

What I Don't Know. What I Know.

I know that time at camp is transformational in the lives of kids. One of the many reasons that, as a parent and as a child development expert, I'm such a fan of sending kids to camp is that it gives them an opportunity to face emotional, physical, and environmental challenges that push them to be better problem-solvers, to learn that they're capable of more than they know, and to overcome obstacles even when outside their comfort zone. And while I *want* that and *choose* that for my kids, knowing it's in their best interest, I also feel a little uneasy knowing my kids may experience some discomfort while away from me. Not knowing the ins and outs of their days can be anxiety-producing for parents.

So one way that I manage my internal distress when my boys are away at camp is to remind myself that I'm worrying about *what I don't know*, and that I can instead focus on *what I DO know*.

- *What I don't know:* How many nights he's sad when he's falling asleep, missing home.

What I do know: Being sad and missing home isn't bad for him. This gives him an opportunity to learn that he's strong enough to handle difficult emotions and challenging moments. He's building emotional resilience. I trust that he'll ask for what he needs and that there are adults there watching out for him and checking on him. I'm glad he loves home enough to miss it.

- *What I don't know:* If she's putting on sunscreen and bug spray. What if she's getting burned and bitten?

What I do know: I picked this camp because I trusted that my child would be safe there. Camps are well-versed in handling outdoor elements, and they certainly know about sunscreen and bug spray and talk to the kids about being responsible for self-care. My daughter handles all kinds of her own physical needs every day away from me at school and at friends' houses. If she gets a few bites, they'll itch. She'll learn to remember bug spray or wear long-sleeves. If she gets a sunburn, it will hurt. She'll learn to be more careful with sunscreen. Bug bites and too much sun are rites of passage of summer. It also means she's getting great restorative, explorative time in nature and lots of vitamin D!

- *What I don't know:* If he's walking around in wet socks or getting cold.

What I do know: That he will figure it out, endure it, or ask for help. That being uncomfortable will be the best way (much more effective than a parent

reminding or nagging) for him to plan ahead better and make better decisions the next time about self-care. That he will learn that being cold or wet or physically uncomfortable is something that isn't that big of a deal. And if he's not noticing or caring that much, that means he's probably having a great time.

You sent your child to camp for a reason. Focus on what you do know—that your child is safe. The she is enveloped by friends, adventure, nature, and the opportunity to learn more about how strong and resourceful she is. This experience you are giving her, despite your reservations and discomfort, is a gift that will empower her for years to come.

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