

HIKING WITH KIDS



BEFORE THE HIKE

When you are planning to take your child/children on a hike it is important to remember that the hike is for them, and not you. Although adults may enjoy a fast paced long hike with tons of elevation gain and loss while bagging multiple peaks, a hike like this will only spoil the experience for the child. Instead, follow some of the tips below when planning your outdoor adventure.

MODIFY YOUR IDEA OF A HIKE

You may not make it to your planned destination: that inspiring overlook or amazing waterfall; you may not even make it a half a mile, but that does not mean the hike can't be packed full of adventure. Be prepared to modify your hike based on the comfort level of the children. If you do, next time they'll be excited to make it to that special spot. If you don't, they may not want there to be a "next time".

CHOOSE THE RIGHT TRAIL

Choose a short trail with minimal elevation gain and loss, lots of things to do and see, and one that is safe. However, remember that even if you chose the right trail, you may need to modify your plans to meet the needs of children.



ON THE HIKE

Even though the hike may not be long in terms of distance, there are plenty of things that can be done to make the hike as adventurous as possible. You will have a successful hike with your children if you can make it an adventure filled with discoveries. Since children find almost everything in nature to be an adventure, you won't have to go too down the trail to make it happen.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS

All the proper planning in the world won't help if children aren't dressed properly. As soon as a child becomes uncomfortable, his or her enjoyment will stop. Maximize the enjoyment by wearing appropriate clothing for the weather, and be prepared for the weather to change. Also, proper footwear is important. Kids don't need to wear hiking boots, but close-toed sturdy shoes are helpful.

PACK PROPERLY

Packing properly can make a hike with kids more enjoyable. Have water or a snack in your pack. Bring a jacket, dry socks, or even a change of clothes in case the weather changes drastically or kids get wet. Have items in the pack (guidebook, journal, discovery kit, camera, etc...) that can help make the adventure more meaningful. Of course, don't forget the first-aid kit, flashlight, matches, insect repellent, sunscreen, etc...



LESS IS MORE

The first time you go for a hike, go for a short one. Leave children wanting more – not exhausted. A child 5-7 years old can walk ½ a mile comfortably.



ENGAGE THEIR SENSES

Discoveries can be found all over the trail. Brush leaves out of the way and look for insects, watch pollinators interact with flowers, touch the bark of various trees, listen to the calls of birds, etc... There is no limit to the amount of things that can be discovered in nature. To help with the exploration, bring a kids guidebook or magnifying glass. Most importantly, let children share their discoveries with you as you share discoveries with them.



TAKE TIME TO OBSERVE

Encounters with nature can be extremely educational and meaningful. Make sure you take time to observe. From watching a centipede cross the trail to learning the names of trees based on the bark, connections to nature can be made through observation.

BE PATIENTLY EXCITED

Kids can find an adventure in everything – a stick, a rock, a bird, a bug, etc... Even though they may stop every two seconds to look at the next coolest thing they ever saw, be patient. Being patient and getting excited about what they are excited about will only aid in their desire for more encounters in nature.

WALK A MILE IN THEIR SHOES

While walking a mile or two may not seem that far to adults, to little kids – depending on age and experience – it can be too far. Remember, their little legs don't cover as much ground per step as ours. Let them set the pace and guide their journey. Make the first hike short in distance, but long in adventure.



REST BEFORE REST IS NEEDED

As soon as kids get tired, their experience and joy begins to diminish. To prevent them from getting tired, take rest stops before they are needed; and, compliment them about what a great job they're doing before they begin to complain about the distance walked or the steepness of a hill.



TIPS AND TRICKS

Here are some other tips and tricks to make sure the hike is as meaningful as possible.

HIKE WITH A BUDDY

While it is always a great experience to spend time in nature alone with your children, sometimes bringing one of their friends along will make their trip more fun. Playing with friends, children can take their discovery experience to new levels. Plus, it is a great way to introduce other children to nature.

Happy Hiking



OAKS	MAPLES	PINES
are usually deciduous trees that shed leaves in winter. Their broad leaves can vary widely from rounded lobes to sharply pointed lobes to smooth. Oaks produce nuts called acorns that usually have one seed inside. Their bark is typically gray with deep furrows and scaly ridges.	are deciduous trees that are known for brilliant fall colors. They have broad leaves usually with five lobes and pointed tips. Maples produce winged fruits called samaras that spin to the ground as they fall. Young maples have smooth bark that develops long deep furrows as the tree ages.	are evergreen trees, meaning they keep their leaves all year. Their bark is usually thick and scaly. Pines produce cones and have needles that grow in bundles (fascicles). Their crowns are tapered, being wider at the bottom and pointy at the top.
Can you find these Oaks?	Can you find these Maples?	Can you find these Pines?
WHITE OAK <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 7-10 rounded lobes• Oblong acorn with shallow cup• Ash gray bark that becomes rougher in older trees	RED MAPLE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3-5 lobes with toothed edges• Red twigs, flowers, and samaras• Rough gray bark on older trees	WHITE PINE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bundles of five long needles• Long, thin cones• Rough gray bark
RED OAK <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 7-11 bristle-pointed lobes• Round acorn with flat cup• Dark reddish bark with wide 'ski track' furrows and ridges	SUGAR MAPLE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 5 lobes with rounded notches• Samaras with round, green seeds and brown wings• Brown bark with long, thick ridges	VIRGINIA PINE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bundles of two short twisted needles• Egg-shaped cones with sharp prickles• Reddish-brown scaly bark
HUMANS USE OAKS FOR: <ul style="list-style-type: none">BoatsAcorn FlourFurniture	HUMANS USE MAPLES FOR: <ul style="list-style-type: none">SyrupGuitarsBowling Pins	HUMANS USE PINES FOR: <ul style="list-style-type: none">TurpentinePaperTea

CHECK THE CHECKLIST

Adventures in nature are more fun if it is a game. Develop checklists along the trail to aid in the discovery. Examples would be counting the number of mushrooms you find, the number of birds you hear or the number of different types of trees you see. Or, you could simply pick up a TRACK Trail brochure and use it to guide the exploration. (Click on picture for hyperlink)

NO TIME TO BE BORED

Keep kids interested with activities along the trail. Play games, count, touch, listen, smell and taste (if you know what you're tasting). The more senses you engage, the richer the experience will be for you and your kids.

HAVE FUN!

If you're not having fun, then your kids won't be having fun. If you're not going to enjoy walking one mile, they are not going to enjoy walking one mile. Being less than enthused about the distance of the trail will have an extremely negative impact on the children's experiences. Kids are the masters of reading body language; don't spoil the fun by sending the wrong signals.



SAFETY

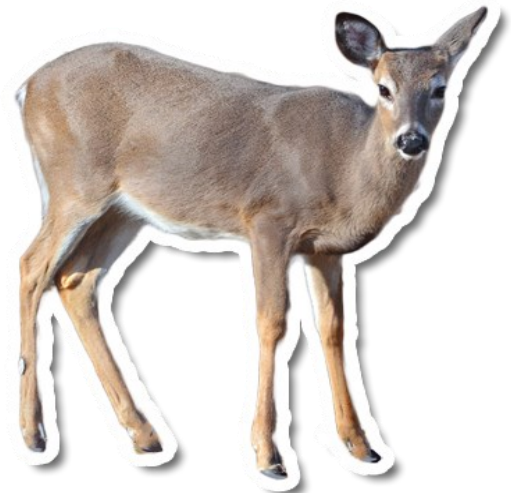
There is inherent danger in anything we do, from driving a car, to walking across a street, to playing basketball... nature is no different. We want you to be safe when adventuring outdoors. Here are some tips to help you and your family have a safer nature experience.

KEEP KIDS CLOSE

Obviously, we want our kid's experiences in nature to be filled with fun and excitement... letting them have the freedom to explore and learn through direct experience. However, just as in any situation, keeping kids close is the best practice for safety. Poison-ivy, wildlife, road crossings, and strangers are always best dealt with in a group situation with adults around.

WILDLIFE

Remember, when we enter the woods we enter the homes of wildlife. Encounters with wildlife can be extremely special; and although you may have an interest in the animal, the animal probably has minimal interest in you. When you encounter wildlife on the trail, the best thing you can do to remain safe is to give the animal space to go about its business. Consider yourself lucky to have had an encounter and remember that you are in the animal's home – be respectful.





POISON-IVY

For approximately 85% of the population, safety in the woods means avoiding poison-ivy. Poison-ivy is a woody vine that produces an oil called urushiol on its stems and leaves. For many, urushiol is a skin irritant that causes an itchy rash.

In general, staying on the trail is a good way to avoid poison-ivy. However, since poison-ivy grows on the fringe of many hiking trails, knowing how to identify it is the best way to avoid contact. Poison Ivy grows in leaflets of 3, leading to the rhyme: “Leaves of three, leave it be”... and has a hairy vine, leading to the follow up rhyme: “Hairy vine, no friend of mine.”

Note: The outer two leaflets are notched on their outer edge while their inner edges are smooth, and the central leaflet is notched on both sides. Also, poison-ivy does not have any thorns on its stem.

CAMPING SAFETY TIPS

FLASH FLOODING
Know Your Action
Avoid hiking in canyons
Don't camp near streams or rivers

HEAT
Know Your Action
Remain hydrated/bring extra water
Wear light, loose fitting clothing
Use sunscreen
Take breaks in shade

LIGHTNING
Know Your Action
Remain weather-ready
If you hear thunder or see lightning...
go immediately to an enclosed building or hard-topped vehicle.
Avoid isolated tall trees or ridge tops.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO
Check the forecast at weather.gov
Always pack for inclement weather, regardless of the forecast!

WEATHER

Weather can change rapidly in the mountains. The best way to stay safe is to be prepared and pay attention. Be prepared by having adequate clothing for weather situations that could occur (i.e. in the summer, you don't need to bring a snow jacket; but, thunderstorms are common so a rain jacket might be needed). As you journey down the trail, monitor the weather. Has the weather changed? Is a thunderstorm rolling in? If so, use your best judgment to determine if the weather is safe enough to continue or if it would be best to turn back.

Be Safe and Enjoy!