



*Camp Matoaka  
Parent Handbook  
2018*

The purpose of this handbook is to accurately describe and explain current camp policies. This should act as a resource, as well as to educate camp families, new and returning, about the specifics of each camp rule. If you have any questions regarding these policies, please do not hesitate to contact us at 207-512-2300.

## GENERAL STATEMENT

Camp Matoaka has instituted policies to help each camper derive the most from her camping experience. In order for our staff to give your child the individual attention she deserves, we have set high standards for our staff as well as our camp families. It is your responsibility, as parents, to disclose any emotional, physical, psychological or medical information about your child to allow us to give her the best camping experience. Full disclosure is required before each camper arrives at camp. Please be pro-active on any clear issues or past behavior from previous years at camp or school.

## BRACES AND GLASSES

If your daughter has braces, we suggest that you provide her orthodontist's name and phone number on her medical form. If your daughter wears glasses, we suggest that a second pair be sent to camp with her and the prescription written on the health form with her doctor's name and phone number.

## BUNK PLACEMENTS

Please understand that we will do our best to place your daughter with her friends, but that sometimes it can be extremely difficult. We cannot guarantee that your daughter will be with every single camper that she wishes to bunk with. We must take into consideration the well-being of the entire camp community when assigning bunks to campers. **Do not make bunk placement promises to your daughter that the camp may not be able to deliver.**

## CAMPER PROFILE

In our continuing effort to make sure all Matoaka campers feel at home, we require a Camper Profile Form to be completed prior to your daughter's arrival at camp. This form, both for returning and new campers, should be filled in by parents no later than the posted deadline. It will give both the Leadership Team and cabin counselors more information about your daughter so that we can make her stay as pleasant as possible. We insist on complete and full disclosure on all responses. This information is used to establish proper staffing and support services and appropriate placements for all campers.

## CANTEEN

We do provide a no-fee canteen service that is available to all campers three days a week. No other food will be allowed in the cabins. Stationary supplies, toiletry items, batteries, etc., may also be obtained from the canteen at no additional charge.

## **CLOTHING – SIMPLE AND DURABLE**

Expensive, fancy clothing is not needed at Camp Matoaka. Campers should be able to participate fully, in all camp activities, without worrying about spoiling expensive clothing! All clothing will be washed and dried by a professional laundry service each week. Campers will not need jewelry or make-up; they are unnecessary at camp – so please don't plan to send them. Camp will not be responsible for these items.

All clothing and personal items must be labeled with your child's first and last name.

## **CELL PHONES/SMART WATCHES**

We do not permit cell phones or smart watches at camp. We understand a camper may bring a cell phone or smart watch to camp for safety-related, travel purposes, but upon arrival at camp that cell phone or smart watch will be required to be kept in the office for safe-keeping. The phone/watch will be returned when the camper checks out at the end of her session (please refer to the Technology Registration Form – which all parents must complete).

Aside from the fact that cell phones can get lost or stolen and that the physical camp environment is not kind to such items, there is a fundamental problem with campers having cell phones at camp, and that is trust. When children come to camp they – and you – are making a leap of faith, temporarily transferring their primary care from you as their parents, to us, and their counselors. This is one of the growth-producing, yet challenging aspects of camp. As children learn to trust other caring adults, they grow and learn, little by little, to solve some of their own challenges. We believe this emerging independence is one of the greatest benefits of camp. It is one important way your daughter develops greater resilience. Contacting you by phone essentially means they have not made this transition. It prevents us from getting to problems that may arise and addressing them quickly. Sending a cell phone to camp is like saying to your daughter that you, as the parent, haven't truly come to peace with the notion of them being away from you and in our care.

We promise to tell you if your daughter is experiencing a challenge in her adjustment to camp. You can help by talking with her *before she leaves for camp* and telling her that there is always someone she can reach out to, whether it be a counselor, her Unit Head, Leslie and Jason, or even the camp nurses. We are all here to help, so please trust us!

## **DIGITAL CAMERAS**

We do permit digital cameras, but you should know that any camper who takes a compromising photograph of another camper or staff member and uploads it on the Internet or makes it public in any way may be subject to dismissal from camp or may not be allowed to return. We suggest that if your child wants pictures from camp, that they bring a disposable camera or upload the photos onto your home computer with you present. We take photographs during the summer, which are available for viewing on our secure (password protected) website. Please help us maintain a safe environment by explaining this to your daughter.

## **ELECTRONIC DEVICES**

**Computers, iPhones, iPads, and smart watches with wifi capabilities and/or gaming devices are not permitted at camp.** The Nano, Shuffle, and iTouch (assuming all games, videos, and cellular service are removed) are permitted at camp. These devices distract the campers from the personal and social connections that we foster at camp. Our campers will turn in any electronic devices that are not permitted in the bunks, but may be used for school-related purposes (please refer to the Technology Registration Form). All devices brought to camp will be kept in the Office for safekeeping and will be returned at summer's end.

A few things to keep in mind about bringing a music device to camp: First, we recommend having a conversation with your daughter about appropriate times to listen to music. For instance, on a bus trip, or at night before bed-time, is okay. Listening to music with headphones during clean-up, rest hour, or in between periods is not permitted. Also, the only time the music player should be out of the cabin is when campers are going on a day-trip. The music player should not be outside of the cabin otherwise. Another thing to keep in mind about having an iPod or other music device at camp is that, in our community environment, sometimes things go missing. Our campers need to be responsible for their items and take care of their music player, which means a safe spot should be designated for their iPod or music player. Campers can discuss this location with a cabin counselor.

By following these expectations, we want to ensure your daughter enjoys the total camp experience!

## **HEALTH CENTER**

Our on-site Health Center is a modern building, fully-equipped with emergency first aid equipment, one AED defibrillator, two exam rooms, sick camper overnight rooms, as well as a comprehensively stocked dispensary of common over-the-counter medications. The Health Center is staffed by five resident registered nurses and a local nurse practitioner who makes calls Monday thru Friday, and is on-call on weekends. The Health Center is staffed 24 hours a day by at least one of the nurses. All camp health records are kept on our computer network and are immediately accessible to the Directors. All medical information is strictly confidential and is limited to the Directors and nursing staff. Other staff are informed only if there is a clear need-to-know. If further treatment is required, campers are taken to Emergency Care - Maine General Health located in Augusta, Maine.

## **HEALTH HISTORY AND EXAMINATION FORMS**

It is a requirement of Camp Matoaka and the American Camp Association (ACA), that every camper have a completed health history and examination form for every summer they attend camp. These give our medical staff critical medical history, allergies, current treatments, as well as the results from a complete physical by your physician! (The doctors examination can be up to one year prior to camp attendance). This form will be available to you in April, and is due by the specified deadline. Without these forms, NO treatment can, or will, be given by the camp nurses or physician, including the dispensing of regular medications. Please complete the forms promptly and return them to camp no later than the specified deadline. Please include health insurance

information on the form. We are very cautious about our health care practices at camp. The information required is used to identify the appropriate health care, not to screen out campers, and is strictly confidential. We require full disclosure of all medical information pertaining to each camper.

The on-site Health Care staff are always happy to receive calls/emails from parents regarding any health care issue or concern. Please be assured that parents will be notified if a medical problem exists. If a camper needs antibiotics, or stays in the Health Center for more than 24 hours, parents will be called. Parents will also be called if their daughter needs to visit with the nurse practitioner for any reason. In view of that, if you receive a call regarding a medical issue, the camp is simply informing you of the situation. If there is a medical emergency, our health care staff will phone you immediately. Your daughter(s) is in good hands, and our medical staff are well-trained and experienced!

All parents can help when it comes to any communicable diseases. If your daughter(s) has been exposed to any communicable diseases prior to camp, it is your responsibility, and we expect you, to call camp and speak with a Director.

### **HEALTH INSURANCE**

Every camp family is required to carry adequate health care insurance for their campers during their stay at camp. Camp does not carry any health or other medical insurance that would cover the camper while attending camp. Parents will be responsible for all costs of medical treatment, drugs, medications, etc. provided to their child during the camp season.

### **HEALTH SCREENING/HEAD LICE**

Screening will take place for all campers within 24 hours of arriving at camp by a professional lice screening and treatment company. Screening is performed with the aid of pediculosis sticks and a special black ultra violet light. If head lice are discovered on a camper, the family will be notified by telephone and will be responsible for the charge of the removal of the lice by the professional lice company.

### **MEDICAL BILLS**

As stated on the camper application, Camp Matoaka requires credit card information to be on file for medical charges incurred during the summer. The camp tuition does not pay for medical insurance, or medical expenses of any kind.

### **MEDICATION**

Safety is our #1 priority. In accordance with ACA policies, our health center staff are the only people authorized to administer medication to your daughter. All medications, with the exception of asthma inhalers and epi-pens, are kept in the Health Center.

This summer, we will continue to use CVS Pharmacy in Waterville, Maine to pre-package our campers' medications. Camp families are required to contact CVS in Waterville, Maine to package all of your child's medicine in pill form for camp. Camp families will call or fax CVS your daughter's prescription. Then, CVS Pharmacy will individually package, seal and sort the pills according to the day and time of administration. This includes prescription and non-prescription medications. Each individually sealed packet will be labeled with your child's name, medicine, dosage, date and time to be given. The CVS system ensures that each camper receives their correct medicine at the correct time. Although you are not required to have CVS Pharmacy fill prescriptions that are not in pill form (i.e., liquids, inhalers etc.) you may choose to do so and they will be dispensed as well. If you choose to ship to camp your daughter's inhalers, allergy shots, etc. please do so with a clearly labeled package prior to her arrival. **Campers should not travel to camp with any medications** (we do not want any items to be lost or misplaced).

Camp Matoaka will pick up your daughter's prescriptions from the CVS in Waterville. prior to your child's arrival. All unused medications will be sent home by the camp at the end of your child's stay.

### **LAUNDRY SERVICE WEEKLY**

All campers are required to bring their own towels, sheets, pillowcases, pillows, blankets, and must use the camp laundry service. All international campers will be provided with these items at an additional fee. Each cabin will be assigned a "laundry day" and a "sheet day." On this day, their dirty laundry and sheets will be taken from their cabin in the morning and returned the following day. The laundry cannot accept silk or any articles that require dry cleaning or special handling. All swapping, trading or exchanging of personal items at camp is not allowed.

### **LOST AND FOUND**

When clothing or equipment items are left around camp, they are brought to the camp laundry to be cleaned. From there, they go to the Lost and Found and are sorted into cubbies by bunk. The cycle is broken at the end of camp when we no longer have campers. At this time, items are cleaned, stored and catalogued. If you are missing some items, you may call camp no later than September 1<sup>st</sup> and request for them to be shipped to you via UPS. Please remember, though, we can only return what we find. All personal items **must be labeled** with your child's first and last name in order for us to identify them.

### **MEALTIME SEATING ASSIGNMENTS**

Random table seating assignments are given each week to all campers and counselors. This method insures that all members within the camp community get to know one another during their stay at camp. This method dates back to Opening Day in 1951 and fuels the "Matoaka Magic". Each morning, the campers and counselors sit with their bunkmates, and the rest of the day, the tables are mixed age groups.

## **NUT-FREE CAMP**

We are a nut-free camp. This means we don't cook with or use any ingredients that contain or may contain any nuts. And, we don't allow on camp any food items which may contain nuts.

## **NUTRITION**

We are proud of our excellent food service and varied menu. Our licensed professional food service staff is constantly overseeing our menu to seek healthier alternatives in order to lower salt, fat and sugar consumption. We aim for a well-balanced diet that features variety and choice in both main dishes and desserts. Twice each day, we offer fresh green salads and fresh fruit as well as home-made baked products. We accommodate campers and counselors with gluten free, dairy free, vegan, and vegetarian restrictions. If you have any concerns or special needs, please call the directors.

## **OFFICIAL CAMP CLOTHING – THE CAMP SPOT**

The Camp Spot is the Camp Matoaka's official clothing outfitter. All clothing orders should be placed early to insure pre-camp delivery. Please remember that all clothing must be labeled with the camper's first and last name. This includes all hard items such as tennis rackets, shoes and sneakers, shin guards, etc. Duffel bags are unpacked and are inaccessible to campers during the summer. Excessive amounts of clothing and incidental gear are usually left in the duffel and, therefore, are not needed at all.

The shoe bag must be obtained through the official camp clothier, as they are specifically made to fit the end of the beds at camp.

Please refer to The Camp Spot catalog for the Packing List.

## **MAIL**

Camp Matoaka encourages correspondence from home, however, mail items are limited to letters, faxes, emails, and envelopes 5"x 8" and smaller. Please refer to the "No Package Policy" below. When sending "snail mail" to your daughter, please put her bunk number on the envelope. If you choose to send her mail prior to her arrival, you will not know her bunk number. You will receive an email from your daughter's Unit Head with her bunk number on her arrival day at camp. At that point, you can send your daughter an email. Since the girls cannot access email from camp computers, these emails will be printed off each day by a member of the office staff and distributed with regular mail. Please do not send attachments, as they will not be printed.

## **PACKAGE POLICY**

In an effort to reduce unnecessary competition among the campers and constant pressure on parents to send packages, Camp Matoaka has established a "No Package Policy." This means no care packages! This means no food should be sent to camp! Should your daughter require something from home that she cannot obtain at camp, please email or call your Unit Head to make

special arrangements. One birthday package may be sent, so long as it does not contain any food. Please clearly indicate that it is a birthday package and the date it should be delivered to your daughter.

### **PERSONAL, TRIP, & OUTING EXPENSE**

This is a pre-determined amount of money applied to your invoice to be used for college league clothing, spending money on trip days, and bunk nights. This spending money is to take the place of any loose cash lying around the cabins.

### **SCHEDULING OF INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES**

All Matoaka campers start the summer with a basic schedule. This concept is predicated on our long-standing belief that all Matoaka campers should be exposed to and develop lifetime skills in the following activities while at camp: swimming, tennis, arts and crafts, waterskiing, boating/sailing, and athletics.

There are 25 instructional periods per week, of which approximately half are electives. Campers may modify their schedules twice a week!

An activity preference form is available in the spring, which allows campers to rate each activity and inform the office of any special requests.

### **TELEPHONE POLICY**

After the first full week of camp, campers are allowed ONE incoming phone call per session from parents. Phone calls for birthdays from immediate family members can be arranged with the directors ahead of time. Campers will not be called out of activities to receive phone calls at any other time. We ask that phone calls be kept brief.

Parents are encouraged to call and speak with Leslie, Jason or your daughter's Unit Head at any time during the day. We will continue to staff office phones throughout the day and night, without the use of any answering machine or recording devices.

We suggest that if you have more than one child in different age groups, please make your phone call individually on their day and not try to speak with both girls together.

Please understand that phone calls are not mandatory. Sometimes they are beneficial, and other times they are not. Sometimes children who experience homesickness do not benefit from phone calls, as it only delays them getting beyond it. Some kids don't get any phone calls at all during the entire summer. This is a family decision.

### **TRAVEL**

The official Camp Matoaka travel agency is Atlas Travel, and our contact person is Dianne Doucette. Dianne facilitates all group travel flights, as well as individual flights. If you choose not to

use Atlas Travel, we require that your daughter fly into Portland Jetport on the first day of her camping session to arrive between the hours of 10:00AM and 2:00PM. The camp will have staff and vehicles there to pick up the campers and bring them directly to camp. Camp chaperones will be provided on Camp Matoaka Group Flights from certain areas when the number of campers flying from that area is sufficient. If no chaperone accompanies your camper, we suggest you arrange for an "unaccompanied minor status" with the airlines. When small groups of campers fly together, from an area without chaperone service, parents may split the cost of such service and request the camp to provide a chaperone. The costs associated with this extra service shall be divided evenly between all campers using the service.

All travel information requested by the camp must be supplied to the camp office within the required deadlines. It shall be understood by all camp parents that all travel plans and notification of these plans to the camp office in a timely manner is the responsibility of the parents. Camp Matoaka will accept no liability for camper travel when these rules are not followed exactly. Campers who do not use the camp travel agent are solely responsible for notifying the camp of all travel plans and subsequent changes.

You may not send camper's luggage with them on the plane. All luggage must be sent to camp at least one week in advance of the campers' arrival. This applies to all campers.

The trucking service we partner with is Camp Baggage.

### **VALUABLES**

Camp is responsible only for cash or valuables, including passports and tickets, checked in at the office and kept in the safe upon your daughters' arrival at camp. Money given or sent to your child should be given to the office to hold for safekeeping. Camp is not responsible for money not given directly to the office. There is no need for campers to have money in their cabin at any time.

### **VISITORS**

Grandparents/relatives are welcome to visit your daughter while at camp. We do request advance notice and ask that relatives not arrive to camp unexpectedly. Campers are not allowed to leave camp at any time. This must be strictly enforced for the safety and well-being of your daughter(s).

### **HOMESICKNESS**

In working with many homesick campers over the years we are often asked, "What can a parent do to help prevent homesickness?" We hope this information will help your daughter and you. If you have any questions or get a "sad" letter during the summer, please do not hesitate to call us. Rest assured that if we are trying to resolve a homesick issue with your daughter, we will call you.

### **WHAT YOU CAN DO BEFOREHAND**

Pre-homesick planning should begin long before the final goodbye at the bus or the plane. We suggest involving your child as much as possible in pre-camp planning. Make her feel a part of it

from the start. Explain that she will be expected to write home two times each week. Then let her choose her own personalized stationery. Cover the telephone policy and explain how you plan to handle speaking to her while she is away. Discuss the need for labels, for lost and found and laundry items. Let her help mark some items. Many child psychologists feel that preparation for a first summer at camp may be more important than the child's personality or age in determining whether or not she'll be homesick.

Please start talking with your daughter about camp months beforehand. Review the camp brochure, website, clothing catalog, and yearbook video. Ask the camp for some names and telephone numbers of girls in your area who are also going to Matoaka. Introduce your daughter to these girls and let them meet together for a short time.

Our activity preference form will be available in April. Let your child help choose her schedule. This gives both of you a greater feeling of familiarity about where she will be going. After all, this is what homesickness is... a longing or wish for the familiar or known, usually while we are in an unfamiliar and strange place. Your daughter has not yet had the chance to make our camp a "home-away-from-home." She has not yet experienced "Matoaka Magic."

It's painful to admit there are times when our children aren't happy and there is not much we can do to make it better. One psychologist stated, "Parents take far too much credit for their kids' success and far too much blame for their kids' difficulties. The best advice is to be available and supportive, and tell them often that you love them, even if they pretend not to hear."

All of this is training for her future in the adult world. Many people feel we don't ask enough of kids these days. It's not too much to ask young girls to look at a difficult situation and figure some things out for herself. Finding ways that she, by her own initiative, can make it better builds self-confidence.

Everything children do is part of learning to become productive, accountable, kind and responsive grown-ups. How a child treats a playmate and how she responds to her playmates are indicators of her adult behavior and of how she will deal with life. How we react as parents to our kids' stress and conflicts also affects the way they deal with life. Understanding more about failure and success, gives children courage to take risks and to see themselves in a new light.

Homesickness is as much about parents as it is about the child. It is best not to let your child see your fears about camping. It is not helpful to say "I'll be lonely without you" or "I'll worry about you" or "The house will be empty without you." These words, while sincere, are not what they need to hear. Your daughter needs a parental show of strength. When parents are confident in their child's ability to do well on her own and they expect her to have a good time, they give her the necessary self-assurance to meet new challenges. It's like money in the bank...something to draw on later when twinges of homesickness start to appear. Lots of hugs are prescribed in this pre-camp time. Physical contact is a powerful means of communication with other people. At camp, we use this as a gentle and supportive way to nourish the spirit, convey happy emotions and simply make your daughter feel good about herself. Psychologists describe American culture as a "low contact" culture. There are many "high contact" cultures, in which social touching is much more acceptable. Just by viewing our promotional video you may have noticed that within the first five minutes there

are twenty hugs or other physical contact involving more than fifty people. Camp Matoaka is a “high contact” culture.

### **WHAT IS HOMESICKNESS?**

When faced with a situation that calls for new behavior, it is characteristic of humans to want to return to ways of doing things that are most deeply ingrained in them. Commonly called the “nesting instinct,” every human craves comfort and security in their surroundings. Children who are homesick suffer guilt and anxiety. They are anxious because they feel that without a parent present, they cannot survive. Homesickness is also a crisis in confidence. Homesick feelings may be reflected in indirect ways. “The food stinks here. There are tons of bugs everywhere. Absolutely nobody in my bunk likes me, and I have no friends.” Intuitive parents learn to decipher this code and read it for its face value. Children are unaware that their homesickness is a distortion of need. They think they still need a mother to do for them what they don’t think they can do for themselves.

Your daughter will be assigned a daily rotating housekeeping job to do in her cabin, in addition, she is required to make her bed. If she is not required to do any of these chores at home, please prepare her. Unless children are prepared for new experiences and for this new camp situation, the change of living in a bunk with fifteen new people, eating with three hundred or more people in a dining room and hearing the loons on the lake can be a shock.

***That is what homesickness is:*** desire to be back where everything is well-defined, familiar and predictable. When your daughter is homesick she dreams of perhaps having breakfast with the family, playing with siblings (yes, even if all they do is fight the other ten months of the year), watching TV or just playing with friends. Everyone is there and things are like they are supposed to be. Your daughter may complain of feeling ill. She may feel frightened, lonely and abandoned. Her pain feels real. Her suffering increases at night and during quiet times of the day. Rest hour and early mornings are a bad time. Recently we’ve discovered that most of our homesick campers have never moved or have not changed schools since the age of five. If this description fits your daughter, a discussion about change, growing up and dusting off her ‘friendship-making’ skills is necessary. Skills for keeping friends are different from skills required to make friends. Please discuss this with your daughter. Friendship-making skills require your daughter to “offer” herself in friendship. To go out of her way to make a connection with another person is essential. Discuss the subject of breaking the ice with new people. Can she approach a new friend and initiate a conversation without being pushy or offensive? Practice role playing and decide on a method that feels comfortable to her. It is so important for her to reach out even if she hasn’t had to make friends in a long time. A child tends to sit back and wait for someone to make the first move. If others don’t, it compounds the feeling of isolation and hopelessness as she watches others enjoying themselves. As one camper said to us “every body is so happy, and I am not.”

### **SOME OTHER SUGGESTIONS**

Be positive about the camp experience and emphasize the good things. If you have personal anxieties about it, don’t burden your daughter with them. Do not make the mistake of telling your daughter repeatedly how much you will miss her. This will only cause her to worry about this. If she is aware of anyone who has not had a favorable camp experience, express regret for this rather

than as a possibility for your child. You may say it was a shame that Sally didn't enjoy camp and that she missed wonderful activities after she left.

Do not write long sad and nostalgic letters. Newsy letters of who's doing what, who you have seen lately, and where you have gone with other adults tend to be great stabilizers for your daughter. She will not feel she is missing anything at home. Overly cheerful letters may not help either, one eleven-year-old told her mom, "Tell dad not to write such happy letters, it makes me feel like I should be there."

It is important to keep the lines of communication open. Listen to your daughter's thoughts, her worries and fears, and be reassuring. Once you have registered her for camp, keep bringing the subject of camp up. She may need help talking about it. Homesickness may reoccur in your daughter's first and second year at camp, but once a child has mastered her homesickness, she has gained something wonderful...a proud feeling of self worth. Assess if your child is really ready for camp. We do not recommend pursuing the matter if a child really opposes camp. It can be discussed at a later time when the child is ready.

If your daughter is displaying signs of homesickness at camp, we will use one or more of the following approaches:

1. I realize this is painful for you. You are having a tough time, aren't you?
2. Do you feel physically sick? (Is there a physical basis?)
3. You will not feel this way the whole summer. Gradually it will go away. It is not that you will stop missing your parents, it is just that it will not hurt so badly.
4. Unfortunately there is no pill I can give you to instantly make you better, but there are some things we can do:
  - a) Would you like to sit with a special friend in the dining room?
  - b) What is your favorite thing to do here? (Let's do more of this)
  - c) What do you not like in your schedule? (Let's do less of this)
  - d) How have you offered yourself in friendship to others? Have you asked someone to walk to lunch with you or asked them to hit a tennis ball with you? Asked a bunkmate to show you where to go to change your schedule?
  - e) What counselor(s) do you feel close to? (Let's see more of them)
  - f) What campers do you feel close to? (Let's see more of them)
  - g) Have you been receiving mail? (Phone home to request more mail)
  - h) Is there anything you are worried about? Is there anything you feel you are missing?
  - i) Did you have a good year at school?
  - j) This is what growing up is all about. It's not only about good things like staying up late, its about a lot of change and sometimes change is difficult.
  - k) Depending on the camper's age we might suggest increased phone calls with her parents – sometimes this will help her get over the "hump". In this case we always call the parents first without the child present to get their permission and from there we work together to formulate a 'homesick' plan.
5. I am going to give you a homework assignment – I bet you never thought you would get homework at camp! By five o'clock, I want you to come to me knowing two new names of

bunkmates and tell me something about them...I will see you at five o'clock right here at my desk.

6. Now I have another assignment for you...you have to have a conversation with someone new in your bunk. Ask them where they went on their last family vacation.

Homesickness often ends when the camper gets involved with the program. If it is more severe, we will always call you at that time. The severity of the homesickness usually depends on the age of the child; the older the child the worse the problem. Older girls often feel worse because they are embarrassed. Homesickness is for little kids, not for mature teenagers like themselves. This dependency can breed anger and hostility. These feelings may come out in heartbreaking letters like this one:

"Dear Mom and Dad,

I hate it here. Please let me come home. I will make my bed everyday and not take my allowance for fifteen years to pay you back. I cannot last another day. Every night I cry. I cannot fall asleep without a kiss from you. I threw up today and went to the infirmary. The nurses don't know anything, said I was fine. I do not know hardly anyone and I'm so homesick I'm about to die. Please come and get me, NOW! I hate camp.

Love Jordan.

These are my teardrops."

How is a parent to respond to this? The way Jordan's mother did; by giving her daughter confidence in her abilities to cope, acknowledging her complaints and doing it with dignity and tact.

"Dear Jordan,

We read your letter and were impressed by how clearly you stated your feelings. We know that it is not easy for you. You miss us very much and wish you were home. We love you too, and have faith in your ability to make a good summer for yourself. We know you will benefit greatly from the all of the activities you will learn and the friendships you will make. You are so capable and we have spoken to the Director and know there are many kids and adults that care for you. We are looking forward to talking to you soon. Is there anything you want us to bring when we see you on Visiting Day?

Love Mommy and Daddy."

Of course, there are always judgement calls based on your child's individual maturity and personality. The ability to call home and speak to you is always something we might offer to a few homesick campers. We do not allow phone calls until after the first week of your daughters stay with us. There are always exceptions. Some campers like Anne require different treatment. Anne is a mature, eight-year-old, only child who knows her own mind. She came to us crying about being homesick, but ended up talking about which activities she wanted on her schedule. She had no complaints about camp. The second time Anne came to us she was agitated and said matter of

factly, "I need to speak to my mother." After her phone call home, Anne was never homesick again. Some children just need to touch base with their parents.

Janie is another child who required a slightly different approach. She was very homesick her first year at camp. Her second year started out fine and then four days into the season she was homesick again. She admitted it wasn't as bad as the first year, but she was disappointed in herself because she was also the only camper in her bunk not to get mail from her parents during the first four days of camp. After speaking with her mom, she quickly recovered with a few hugs and encouragement.

Jessica returned for her fourth summer with us and had never been homesick before. She'd moved twice, once when she was five years old, and again when she was eleven. She didn't fit into the homesick mold of having rusty friendship-making skills. She had friends and knew a lot of people. Her first cousin was a popular counselor who had been coming to camp since she was eight years old. But other circumstances can contribute to homesickness. The previous school year had been a bad one for Jessica. Then her best friend decided to change schools so she was projecting ahead to the fall when she would be without her. Her best friend at camp the previous summer did not return to camp this summer, so Jessica was starting all over again in the friend department. She was dealing with a new development that she didn't think she could handle...a definite crisis of confidence!

While this feeling of homesickness is powerful and strong, for most campers it soon passes as they get more involved with the camp program, gain new friends, and feel closer to their bunkmates and counselors. Very few campers get so homesick they must leave camp early. There is great self-satisfaction when a girl conquers homesickness and realizes what she has achieved in the process. Many parents tell us their recovered homesick child went on to have the best school year ever. Loyalties, camaraderie and strong attachments evolve when a commitment is made and completed. These benefits can last a lifetime molding your daughter into the strong and healthy woman she will become.

One of the toughest judgment calls parents face is deciding when adversity is good for children. Working hard to make them happy isn't necessarily what is best for them. A lot of life is about surviving adversity, finding inner strength to pick yourself up after a setback, learn from it and keep going. Friendship calls for lots of problem solving, negotiating and compromising. Your daughter must realize that all peer relationships have minor ups and downs.

Parents can underestimate their child's resilience and be too quick to shield them from hurt. This can undermine the strength and self-healing that come from facing adversity. Display an attitude of life can sometimes be hard, but this is a chance to learn self-respect, tact, perceptiveness and acquire some insight. Then you can ask some "difficult questions like have you been as friendly, responsive, and sensitive to others as you can be?"

Camp Matoaka believes in validating every girl. We structure our program so each girl can learn what success means: Suzie can water-ski, Heather is great in drama, Jeanne is an artist and so on. Our "Of the Week" Awards confirm this weekly.

Included here is a short list of Do's and Don'ts for different time periods involving your child and camp.

### **BEFORE YOU SIGN UP:**

#### **DO'S:**

Resolve any conflicts privately you and your spouse feel about your child's ability to cope and your ability to let her do so.

#### **DON'TS:**

Let her hear you discussing her possible inability to cope at camp with someone on the phone at your home.

### **AFTER YOU HAVE SIGNED UP, BUT BEFORE CAMP:**

#### **DO'S:**

Involve her in pre-planning talk about:

- Wildlife noises
- Letter writing
- Camp phone policy
- Lost and found items
- Her schedule (let her make choices)
- Friendship-making skills
- Review the yearbook video of Camp
- Contact local campers through the office
- Show confidence that she'll do well on her own
- Expect her to have a great time
- Discuss the value of completing whatever she begins
- Tell her you'll be thinking of her having fun
- Give her lots of hugs
- Realize you can't always make her world perfect
- Set a positive example by letting her know you may be taking a new class or trying a new sport while she is away

Help her practice:

- Bed making
- Sweeping/using a dustpan
- Cleaning the bathroom
- Hanging wet towels on a clothesline
- Putting dirty clothes in a laundry bag
- A role play...with you as an established camper already comfortable with camp and she has to approach you to break the ice

### **DON'TS:**

- Discuss your fears, your bad experiences at camp
- Cue negative responses i.e. "I'll be lonely without you."
- Let her overhear plans you have made with other families and their children for the period of time she will be camp
- Buy all new clothes – an old everyday pair of shorts are comfortable and safe

### **AFTER CAMP BEGINS:**

#### **DO'S:**

- Speak and write about broadening her horizons (finding the key to her interests, keeping it to develop into a lifetime sport or activity.)
- Contact camp on hearing codes: i.e. Food stinks, no friends.
- Ask about her friends.
- Write about your activities with: other adults, your friends, your spouse etc.
- Send camp your itinerary and dates of any trip planned.
- Call camp if you will be informing her about any death.
- Encourage her to limit passivity and promote activity. (Suggest she join teams and change her schedule to promote initiative.)
- Remind her to use her 'break the ice' method.

#### **DON'TS:**

- Write sad nostalgic letters.
- Inform her the whole family got together and she was the only one missing.
- Call from a party and invite others to say hello.
- Write to her while you are alone away on business and reminisce about her childhood.
- Tell her you're redecorating her room and that you're sure she will like the things you've chosen for it.
- Try to protect her from making a mistake.

### **ONCE CAMP STARTS, IF YOU ARE INFORMED YOUR DAUGHTER IS HOMESICK:**

#### **DO:**

- Set limits – short-term solutions such as taking her home, do not last.
- Show support for the person who is trying to grow up inside her.
- Be candid about questions we ask about her home life.
- Be in contact with a director about recent letters you've received.
- Consider speaking with her more often if requested by a director.
- Be sympathetic but strong when faced with a crying child begging to go home.
- Reinforce her original commitment to want to come to camp.
- Reinforce her strengths and ingenuity.
- Remind her of consideration for others.
- Tell her I love you.
- Tell her what faith you have in her ability to deal with her difficulties.
- Speak to her about surviving adversity.

- Ask her some 'hard questions.' "Have you offered yourself in friendship to others?"..."Have you been sensitive to others?"
- Tell her she's the best.

#### **DON'TS:**

- Panic
- Tell her "just try it for four more days and we will see how you feel then."
- Fluctuate even slightly over your first resolve...to have her complete camp.
- Don't send packages. (Give her encouragement not things.)
- Don't try to rescue her – it keeps her from learning to tolerate frustration and separation.
- Don't cast an older sibling in a 'care taker' role – this causes feelings of resentment.

#### **IN CLOSING**

Camp Matoaka is always ready to assist campers toward overcoming bouts of homesickness...campers are encouraged to seek our personal help. We are also there for our camp parents too. Please give us a call and let us know what you are feeling. We pride ourselves on our ability to work closely with our families and for our campers to deal with homesickness with dignity and confidence.

#### **WE ARE HERE FOR YOU**

We understand that the process for sending your daughter away to camp can be overwhelming. We are here for our parents as much as we are here for your daughter. So, please don't ever hesitate to call or send us an email at any time!

