

Dealing with 'First Day of Camp' Jitters

Each summer, we welcome a bright young pack of preschool age campers who are a mix of kids we know and new friends. While some of our campers have experience in a group learning environment or have attended a year or more of school, for many it will be the first time in a setting like ours. Here are a few tips for helping you and your little one balance any mixed emotions of excitement and anxiety.

- **Create Routines and Rituals:** Most preschoolers find comfort in knowing what is coming. Decide on a morning routine right up to the point of parting and tell your child about each step. Get your child's buy in by helping him/her remember "what comes next?" Do you part with a special handshake, whispered mantra of encouragement, or just a smile and a wave? Practice your steps together and do your best to stick to it on Monday morning.
- **Model Positivity:** Acknowledge and talk through your child's feelings leading up to camp, but model the attitude and emotions you want him/her to exhibit at drop-off. Lingering, worried-filled goodbyes are always rockier than short, excited ones.
- **Visit:** A dry run to the Museum can help relieve some of your or your child's worry about the unknown. Ask the front desk if anyone from the summer camp staff is available to show you our camp rooms and talk to you and your child about what happens at summer camp!
- **Read Books or Tell Stories:** Stories can help children process their own feelings and demystify the unknown. Look for books about first days of school or separation anxiety. Some of our favorite titles include Llama Llama Misses Mama by Anna Dewdney and Eliza's Kindergarten Surprise by Alice McGinty.
- **Comfort Object:** Let them bring a comforting object that they can keep in their backpack as a reminder that mom, dad, or other caregiver will be back at the end of the day. If your child doesn't have a small object that s/he is connected with, create one! A love stone, small photo, or charm on a necklace can do wonders.
- **Communicate:** Let us know ahead of time about anything you think could help us ensure that your child has the best possible experience and feel free to check in with the Camp Coordinator or Lead Teacher in your child's camp to make sure s/he is on the right track.

Know that a few tears and clinginess are common and healthy behaviors. We will help your child join the group in a way that feels good to him/her. Although rare, if our experienced staff sees that your preschooler doesn't become happy, engaged, and comfortable quickly after drop-off, we will call you for a phone consultation to brainstorm possible solutions.

Our 4-6 year old camps are designed to be fun, learning opportunities for kids who have turned four before the first day of camp and are bathroom independent (fully potty trained). If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call the GCM Camp Coordinator at 336.574.2898 or email hoakley@gcmuseum.com.

