



# Leader Support Guide

## HOMESICKNESS WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

Homesickness is universal. Psychologists call it 'separation anxiety' and few people are immune, it is something we can all suffer from. It is often experienced by little children with their first time away from Mum, right up to Leaders and business people away from home without friends and family. However over time, the tendency for it to happen does change and we do develop coping mechanisms. Handling homesickness is all part of maturing and developing as a person. For young people dealing with it as they progress through life helps them develop their own self confidence and independence.

Every Adult on their first time away from home from more than a couple of days starts to 'miss home', perhaps getting a little anxious wondering what's happening, missing their own bed, or toilet. Its simply 'I need reassurance that everything is happy or OK'.

In younger children this is more pronounced, as away from home they no longer have the safety of the families and familiarity of their room. In very young children it's simply separation from the only thing in life mum, even if she is only in the next aisle in the supermarket!

### **How does a Youth Member (or Leader) feel?**

Homesickness isn't the quite the same kind of 'sick' they felt after they had too much cake and it's not like having a cold or the flu. Nothing's really wrong inside their body, but they still might have a headache or a stomachache or even feel no one likes them. They will probably hurt inside, the way it does when their scared or sad and they might even cry and that's OK.

Homesickness means they miss their family, friends, dog, house, even their neighborhood; things in life that are comfortable and familiar. In fact for some any time they are away from home, even for just one night, can be tough for them.

#### **1. Symptoms**

Symptoms normally only last a day or two at the most. They range from the usual 'nobody loves me everybody hates me', through things such as headaches, feeling sick, stomach aches, sad, deserted, off food and sometimes sleeping difficulties. These are all transient and quickly overcome if handled properly. *(Remember at big events like Cuboree and the Jamboree we have a full medical staff who checks in case they are genuinely sick).*

#### **2. Main way to help**

Leader reassurance and keeping them busy is important. The same technique you used when you left your child with someone else for the first time, have the person distracted them and kept them busy. That's what Leaders do at a big event, such as a Jamboree.

#### **3. Travel**

Travelling to camps, or Jamborees, with the group is an essential part of helping them cope.

In the case of Jamborees and other events, for even a relatively short trip, travelling together helps them develop a stronger bond by forming a

support group for each other. They arrive as a group and are kept busy assembling the tents and camp, that night they sleep well and start off refreshed the next day.

#### 4. Phoning Home

This is the biggest problem because it is so easy for a child to carry a mobile phone and for those at home to unintentionally make the homesickness problem a lot worse for their child.

The very worst thing is for Mum or Dad to say **'We miss you'**. They should be advised to direct the conversation around to what the child has been doing and what they plan for the rest of or next day. If the child ask if parents miss them parents should be advised to simply answer along the lines of *"Oh yes, but we are really looking forward to hearing all about the [event] and seeing your pictures when it's over"*.

Encourage your child to get involved, to go and meet other scouts from other places, to develop some contacts. Advise them to talk to their Patrol Leaders and Troop Leaders. At Jamborees and large events there are Leaders or Sub Camp Team members, all there to support youth members.

Leaders try to be very positive! This event will be a great part of a child's development.

#### 5. "You can always come home"

**NEVER suggest that they can go home.** The phrase 'If you don't like it you go/come home' causes problems and only serves to exacerbate the problem. There are better ways of supporting your youth helping them grow.

At big events like Jamborees the Contingent and Jamboree HQ have a medical and other support teams with years of experience in adolescent problems. If they feel it's in the child best interest to return home they will decide, with you, when to contact parents or guardians.

If a Leader doesn't feel he can help or others can be more effective, they have a special Welfare Leader and Sub Camp Team to call on; in fact they in turn can call on the Contingent HQ Team with accredited personnel. The Contingent HQ, check daily with each sub camp, seeing what is happening and if their help is needed.

At smaller events Leaders shouldn't be nervous or afraid to ask for help from other leaders.

### Assisting them to overcome Homesickness

Busy fun is at the top of the list of homesickness cures. The more fun and activity you keep Youth Members busy with the less they will feel homesick. So as a Leader keep your child busy and for the first few days discourage them lying around or going off to their tent alone.

As previously mentioned travelling to camp in the busses is also good, because they have a shared experience with the rest of the group and develop closer relationships, even on short trips.

**Involve the Patrol.** Take the patrol aside and explain to them how sad one of their members is. Encourage the patrol to engage the homesick child in activities, maybe make him/her a leader in a game. The patrol system is integral to the Scouting section. The Patrol should form the support structure for each member and as such, provide a sense of 'security'.

Limit telephone calls home if possible. Parents/guardians normally starting to worry about their child but it doesn't help to communicate this anxiety onto the child, again it simply will make matters worse. Going home is not an option the only achievement is that parent's feel better, their child a sense of failure. True there is no place like home and being homesick (*away and missing the things you know and where you feel comfortable and familiar*) is not much fun; if it does occur it normally only lasts for a couple of days and it is a great help to the child's personal development by learning ways of beating it.

As Leaders we put in many hours to give Australia's Youth an enjoyable learning experience, you don't want them to miss out on all the fun and adventure that will be a rich part of their life for years to come. Remember be positive and firm.

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