

Dealing with

HOMESICKNESS

Dos & Don'ts

Do!

- Quickly give the students love and comfort and then immediately get them engaged in an activity. Keep them busy, give them a special task. Help them focus on fun.
- Missing home usually happens during quiet time. Rather than looking at pictures of family and writing letters home during free time and before bed, homesick kids should read a book or do something else which takes their mind off of home.
- If it continues, make sure the students don't have to poop or that there aren't other underlying issues going on.
- Encourage the students to take things one step at a time, moment by moment, rather than thinking about the entire week. (e.g. "Let's just think about what we're going to do in the next two hours, and then we can check in at free time," or "Let's just think about sleeping through the night and greeting each other at breakfast tomorrow morning.")
- Evade the questions, "Can I call home," or "Can I go home." Simply answer, "We can talk about that later. Right now I want to focus on how to help get you back with the group and having a good time."
- If it feels like it might be helpful, you can break down the Mosaic way of looking at homesickness for the student – it's like having one foot in the program and one foot back at home. What we're trying to do is help students to bring both feet here. And we can do that! Tell the student, "If part of you wants to be here, we can help you make it through the week and have a good time. But we'll have to work together on that."
- Try drawing a mountain and write all the days of the week with Monday and Tuesday on the left, Wednesday at the top, and Thursday and Friday on the right. Then draw a little figure to indicate where they are. You can say something like, "Look, It's Tuesday night! Starting tomorrow it's all downhill!"
- Keep in mind that homesickness is contagious. Encourage students to support each other rather than bring each other down.
- Remember that, even though it seems like the world is ending when a homesick child is sobbing, it's not. We almost never send a student home because of homesickness. If we have their teachers' and parents'/guardians' support, we're always able to help students through it. You can share this information with your students. It is extremely unlikely that the one case you're dealing with is going to be a record breaker.
- Remind students that homesickness is actually a very beautiful thing – it means that you love your family and your home, and missing them is a reminder of your love. Consider it a gift that allows you to appreciate all you have back at home.

- Let students know that it is possible to be homesick and enjoy Mosaic at the same time. Those feelings can co-exist. (Some students feel guilty about having fun here, thinking it must mean that they don't love home.)
- If homesickness is extreme, we may agree to give a parent a message from the student. This should be a team decision with the cabin leader, staff and the Director included. Getting parent buy-in and a message from them urging the child to stay can work wonders.
- Let the Director or Youth Leadership Director know that you are dealing with a homesick student. If the student does not get over it quickly, ask them for support.

Don't!

- Spend too much time consoling the student one on one. This can just feed the tears and cause the student to spiral downward. The worst thing you could do would probably be to go on an hour-long walk with the student away from the group. We have to find that delicate balance between comforting students without feeding the tears and helping them to move on.
- Tell the students that they can't call home or can't go home. This can make them feel trapped. It's important that it be their own decision to stay with us. We want to work with them to help them make this choice and feel empowered by it. Try to evade the questions about going home and put them off until later. If this doesn't work, you can turn to the Director and Youth Leadership Director for support.
- Negotiate with a homesick student at bed time... ever. It won't go well. Bed time is time for sleep, not addressing issues. Many of us (not just children) tend to spin out when we are tired and just need to get to sleep. Tell the student that, "right now it's bed time, and we can talk about it more in the morning, but right now everyone is sleeping, including your mother, and it's time to go to bed." You can sit by the student's bed, tell a story, sing, and comfort him/her, but do not engage in negotiating.
- Feel you have to deal with a homesick student alone! Ask for support if you need it.