

FAMILY HANDBOOK



CAMP DARK WATERS

**A CAMPER'S TREASURE, A QUAKER TRADITION
SINCE 1928**

www.campdarkwaters.com

Phone: (609) 654-8846

Fax: (609) 654-2022

Email: info@campdarkwaters.net

USPS Mailing Address

P.O. Box 263
Medford, NJ 08055

UPS / FEDEX / Amazon

26 New Freedom Road
Medford, NJ 08055

Federal Tax Identification Number

223-748-083

Mission Statement

Camp Dark Waters provides a fun, outdoor camping experience based on the Quaker values of Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality and Stewardship. Because we believe that each of us possesses an inner light reflecting our goodness, we respect every individual while appreciating the differences between us. We nurture the spiritual, physical and emotional growth of children and young adults as they encounter themselves and each other in cooperative efforts. Here, we expect all who come will find a new closeness with each other and with the world around us.

Purpose

At Camp Dark Waters it is our goal to develop and operate a camp that provides outdoor camping and community living experiences in a Quaker setting. We encourage spiritual outreach and growth, as campers and staff members encounter themselves and each other in cooperative efforts and solitary moments. Because we believe that the Light resides within each of us, we respect every individual without regard to race, color, religion, sex, age, handicap, national origin, or sexual identity. We encourage experiences which reflect and educate about the traditional Quaker testimonies of peace and non-violent conflict resolution, simplicity of living, stewardship of our resources, equality and breaking down barriers while living life with honesty and integrity. Through both service and work, we seek to strengthen our community by promoting cooperative activities which are fun and which improve self-esteem and self-determination. Our camp and conference center provide a gathering place for people from Meetings, families, schools and other organizations. Here, we expect all who come will find a new closeness with each other and with the world around us.

Welcome to Camp Dark Waters!

Thank you for choosing Camp Dark Waters for your child this summer. We're sure it's going to be a wonderful experience your child will never forget. This handbook is designed to help you and your child prepare for this summer. Whether this is your first experience with Camp Dark Waters, or you're returning for another summer, this handbook has information that will be useful to you. Please take a few moments to read through it. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to give us a call at (609)654-8846, or email info@campdarkwaters.net

Our Philosophy

The child-centered philosophy of Camp Dark Waters is the same now as it was in 1928. Here, we believe that contributing to the growth and development of an individual is the greatest single act a person or organization can accomplish. We believe strongly in the value of a cooperative, collaborative group living experience.

Our Campers

Our campers come mostly from the Philadelphia region and South Jersey. Many more come from New York and Washington D.C. We also welcome campers from many different US states, and countries from all over the world. We take pride in the diversity of our camper population. At any given time, children from all racial, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds will be at camp. We work hard to maintain a culture of acceptance and respect, where people are cherished irrespective of who they are, where they come from or how they identify.

Inclusion at Camp

Camp Dark Waters is committed to being a safe space for children to learn and grow. We believe that a thriving community is one that acknowledges and embraces diverse identities -- age, race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, nationality, religion, physical and mental ability, and socioeconomic status -- and that the range of identities, beliefs and experiences at Dark Waters strengthens us as a community and as individuals. We encourage children to be their truest selves and make sure all campers feel valued within our community, because of who they are, where they come from or how they identify.

Camp Dark Waters strives to be welcoming to transgender, non-binary and genderqueer campers and staff. Though we don't have gender-neutral cabins, we make sure to place non-cisgender campers and staff into the cabin groups they feel most comfortable. All other areas of our program and facilities, from our activities to our single-stall bathrooms and showers, are gender-neutral. We believe in the value of privacy, so we will not disclose a camper or staff member's gender identity, sexual orientation, transition status, etc. to anyone without clear direction from that person.

We welcome all campers and families and will make every effort to accommodate anyone who is interested in coming to camp. We know that new experiences can sometimes benefit from additional support, and encourage you to contact us if you'd like to discuss how we can work together to make camp a rewarding and successful experience for you or your child.

Behavioral Expectations

Camp Dark Waters strives to be a safe and fun place for children. In keeping with our belief that every child deserves to be treated fairly, we set out the way we treat each other in our Camper's Rights document. Please take some time and discuss the following content of our Camper's Rights document with your child to ensure the best possible experience for all campers:

- **I have the right to be happy and to be treated with kindness.** This means that no one will laugh at me, ignore me or deliberately hurt my feelings
- **I have the right to be myself.** This means that no one will treat me unfairly because of my size, ability, race, gender, sexuality, religion, or any part of my identity. I am different because I am myself.
- **I have the right to be safe.** This means that no one will hit me, kick me, push me or pinch me. I will be free from physical and verbal threats.
- **I have the right to hear and be heard.** This means that no one will yell, scream, or shout at me, and my opinions and desires will be considered in any plans we make.
- **I have the right to learn about myself.** This means that I will be free to express my feelings and opinions without being interrupted or punished.

Camp Dark Waters strives to strike a thoughtful balance between the needs of the individual and needs of the community, to provide a safe and healthy camp experience for all. Camp is a place where we all strive to be our best selves. It is our goal to create a community where each individual feels celebrated.

We spend time at the beginning of each session discussing positive behavioral expectations. As with any community, conflicts or disruptive behaviors will arise. Staff are trained to help campers work through

these issues productively and restoratively, and most can be dealt with through discussion and support. People make mistakes. We believe that the best way to learn from these mistakes is through careful consideration of the consequences, not through arbitrary punishment. We will respond to each situation with a balanced approach and consideration of the impact on individuals and our community. Behaviors that are egregious, dangerous, or that cannot be resolved in a way that supports the community as a whole, may result in a camper being sent home from camp.

Financial Aid

We believe that money should not be a barrier to children attending Camp Dark Waters. We strive to keep tuition affordable but understand that some families need additional assistance. We offer income-based support to families via our scholarship fund - The M. Reid Bush Campership Trust Fund. The option to apply for financial aid is available when enrolling your child. Families that need help meeting the cost of tuition are encouraged to apply. Please visit our website or call the camp office for more information.

The SPICES of Camp Dark Waters

Since its founding in 1928, Camp Dark Waters has been grounded in Quaker Philosophy. A Quaker Meeting for Worship is held each Sunday, in which all of camp sits silently for about half an hour and each of us engages in some quiet reflection. Campers are encouraged to share their thoughts with the whole group, if moved to do so.

The Testimonies of Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality and Stewardship continue to guide our policies and procedures. While Camp Dark Waters is not a religious camp, we believe that these ideals help us to create a loving, nurturing, and healthy environment for your children to learn, grow and play. People of all beliefs and backgrounds are welcomed into and help enrich our community.

Quaker Testimonies – SPICES

Simplicity: We try to keep life simple at camp. Take a quick look around camp and it is easy to see that our facilities and programs are simple in nature. We run around barefoot (except when we need to wear shoes for safety) and play in the sand. Cell phones, tablets and video games are left at home. We introduce new activities and facilities from time to time, but always remain faithful to our roots, traditions, and legacy dating back to 1928.

Pease: We are committed to nonviolent resolution of conflicts. We work hard to identify and resolve problems before there is conflict. When conflict arises, we see it as a teachable moment to help give campers the tools to work toward non-violent solutions. Teaching peaceful conflict resolution is a goal of every staff member and is something we focus on in staff training.

Integrity: We teach that keeping promises and doing our best are important in life. We help children learn to take responsibility for mistakes and work hard to put them right. Honesty and striving to do the right thing, rather than the easy thing, are central to life at camp.

Community: We work hard to ensure camp is an open and accepting place where everyone feels welcomed and valued. We try to share the strengths we have with all people in our group. We are all responsible to one another in our camp community. We take care of one another and appreciate the company we share. Daily crew duties - small tasks or chores that each person does every day at camp - help to reinforce our reliance on each other.

Equality: We believe that everyone at camp is equal and worthy of respect. We teach and model love and acceptance regardless of the differences between us. Everyone brings their own personal uniqueness to our group, which makes us a stronger and more diverse community.

Stewardship: We feel responsible for taking care of the Earth and all life on it. We are mindful of how we use our time, energy, and resources. Every aspect of our program is built around taking advantage of our unique environment. We build our buildings to blend into our environment, not dominate it. An appreciation of nature, our environment and the outdoors are strong features of our program.

What We Teach at Camp

Camp Dark Waters is much more than playing kickball and making friendship bracelets. While those activities are great fun, we train our staff members to focus on developing life skills in our campers. When we teach archery, our goal isn't simply to teach campers to hit the bullseye, it's to teach persistence, following step-by-step directions, concentration, patience and more. Below is a small sample of some of the values, traits and life skills that we help our campers develop:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sharing ● Persistence ● Patience ● Consideration of others ● Kindness ● Gratitude ● Empathy ● Forgiveness ● Sympathy ● Honesty ● Listening ● Generosity ● Teamwork ● Discretion ● Leadership ● Ingenuity ● Emotional regulation ● Compromising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Respect ● Acceptance ● Self-motivation ● Tolerance ● Flexibility ● Genuineness ● Organization ● Compassion ● Curiosity ● Integrity ● Independence ● Loyalty ● Hope ● Creativity ● Caring ● Dependability ● Social understanding ● Self-expression ● Self-advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Decision making ● Relationship building ● Problem solving ● Conflict resolution ● Self-discipline ● Self-control ● Open mindedness ● Critical thinking ● Responsibility ● Self-esteem ● Sensitivity ● Communication ● Good manners ● Trusting ● Being trustworthy ● Hypothetical thinking ● Good judgment
---	---	---

Cabins

Campers stay in rustic cabins staffed by at least 2 counselors. Our camper-to-counselor ratio is approximately 4:1 and our overall camper-to-staff ratio is about 3:1.

Campers are assigned cabins on a basis of age. We will attempt to accommodate requests to be bunked with another camper, but cannot guarantee that we will be able to meet such requests.

Crews

At Camp Dark Waters, we work and live together, with everyone taking responsibility for daily tasks and chores and the upkeep of camp. Each camper is assigned to a crew consisting of approximately 10 campers and 2 or 3 staff. Each crew is comprised of campers of all ages and genders. Crews sit together at meals and complete crew duties together. Crews have a new duty each day, such as meal set-up or clear-up, dishes, pots, kitchen patrol, cleaning the bathrooms and more. Our staff work alongside campers in completing their crew duties and maintain careful supervision. Crew time provides a great opportunity for campers to form friendships with other children who are not in their cabin.

Program

Our free-choice activity program is based on providing flexibility and tailoring our activities to our campers' needs. Every day, our campers have the choice between a wide range of activities, run by dedicated and creative counselors. We offer classic camp activities such as canoeing and archery, individual skill development, educational discussion-based programming, creative expression in the arts, a range of arts and crafts, sports, games and aquatics. We offer a broad range of activities, tailored to children of all ages, interests and developmental levels. We balance active programming with quiet and

meditative activities, any of which children can attend depending on their mood and interests.

We often hear campers remark how hectic their lives are away from camp. Stress from school, sports practice, music lessons and other responsibilities which may be present in life outside camp is not an issue here. Furthermore, campers are given the opportunity to make meaningful choices about how they spend their time, on a daily basis. Our daily schedule provides plenty of organized activities, balanced with free time to relax, read or enjoy playing with friends.

Our daily schedule features 4 activity periods, each beginning with an assembly in which staff explain the options available for that period. Some of the activities your child may choose from include:

Archery / Arts & Crafts / Cookouts / Swimming / Canoeing / Drama / Fishing / High Ropes / Hiking / Campfires / Softball / Making Music / Nature Crafts / Basketball / Big Swing / Low Ropes / Touch Football / Ultimate Frisbee / Volleyball / Camouflage / Bug Hunt / Hill Marbles / Friendship Bracelets / Debate / Drum Circle / Water Ball / Cooking / Outdoor Survival Skills / GaGa / Kick Ball / Sandcastles / Juggling / Yoga / Camp Play / RPGs / Swamp Stomp / Poetry / Frisbee Golf and much more!

Special events and theme days are also scheduled each session. Regular day and overnight off-site trips include berry picking, river tubing, county fairs, hiking, visits to local state parks, and canoe trips.

Typical Daily Schedule:

- 7:30 Wake-up
- 7:45 Meal set-up crew
- 8:00 Breakfast
- 8:30 Crew duties
- 9:00 Cabin clean-up
- 9:45 Assembly - 1st activity period
- 10:45 Transition time
- 11:00 Assembly - 2nd activity period
- 12:00 Free time
- 12:15 Meal set-up crew
- 12:30 Lunch
- 1:00 Crew duties and free time
- 2:00 Rest hour
- 3:00 Assembly – 3rd activity period
- 4:00 Transition time
- 4:15 Assembly - 4th activity period
- 5:15 Free time
- 5:30 Meal set-up crew
- 5:45 Dinner
- 6:30 Crew duties and free time
- 7:15 Evening program
- 8:30 Prepare for bed
- 9:00 Taps, lights out, Counselors read to campers

Skill Progression Based Programs

Campers have the option of engaging in one or more of our skill-based activity programs. We offer progression-based programs in canoeing, archery, fishing and TrailBlazers (outdoor survival skills). Additionally, all campers participate in swim classes every weekday. While skill-based programming allows for campers to focus on developing their abilities in an area of particular interest, all campers are welcome to attend any activities, regardless of skill level.

Swimming

All campers participate in swim lessons Monday-Friday. The day after they arrive at camp, campers undertake a swimming evaluation so we can establish their proficiency. Campers are then put into appropriate swimming groups based on the American Red Cross Swim Program. During swim class, we work with campers to improve their confidence and proficiency in the water. Campers who demonstrate significant progress are able to move on to the next American Red Cross swim level.

Camp Policies

Please familiarize yourself with the following camp policies. If you have any questions, feel free to contact the camp office.

Registration

Please choose your session(s) carefully so that your camper may experience the whole wonderful session from beginning to end. Campers must start and end their sessions at the correct times on Check-in and Check-out days. Arriving late, leaving early or removing your child for part of a session affects their experience as well as the experience of other campers in camp and creates more work for our staff on already very busy days. **Non-emergency late arrivals, early departures and leaving during the session must be approved by the office and are subject to a \$50 service charge.**

Refunds

Cancellation or reduction of sessions after April 1st shall incur a \$200 charge per occurrence. No refunds of any tuition will be made after June 1st.

Though we always strive to help children learn from their mistakes and work through problems, it is not always in the best interest of the camper or those around them to stay at camp. Camp Dark Waters reserves the right to dismiss any camper for serious, or repeated infraction of the camp policies, or if they pose a threat to themselves or others. In the event of such dismissal, no refund shall be granted.

Medical Care

Minor injuries and illnesses will be handled on site by our qualified medical staff. If your child requires additional outside care, we will attempt to contact you first to update you on the situation. If we cannot reach you, we will attempt to contact the emergency contact person listed on your child's health form. If we still cannot make contact, your signature on the health form will act as permission to seek appropriate medical care. Our primary outside care facility is Virtua Hospital in Voorhees, NJ. You will be responsible for any medical bills, payable when you check-out at the end of the session.

Phone Policy

We are a low-tech, nature-oriented camp, where campers are able to disconnect from technology. Therefore, our policy is that we do not allow campers to make or receive phone calls. **Please do not promise your child that they may call you at any time.** This is unfair to other campers and such promises increase the likelihood your child will be homesick. Arrangements may be made for calls under special circumstances, such as a birthday or a family emergency. Please contact the camp office if you need to make such arrangements.

Mail

Our campers receive mail each day, during rest hour. Mail should be sent to P.O. Box 263, Medford, NJ 08055, addressed to Camp Dark Waters, c/o your child. Please list your child's cabin on the bottom left corner of the envelope. If you are sending a package via UPS or FedEx, or ordering from Amazon (Please remember to put your child's name), you should send it to our street address: 26 New Freedom Rd, Medford, NJ 08055. When sending a package, please remain mindful of our policies regarding items we do not allow at camp. Please refer to the packing section of this handbook for a complete list. **Please refrain from sending gifts not allowed at camp, as it sends a message to campers that it is okay to break the rules.** Packages are opened by campers, under supervision by staff. Any items your child receives that are not allowed by our policies will be kept in the camp office.

We offer a one-way messaging system which enables you to write to your child, who will receive your message the same day. Messages can be sent to your camper by logging into the parent dashboard. We will email you with a guide on how to do this before the summer.

Each Sunday, your child will be required to write and send a letter home. You should, therefore, receive at least one letter each week. If your child is young or inexperienced in addressing letters, you may wish to send pre-addressed and stamped envelopes or postcards with your child.

Visiting on Change Days

If your child is staying for more than one session, we encourage you to visit on a change day between sessions they are attending. You can visit your child at camp or sign them out for the day. **Visiting day hours are 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.** We allow campers to leave camp with another adult, or family of another camper on a change day, only after permission is given by the parent/guardian of that camper. Please contact the camp office if you wish to make such an arrangement. To

preserve the continuity of the camping experience and to avoid homesick feelings in other campers, **please do not visit on days other than change days.** Special arrangements can be made with the camp office, if such a visit is necessary.

Arrival and Departure

All campers should arrive on the first day of a session between 1 and 4 p.m. Hours for departure are Saturday mornings between 10 a.m. and noon. Arrival and departure days are busy with many tasks to accomplish for both campers and staff. Because of this, **Non-emergency late arrivals, early departures and leaving during the session must be approved by the office and are subject to a \$40 service charge.** Lunch is not served to departing or arriving campers on change days.

Procedures for Arriving Campers

Arrival:

Upon arrival at camp, you will be greeted by a staff member at the end of our driveway. There is a lot of traffic leaving and arriving on change days, so please only proceed down the driveway once instructed to do so. When you enter our parking lot, please follow the instructions given by our staff. We have limited parking space, so we need to ensure that everyone is parked as efficiently as possible.

Check-in:

Check-in happens in front of the camp office. At the check-in desk, your child will be given their cabin and crew assignments and you will have the opportunity to sign up for pictures if you have not done so in advance. If you have pre-ordered any store items, the staff at the check-in desk will direct you to the camp store, to collect them.

Nurse Check:

After checking-in and picking up store items, you and your child will meet with one of our nurses. **Please do not move into a cabin until you have met with the nurse.** Here, the nurse will conduct a lice-check and ensure

that your child is in good health. While this is happening, you will be able to discuss any medical needs, medications or any other issues with a nurse. The nurse will review your child's completed health form with you, and answer any questions you might have. While we attempt to keep the line moving, please understand that our nurses need to spend time with each family to ensure they have a thorough understanding of each child's medical needs.

It is important that you share information about any physical, mental, medical or emotional issues your child has, with the nurse, year-round camp staff, and/or in the online registration when enrolling in camp. The more information we have about the individual needs of a camper, the better equipped we are to ensure that their time at camp is happy and successful. Failure to disclose any such information may result in your child having to be sent home from camp. All information received will be kept confidential and used only to care for your child.

Medication:

Any medication your child takes will be reviewed by our medical staff, and the nurse will discuss it with you during the nurse check. All medication is held securely in our infirmary and delivered by our camp nurse as required. No medication (prescription, homeopathic or over-the-counter) will be allowed in the sleeping cabins. Because it is unlawful for any health care professional to distribute any medication without the original packaging, **all medication must be in the original packaging with the child's name on it and listed on the health form.** We cannot accept expired medication, or any medication not in its original packaging, under any circumstances.

Cabin move-in:

After visiting the nurse, it's time to move your child into their cabin. Here, you'll get a chance to meet your child's counselors. Feel free to ask questions and get to know the counselors a little better. Information on any bedwetting issues, medication taken, anxieties your child may be having, recent difficult experiences, and general social adjustment of your

child should be given to the counselors. This is incredibly helpful and helps us provide the best possible camping experience to your child.

After you have finished moving your child in, the check-in process is complete. Saying goodbye can be hard, especially for a camper who is experiencing camp for the first time. We suggest that you discuss your plans with your child before arriving at camp. Designate a short amount of time you intend to stay after settling your child into a cabin and stick to it. Lingering longer can often make a child nervous and more likely to feel homesick.

We recommend you allow 60 – 90 minutes for the check-in process. Our Camper Advocate and Camp Director will be available if you need to talk about any issues regarding your child, or have questions.

Procedures for Departing Campers

Check-out:

When you arrive to pick up your child, you will be directed to the same desk at which you checked them in. There you will confirm who you are picking up and pay for any incidental charges – stamps, batteries, envelopes, laundry etc. – that may have been incurred. You will also be given cabin/camp pictures, if you ordered them. You will then be directed to the Main Area of camp, where your child will be waiting.

Infirmary visit:

Your next stop is at the infirmary, if your child took medications or had any medical issues at camp. The camp nurse will return any unused medications. If your child required outside treatment for any illness or injury, the nurse will inform you of any continuing treatment required. You will also have the opportunity to ask about any medical care received by your child.

Move out of cabin:

Next, you will proceed to your child's cabin. Please take a few moments to speak with their cabin counselor to learn more of your child's experience at camp. Our counselors will be happy to answer questions about any

aspect of your child's stay. When you arrive, your child should be packed, but items are often misplaced or forgotten. Please take a moment to search through, around, and under the cabin, for any belongings your child may have missed. Lost and found clothing will be placed in a public area for you to go through as well. After a few teary good-byes, you'll be ready to leave.

Completing the check-out procedure normally takes around an hour.

Homesickness

Homesickness is often a concern for families sending their child off on their first overnight camping experience. It is something we deal with on a daily basis and have a lot of experience managing. Children missing home is a normal reaction when they go away to camp. In our experience, almost all children miss something about home while they are away at camp. Missing home is not a bad thing: it is a natural part of being away in a new environment and reflects the love children feel for those at home. We spend a lot of time training our staff on effective management of homesickness and have a long track record of helping homesick campers understand and work through their homesickness. We pride ourselves on the individualized care we can provide to campers, to ensure that they have a successful time here.

How We Deal With Homesickness at Camp:

Every child is different so there is no one way to deal with homesickness. In general, we talk with the child and reaffirm that missing home is okay. We talk about things they like about camp and what activities they want to participate in. We then ensure that they get the opportunity to do those things. We know from experience that mealtimes, bedtimes, and free times are the toughest for campers missing home, so we try to keep your child occupied during those times. Sometimes giving extra responsibilities such as walking the camp dogs or helping write the schedule can be useful. Some campers benefit from writing home or journaling. Others need to be kept active in order to distract them from

feeling sad. We have a range of strategies available and will work hard to find the right solution for any homesick child.

We have dedicated, experienced and well-trained counselors who are able to address the majority of homesickness. If they require additional support, a member of administrative staff may become involved. In most cases, homesickness goes away within a couple of days as a child becomes immersed in the camp routine. If homesickness persists, our Camper Advocate or Camp Director may contact you to see if you can suggest any ideas or strategies. In such cases, we work collaboratively with families and other CDW staff to ensure there is an effective strategy in place. In the rare event that the decision is made that camp is not going to be a positive experience for your child, we will make that decision together with you.

How You Can Help Your Child Avoid Homesickness:

There are many things you can do before camp begins to help prepare your child for the camping experience. Here are a few examples:

Involve your child

It is important to involve your child in the planning for camp. Please be open with your child about discussing their feelings or concerns about going away to camp. If a child feels forced to go to camp, or abandoned, they are much more likely to be homesick. Allowing your child to feel as though they had a voice in the decision to go to camp, goes a long way to avoiding such feelings.

Provide some practice time away from home

Going away for two whole weeks is a really long time for a child who has never been away from home before. Giving your child time away from home provides the opportunity to learn to deal with those feelings. Plan some sleepovers at a friend's house, or with other relatives. If your child is involved in a youth group or scouts, let them go on a weekend group trip without you. The more times your child experiences time away from you, the easier it becomes.

Talk with your child about homesickness

Don't assume that your child will be able to deal with issues of homesickness alone. Talking with your child about these issues in the months before camp starts will help. Devise ways to help your child deal with those feelings. Suggestions such as staying busy, writing letters and talking with the counselors and directors are great.

Watch how you phrase things

Keep your conversations in a positive light. Don't say things like you know they are going to miss home. Instead, frame it in ways that keep your child thinking positively.

If you tell your child, *"I sure hope you're ready for this," "I'm going to miss you so much I might die,"* or *"Gee, I hope you don't get so homesick you have to come home early,"* you'll be putting those negative ideas in your child's head. You have to be careful what you say.

Instead say things like, *"I know you might miss home a little, but I know you can handle it," "Sure, I'm going to miss you, but you'll have a great time and I'll be here when the session is over,"* or *"If you start to feel like you're missing home a lot, remember the ways to deal with it we've talked about and don't forget your counselor is there to help you out."*

Have a positive, reaffirming letter on the first day of camp

You can either mail the letter in advance or give it to your child's counselor when you arrive, to give to them later. Load the letter with positive messages about how excited you are that your child is getting to experience camp. Remind your child of all of the fun activities that are going to happen. Reframing the time away into something else positive is also a great idea. Writing things such as *"Two weeks is just about as long as winter break was and remember how fast that flew by,"* helps children think of their stay as a short vacation from their normal routine.

Don't make deals for early pick-ups or phone calls

This is a common mistake well-meaning adults make all of the time. You may think that you're comforting your child, but it increases the chance they will be homesick. Instead of focusing on adjusting and having fun at camp, they will focus on your promise. Our staff are skilled at helping

children work through their feelings and making their time at camp a positive experience. Promising an early pick-up or phone call ties our hands and puts you on the spot. Increasing your child's self-esteem and independence probably played a large part in your decision to send your child to summer camp: this is much more difficult to achieve if they are focused on coming home.

Letters From Your Child:

Nothing is harder for parents to see than a letter from their child saying that they are miserable. Know that your child is surrounded by people who will do everything they can to make camp a positive experience. Although it is a natural desire, please resist the urge to jump in the car, drive to camp and pick them up. If you receive a homesick letter, remember that mail takes time to get to you so the letter will be three or four days old by the time you receive it. There is a strong chance your child will be over it by the time you get the news. Of course, you are welcome to call camp for an update. Speaking with a member of the administrative staff or your child's counselor should set your mind at ease. We'll give you an update on how your child is doing and what we've done to help. You may also want to write a return letter to your child. The following is a good sample response:

Dear _____,

I've just gotten your letter telling me how homesick you've been. Those feelings must have been really strong when you wrote it. I know we talked about it being ok to miss home some, but I guess we didn't expect them to be so strong. Thanks for writing me a letter to tell me how you've been feeling. That really took a lot of courage. We talked a lot this spring about you wanting to go to camp. Remember how we talked about how long you should go for and we agreed together that two weeks seemed about right? I bet that seems like a really long time right now, but as you're reading this letter, there's only one week left. Imagine that! You're already halfway through! That's a lot. I'm really proud of you.

It's been a few days since you wrote me. You may not even be homesick anymore. I'll know for sure when I get your next letter. If you're still having some problems, think about all the things you can do to help you feel better. Your counselors can help you a lot. Keep doing all those fun things at camp. Remember how much you were looking forward to doing archery this summer? Keep writing a

lot of letters, and keep smiling. Before you know it, it'll be Saturday. Seven more days is not that much. I know you can do it!

Snoop says "hi". We'll take him out to the park when you get home to play fetch. He'll really like that.

I can't wait to see all the neat things you've made in arts and crafts. Daddy and I miss and love you. We'll be there at 10:00 on Saturday morning to pick you up, just like we planned. I can't wait to get your next letter.

Love, Mom

This kind of letter really helps. It acknowledges that your child is homesick and offers ways to help. Don't dwell on the negatives; instead focus on the positives of being at camp. The same is true even when writing a letter to a child who isn't homesick. Don't mention sad events that your child has no control over. Telling your child that the family hamster died should wait until the end of camp. Also, saying things like how bored you are without your child and how much you really miss them only adds guilty feelings to your child. Keep your letters newsy and upbeat. Provide lots of questions for your child to answer in the next letter. Pictures from home, comics etc. are always big hits with campers. Your child doesn't need to get a letter every day, but three or four letters a week will really help.

Don't forget, it takes a few days for the mail to get to camp, so if you wait a few days into the session to send a letter, your child will go a whole week without hearing from you. The one way messaging system mentioned in the "Mail" section earlier in this handbook is a great way to contact your camper in addition to sending letters. depending on what time of day you send a message, your child will receive it that day or the next.

Packing List for 2 Week Stay

Please send your child with things that can get **dirty, ruined, or lost**. Sending a camper with clothing, bedding or belongings of high financial or sentimental value is strongly discouraged.

You'll need a two week supply of these items:

- Underwear
- Socks
- Shorts
- Pants, sweats or jeans (2 pairs)
- T-shirts
- Sweatshirt or Jacket (2)
- Swimwear appropriate for vigorous activity
- Pajamas
- Towels (at least 3!)
- Soap, Shampoo / Conditioner
- Hairbrush
- Toothpaste/brush

Laundry is only provided to campers staying longer than two weeks.

Make sure you have:

- 1 pair of sneakers
- 1 pair of flip-flops or slides
- Raingear
- Laundry bag
- Flashlight with spare batteries
- Insect repellent (aerosols cannot be used in the cabins)
- Water bottle

For Sleeping:

For health and safety reasons, sleeping bags cannot be used in the cabins.

- 2 sets of twin sheets
- Heavy blanket (it gets chilly at night)
- Pillow and pillow case

Additional Suggestions:

- Bandanas
- Playing cards or small board games
- Books/Magazines (no e-readers)
- Camera
- Ball glove

- Musical instrument
- Fishing equipment
- Envelopes, stamps, paper and pen

What NOT to Bring or Send: We ask for your help in avoiding the following:

- **Electronics:** Video games, cell phones, tablets, and other types of electronics should be left at home. We believe time in the cabin should be spent communicating with each other and these items prohibit such an experience.
- **Food, gum or candy:** These items attract animals. Camp provides plenty of food and snacks. There is no need to send any.
- **Money:** Nothing is available for purchase with cash at camp. Any expenses incurred during your child's stay will be charged to your child's account.
- **Weapons, flammables, and explosives:** These items have no place in a safe camp environment. If an activity requires a pocket knife, camp will provide them.
- **Tobacco, alcohol, and illegal drugs:** Possession of such items will result in immediate dismissal from camp.
- **Anything Valuable:** Camp Dark Waters is not responsible for any lost, stolen, or broken items. Please do not bring anything to camp that has financial or sentimental value.

We recommend that you and your child pack together. This allows you to make sure items that are not allowed at camp are not packed and also allows your child to know what items they have brought to camp.

Pack your things in

- Duffel Bag or large zippered sports bag
- Long, flat Rubbermaid storage container
- Suitcase

There is very limited space in the sleeping cabins. Your things will be stored under ½ of the floor space under your bunk. Please limit your luggage to 2 bags or less.

**We're Looking Forward
to a
Wonderful Summer!**

