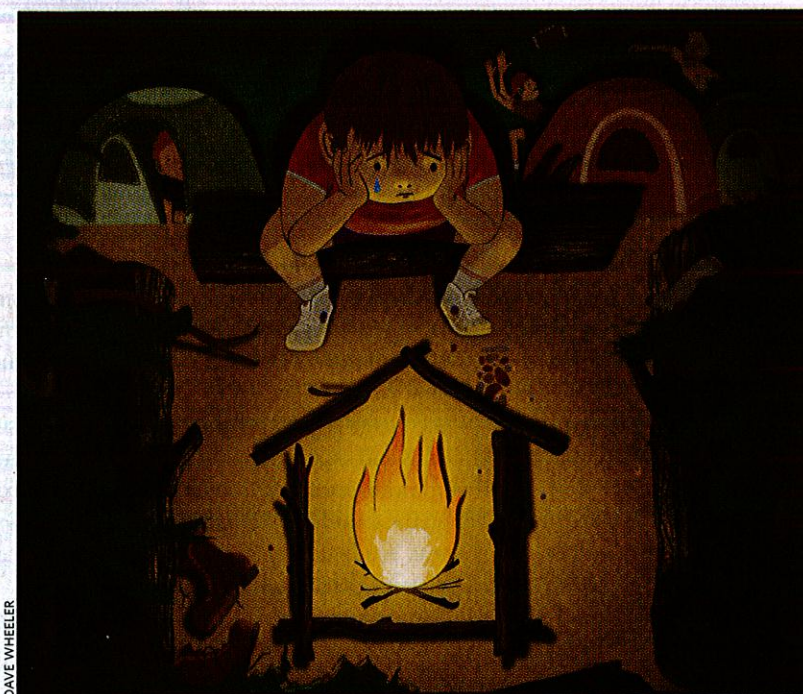


# 'I Wanna Go Home!'

How to head off homesickness before, and during, resident camp.



**THE ROAD TO HOMESICKNESS** is paved with good intentions, as James Feuerstein discovered last summer at Akelaland, the Cub Scout camp he directs for Pennsylvania's Minsi Trails Council.

"We had a boy who was doing great," Feuerstein says. "It was about Wednesday, and his grandparents sent him a collage where they spelled out 'We Miss You' with pictures of his pets and his grandparents and all of his cousins and everyone. As soon as the boy opened it up, he burst into tears and had to be taken to see his grandparents."

While most boys have a great time at Cub Scout and Webelos Scout resident camp, Feuerstein's story demonstrates that homesickness can lurk behind every tree in the woods. Fortunately, you as a den leader, Cubmaster, or parent can take simple

steps to ensure that smiles are more plentiful than tears among your Scouts.

First, explain this rule to families: No "We Miss You" collages!

That doesn't mean that mail is bad, though. When Steven Straub ran the Lincoln Heritage Council's resident camp program in southern Indiana, he installed a mailbox in the camp office where leaders could deposit letters brought from home. But he emphasized in pre-camp materials that family members should express pride in their Scouts rather than write anything that might encourage homesickness. "Say, 'You're going to have a great experience; I'm glad you're having this time away,'" he says.

Of course, the "away" part can be a challenge for some boys since very little about camp is like home. But Straub and Feuerstein say there are

several ways you can minimize the differences—or at least the surprises.

## Surprises Are Bad

Try, if possible, to visit the facility before camp starts. This could be at a pre-camp meeting or open house, but it could also be during another council event or even on a pack campout. Boys who know their way around camp will be more confident when they arrive for summer camp.

At the very least, parents should figure out how to get to the facility, because some camps can be hard to find. "If you've got the time, MapQuest it and drive out," Straub says. When boys know what to expect—and parents know how to find the camp—everyone's stress level goes down.

Feuerstein encourages packs with younger boys to visit the camp facility in the offseason. "Sometimes moms and dads have this terrible idea of what camp is going to be like," he says. "Camp has changed a lot in the past few years, so parents' experience of camp is not necessarily reflective of what Scout camps are like today."

Especially if Mom or Dad won't be attending resident camp, as is often the case with Webelos Scouts, it's important that boys spend some nights away from home, even if it's at a grandparent's house or with a friend down the street. "They're getting a chance to see somebody else's house, live somewhere else, spend a little time away from their parents, and

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find out they can have a good time and come back home again," Feuerstein says.

## Friends Are Good

Straub recommends that packs attend camp together rather than have boys attend different sessions. "If you can go with the rest of your pack, there's security for the boys because they'll at least know somebody else there, and you as an adult will know somebody else there," he says. "That can make for a little more successful experience. If you have trouble, you've got another parent or adult you can lean on for help."

He also recommends letting the camp know about other special requests. He once had a family show up who asked to camp with their cousins from another pack. While he was happy to accommodate them, he wished he'd known before

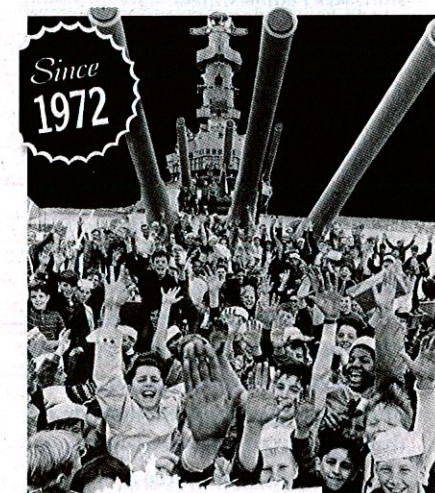
check-in day. "Any program director or camp director worth their salt wants the kid to have a positive experience," he says.

## The Staff Can Help

Both Straub and Feuerstein emphasize that pack leaders should reach out to camp staff if they're having problems with homesickness. "I identified five or six kids on staff who were really good at dealing with this issue," Straub says. "There are some kids who are really good at talking to other kids."

Feuerstein, meanwhile, offers extra help to packs that are camping for the first time, or whose experienced camp leaders have moved on to Boy Scouting. "We always have staff to help them," he says. "They go out and visit them at night and help them get a fire going."

Besides lighting fires, caring staff members, along with confident pack leaders, can kindle a love for camping that will last a lifetime and that might even counteract the effects of those "We Miss You" collages. ★



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