

Camp Ready: Helping Your Child Feel Safe, Supported, and Confident

As school winds down and summer quickly approaches, many families are preparing to send their children to sleepaway camp, some for the first time. July 4th will mark one year since catastrophic flooding in the Texas Hill Country brought heartbreaking losses across Texas, including to summer camp communities, families, and children. Given this recent tragedy, even children and parents who were not directly impacted may have more fears or concerns about camp this year.



The good news: there's a lot you can do to help your child feel ready, supported, and eager to attend camp.

Talk About Feelings Openly

Kids cope better when they can name their worries. In other words, we first have to “name our fears to tame our fears.” Try starting with something positive (“What are you most excited about?”) and then gently invite concerns (“It’s normal to have some worries—want to share any?”). This helps your child feel heard and gives you a chance to directly address any specific concerns they might have.

Reassure Them About Safety

Let your child know that many caring adults at camp are there to keep them safe. You can also explain the difference between “kid worries” (like which friends will be in their cabin) and “adult worries” (like safety planning). Tell them who they can talk to at camp if something feels hard or worrisome.

Give Them Choices

Much of children’s anxiety comes from the unfamiliar and not knowing what they can expect in a different setting. Remind your child of the things they can control at camp—bringing a favorite stuffed animal or blanket, choosing activities, getting letters from home, and more.

Set Realistic Expectations

Camp is fun, but not every moment will be perfect. You might say: “There may be times you’re having a ton of fun and other times you may feel a bit sad or miss home. That’s completely normal.” Help them remember specific coping tools that seem to work for them—listening to music, journaling, talking to a friend or counselor, etc.

Take Care of Yourself, Too

Kids are like sponges and easily pick up on adult stress. And preparing to send your child to camp can feel overwhelming and anxiety-provoking. Make sure you’re getting the support you need—whether it’s time with friends, exercise, breaks from work, or talking with a therapist if needed. A calmer parent helps create a calmer child.

When a Child May Need Extra Support

Most kids adjust quickly once camp begins. But some—especially those with past trauma or mental health challenges—may need more help. Here are some signs to watch for:

Younger Children (6–11)

- Clinginess or intense separation anxiety
- Major behavior changes like sleep issues or problems eating
- Big outbursts or irritability
- Frequent crying

Older Youth (12–18)

- Withdrawing from others
- Aggression
- Nightmares or flashbacks (for those with a history of trauma)
- Risky behavior (including substance use)
- Thoughts of or attempts at self harm

If you notice any of these signs, consider reaching out to a therapist for an evaluation and guidance.

Some Final Words of Encouragement

Camp can be one of the most joyful and confidence-building experiences of childhood. With your support, your child can feel prepared, safe, and excited for the adventure ahead.

Additional Support

If your child or family would benefit from additional support, consider contacting a licensed therapist, school counselor, or other trusted mental health professional for guidance. Families seeking trauma- and grief-informed assessment or therapy may also contact the Lucine Center, which serves children, youth, and young adults across Texas via teletherapy. For more information, please call [832-244-9502](tel:832-244-9502) or visit the Lucine Center website at lucinecenter.com.¹

These guidelines were developed by the Trauma and Grief Center at the Meadows Institute. For more information, please contact:

Julie Kaplow, PhD, ABPP, Executive Vice President, Trauma and Grief Programs and Policy, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute jkaplow@mmhpi.org