

CAMP BURT SHURLY – POLICY ON PHONE CALLS HOME

At summer camp, NOT talking to your child really is a good thing! It is important to understand the basis for this statement. I have worked in camping for over 20 years and have seen the negative effect that too much communication has on a child when it comes to camp.

I have seen firsthand a happy, well-adjusted camper who is loving camp, enjoying their stay, and making friends simply crumble at the sound of their mother's voice on the end of the phone. I have seen children who, after two weeks of homesickness, have just begun to really enjoy camp, get dragged back into severe homesickness by a call from Mom and Dad who insist on speaking with their child because they just received a letter (written a week ago).

A simple fact of life is that **we all get homesick!** Our counselors are from all around the world and they experience homesickness during their stay at our camp. It's not because they don't love working here...they do! But they also miss the comfort of the life to which they are accustomed. To know that homesickness is a normal part of growing up helps the campers realize they have the capacity to beat it.

Let's go back to the decision you made to send your child away to camp. Why are you sending your child away? Actually, let's rephrase that statement: Why are you giving your child this wonderful opportunity? Probably because you know that **camp provides children with an opportunity for growth** in a safe, caring environment.

Part of this growth, a BIG part, is **allowing your child the space for this growth to occur.** We know that a child cannot expand their limits while we hold them so tightly. They need to run, fall, get up and do it all over again. Camp is not a perfect science. It is a microcosm of the extended world. Sometimes every day is not as good as the day before! Sometimes friends fall out and then become friends again. Learning to live in a cabin with 12 different and diverse personalities is not easy, but it teaches incredibly useful life skills. It is difficult for some children – especially their first time away from home. But that does not mean that your child needs to talk with you about it immediately. Where is their growth if you try to solve the problem for them? How do they learn to make their own decisions if a parent makes all their decisions?

Another thing to remember when tempted to call your child - **YOU PICKED OUR CAMP!** It is with a large dose of assumption on my part that you did research. You looked into our camp and you chose Camp Burt Shurly for your child. You asked questions about the caliber of staff that will be looking after your child. You learned as much as possible about the programs on offer. You learned about the policies and procedures. You read all of the literature that we have sent to you...

then you decided to send your child here! It was then you decided to trust us with your child. This is your most precious possession. Why did you send your child to this camp if you do not trust them to care for your child's best interest? You must show your child that you trust them to grow and that you trust the camp, as professionals, to look after your child and their best interests. Knowing you chose a great, trustworthy camp gives you as a parent tremendous peace of mind.

HOWEVER - You should not be kept out of the loop. We will communicate with you if there is a significant problem. The camp will keep you informed of everything you need to know from health issues to injuries to behavior problems to debilitating homesickness.

Also, keep this in mind: we do not want an unhappy child moping around camp! Homesickness is contagious! **A good camp will work with your child.** They will help get them involved in activities. They will have a bunch of counselors working round the clock to help your child integrate into camp and make friends. **Friends after all, are the biggest antidote to homesickness I know.**

But do not speak with the child. It prohibits their growth. Let them breathe. Let them know that they can do this! Send letters encouraging them. Letters espousing how you hope they are enjoying the cool activities. That you hope they take time to shower and brush their teeth.

Do not write how much you miss them. That you don't know what to do with yourself. That the dog is pining and not eating. That you are going to their favorite restaurant without them. This only puts guilt onto a child that is having a good time. How can a child enjoy camp when their mom is missing them so much?

If the camp thinks that it is a good idea for you to speak to your child, I can only offer one piece of advice, one phrase to use that I have seen work 99% of the time. Take a deep breath and repeat after me...

"You are not coming home, you made a commitment to go to camp and that is what you will do. You wanted to go to camp. We will pick you up at the end of the session. I love you. I believe you will have a great time at camp."

Then hang up!

This might be the hardest call you will ever make. Your child will talk about how miserable they are! They will indicate that the camp is starving them and they are on hunger strike! They have no friends and no one cares about them. They are really sick and no one is doing anything about this. Experience has taught me that they will say **anything** to get home.

Whatever happens, DO NOT give your child an escape clause! This may sound harsh, however, if you are sending your child to camp with the phrase "*give it a try, if you do not like it, I'll come and pick you up*" – save yourself, the

camp and the child the time, effort, and energy and do not send the child to camp! They will already know that you will “rescue” them. That when times get tough, Mom and Dad will help them avoid a less than perfect day. It will not matter how friendly the staff are! It will not matter how awesome the activities could be. It will not matter how great of friends the kids in the cabin could potentially be...your child will ALREADY want to go home. Your child will mentally not want to be there, and you have already given them an out! The staff will try all the tricks in the book, but it will not help because “I’m going home, my parents promised me.”

Overnight camps are a great learning tool for children lucky enough to have the opportunity to go. But when they do, as a parent you must allow them the space to grow. Allow them to fall. Allow them to fail. **Allow them the freedom to find themselves.** Make new friends. Find their personality. Find their strength. Find their courage. Find their self-confidence and self-belief.

Do not spoil this wonderful opportunity for your child by insisting on speaking with them. More often than not, talking to them will end in failure. It is not a failure for the camp. It is not a failure for you as a parent. It is taking away your child’s chance to strengthen their problem-solving skills. It is taking away their ability to develop and trust in the alternate support structures that they have developed outside their school and family. Taking away their chance to do something on their own. No camp wants a camper to leave without growth. That would be the biggest failure of all.