

**SCOUTS-L**

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**HOMESICK**

**Date: Mon, 17 Mar 1997 20:30:09 -0500**  
**From: Andrew Hagemann <hagemann@visi.net>**  
**To: jambo97@hoplite.org**  
**Subject: Re: JAMBO97 Homesick Scouts**

**Jerry Mathews wrote:**

>  
> Homesick scouts.... SNIP... have some of you experienced jambo  
staffers out there  
> had to deal with this one? Have any tips to share?

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**Jerry,**

**Night time is always the hardest on the homesick Scout. Being active during the day helps to keep the boy's mind from probing the "wound" too much, but in the silence of evening his emotions tend to boil over. In my experience, there is little you can do to help then, so be patient, talk kindly to him, and let him call home as often as his folks can afford it. Almost all parents will have told their boy that he's there for the entire duration. Long before he jumped in your van to ride off into the adventure of his lifetime, they've told him to be brave.**

**Usually after a boy has cried himself to sleep for a couple of nights (Ugh! The boys hate it as much as we do.), he's resigned to either 1) hurting himself so you'll have to send him home or 2) sticking it out. My Scouts once voluntarily formed a nighttime "suicide" vigil for one boy who told us he was going to hurt himself so we'd send him home. After one night of this attention, he seemed to realize that he was among true friends. Also, his folks never wavered in their resolve that he remain at summer camp.**

**After all that, he stayed the rest of the week without wailing and crying himself to sleep.**

**Helpful hints:**

**1. Make sure his folks don't "cave in" and agree to his coming home early. (Agree to this with them before leaving home. Make sure they've told him this several times LONG before he gets into your van for the trip.)**

2. Make sure you talk to and LISTEN to the boy to discover what's preying on his mind. Hazing? Phobias (hates bugs??) Not getting involved with the activities? Misses his Mama's hugs and kisses?
3. Help the boy to discover a reasonable (for him) solution to everything EXCEPT going home (and, okay, the kissing part).
4. Ask the older Scouts to take him into their sphere of influence and involve him in their good times. They will. You'll be amazed by their willingness to help the boy.
5. Find a kind-hearted lady Scouter for the boy to talk to. Sometimes just talking to a nurturing female can "tide them over".
6. NEVER lose your temper.
7. Don't tell him what to do. Let him tell you what he's going to do to solve his emotional distress (coach him, coax him, but don't TELL him.)

I hope this helps.

Drew

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Date: Tue, 18 Mar 97 09:06 EST  
From: "Michael N. Pocalyko" <0006018830@mcimail.com>  
Subject: JAMBO97 Homesick Scouts

Dear Friends in Scouting,

First of all, this thread on Homesick Scouts is a very important one, and I'm so impressed and pleased to see the caring and responsibility that we, as Scouters, are taking for our boys. It's a good reminder of what it is we do and why we really do it.

Drew Hageman's 3/17 post is right on target, and I recommend we all archive

it as the groundwork for how to handle the problem. Thanks, Drew--and well done. I would like to add a couple of things, as a Scouter, Commissioner, and practiced summer camp comforter of homesick Scouts.

Drew mentioned

> let him call home as often as his folks can afford it.

and he's right . . . in MOST cases. Please temper this sound advice with your understanding of the boy's family situation. There are moms, especially, who can make the situation worse for you and your boys, and aggravate the homesickness. It's a tough call, but sometimes it may be better to say, "you can call your Mom in the morning." If the boy is in some emotional distress, and the parent he reaches at 2:00 a.m. is either the "Oh, honey, you can come home to Mommy any time you want" Mom or the "Quit being such a damn Nancy boy" Dad, you may have just made your own situation as a Scoutmaster worse. (I've experienced both types of parents. So have you.)

In the call-home instance, often the first and best telephone call--for severe and unresolvable cases of homesickness, which are actually pretty rare--could be from the Scoutmaster to Mom and Dad. How do you know when that point is reached? When it starts to affect the other boys on a more than temporal basis, and his behavior impacts your abilities to achieve the Scouting program. Communication with the parent, helping you to understand this young man better, can help you a lot. Every boy is different, and every resolution of a homesickness problem is different, too.

Dysfunctional families are often a root cause of homesickness, and here we have to include the over-mothering Moms and the families like that one Cathy Porter described (the Disney World story), who are not particularly attendant to their children's emotional needs.

One other important note. In Drew's post, he talks about how

> My Scouts once voluntarily formed a nighttime "suicide" vigil for one  
> boy who told us he was going to hurt himself so we'd send him home.

The mental health professionals will tell you that verbal expression of suicidal ideation in a teen or pre-teen boy is ALWAYS a major signal of danger, and that unless you're trained as a psychiatrist, family practitioner, or clinical psychologist (I'm not, and most of us Scouters are not either), you should not hesitate: pass the problem on. This is where Bob Cooney's excellent suggestion about the chaplains is extremely pertinent.

Most of today's clergy of all faiths are professionally trained in crisis screening methodologies. At the Jamboree, we will also have medical doctors only steps away from any campsite. A kid threatening to hurt himself is quite serious, and not something I would necessarily try to handle on my own. The lesson is that at the Jamboree we have incredible resources and wonderfully caring people all around, and we should take full advantage of them.

Finally, a few suggestions to add to Drew's for the "garden variety" homesick kid, even if his ennui is pretty severe:

First, every Scout has been homesick at some time or other. I was as an 11-year old camper . . . weren't you? Use this knowledge. Talk about how you felt. Even better, link the homesick fellow up with an older Scout whom he (and the other Scouts) admire, and let that senior boy counsel his homesick Brother Scout. In my Jamboree Troop, I have two Impeesa-trained Scouts, and they've certainly learned counseling skills . . . much like us over-40 Boy-Men have practiced as a result of our Wood Badge training. The lesson: The homesick Scout has to know that the emotions he's experiencing are universal, and that he's not alone. This is a great comfort--and often is as far as it has to go. Use your boy leadership, here, in Bowling Green, and always!

Second, it's the idle time that makes a boy homesick. Keep him busier than he ever imagined he could be. The boys can do this . . . from the moment he gets up until he bunks down exhausted at Taps, they keep him occupied. Physical challenges are best--swimming, COPE course, pioneering, chucking around a football. He can help cook every meal (note, NOT "he can help

clean up every meal"). To accomplish this, you once again get your SPL, ASPL, and Troop Guides involved . . . task them with keeping the homesick Scout occupied and busy 100% of the time. These senior Scouts are your best resource, and they can help him a lot. By the time the homesick one is ready to hit the rack, he's too tired to whine. A few days of this, and he's usually "cured."

Third, as a Scouter, you're NOT a surrogate parent, even though most of us are parents. The homesick Boy Scout misses Mom and Dad, and the structures of home and family. Any Dad-like or Mom-like connection you make with him is a poor second best. So don't try it. Better to substitute a temporary family--one with 35 brothers, and 30,000 other brothers (with apologies to "Newhart"). That's his structure for the mean time being. Once he actually understands that--including that it's TEMPORARY--you're a long way to having your problem solved.

Many thanks to Drew Hageman, Cathy Porter, and Bob Cooney for their fine work in this thread. You've all made some boys' lives better today.

Yours in the Scouting spirit,

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"My brother, I too have kept the Vigil."

". . . and a good old Fox, too."