

Minimizing Homesickness

Being away from home can be both exciting and challenging—for both students and their families! For many of our students, their week at The Mosaic Project's Outdoor Project marks the first time they have been away from home for an extended period of time. It can also be the first time the family experiences their child away from home for a week. This is an extremely special and rewarding occasion!

Missing home, family, and even pets is natural for children, especially when it is their first time away from home. Most students experience a short adjustment period to Outdoor Project. Soon, they get caught up in the excitement of new friends, activities, and adventures. Our staff is expert at supporting students as they adjust to their week at The Mosaic Project. We are happy to say that after working with thousands of students, we have very rarely had a student go home because of homesickness. Often the secret ingredient in helping students to overcome a bout of homesickness is preparation by their parents/caretakers. **Here are some tips for how you can help your children adjust quickly and easily to being away from home:**

Preparation and Prevention

- Have them practice being away from home by having overnights with friends or family.
- Help students be proud of being independent and ready for their time at Mosaic's Outdoor Project.
- Share stories about your own first experiences away from home, keeping the stories positive!
- Have students participate in packing their own bag, including a favorite personal item such as a stuffed animal. They can also pack a family picture.
- Write an encouraging letter or your note for your child that they can read while at Mosaic. Let them know how proud you are of them for practicing their independence!
- Plan for your child to stay the whole session. **DO NOT** tell them that they can call home, come home, or that you will pick them up if they are homesick or uncomfortable on the first day. It sets them up for failure instead of success and can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- Do not bribe your child in order to get them to attend the Outdoor Project.
- Your positive energy is key to their success! If your child thinks or senses you don't want them to go, their worry and homesickness will increase. On the Monday of their session, say goodbye with confidence and encouragement.

While at Mosaic

- We address homesickness the very first day with all students and assure everyone that if they are missing home, they are not alone. We remind everyone that there are many adults and youth leaders available to support them in feeling better, and they can (and should!) come to us with any issues they have.
- Staff, Youth Leaders, and teachers provide individual support to students who need help adjusting. We share that homesickness is actually a very beautiful thing—it means that they love their family and their home, and missing them is a reminder of that love. Consider it a gift that allows you to appreciate all you have back at home.
- Except under the most unusual circumstances, we do not have children call home; we have found that calling home generally makes homesickness and anxiety worse. It also is not logistically possible for 90 students to be on the phone throughout the week. Additionally, when one student talks to their family and the word spreads that they have done so, homesickness can spread throughout the entire community. Homesickness is contagious!

- We partner with students' teachers to communicate with families. We find that messages of encouragement from home can be helpful, and teachers can share messages to/from your child each night if you like.

Having your child away from home for a week can be challenging for parents/caretakers too! Here are some tips to help you adjust while your child is at our Outdoor Project:

- Visit our website (www.mosaicproject.org), watch our videos, and remind yourself of the growth, development, and independence your child is experiencing this week.
- Talk with other parents/caretakers who have had these same feelings when their children left for overnights the first time.
- Stay connected with your student's teacher. We encourage teachers to send updates and photos from Mosaic to families throughout the week.
- Know that your child is well taken care of by supportive adults. They will be so excited to share all about their adventures when they return on Friday!
- Remember that in an emergency, you will be able to communicate your student's teacher.