

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO

# CRUSHING CAMP

MANAGING CAMPER WORRIES  
ABOUT SLEEPOVER CAMP



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# WELCOME!

Thank you for taking the time to read our guide. We know that transitioning to or back to camp can bring up a lot of questions and worries for families. That's why we have crafted our guide for parents (and campers, too, really) as the first step to thinking and learning about all the things that might come your way as your camper takes on their adventure.

This guide is meant to serve as an introduction to the whole overnight camp experience. If you feel that your child or t(w)een could use some additional support or guidance, we have also created specialized workbooks to explore an in-depth, strengths based approach to camp.

The workbooks are not only unique and one of kind, but tailored to the overnight experience specifically. They are full of awareness and confidence building activities. Best of all, they have been crafted by a Child Psychologist and Social Worker. They will ensure that not only are general worries addressed, but that your child or t(w)een will be set up for success with the perspective of a positive mental wellness lens!

You can find copies of our workbooks on Amazon. Don't forget to check out Dr. Morea's other resources at her page on Amazon, too, including Adult, Teen, and Child Guided Journals (these could also be taken to camp) and a Self-Esteem Workbook for older Teens and Adults.

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# INTRODUCTION

**Welcome to the Crushing Camp guide!** Your complete handbook for information and things to consider from all domains as your child heads to (or back to) camp! We are so thrilled to have teamed up to offer this guide for a few reasons. First and foremost, as child experts and professionals, we bring to the table unique expertise (more on that in a bit). Second, with camp experience ourselves, and that of our children, we understand and can navigate firsthand the camp system pretty well. Over the years we have seen how pre-camp jitters and worries can surface. But, we have also identified and executed ways to confidently navigate the camp transition process. And lastly, as close friends and colleagues, we understand the value in community. So we have pooled all of our personal and professional resources into this project, to bring you a complete, concise guide to crush camp. And best of all, it's FREE!

Transitions can cause worries, we get it. And camp is no different. It's anticipated that you and your child or teen might have many questions as you prepare for their time away at camp. Jitters are actually expected and healthy, too. Just like starting a different grade at school, meeting new people, or visiting with someone that you haven't seen in some time can offer both excitement and worries, camp usually draws on similar feelings.

Time to learn a little bit about us and our mission. Julia is a Registered Clinical Social Worker and Sleep Consultant. Marilisa is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist. We both specialize in working with children and adolescents and have seen any and every worry under the sleepover camp sun. We know and understand anxiety and have tried and tested strategies to help with the transitioning process. Our goal is to offer our wisdom, knowledge and ideas on how to make your family's camp experience a positive one. Our mission: Building Confidence in your child or teen to Crush Camp!

We hope that you find as much value in this guide as we intend it to bring to you. We want you to have tips and a better understanding of your child's needs. Our goal is to make it accessible, relatable and available to any family who might benefit from it.

# COMMON WORRIES

(with littles)

Camp is exciting! Your child will likely share all of the things that they are looking forward to that come along with sleepover camp. From activities, to making new friends, to sleeping on a bunk bed, these are all things that many children and adolescents openly discuss. But, camp can cause some worries, too. As we had mentioned in the introduction, not only is it common to have anxious feelings about camp, it is expected. Let's go through some of the common worries that we have seen in children and teens at camp. To make things simpler, we have broken these worries down by age groups.

**If you have a child heading to camp who is between the ages of 7-11, here are some of the common worries that you might see in them:**

- Sleep** - Insomnia, fears about sleeping away from home, new noises, being the last one awake
- Bed Wetting** - Fear of having an accident, what to do if there is an accident
- Hygiene** - How to seek help if needed, changing in front of others, remembering grooming habits (including nail care, skin care, and things related to puberty)
- Social** - Making friends, being included vs excluded
- Home Sickness** - FOMO, being away from home, routine and structure change
- Independence** - Being overwhelmed by freedom
- Adjustments and Transitions** - New structure/routine/downtime and how to manage
- Bathroom Worries** - Inconsistent bowel movements or changes, who can help if needed
- Food** - Not liking food options, picky eating
- Swim Test** - Fear of taking/not passing the swim test, feeling inadequate, missing out
- Laundry/Organizing clothes** - Worries about unpacking, organizing clothes, daily changing
- Cabin Assignment** - Will people accept or like me? Will I be with my friends? Possible conflicts?
- Cabin Layout** - Where will my bunk be located? Top or bottom bunk? Will I be near a friend?
- Puberty**- Getting period or having it for the first time, body hair and changes, use of deodorant
- Identity and Diversity** - Looking or feeling different (race/skin colour etc.), sexual and gender diversity - coming into their own and how to present themselves to others with pronouns, etc.

**Other worries not listed above:**

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# COMMON WORRIES

(with t(w)eens)

Whether this is a first-time experience, or a return from last summer, fears for your tween or teen about heading to camp can be quite strong. Though some of their worries may look similar to 7-11 year olds, alongside those, here are some additional common worries that surface for our older crew.

**If you have a t(w)een heading to camp who is between the ages of 12–15, here are some of the common worries that you might see in them:**

**Sleep** - Needing white noise machines or music to fall asleep, darkness, lack of privacy, other sleep challenges or needs not being met

**Disconnect from Technology** - Unable to communicate with school friends, anxiety regarding withdrawal from social media, feeling detached or isolated

**Grooming** - Having to let go of home routine when getting ready, self-conscious if unable to wear make-up or groom the way they are used to, not having supplies/products that they normally use

**Home sickness** - From friends, significant others, or family back home, FOMO

**Social/Peer Pressure** - Fitting in, desire to partner with someone at camp, feeling isolated or ostracized, navigating how to manage peers partaking in risky behaviours

**Relationships** - Managing long-distance or new relationship fears, or issues that arise

**Adjustments/Transitions** - To new people, camp expectations, or conflicts

**Self-Esteem** - Body image issues due to comparison to peers, changing in front of others, body changes due to puberty

**Food** - Food desires that are not available, restricting of food due to body image fears

**Cabin Assignment** - Past friends or foes, wanting to be accepted and included

**Puberty**- Getting period or having it for the first time, body hair and changes

**Identity and Diversity** - Looking different (race/skin colour), sexual and gender diversity - coming into their own and how to present themselves to others with pronouns, etc.

**Other worries not listed above:**

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# TALKING ABOUT WORRIES

As parents, it can be hard to know when and how to talk to your children or teens about their worries related to camp. We want to offer you some “tells” that it’s time to start a conversation. We will also suggest some “Dos and Don’ts on what would be appropriate to say to them or address.

First, let’s start with some of the **“tells”** to look for when it would be time to start a dialogue about camp fears. Your child or teen will likely...

Ask lots of questions related to camp and what to expect

Feel undecided if they want to go; flip flop on their views on it

Present with some separation anxiety as the time nears closer or once it is confirmed

Show reluctance to go shopping for necessities for camp

Experience nightmares with themes around separation or peer issues

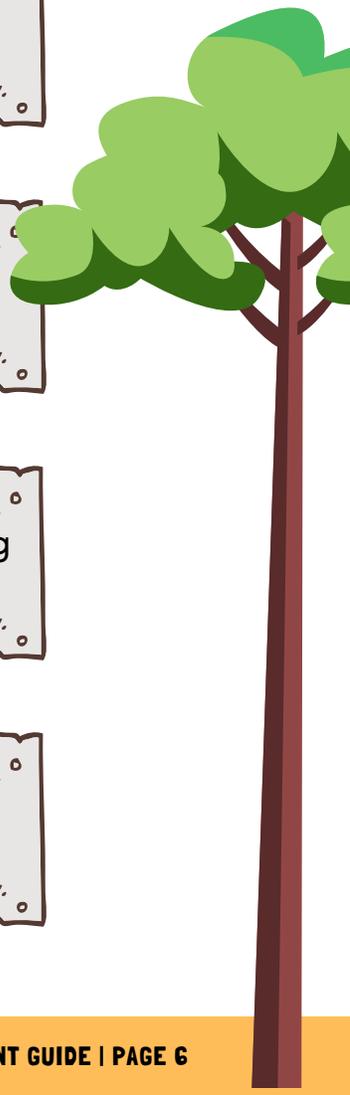
Develop an active imagination of bad things that could happen

Share with you a lot of “What If...” questions

Have an escalation of other things - not wanting to do extracurriculars, homework, etc

Demand more attention and time from you

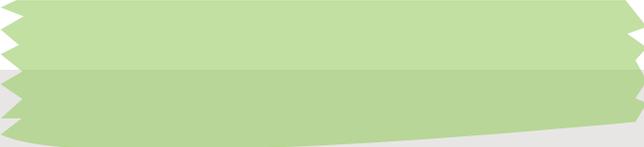
Have a regression in independence



# MANAGING WORRIES

## (The DOs)

Next let's address some of the appropriate ways to manage these worries or potential concerns. Below is a list of DOs on how to approach various situations that might surface.

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1. Share your own personal worry experiences, or those of close others, and how they were able to be managed.
  2. Validate worries - let your child/teen know that it's normal and expected to feel worried.
  3. Talk about various ways to handle change and difficult situations (get them ready for problem-solving generally, not just camp specific concerns).
  4. Connect with a safe person at camp such as the director, a camp leader, etc.
  5. Learn the camp policy about homesickness/returning home and calling or emailing home BEFORE you make any promises that might later be broken.
  6. Connect with the camp about how to foster continuity of care while away if your child or teen is in therapy.
  7. Prepare for likely scenarios with social, emotional and physical concerns and problem-solve solutions together.
  8. Show photos of the camp and discuss activities in which they will likely participate.
  9. Connect with other children or teens going, if possible.
  10. Practice independence skills that are needed and expected while away (grooming, laundry).
  11. Prepare them for what to do when there is a lot of downtime at camp, especially for the little kids, as this can be overwhelming for them.
  12. Prepare for them a stack of pre-written letters they can open when they are in need of a Home Hug.
  13. Pack items from home that are comforting for when times are tough or nights are rough, such as pictures, stuffies, or other comforting home items.
  14. Tell them all the reasons why you are excited for them to have this experience and help them create their own list, too.

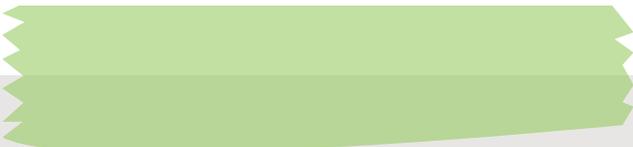


# MANAGING WORRIES

## (The DON'Ts)

Now that we have established some adaptive and positive ways to address camp anxiety, let's shift our focus to things that would be helpful to avoid.

Below is a list of DON'Ts when trying to prepare for camp. Many of these might seem intuitive, but reminders are always good, right? Let's try to avoid these things below.

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1. Promising your child or teen that they can call home at their discretion.
  2. Promising to pick them up to come home early if they are not having fun, which often sets the tone for the experience. If this is a tough one for you, at least know the policy of the camp, and set a date of the earliest possible time that you would come and pick them up (i.e. one week if it's a two-week camp, etc.)
  3. Projecting your own anxiety onto your child or teen (i.e. crying at drop-off, telling them that it will be harder for you because of your close relationship with them). Hear us out on this, as we aren't saying don't cry. Cry away. Ugly cry. Just don't let them see you sobbing and regretting this decision yourself as they are trying to board a bus, when they are already afraid to do so.
  4. Sending letters sharing all of the excitement that they are missing out on while they are away.
  5. Setting unrealistic expectations that it is going to be a completely amazing experience from start to end.
  6. Setting unrealistic expectations that things can be modified for your child or teen in all aspects, such as food preference, times that they want to shower, etc.
  7. Expecting that every letter you receive will be a cheerful one, as most often children and teens write home when they are homesick or sad. That moment usually passes quickly.

Other reminders for yourself not mentioned above:

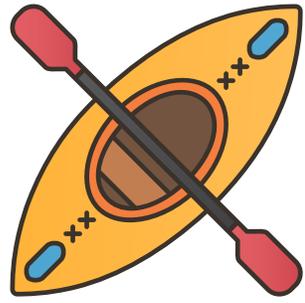
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# SHARING IS CARING

(with camp that is)



If you are new to the whole camp thing, you also likely have many questions about the process. From our experience, personally and professionally, we have found that the best way to prepare your child or teen for a successful summer is to be open and honest with the camp. This includes sharing any special considerations that your child or teen might have. We've compiled a list of the various things that you might want to consider and have shared them below.

It might seem scary or that it is a breach of privacy to share confidential details about your child or your family, but keep in mind that by sending your child or teen off without the camp knowing to look out for certain things that might arise, it is actually setting up the experience to be a perfect storm. It's better to be proactive than reactive, in our opinion. So, here are some things that we encourage parents to at least mention to camp staff.

- Medical conditions
- Behavioural, social and emotional needs
- Mental Health concerns and current status of them
- History at other camps; patterns, concerns, areas of growth
- Medication changes or needs
- Conflicts with any other campers
- Presentation when struggling i.e. shut down, anger, panic
- Coping strategies that have proven to be effective for your child
- Triggers i.e. if things aren't fair, recent losses or life changes, sensitive topics
- Eating/sleep habits that are concerning
- Diversity concerns, including fears of being excluded, targeted
- Sibling and friend dynamics

# THINGS TO CONSIDER

Now it's time to address (or readdress) all other things to consider to help make the camp adventure a smooth and seamless transition for your family. We have devised a list of things to take into consideration to help with making your child's time away at camp a comfortable and enjoyable experience. Review the list below and check things that you would like to follow up on before they head to camp.

- Ask yourself if using the summer break to have your child go off of medications is the right time to do so and is in best interest of your child.
- As we mentioned above, being open about mental health and behavioural needs with the camp will help set up your child for success, not stigmatization.
- If siblings are attending the same camp, have a conversation about expectations of each of them and what is realistic to expect from each other.
- Plan ahead - if your child is in therapy, put in action a plan for while they are away at camp or when they return back home.
- Have a discussion about whether talking on the phone or bringing your child home early is actually in their best interest. Have conversations with others to help guide you, such as their pediatrician or therapist. Make a plan to utilize the support of their camp counsellor, unit head and/or camp management or administration about ideas and/or suggestions for how to manage this, as well.
- Put together a toolkit of all things comforting (hand lotion, pictures, small toys/stuffies/fidgets, colouring books and pencil crayons, a special note that they can open and read each day, etc).
- Have a chat with the camp about inclusivity and accommodation for diversity needs.



# FINAL SEND OFF

A huge **THANK YOU** for reading this guide through. We hope that you found it helpful and useful. We know that this process can bring about a lot of questions, and our goal is to answer some of those for you. We encourage you to read the guide with your child or teen to see what sits with them, too, as it may surprise you.

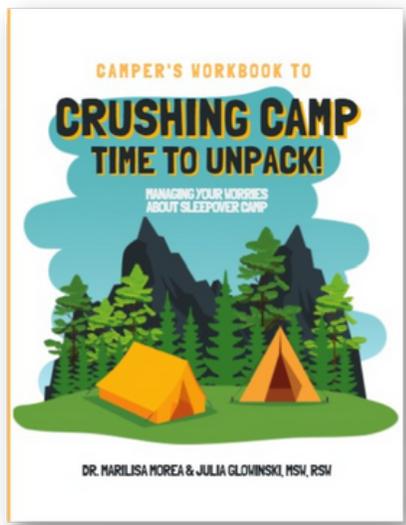
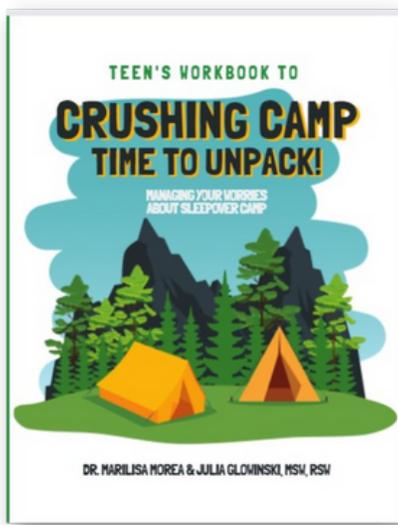
As you prepare for this summer ahead, remind yourself that the worries will fade, the fears will pass, but the memories that your child or teen will create will likely last a lifetime. Camp offers so many amazing character building opportunities; independence, resiliency, problem-solving and friendship building skills. We are hopeful that our guide will help prepare you and your littles to be one step closer to achieving all of these goals.

If you are finding that this guide created more questions than answers, or are simply looking for some direction on how your camper can navigate the worries that might arise, we would love to help with that, too. Check out the accompanying workbooks that we have created. And because we understand the diverse needs of a developing camper, we have dedicated child and teen versions to meet them.

Julia and Marilisa  
Helping your family crush it at camp!



**FIND US ON AMAZON!**





# AUTHOR BIOS



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Julia Glowinski is a Registered Clinical Social Worker and Certified Sleep Consultant. She worked on the management team of two Adolescent Psychiatric Crisis Units at a Mental Health Centre in Toronto for 8 years, before opening her own sleep-based practice, Glow Sleep Services. Julia commonly works with separation anxiety, sleep-related anxiety concerns, and helping her clients transition through various aspects of their lives, including heading to camp. She has years of overnight camp memories from her own childhood, and has recently had the pleasure of being able to introduce this experience to her children as well. Noteworthy, Julia spends her summers at sleepover camp as a camp Social Worker, supporting children and teens as they navigate the ups and downs of the overnight camp experience.

Dr. Marilisa Morea is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist working with individuals of all ages. She was a Lead Psychologist at a Toronto-based Children and Adolescent's Mental Health Clinic for 10 years, and is now the proud owner of her own practice, Monarch Therapy + Wellness Centre. Much like Julia, a lot of Marilisa's work is with those who are struggling with separation and anxiety disorders. She commonly works hand in hand with camps to help transition her clients to camp and supports them while they are away as well. She herself was a camp counsellor and director and has children immersed in the love of summer camp as well.

Marilisa is the proud author of the Get It Together Series; a Self-Esteem Workbook, and Guided Journals, for Littles, Teens and Adults (coming soon). You can find details on Amazon or her website.



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