



Lutheridge + Lutherock Ministries

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TO: Lutherock Camper Parents

FROM: Van Van Horne

We are excited to be welcoming your child to Lutherock this summer. As a parent, I understand the joy and the anxiety such an experience can hold for both you and your child. This letter comes to let you know more about Lutherock staff and program and to share ideas about how you can help your child's week at Lutherock be the best it can be. Some of these ideas are for young children, or for those who are at camp for the first time. We've found, however, that this information can benefit the parents of older, experienced campers as well. **Please adapt these suggestions to fit the age and experience of your child**, and feel free to call me if I can be of help in doing that.

This summer we will have more than 28 summer staff for Lutherock, and we interviewed, ran background checks and checked references for every one of them. All are college students or graduates who have a genuine love for children and have had experience working with them in some other setting. We also look for those whose own faith is alive and growing. They must understand and commit to living for the summer as good Christian role models for children and for each other. I will not contract any counselor that I would not want for my own child. Our staff then receive 14 days of intensive training on how to handle everything imaginable at camp. By the first week of camp, they are confident and excited about being a counselor. **I am very proud of our staff and come to love them as part of my family.** We have no doubt your child will feel that way as well when it's time to go home from camp.

Your child will be very busy during the camp session. We structure the day to include a variety of activities so that everyone can find something at which they excel. We're in the business of building self-esteem! There is not much "free time" at Lutherock. There's just too many fun things to do! This will mean your child will not have much time to think about you. THAT'S GOOD! If this is the first time away from home for your child, it may be difficult. Keeping busy doing things you enjoy is the very BEST way to combat homesickness. (It also works for parents who are missing their children!)

There are many things that you can do to minimize homesickness and build confidence in your child. The most important is your attitude. If you are excited about your child coming to Lutherock, your child will be too. If you are anxious and frightened, your child will pick that up as well. Take time to talk with your child about coming to camp and make sure your conversations are positive ones. If your child has fears, address them honestly. (It will be dark at night: Let's make sure you have new batteries for your flashlight....I might get lost: Your counselor will never let you out of sight. etc.) **If you have fears, do not share them with your child!** Call our office and speak to me instead. Do not dwell on how much you will miss the child while you are apart. Children in many situations can feel very guilty for leaving you! Say, "Yes, we'll miss you, but we're so glad that you get to have this adventure!"

If this will be the first time away from home, let your child stay overnight with someone they know and trust like a friend or grandparent as a way to "practice camp". Even at home, encourage your children to do as many things as possible for themselves. **Camp will challenge your child to be more self-sufficient.** THAT'S GOOD! The counselor will always be there to help.

Encourage involvement in every way possible. Let your child pick out some neat new stuff like a flashlight or disposable camera. New clothes are not the best idea. Kids get DIRTY at camp. **Please don't let your child bring anything expensive or precious** (electronics, jewelry, etc.) that could get lost or ruined. With 100-200 people moving in and out each week, things go home in the wrong suitcase, or just seem to disappear! And we have lots of lost and found that somehow turns up at the end of the summer! The back of your child's information letter outlines what to bring and not to bring. Please read it too! If you think your child may be homesick, encourage him/her to bring something from home that will bring comfort.

When you bring your child to camp, don't linger. The goodbye is the hardest (for you and the child!) Help your child get settled...but then give a quick hug and kiss and say "You've got so many new friends to meet, we'll let you get started! Have fun!" and turn your child over to the counselor. THEN LEAVE! The counselor is trained to engage your child and help get things started well. That can only start happening when you've stopped waving!

If you want your child to write, send self-addressed stamped envelopes or postcards. Understand that **the first card you receive may be a lonesome one.** It was probably written five minutes after you left! By the time you get it, most likely your child is settled in and having fun. That usually happens by Tuesday morning. If you are worried about a letter you've received (or just worried about your child), call our office and

we will check on your child and give you an honest report. **Make sure your letters or emails are cheerful and encouraging.** DO NOT share sad news in a letter to camp. Wait until your child is with you. And as much as possible, make what's happening at home seem pretty boring, so your child doesn't feel like there's a lot being missed. ("We weeded the garden today" instead of "We got a new puppy.") You can share the exciting stuff when you pick your child up...by then your child will have exciting stuff to share with you as well! Sending surprises in letters to camp is always fun. A comic book, a paper airplane, a small ring or necklace (**no food or gum**, please) can really brighten the day and give a homesick camper something to show and share with cabin-mates.

Please do not tell your child that if they are homesick you will come to get him or her. That really sets the child up to fail from the beginning. Instead let them know that you have every confidence in their ability to handle this big adventure. If your child persistently ASKS if you will come if s/he is homesick, or seems VERY frightened about camp, perhaps your child is not quite ready, or there is some reason why this is just not a good year for camp. Feel free to call and talk to me if you need help making that decision. If your child is simply hesitant, find out what specific worries the child has and make a plan to address them. If there are specific things that your child needs help with, PLEASE write it in a letter to the counselor. Just let us know what help is needed or what works and doesn't work for your child. A letter is better than trying to TELL the counselor when you drop off your child because that's often a very hectic time. A letter lets the counselor read at a quieter moment and refer to the letter later. Any information that you can share to make the stay at Lutherock better for your child is much appreciated. That is especially true with **special needs children**. Don't think that we will think less of your child. WE WON'T! Sending a letter with your child's special needs at least two weeks before his/her camp week allows us to place your child with a more experienced counselor, make the group smaller or at least not put three special needs campers in the same cabin! Having the information in writing allows us to share it accurately with area director and counselor, as needed. Please give us the help we need to make camp fun for everyone. And on that same note, **PLEASE do not use camp as the time to change medication schedules for your child.** This is the single biggest problem we have with behavior management at camp. It may make things harder for your child, but it can also affect the whole group. I appreciate you making us aware of any situations that may require extra skill or attention for your child. If I have questions about any information you send, you may be sure that I'll call you.

Please understand, however, that your child will NOT call you. We have up to 200 children on camp each week, and access to phones is just not possible. Cell phones present a totally different problem. It is VERY disruptive for a cabin group if one of them wants to make phone calls to friends or family at home. Bonding a group only works if all the attention is focused on THESE new friends, and what we are doing HERE and now. The group becomes an amazing blessing to your child when THEY are the child's support group for this week, helping each other through difficult times and sharing joys together. That gives counselors the chance to talk about and campers to experience **community in Christ**, and to grow together, which is always our goal. Even thinking about making phone calls home distracts from that focus. Also, I've truly found that phone calls usually make campers MORE homesick. Know that our goal is to help your child have a great week at camp. If your child is miserable, we will not MAKE him or her stay. We'll try everything in our "bag of tricks", and then I'll call you for advice, and I will let you decide if your child should come home. But that RARELY happens. Our staff are pretty good homesickness busters! If you MUST talk to your child during the camp week, please call our office and we will arrange the least disruptive time for that to happen.

If you are staying at camp while your child is a camper, please leave your child alone as much as possible. Your child needs the chance to be independent while at camp, and seeing you can make that transition more difficult. Even if YOUR child is fine and seeing you doesn't cause any problems, there may be another child in the group who is missing home, and seeing ANYONE'S mom or dad makes her want to see hers. Please let your child know that you will NOT be seeing them, so that they don't expect that, and then try to make that happen. Your child's area director will be happy to give you a "report" on how your child is doing.

We want your child's experience at Lutherock to be the best it can be. I promise to do all I can to make that happen. I am excited to share in this important part of your child's growth in skills and confidence and in faith. Thanks for your help in preparing them for this adventure. And thank you for sharing your precious child with us. Please do feel free to call our office if I can answer questions or be of help in any way.

God's Peace,

Van Van Horne
Lutherock Program Director