

Dealing with homesickness

However good your camp may be, at one time or another you will come across a homesick Scout. This will obviously affect their enjoyment of the camp, and it may rub off on to other Scouts. Below is some advice that may help you recognise and deal with homesickness.

Remember: Camp doesn't suit everyone.

Signs and Symptoms

The signs and symptoms vary a great deal from Scout to Scout (but on all Scouting activities you should always watch out for behaviour that is out of character as this usually means there is a problem). Here is a list of some of the more common signs of homesickness:

Tearfulness

Not necessarily crying but often welling up and looking very upset when told off (more than usual for that Scout).

Loneliness

A Scout who often sits alone at meal time, is always chosen last for games etc, is going to be more prone to homesickness than a Scout that includes or makes an effort to get involved.

Not Participating

Scouts don't go on camp to sit around and chat, so if a Scout isn't participating in any activities there may be a problem.

Not Eating

Homesickness is about missing things they used to at home, and being very hungry isn't a normal part of home life, (however much a teenager may think it is) so if a Scout isn't eating properly you may have a problem.

Attention Grabbing

The ratio of adults to Scouts on camp is normally a lot lower than at home, so whilst ensuring that you give time to every Scout on camp keep an eye out for the Scout that keeps trying to get your attention.

Cure

It is important to remember that homesickness isn't an illness it is a state of mind. However, 'curing' homesickness is a very difficult (and much harder than avoiding it) - once a Scout feels homesick, it is a very long way back to normality, so it is very important to plan every camp to avoid anyone getting homesick.

Avoidance

These are some things you can do to help:

Don't let Scouts phone home - *if a Scout is homesick then talking to parents from home is only going to make thing worse.*

Don't allow parents to visit camp - *if a Scout is homesick then seeing their parents will make then think of home more.*

Plan a full and varied programme

This may sound obvious but it is important to try to include activities that all Scouts can do well at, if a Scout is last or worst at everything they are likely to feel more homesick.

Have an organised rota of jobs for all Scouts, and STICK to it.

Many camps have rota's for washing-up and cooking etc but it is important for the Leaders to have a copy as well and ensure it is stuck to. Feeling that you are doing more than anyone else is always going to make you feel unhappy, if there is a rota you can see that the work division is fair.

Keep a careful eye out for bullying - *obviously bullying is never acceptable in Scouting, but it will always increase the incidence of homesickness.*

Ensure the toilet facilities are as good as possible - *toilets on camp are not as 'user friendly' as home so please ensure they are as good as you can make them. Not being able to use the loo makes for a very unpleasant camp.*

Make sure that everyone has enough to eat - *hunger not only causes homesickness but isn't nice for anyone, the food on camp can be strange and unusual try to ensure that there is always plenty of bread and jam around so if their really hungry they can eat. Whilst we should always try to feed Scouts a balanced diet they will get more nutrition from food they eat than the food they don't. Scouts won't suffer malnutrition in one week.*

Never send a Scout home for homesickness - *if you send a Scout home you will encourage others to want to go home, also the Scout isn't going to get over homesickness by giving in to it.*

Don't let it rain - *OK so you can't avoid rain, but do make sure you have planned a programme in case the weather is wet. Scouts don't go on camp to be bored.*

Use your Patrol Leaders - *that's what they're there for. Ask them to keep an eye on their Scouts and inform you of any problem, get them to ensure all Scouts are involved in all things. At your evening P.L.C.'s (if you hold them) discuss how each Scout on the camp is enjoying him/herself. Remember, the PL's are much closer to the Scouts than you are, so ask them for idea's if you have a problem.*

Managing Homesickness

Whilst we have already said that curing homesickness is very difficult it is possible to manage homesickness. Try to keep a Homesick Scout busy and allow then as little time as possible to think about home. Make sure that you keep a close eye on any potential homesickness victims, (however they are often different Scouts to the ones you expect) but don't noticeably single them out for special treatment. The last thing you should do is mention homesickness or discuss home with them.



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Remember - A busy Scout is a Happy Scout