

TIPS FOR HIKING WITH KIDS

Beginner Hiking Program for Families, AMC Family Outings

The following pages represent some of our leader's favorite tips and ideas on keeping your kids having fun in the outdoors. Enjoy!



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MANAGE YOUR EXPECTATIONS

It's always best to start simple and easy. Short introductions to the outdoors can be done in your backyard and in neighboring conservation areas. Build up your kids' (and your) comfort level.

- Make it about the journey.
- Discover along the way.
- Start with an easy hike.
- Stop frequently and refuel.
- Be flexible, always.
- Teach basic safety precautions.

BE A DETECTIVE ON THE TRAIL

- Fill out a nature Bingo Card:
<https://www.massaudubon.org/get-outdoors/young-explorers/explore-a-sanctuary/nature-bingo>
 - Check out the website of your destination as sometimes they will have ideas: ex. Flume Gorge has a scavenger hunt you can print out ahead of time.
 - Look for the next trail blaze
 - Find evidence of animals (ie. look for tracks)
 - Count the number of animals you see, or keep a list
 - Bring a camera or binoculars. Stop and really look at things.
 - Carefully overturn a log and look for pill bugs or other critters. Place the log back with care.
 - See how many pieces of trash you can find (and pack them out!)
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BE CREATIVE ON THE TRAIL

- Ask kids to close their eyes and list all the sounds they hear
- Ask kids to close their eyes and list all the smells they smell
- Make a nature bracelet by wrapping duct tape loosely around your wrist with the sticky side out. See what you pick up along the way. (only pick up items already loose on ground)
- Make bark rubbings with crayons
- If hot, make a sponge necklace to cool off (ahead of time)

<http://www.thecraftycrow.net/2012/07/cool-off-sponge-necklace-tutorial.html>

- If you are near a river or creek, build a boat out of sticks and bark
- Make fairy houses
- Find a trail with big rocks because kids of all ages may love to scramble and climb up rocks
- If hiking is becoming a chore, stop hiking and change focus. Play hide and seek for a few minutes. Tell a ghost story. Distract for a bit and then get back to the hike.
- Have kids lie down somewhere flat and describe what they see above them. Make up stories about cloud formations.
- Bring a sketchbook and pencils and do some drawings of something along the hike or something at your destination
- For older kids, set up a challenge or goal. "I bet you can't hike (safely) to the waterfall in 45 minutes! Ready, set, go!" Or, "who can find five species of trees first?" Sometimes a little competition can be motivating.
- Collect a few items from the ground and make land art. Return items when don



LEARN SOMETHING ON THE TRAIL

- Look up interesting facts of your hike location ahead of time. Every so often, stop the group and ask a trivia question about the area. Ask if they can find the hemlock tree. Ask if they know why the stone wall is there. Ask them how long they think the boardwalk is?
- Nature trivia: Either look up or know some nature trivia before your hike and ask the questions while hiking. If you are really prepared, teach some of the trivia during the first half of the hike then ask the kids the questions during the second half of the hike and see if they remember!
- Talk about the 10 essentials everyone should have in their pack.
- Come up with as many tree species as you can
- Bring a plant ID book
- Let older kids help plan the hiking route or destination.
- At intersections, have kids look at the map with you and help you determine which direction to go.
- On the map, have kids count the number of streams they will cross and have them count them

as they cross them on the trail.

- Teach kids the concepts of geology. For instance, you could teach the word ‘runoff’ and then everytime you call that out during the hike, the kids would have to move to the lowest part of the land where the runoff would go. Or teach them about divergent and convergent plates - when you call those words out, kids would ‘converge’ with a partner or ‘diverge’ by running or walking apart.
 - Teach kids the principles of “Leave No Trace” and help them learn to be a considerate hiker.
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JUST HAVE FUN ON THE TRAIL

- Hike with other kids – this provides motivation and less complaining. Bring a friend or join an AMC Family Outings hike!
- Try geocaching or letterboxing
- Take turns having each kid be a leader
- Pair kids together if some are too fast or slow
- Bring along a favorite piece of clothing or a costume. Have a Halloween walk or dress like animals and creep through the forest. Even just bring a bandana or buff or something your child doesn’t wear everyday to keep things interesting.
- For older kids, especially, engage them with map reading and have them help with navigation.
- Play games while you walk. (see *Games to Play on the Trail* document)

SAFETY ON THE TRAIL

- Kids should stay with their group and not get too far ahead.
- Make sure kids know to stop at all trail junctions and wait for others before proceeding.
- Kids should have a whistle attached to their pack or to their clothing. Teach them to stay in one location and blow the whistle should they become separated from their group.
- Kids can carry a trash bag in their pack and teach them to punch a hole in it to put their head through (like a poncho) should they become lost and need protection from the weather.
- Especially for older kids, teach them about appropriate clothing to keep them warm and dry (i.e. fleece, wool, synthetics and no cotton shirts or pants).

FOOD & WATER

- Always eat before you are hungry and drink before you are thirsty. This is especially true for kids - feed them before their blood sugar is already too low!

- On that same topic, bring LOTS of snacks and plenty of water (open-neck bottles often get spilled). Make sure snacks are easily reached so that kids can munch and hike at the same time if the whole group is not stopping for a break.
- Make up your own trail mix bar, either before the hike or at the parking lot.
- Bring ‘summit’ cookies, a reward for getting to your destination or to your turn around point. You could place M&M’s along the trail to entice forward movement. Or offer an enticement (could be food or not) for the grumpiest kids who need a little push to get to the top.
- Bring extra water or baby wipes for any sticky fingers or messes.
- Bring a trash bag for food wrappers or trash on the trail.

CLOTHING & FOOTWEAR

- You do NOT have to buy the most expensive high-tech gear from high-end outdoor stores! There are lots of non-cotton, fleece/nylon/synthetic pants/tops options at local department stores such as Target and Walmart. Just read the labels to ensure they are synthetic and not cotton!
- If hiking with a baby carrier and are using cotton onesies, bring several changes of clothes for them because babies sweat, too! Wet cotton can make your baby cold, even on a warm day.
- For kids approximately 3-5 yo and under, sneakers are usually fine for hiking/walking in. As kids get older and start hiking more aggressive (i.e. rocky) trails, consider lightweight trail runners or hiking boots.
- Keep plastic “bread bags” in your pack for when kids’ feet become wet. Replace wet socks with dry ones, then put feet inside the bags before stepping back into wet shoes.

WHAT SHOULD KIDS CARRY?

- All kids should carry their own pack!!! This fosters independence and a sense of ownership while it is less that Mom and Dad need to carry!
- The littlest kids might only carry their water bottle or a light snack and a whistle attached to their pack.
- Increase the weight they carry as they get bigger and stronger. Older kids should be able to carry the same essentials that Mom and Dad carry: extra clothing, food, water, rain protection, headlamp, etc.

AND FINALLY...

It’s ok if your first outing or outings don’t go exactly as planned. Or if they even end up with crying or tantrums. It’s better to have gotten them out in the woods than to not have tried at all. We have all had the children lay down on the trail and refuse to move. Try things like rewards at the end of the trail and they may even be excited the next time you go out.