



# ST PETERS GIRLS

**Preparing your Junior School girl  
for camp success**



## Introduction

St Peter's Girls provides a comprehensive Outdoor Education Program for all girls in the Junior School, Years 2 – 6. Our camps are considered a compulsory part of the curriculum and are designed to promote the sequential development of camping skills; physical, social and emotional skills; environmental awareness; and enjoyment and appreciation of the outdoors. Each camp builds on skills learned in the previous camp. However, support is always provided so that students may enter the program at any level.

## The benefits of camp

At St Peters Girls, we believe there are many benefits to the experience of a school camp. The following are considered to be of particular importance:

- **Relationship building and social skills:** most activities at camp involve team work, which provides opportunities to strengthen established friendships and also to develop new friendships by connecting with girls they don't regularly talk with at school.
- **Independence skills:** school camp will look after your daughter but also allow them a slightly greater independence than they may be used to. Parents are not there to remind their children to eat their vegetables, brush their teeth, or to have a shower. This is therefore a great opportunity for children to learn how to take care of themselves and to do things on their own. When children go to camp, they often return home more independent.
- **Personal challenges:** at camp, children will be exposed to a range of activities that they may not have tried before. These activities facilitate learning in a variety of forms, providing a greater awareness of skills and capabilities that may be new for many.

## Worries about camp

Although there are many benefits to the experience of a school camp, it is recognised that for many children (and their parents!), even the thought of sleeping away from home can provoke high levels of anxiety. Some of the common worries about camp include:

- *Not being able to sleep*
- *Not liking the food camp will offer*
- *Who they will be sharing a cabin/dorm/tent with*
- *Not enjoying the activities camp will offer*
- *Feeling homesick (missing mum/dad/the dog)*

Although these are all understandable worries, it is important to help your daughter feel more positive about camp and to overcome any worries about not enjoying camp she might have.

## Are YOU ready to send your daughter to camp?

Sending children off to camp is emotionally tough on parents, even if it's not your first time. It is normal to be concerned about your child's physical and emotional well-being, but excessive worrying is unhelpful to your daughter. For example, one study that examined the effects of children's and their parent's anxiety concerning camp showed children with anxious parents had higher levels of homesickness than those with parents who showed no anxiety.

It is therefore unhelpful to make comments that express anxiety or ambivalence about your daughter going to camp. Comments such as "*I hope you'll be okay*" and "*what will I do without you?*" can leave children worried that something bad might happen to them or their parents, and can make them feel even more anxious about going. Instead, let your daughter know that you will miss her but that you know she is a strong girl who can go away to camp and enjoy it. Explain to your daughter that 'homesickness' is normal, but that she can use strategies like sharing her feelings with other people and thinking about all the good things that camp is giving her to help ease her worry. It is possible – and OK – for her to miss home AND have fun at camp at the same time!

Your confidence in a successful camp experience will be contagious. **If YOU present camp as a wonderful experience and opportunity, your daughter is more likely to be a successful camper.**

## Preparation: the key to camp success

All children are at different levels of 'readiness' for camp. If you have a child who loves doing sleepovers, loves going to her grandparents and play dates, and relishes new situations, then you've probably got a child who is pretty 'ready' already! On the other hand, if your daughter is a little shaky about all of those things, and perhaps doesn't sleep in her own bed yet or has never spent the night away from you, you need to start preparing for camp **NOW**, so that by the time the camp comes around, she is ready to enjoy her time away. For these children, the key to camp success is *preparation*.

### Using a stepladder

One of the most important predictors of camp success is **being able to do sleepovers**. Therefore, before going to camp, your daughter should be comfortable spending the night away from home. If they haven't done this before, now's the time to start practicing separations.

In order to achieve this, it may be necessary to use a "stepladder" approach to gradually increase the length of the separations. Using a "stepladder" approach, you and your daughter will work together through a series of small, gradual steps, one at a time, in order to reach a larger goal e.g. "Sleep in my own bed" or "Go to Year 3 camp". Each child's 'starting point' on the stepladder will be different, depending upon what they can/can't manage already. After each step is achieved, your daughter should receive a small reward (NB: rewards do not have to be monetary, they could include going to the park or choosing the family meal). Examples

of a step ladder is shown below. A blank stepladder is included at the end of this document for your own use.

### Step ladder example

**Goal:** Go on Year 3 camp without worrying that Mum isn't there.

1. Stay at home with Dad whilst Mum goes out for twenty minutes.
2. Stay at home with Dad whilst Mum goes out for the afternoon.
3. Stay at home in the evening with Nanna whilst Mum goes out with Dad for one hour.
4. Stay at home in the evening with Nanna whilst Mum and Dad go out for dinner and a movie.
5. Stay the night at Nanna's house, call Mum before going to bed.
6. Stay the night at Nanna's house, no phone calls to Mum.
7. Go to a friend's house for a 'mini-sleepover' – stay until 10.30pm then come home.
8. Stay the night at a friend's house, call Mum before going to bed.
9. Stay the night at a friend's house, no phone calls to Mum.
10. Stay at Nanna's house for two nights, no phone calls to Mum.
11. Stay at the Year 3 campsite for three nights.

### Thinking about camp differently

Start talking with your daughter about the fact that they will be going on camp **NOW**. Not talking about it can lead to underlying building anxiety. Listen to their thoughts and feelings about going, including any worries or fears. Talking about any worries or fears they have now gives you plenty of time to give them the coping skills and strategies they need to be successful. However, you saying "there's nothing to worry about!" will not work.

It is crucial to unpick *exactly* what each of their worries are. Once you know exactly what the worries are, you can then start to help them think more realistically about them. Encouraging them to think differently helps reduce anxiety. In order to help your daughter think differently about their worries, you can ask questions such as: Do you know this for certain? What are the facts? What else could happen? What has happened before when you had this worry? What is likely to happen? What has happened to other people? What is a different way you can think about this?

For example, one of their worries might be that they won't like the food at camp. But instead of thinking "*I don't want to go to camp because won't like the food*", more helpful (and less anxiety-provoking) ways of thinking about this could be:

- *I don't know for sure that I won't like the food - I don't know what's on the menu yet.*
- *There is a chance I might not like all of the food, but there is also a chance that I might like some of it.*
- *They might have a food I have never had before and I might like it.*
- *Other children could be feeling the same as me.*
- *Even if I don't like the food, I can still eat it. It wouldn't be the worst thing in the world.*

- *Even if I did not eat for the whole camp (2 days) I would not die and I can eat when I get home.*

You can also work with your daughter on 'talking back' to her worry and not letting it boss her around. For example, get her to distinguish between "what the butterflies (in her tummy) say" (e.g. I won't be able to have a good time at camp because I will miss my mum too much") versus what her "brain" could say in reply (e.g. "I don't know this will happen for sure. There are a lot of exciting activities planned and I might be too focused on not falling out of my canoe than what mum is doing", "I might miss my mum, but this doesn't mean I won't be able to have a good time"). An example is included at the end of this document for your own use.

## Other ideas

Some other ideas to help your daughter feel less anxious when they are at camp include:

- Taking a favourite stuffed animal/blanket/trinket, etc.
- Taking a special pillowcase.
- Creating a photo album of family members to look at while at camp.
- Encouraging your daughter to use 'calm breathing' during times of homesickness, anxiety and worry (the 'Take 5' calm breathing strategy is attached). Practice this with your daughter at home before the camp, at times when they are not anxious.
- Reminding her that homesickness is normal and like the weather – if she experiences it, it will pass.
- Taking a journal. You can write encouraging message that she can read while she is away. She can also write or draw things she will like to share with the family once she is back home.
- Planning a special welcome home party or activity.

Finally, it is also important to practice **'independence' skills** at home in the lead up to camp. Does your daughter brush her own hair? Dress herself? Brush her own teeth? Know how to apply sunscreen and turn the shower taps on and off in the right order? There are lots of simple skills she can practice to feel more confident about being away from home.

**Nicole Letch**  
School Psychologist



## Step by Step Plan

Goal: \_\_\_\_\_

Step 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Reward: \_\_\_\_\_

Step 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Reward: \_\_\_\_\_

Step 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Reward: \_\_\_\_\_

Step 4: \_\_\_\_\_

Reward: \_\_\_\_\_

Step 5: \_\_\_\_\_

Reward: \_\_\_\_\_

Step 6: \_\_\_\_\_

Reward: \_\_\_\_\_

Step 7: \_\_\_\_\_

Reward: \_\_\_\_\_

Step 8: \_\_\_\_\_

Reward: \_\_\_\_\_

Step 9: \_\_\_\_\_

Reward: \_\_\_\_\_

Step 10: \_\_\_\_\_

Reward: \_\_\_\_\_





# CALM DOWN WITH TAKE 5 BREATHING

1. Stretch your hand out like a star.
2. Get your pointer finger ready to trace your fingers up and down.
3. Slide up each finger slowly ~ slide down the other side.
4. Breathe in through your nose ~ out through your mouth.
5. Put it together and breathe in as you slide up and breathe out as you slide down.  
Keep going until you have finished tracing your hand.

