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by



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## The Camp Problem

Please Note - When Dr. Spruce wrote this article, the generic "he" was in use...It's for girls, too, of course!

*If your child is going off for the first time, you can make it easier for him - and yourself.*

**F**or 30 years I have been actively engaged in arranging for the comfort, safety and pleasure of thousands of children who attend camps each summer. And I have discovered that parents need camp-conditioning almost as much as the youngsters. This is especially true of the parents of first-time campers. Far too often they refuse to believe that their children will be happy and safe away from home.

Maybe this advice will help them:

Once you have determined to send your child to camp it will be better for everyone if you then leave it to the experts. This is not easy, I know. But if you take it in your stride both you and the child will benefit.

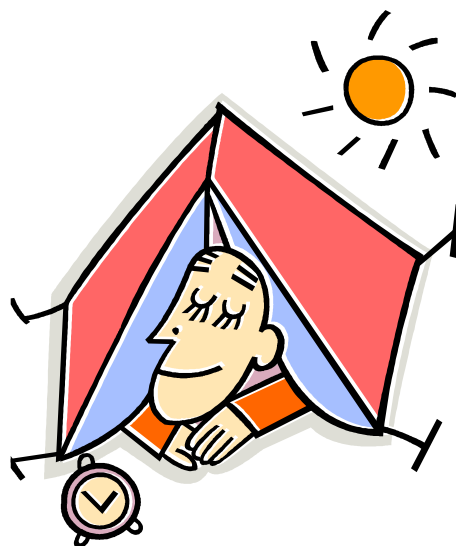
Once you have selected the camp, your major problem for some weeks will be the mental conditioning of yourself and your child for his departure from home. Try as hard as you can to treat the whole matter calmly, even casually. If you accent that "he's never been away from home before" feeling, you will be re-enforcing in his mind that fear of the unknown that all of us have to some extent.

You will make it more difficult for the child to adjust quickly and easily to the new scenes and experiences of camp life. And the actual departure may turn into an unhappy emotional experience for both of you.

As you go about preparing his clothes and camping equipment, making sure that everything is properly tagged and labeled, your attitude should be that this is an adventure which your child will enjoy. Give him a bright picture of the fun he will have at camp and you'll lessen his natural reluctance to be away from home. Don't let your own

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doubts and misgivings over the forthcoming separation put him in conflict over the desirability of going to camp.

This pre-camp period is only your first problem. Once you've seen the youngster off, there is still a follow-up job. The simplest way to handle this is not to follow up too hard. Let me explain this by saying that all youngsters blend quickly into the overall pattern of camp life. They do this more readily if they feel they are just like their fellow campers. **If you single your child out as a special case, it is bad for everyone, particularly the one you're trying to protect.** Your best

guidance here comes from the rules of the camp which your child attends. In general the rules are these: don't send elaborate food packages which may not fit into the diet program. Don't visit the camp except on those days scheduled by the camp. Even long-distance phone calls are not advised.

Most camps recommend that a small sum of money be deposited for the youngster's use in making minor purchases. Don't supplement this by sending additional pocket money. Your child won't need it, and one of camping's major tasks is to teach the child appreciation of other people without regard to material standards.

Write your child often (never let him think you've forgotten him). And don't anticipate accidents or illness.

If you follow these suggestions, your child will be much more likely to fit into the pattern of camp life and his relationship with the other children will undoubtedly be happier.

If you let him go with no apron strings attached, the youngster will return to you more certain and self-reliant. Besides, his appreciation of home and family will be deeper because he will have had, with your help, an opportunity to make another step forward in the process of growing up.

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