**Overnight Camp Survival Guide—for Mom and Dad**

If you are like most parents of summer campers, you probably fall into one of two categories…the “I can’t wait till they’re off” folks, or the “I can’t wait till they come home” types. The former are often parents of veteran campers, or moms/dads who had great overnight camp experiences themselves, and eagerly envision their children experiencing the same. The latter is admittedly more challenging. It’s an uncomfortable feeling…the sense that something is a little “off,” a perpetual worry that plays in your gut, a pensive anticipation at random moments…this is the stuff that extended separations from our children produce in parents of fledgling overnight campers. But fear not, because the experience is not only temporary, but growth-promoting—for parents and kids alike.

**What Your Kids Need**

They need to know that you’re ok…so that they can be ok! If you focus too much on telling your child how much you will miss them, or anticipate every possible issue or concern that might potentially arise, they may begin to question your belief that they can handle the experience. It is best to envision the best possible outcomes your child may have, and keep that in mind when interacting during the weeks and days leading up to their departure.

They need to know what your expectations are regarding communication. You may feel compelled to be texting/calling randomly throughout the day, yet a break from communications-as-usual might encourage a greater self-reliance and motivation to reach out to those nearby when issues or questions arise. Reassure your camper that they are quite capable of thinking through options and problem-solving, as well as taking appropriate risks in reaching out to new friends and camp counselors. The potential for developing self-confidence starts with sons and daughters meeting new challenges with an open mind, and a silenced cell phone.

**What You Need**

As important as enabling your child to feel competent, is to recognize that you as the parent are capable of enjoying a summer camp break as well! It’s great to spend some time focusing on yourself, or engaging in a little extra couples-time, or perhaps spending some special one-on-one time with other kids or family members while your camper is away. Replenishing your own energy and resources is a great gift to yourself, and provides an important example to your kids about good self-care, as well.

**Life Lessons**

So…what happens if your kid struggles during camp, or wants to come home? Rather than over-react, consider the possibility that a teaching moment has arrived. Would you hop in the car and bring Junior home, acknowledging that it’s too difficult to tolerate loneliness or upset or anxiety (and yes, that includes YOU tolerating those feelings in yourself)? Or, would your child benefit from encouragement that there is something she/he can do to feel better, that the difficult feelings won’t last forever and that they can make choices, both attitude and action-based, that will help them tolerate the experience with an open mind and heart. When a kid learns how to make themself feel better, even just a little bit, it is a lesson they never forget. What’s more, they can apply it over and over again when tough times inevitably arise in the future.