



TRUSTING THE JOURNEY

**A Guide for Families Navigating Camp Nerves
and Building Confidence Before Camp**



The way we talk about camp can shape the way campers think and feel about camp.

Our goal is not to eliminate every worry or guarantee every moment will be easy.

Our goal is to help them approach new experiences with confidence, curiosity, and a willingness to grow.

The most important message we can give our campers is not, "Everything will be easy." It is:

"THIS IS SOMETHING NEW. IT MAY FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE AT TIMES. AND I KNOW YOU CAN DO IT."



CONVERSATIONS THAT BUILD CONFIDENCE

VALIDATE

ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THEIR FEELINGS MAKE SENSE

✓ "That makes sense."

✓ "I can understand why you'd feel that way."

✓ "This is something new, so it makes sense to feel a little nervous."

✓ "I felt nervous the first time I tried something new, too."



NORMALIZE

HELP THEM UNDERSTAND THAT NERVOUSNESS
IS A NORMAL PART OF GROWTH

✓ "Lots of campers feel that way before camp."

✓ "Most campers need a little time to settle in."

✓ "It's normal to feel excited and nervous at the same time."

✓ "New experiences can feel a little weird at first."

✓ "You don't have to feel completely comfortable to be ready."

EMPOWER

COMMUNICATE CONFIDENCE IN YOUR CAMPER'S ABILITY
TO HANDLE THE EXPERIENCE

✓ "I know you can handle it."

✓ "You've done hard things before."

✓ "It might feel unfamiliar at first, and I know you'll figure it out."

✓ "The counselors are there to help if you need anything."

✓ "You don't have to know exactly how everything will go."



MAKE ROOM FOR 'I DON'T KNOW'

RESIST THE URGE TO ANSWER EVERY QUESTION

It is okay to say:

✓ "I'm not sure."

✓ "We'll find out when you get there."

✓ "That's part of the adventure."

✓ "You'll figure that out with your counselors."

WELL-MEANING MESSAGES THAT CAN BACKFIRE

✗ "If you don't like it, I'll come get you"

This is one of the biggest mistakes parents make before camp. It sounds comforting, but it creates an escape plan before camp even begins.

Instead of focusing on making friends, trying activities, and settling into camp, they may spend their energy thinking about when they can leave.

Campers may begin "watching the clock" and planning their escape instead of engaging in the experience.

Try instead:

- ✓ "Let's give camp a chance."
- ✓ "It may take a few days to settle in."
- ✓ "I know you can do this."

✗ Making missing home sound scary

✗ "I hope you don't miss home."

✗ "What if you miss us too much?"

These messages can unintentionally increase anxiety before camp even begins.

Try instead:

- ✓ "Most campers need a little time to settle in."
- ✓ "It's normal to miss home sometimes."
- ✓ "The counselors are great at helping campers adjust."
- ✓ "We're excited to hear about your adventures."



✗ "You're going to love everything about camp."

The truth is that there will probably be parts of camp they love and parts they don't.

- They may not love every meal.
- They may have to learn how to share space with a cabinmate.
- They may discover that one activity isn't as fun as they expected.
- They may have a bad night's sleep, miss home for a moment, or feel frustrated when something doesn't go their way.

And that's okay.

Camp is not valuable because every moment is perfect. Camp is valuable because children learn how to navigate the ups and downs that come with being part of a community, trying new things, and growing more independent.

Try instead:

- ✓ "There will probably be things you love and things you don't love, and that's okay."
- ✓ "You don't have to love every part of camp to have a great camp experience."
- ✓ "Sometimes the best parts of camp are the things you weren't expecting."
- ✓ "The counselors and staff will help you navigate both the fun moments and the challenging ones."
- ✓ "You can handle the highs and lows that come with trying something new."
- ✓ "Camp isn't about everything being perfect. It's about learning, growing, and having adventures along the way."





✗ "I'm going to miss you so much. The house won't be the same without you"

It's completely natural to miss your camper while they're away. In fact, many parents find themselves counting down the days until pickup.

As camp approaches, though, it can be helpful to keep the focus on the adventure ahead rather than on the separation.

When campers hear repeated messages about how much they'll be missed, it can sometimes make it harder for them to fully lean into the experience waiting for them.

Instead, try communicating excitement, curiosity, and confidence about the journey they're about to begin.

Try instead:

✓ "I can't wait to hear about how it goes."

✓ "I wonder what you're going to enjoy most about camp."

✓ "I'm excited to hear about the friends you make and the activities you try."

✓ "You're going to have so many stories to tell when you get home."

✓ "I'm looking forward to seeing all the things you learn and experience."

✓ "We're excited for you."

THE PARENT SIDE OF THE JOURNEY

Just as campers are preparing for something new, parents are often navigating their own version of the journey.

You may find the sudden quiet of your house unsettling.

You might miss them more than they miss you.

You may wonder how your camper is doing.

You may even feel a mix of pride and bittersweet emotion when you find out they're doing just great at camp ... without you.

It's all completely normal.

One of the greatest gifts camp offers kids is the opportunity to build confidence, independence, and resilience.

Sometimes that means giving them the space to discover what they're capable of without us right beside them.

That can take a little adjustment for parents, too.

But it makes watching them grow, and those pickup day reunions, all the sweeter.



