

Rx for homesickness: Prepare, support child in new setting

When a child leaves home, it can be tough on both youngsters and parents.

Helping your child cope with homesickness is essential to his or her success in new environments.

The American Academy of Pediatrics offers the following guidelines on how parents can help their children adjust to new settings, including camp, boarding school and college:

- Involve your child in the decision to spend time away from home to increase your child's perception of having control over the situation.
- Let your child know that homesickness is normal and offer coping strategies such as:
 - Spending time with friends to distract the child from thoughts of homesickness.
 - Doing something to feel closer to home, like writing a letter or looking at a family picture.
 - Talking to someone who can make you feel better.
 - Thinking positive thoughts.
 - Trying not to always think about

loved ones at home.

- Arrange two- to three-day overnight trial runs at a friend's or relative's house so your child can learn to feel comfortable using coping strategies. Ideally, the child should not call but can write home. Provide pre-addressed, stamped envelopes and paper.
- Encourage your child to make new friends.
- Be enthusiastic about the new experience.
- Mark the period on a calendar, so your child can see that the time away is not an eternity.
- Never promise that you will pick your child up if he or she does not like the new experience; it expresses doubt in his or her ability to cope.

During hospitalizations, separation usually is unplanned. The following can help minimize your child's homesickness in these situations.

- Talk with your child honestly about why he or she is being



hospitalized.

- Ask the staff to give your child a tour of the hospital unit.
- Try not to convey your own uncertainties about the hospitalization.
- Avoid changing your child's discharge date if you can.
- Write your visitation plans on a calendar for your child. Frequent visits and phone calls can ease homesickness. Try to be on time for planned visits and phone calls.

—Arti Allam