshoredaycamp.com/) in Dix Hills, NY. "Your child will also make lifelong friendships and create magical memories." **Hold Steady**Remember that kids often get over the adjustment to a new environment before parents get used to the next stage of development. While your child is adjusting to camp, don't make pick-up deals and offer to rescue your child. Instead, offer positive encouragement that you know he or she will have a successful summer. "It is important for parents not to transfer any of their own anxieties to their children, creating unnecessary stress for the camper. If parents have worries, they should speak privately with the directors," says David Fleischner, owner and director of [Camp Scatico](http://www.scatico.com/), a Brother-Sister resident camp in the upper Hudson Valley. **Refocus**Don't focus too much on correspondence from camp in the first few days your child is away. If you receive a discouraging phone call or a letter from your camper, remember that like any new experience, adjusting to camp may take a few days and that severe homesickness is rare. Remind your child of all the wonderful aspects of camp. "In every letter that I wrote to my son, I always encouraged him to try new things and always told him how proud we all were of him," says De Stefano. **Trust**When your child is at camp, allow him to solve his own problems or ask a counselor for help. Camp is a setting that allows your child to experience the real world in a safe environment. Kids learn quickly to rely upon themselves and the camp staff they trust at camp instead of their parents. And "the more parents feel that their children are ready for the sleepaway experience, the less anxious they'll feel," notes Fleischner. "So make sure they've slept away from home successfully, either at a grandparent, cousin, or friends' home.""Allowing your child to take healthy risks in a nurturing environment is one of the greatest things you can do for your child," says Adam Weinstein, executive director of the American Camp Association of New York and New Jersey. "Parents who did their research and asked questions when searching for a camp will feel more comfortable when camp begins and be thrilled to watch how their child thrives in the camp community." |

**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)

**Camp: The Best Choice You Made All Year!**

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, hiking the Appalachian trail, lounging by the pool, advanced math classes, diving with Great White Sharks....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, basket weaving camp, theater camp, tennis camp, metal working 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 in the Cascades, you want to know what we are going to give you and your camper to make all the trimming, organizing and sometimes outright craziness (yes, camper forms, we know) worth while.

Don't worry.  We are worth every penny and every minute.

Ranch Camp is a place to experience community, specifically Jewish community.  Where the activities in life that normally set us apart, instead bring us together.  Together we stand each morning beneath the Israeli (and American) Flag 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 and young 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 you will need to catch on to and learn (though 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.  (And, if you are lucky enough to have a SIT...they should be able to do their own laundry!)

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!!

Gina McReynolds

JCC Ranch Camp; Assistant Director

Camp Gives Us What?!? #Loyal Friendships#Jewish Identity#SafeandCaringEnvironment #BeingWhoYouAre #TechnolgyisalsoNotAllowedThankGoodness!JewishValues

**Recommended Reading**

*Homesick and Happy: How Time Away from Parents Can Help a Child Grow* by Michael Thompson PHD

*How Goodly are Thy Tents: Summer Camps as Jewish Socializing Experiences* by Amy L. Sales and Leonard Saxe

*Camp Works: The Long-Term Impact of Jewish Overnight Camping* Published by Foundation for Jewish Camps

**How to access your forms, photos, blogs, newsletters, etc.**

1. **CampMinder Ranch Camp account** – You will use your account to fill out your camper forms (Due JUNE 1st!), view/purchase photos throughout the session (posted each night), purchase/compose and send emails to your camper (printed each morning) and invite your family members to do the same.
	1. You will log on to your account from our website ([www.ranchcamp.org](http://www.ranchcamp.org)) by clicking the link for account log in.
	2. You can fill out, download and upload your camper forms here and can learn more about that process by watching our How-To video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSvcg_wSMNs&feature=share>
	3. **To purchase photos and emails, you must use the CampMinder currency, which is CampStamps. These can be purchased on your account and use to buy photos and send emails.**
	4. **To invite a family member to view photos and send emails , go to Guest Accounts link within your Ranch camp account.**
2. **Blog – We post regular blogs throughout the year about what we are doing and about the values of Ranch Camp. During the summer we will post blogs regularly about camp session happenings, camper content and staff member content. You can view our blog on our website at** [www.ranchcamp.org](http://www.ranchcamp.org) **OR under the news feed in your account during the summer months.**