



Away From Home Guide

2016

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INTRODUCTION LETTER

Dear Families,

As parents and camp directors, we understand the excitement and apprehension that you and your daughter may feel about sleep-away camp. The idea of camp is great, but the reality of separating for 5 or more days can be hard to swallow. The good news is that, if done right, this challenge can be extremely rewarding for everyone. We hope this **Away From Home Guide** provides you with valuable information and strategies that smooth out the transition, so your daughter can be a “happy camper”.

Fact, over 90% of campers will experience some level of “homesickness” this summer. Missing home is totally normal! It’s natural for a girl to yearn for her family, her belongings, her home, and her routines. At the Academy, many girls overcome these feelings on their own, and settle in to their new surroundings with ease. Others seek guidance from a Cabin Counselor or Resident Life Leader. No matter what, you can be confident that our staff is specifically trained to support your daughter and show her the way to a successful camp experience!

Having said that, there is one important thing we ask YOU to do to ease your daughter’s transition to camp: do not offer the option to pick her up early. In fact, we recommend conveying how difficult and impossible that would be. She will stop thinking about the possibility of going home, and just have fun! And you will have dramatically increased her chances of staying and adjusting.

If this packet leaves you wanting more, we recommend picking up the book, “Homesick and Happy” by Dr. Michael Thompson, PhD. He is a consulting school psychologist and popular school speaker. He writes about the magic of summer camp, and why it is so important for children to be away from home...if only for a little while. You can also find him speaking about the “8 Things Parents Cannot Do for their Children” in this YouTube video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7V2j3IngYt4>

Most importantly, we are in this together, so please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

See you at the Academy!



Liza & Eric Wittenberg
Directors



PREPARING FOR CAMP

Here are 10 important tips to help you prepare for camp.

1. PRACTICE MAKES PERMANENT

Parents: Talk with your daughter about how she will get to camp. What will that morning look like? What will happen at home while she is gone? Emphasize that she will not miss anything important that week. Do a test-drive of the trip, either in the car or via Internet map. If you can, join us at the Spring Open House to get acquainted with the Academy before the summer.

Campers: Plan a 1 or 2-night sleep-over with a family member or friend. Review our website to meet the Directors, counselors, and coaches; and check out photos of the Academy. Start getting excited and more comfortable about your upcoming summer adventure.

2. BE OPTIMISTIC AND BE HONEST

Parents: Camp is going to be awesome. Your daughter will try new things, meet new people, and learn more about herself. Let her know that you are confident she will thrive at camp. If you let her know that you believe she can do it, she will be much more likely to succeed.

If you are nervous about camp, or sense that your daughter is, talk with her about those emotions. Share what's on your mind openly and honestly...but with an optimistic outlook: "Honey, I'm nervous; I will miss you this week. But I am also very excited for you to have your first sleep-away camp experience." Just remember, on Arrival Day, dial back your emotions and save them for after camp. If she sees you feeling sad or remorseful, she will feel the same.

Campers: Remember that camp is a place where you can be your best self. List the top 5 things you are most excited to experience at camp. Share this list with your parents. Also, talk through any concerns you may have with them. Be honest with yourself and with your parents.

3. PACK EARLY, PACK TOGETHER

Parents: Packing is an important physical and emotional part of preparing for camp. But if left to the last minute, packing will often create more stress and concern. The earlier you start the process, the more time your daughter will have to ready herself. Print and review our Packing List from the Athlete Handbook weeks before camp. Set out her suitcase or duffle bag a week or two before camp. Your daughter can help you fill the bag and check each item off the list as you go. Now, there is plenty of time to pick up last-minute things at the store. This way, packing for camp can be a big stress reliever.

Fun Tip: Sneak in a surprise note telling her how proud you feel, and how much you love her.

Campers: Go through the BSA Packing List with your parents, and make sure you have everything you need for camp. Knowing where you put each item in your bag will help you unpack when you get to the Academy.

4. BRING A SPECIAL COMFORT FROM HOME

Parents: Help your daughter pack an appropriate comfort from home; such as a pillow, stuffed animal, photo, or special book. Remember, we do not allow campers to bring food or cell phones to the Academy. They unnecessarily distract from our fun-filled program and attract unwanted critters.

Campers: Even the counselors do this! Bring your favorite pillow pet, book, blanket, picture frame, etc. Make your cabin your home away from home!

5. SET A GOAL

Parents: Help your daughter set a specific, measurable goal for her time at camp. In your letters and phone call with your daughter, ask her about her progress on this goal.

Campers: What do you want to get out of going away to soccer camp? Do you want to improve your soccer skills? Do you want to meet new friends? Do you want to catch a fish? Make a goal that is specific to you before camp even starts. Write your goal down, and share it with your family and/or friends before heading to camp.

6. PLAN TO COMMUNICATE

Parents: Discuss a communication plan with your daughter so expectations are clear. Just remember, less is more! With one optional phone-call home per session, and unlimited hand-written and electronic letters, you will have plenty of opportunities to “check in” with your daughter without jeopardizing her camp experience. Visit our “Communication Booth” on Arrival Day if you have any questions about how to stay in touch.

Campers: During your next sleepover, practice not calling your parents to say goodnight or maybe even leave your phone at home! Also, we have designed an easy-to-remember list of topics for you to focus on when writing or talking to your parents from camp. These are described in detail on page 8.

7. CONNECT WITH OTHERS BEFORE CAMP

Parents: Join our “Berkshire Soccer Academy Families” Facebook group, and connect with other camper parents and guardians. You can also call our office and to get connected with a returning family that can share helpful advice with you.

Campers: Follow @berkysoccer on Instagram. Connect with other campers and get involved in the Berky Instagram contests. Tag @Berkysoccer and #berkybraids for a chance to win a \$50 gift certificate to the BSA Camp Store! Check out our latest newsletter, the **Spring 2016 Berky Blast**, for more details.

8. GO TO BED EARLY THE NIGHT BEFORE CAMP

Parents: This one is for your daughter... and you! Get a good night's rest!

Campers: Lay out your clothes and get plenty of sleep the night before camp. Show up to the Academy alert, energized, and ready to hit the field at high energy.

9. TAKE A BREAK AND DON'T FEEL GUILTY

Parents: Let's face it, parenting is tough stuff. Letting go and enjoying the idea that your child can thrive under the nurturing care of someone else can be liberating. You need to recharge your battery too, get perspective, and have grown-up time. As a result, you can be a better parent when your daughter returns home.

Campers: Encourage Mom and Dad to do something they enjoy while you are at camp. You will be having the time of your life...so they should be allowed to have a little fun too!

10. CELEBRATE YOUR SUCCESSES

Parents: Plan a dinner or fun event for after camp. This is the perfect place for your daughter to shine and to tell you all about her favorite camp memories and accomplishments.

Campers: Help your parents plan an event with your friends and family where you can share your favorite parts of camp with everyone!

FIRST DAY OF CAMP

We do everything we can to insure that the first day of camp is smooth, organized, and, above all, welcoming for every camper and family.

➤ ARRIVAL

When you first drive down our long, wooded driveway, our staff members will greet you with smiles. You will receive a map of the Academy. At the center of camp, you will get a glimpse of the excitement (and the lake) while we unload your baggage and take it directly to your daughter's cabin. You then proceed to park your car and head back down to the center of camp on foot.

➤ CAMPER ORIENTATION

After checking in, you will visit several orientation stations that address all your questions about camp. Stations include:

- **Health Center** - talk to our Nurses and Athletic Trainers, hand in your medicine, and complete your Health Screening.
- **BSA Kit** - pick up your Berky shirts and Berky bag!
- **Photo Booth** - get a family photo, or one with your bestie!
- **BSA Store** - authorize spending money and check out the goods!
- **Communication** - set up your phone call home, ask questions about our e-letter system, get the Academy address for handwritten letters

Once you visit every station, your daughter will spend time on the Rec Deck meeting her cabin-mates and Cabin Counselors, playing fun games, and having a snack. This is a great time for parents and girls to start the separation process.

➤ ACADEMY TOUR

Many families are curious to see more of the Academy, so after you have finished visiting all of the stations, we invite you to join us on a guided tour of the facility. Learn more about this beautiful place and how it came to be the Berkshire Soccer Academy!

➤ WELCOME CEREMONY

Liza and Eric kick off each session with a big welcome to families and campers. This is a great opportunity to meet our staff and learn more about the exciting week ahead!

➤ HUG & GOODBYE

After the Welcome Ceremony, we offer families one more chance to say farewell and head up the hill to the parking lot. We're sorry, parents...you can't stay and play!

COMMUNICATION TO YOUR CAMPER

Communicating with your camper sounds easy, but that isn't always the case. It can be especially difficult when speaking with or responding to a letter from a homesick camper, one that reads something like this:

Dear Mom and Dad,

*Camp stinks. I have no friends. Everyone is mean. Nothing here is fun.
If you really love me you'll come get me now!*

Love,

Your poor, helpless Daughter

One of your first thoughts when you learn your daughter is homesick might be, “Life is too short for her to be unhappy. I’ll just pick her up.” Please stifle that thought. The easiest thing for both of us would be to quit working with her and let her go home. But by doing this we would be saying, “I’m giving up on you, and don’t have any confidence in your ability to meet this challenge.”

In many cases, by the time you receive this letter your daughter will be over her homesickness--because our program and our staff have provided a special sense of engagement and belonging, from the very moment she arrived. If not, rest assured she will be on our “watch list”, and, as trained professionals, we take special care of every camper on this list. We will strive to dig deeper, learn more about her feelings, and find ways to better engage her. But remember that this process may take a little time. Be patient.

Our staff, and specifically one of our Camp Directors, Liza Wittenberg, works diligently with parents to help homesick campers adjust to camp, have a great experience, and feel better about themselves for having successfully made it through a difficult time. That is why it is very important for you to contact us if you have any concerns about your child. Our office is generally open 8am to 8pm, and we are happy to speak with you about how your child is doing.

In the same way, if a homesick camper does not seem to be making progress, we will call you to learn more about the child and her situation. In some cases, we may think it necessary for the camper to speak with you. Be prepared for an emotional time over the phone. Homesick campers are not reasonable. They will pull all of your emotional strings, and raise your parental guilt level to an all-time high!

In your response to a homesick letter or call, whether you are writing to your daughter or speaking with her, be loving but firm. Tell her you understand her feelings, that you love her, and that you have confidence she will overcome her difficult time. Try to remind her of the fun and positive things she was looking forward to at camp.

Most importantly, **never** make a “deal” that you will bring her home if she does not like camp. It’s an easy out for the camper, and it doesn’t allow us the time and space to work together to try to overcome it.

Below are some tips for communicating with your camper, and a sample letter from a parent to her camper:

IMPORTANT POINTS WHEN COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR CAMPER:

- ▶ Acknowledge her feelings, “Thanks for letting us know how you feel.”
- ▶ Tell her it’s okay to miss Mom and Dad (and for Mom and Dad to miss her), **and** still have fun!
- ▶ Remind her that homesickness is normal and many kids experience it. Given a little time and space most kids overcome it and have a great time.
- ▶ Encourage her to concentrate on the things she likes at camp. Mention activities she was looking forward to, like soccer games, fishing, yoga, etc.
- ▶ Explain that feeling uncomfortable in a new situation is normal. Learning to cope in those situations is all a part of growing up. Share some of your experiences in similar situations.
- ▶ Frame her stay at camp in terms she can understand, “Camp lasts about as long as Spring Break, and you know how fast that goes by!”
- ▶ Remind her that the counselors and directors are at camp to help her and talk with her about any problems she is having.
- ▶ Ask a lot of specific questions: “What new things have you tried?” “Are you making any new friends?” “What is the most fun thing you have done so far?”

► Be careful NOT to do the following:

- Do not write/say things that incite nostalgia or would make her miss home or worry. "We're at the beach having a great time." "The dog is sick and at the vet."
- Do not bribe. "I'll buy you a new bicycle if you make it."
- Do not make deals or promises you don't intend to keep. "If you're not better in three days, we'll come and get you."

SAMPLE PARENT LETTER TO A CAMPER:

Dear

I hope that by the time you get this you will be feeling much better, and not so homesick. I am sorry that you felt sad, but remember that I told you it's okay to miss us and still have a good time at camp.

Daddy and I were so anxious for you to go to camp where we knew there would be so many exciting things to do—things you can't do at home—and so many nice girls to get to know.

The time you spend at camp, and the things you do there, and the friends you meet can be things you will remember for the rest of your life—But only if you try!

When you get this letter, your time at camp will be half over. There won't be many days left to have a good time, so I hope you won't spoil it by being sad. Daddy and I are looking forward to seeing you when camp is over, and we want to hear about all the many wonderful things you have been doing.

You are a big girl now, and I have a lot of confidence in you, and I just know you can have a great time if you try!

Daddy and I love you very, very much! You are special to us, and we like to do special things with you and for you. Camp is just one of those things.

I Love You!
mom

COMMUNICATION FROM YOUR CAMPER

It is easy for campers to become emotional when writing home because they typically write letters during downtime when they are tired – during rest hour or in the evening before bed. In an effort to guide their letter-writing, we created the “7 F’s”. They are seven topics that help our girls think and share about their experience in an honest and positive way. We encourage you to speak with your daughter about this framework. You can even practice writing a letter using the 7F’s before camp.

“7F’S” LETTER OUTLINE

Dear _____,

FEEL - How are you feeling? Who have you shared your feelings with?

FOOD - What are meal times like? What food have you enjoyed the most?

FAVORITE - Do you have a favorite coach, place, or song?

FIRST - Have you tried or seen something new?

FRIENDS - List the names of your cabin-mates. Who are you sharing a bunk with?

FUN - What did you do or see that made you laugh today?

FORWARD - What are you looking forward to tomorrow, or later in the week?

Love,

Your Happy Camper

A “7F’S” SAMPLE LETTER

Dear Mom,

*I can't believe you dropped me off just yesterday. I already **feel** like I've been here forever! My cabin counselor told me to write to you about the 7 F's, so I guess I'll try.*

*The **food** here is really good so far. We had spaghetti and meatballs last night, and chocolate chip cookies too! For breakfast I ate 7 bowls of Rice Krispies. You know how much I love them!*

*My **favorite** thing so far about camp is that Jack isn't here. Big brothers can be so annoying!*

*I'm going to sign up to do the Fishing elective tomorrow. I've never been fishing, so that makes it my **first**. And everyone says the Fishing Instructor is really nice.*

*I am making **friends** with the girls in my cabin. There are 3 nice girls, one quiet girl, one really loud girl, and 2 girls I don't really know yet. And you know Brenda and Cammy, of course!*

*Ok, so the last one is **fun**. I am having fun, I guess. But I miss you a lot. Sometimes I get sad, but then I remember that I will see you on Saturday. I'm trying to keep busy, like you said, so I don't get sad. My cabin counselor, Jen, helps a lot. She's really cool.*

*I am really looking **forward** to the closing campfire on Wednesday night. We have a really cool skit in the works!*

I love you a lot.

Hannah

SHE DID IT (AND YOU DID TOO)!

It may be your daughter's first time away from home, or her tenth. Regardless, take a moment to bask in your success. She did it! And you did too, parents! As difficult as it may have been, there is something incredible about reaching the finish line. In a speech to hundreds of New York City parents, Dr. Michael Thompson says we cannot give our children self-esteem. Instead, "self-esteem is the by-product of skill development". By providing your daughter with this camp experience, you have given her an opportunity to learn and master new skills in soccer, and also in life.

QUICK TIPS

- Let her know that missing home is normal
- Have confidence she can do it, and allow her the time and space to show you she can!
- Include your daughter in preparing for the Academy - packing, shopping, planning, etc.
- Practice writing a letter using the "7F's"
- Be loving but firm if she becomes emotional
- Don't make deals or promises you don't intend to keep
- Contact the Academy office if you have any questions or concerns

