



Tips for Day Hiking with Kids

Make it Fun!!!! It may sound commonsensical- but the most important thing is to add elements of fun along the trail. Ideas include making up silly songs about the past week, playing I Spy, creating your own treasure hunt, playing word or math games. You could create your own story hike by bringing a book and stopping to read a few pages aloud every 5-10 minutes. For older kids, time on the trail is a great time to connect with your children and hear about their lives. When they're walking and not having to look you right in the eye, they might open up a bit more.

Go with a Group - Bringing several families together is a great way to have some social time AND get out and explore the trails. When kids are with a group of their friends, they often have increased energy and are motivated to explore more. Have the kids take turns leading and engage them in some of the games listed above. When together, kids will ALWAYS come up with some fun and zany games on their own!

Pick an appropriate hike - Pick a hike with an interesting destination, or one that has some interesting stops along the way. To minimize tiredness and the dreaded whining, the hike distance should be age and child appropriate. Older kids can usually hike up to 5 miles a day, and kids from the ages of 2-4 are usually comfortable with a hike of ½-1 mile. Take rest stops often, but don't linger too long or kids might get chilled in the cold winter air. Forcing kids to hike past their abilities and energy level will not be fun for anyone. Check out Trail Finder at www.uvtrails.org to find great family friendly hikes in our area.

Snacks! They're probably the most important thing that you can bring on your hike. Bring fun and healthy snacks to motivate your children to make it to the next rest stop. Let them help you decide what to bring and pack the snacks. Trail mix with nuts and chocolate chips or small chocolate candies is always a hit- fresh fruit, dried fruit and granola bars are great too! Hot Chocolate can be a real treat and motivate kids to make it to a final destination with no complaints. Food will give everyone energy to keep going!

First Aid Kit - No matter how short your hike is, it's always a good idea to bring appropriate first aid supplies. A cell phone for emergencies, Band-Aids and antibacterial ointment are basics. For longer hikes consider acetaminophen or ibuprofen, Benadryl, and moleskin for blisters.

Footwear- Make sure that everyone is wearing proper footwear. Sturdy foot wear will reduce foot fatigue. Wool socks are best in any weather as cotton can cause cold feet and sore spots if it gets wet and rubs against skin.

Clothing- Layers! Layers! Layers! Not cotton layers allow you all to regulate your temperature as you warm up hiking and cool off resting. Remember that kids are more susceptible to temperature changes so make sure that you have enough warm layers to ward off any issues. Hyperthermia can set in quickly with little ones (even in the summer months) so know the warning signs: tense muscles, fatigue, loss of coordination and intense shivering.

Gear- For short day hikes- WATER for everyone, snacks, wipes, tissues, map and a first aid kit are all you need (diapers, rash ointment and plastic bags too if you have little ones). For longer hikes or overnight excursions, plan carefully and do your research. Kids usually can only carry about 10 lbs. comfortably. For a short day hike, there is no need for a child to carry much weight at all, but it may be a good idea for each child to carry a small pack with water, snacks and maybe a note pad and paper if they wish.



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