

Camping with Kids

Camping with children can create memories of family time together that your child will have for a lifetime. By planning safe, successful, enjoyable camping trips when your kids are young will set them on the path to a lifetime of outdoor adventures. Most of the tips are relevant whether you're going canoe camping or taking the pop-up trailer to a Provincial Park or private campground. Your children's safety should always be your number one priority.

Regarding safety, the Algonquin Park web site suggests:

- Carry water, a map, adequate and appropriate clothing, a first aid kit, and a flashlight
- Practice safety when in, on, and around water. Supervise children at all times. Wear your Personal Flotation Device (PFD), and make sure that your kids are never without a PFD if around water or in a canoe.
- Give yourself enough time to be off trails before dusk.
- Be careful near cliff edges.
- Remain in one place if you become lost or separated from your group.

The first step is building anticipation by:

- Planning the trip together.
- Offering choices of where to go and what to do.
- Planning campsite meals. Take them shopping.
- Let the little ones help to prepare and pack the supplies.
- Let older children be fully responsible for some aspect of the trip. If they miss something, it's a learning experience for all of you.

Next, try it out in the backyard before you go on that first camping trip:

- Teach the kids how to set up a tent.
- Try some cooking – be sure to obey all municipal by-laws regarding campfires.
- Try out the new sleeping bags. Let older kids sleep out by themselves.
- Lie on your backs and pick out a few constellations – get an astronomy book for the library to help you.
- Encourage them to be still and listen to the night sounds.
- Choose some special night-time snack that you'll be enjoying in the 'real' trip.

Experience outdoor activities with your kids before you ever leave home:

- Get them familiar with the outdoors in order to eliminate their fears.
- Teach them about safety and to respect nature.
- Teach outdoor skills and outdoor ethics.
- Camp chores are actually fun for kids. They'll love collecting firewood and filling water containers. Make it even more fun by having contests for gathering the most kindling, or doing the fastest clean-up and be sure to have some competitions that the littlest ones can win.

- Go for a flashlight walk in a nearby park or even under the trees in the backyard to give the kids an idea of how dark it will be away from all the normal light pollution of towns and cities.

Organize all of the necessary gear and supplies:

- Take extra clothing and shoes. It's a given that the kids will get extra wet and very dirty ...and that's a good thing!
- Take warm clothing. It gets surprisingly chilly in the evenings, even in summer.
- Pack lots of insect repellent. There's no point in thinking that you can escape completely. This is Huntsville/Lake of Bays after all.
- Don't forget the sunscreen. Tender young skin can burn even when it's overcast.
- Pack a first aid kit for the little boo-boos that are sure to occur.
- Take rain gear. Even the plastic flimsy kind will help ward off the weather.
- Take activity based toys to keep them busy especially if rain is forecast.
- Remember to pack those beloved bedtime items – a blankie or stuffed toy.
- Take a flashlight or glow stick for each child. It helps to alleviate fear of the dark.
- Pack plenty of healthy snacks, The activity is going to make you all hungry.
- Take lots of fluids to avoid dehydration. Just plain water is always best.

Once you are at the campsite:

- Create memories by encouraging each child to keep a journal and take photos with his/her own disposable camera
- Use the opportunity to teach your children to respect campground quiet time and to practice 'green camping'. Adopt "Leave nothing behind but your footprints" as a family motto.

Kids today are much more restricted and programmed than in the past. Camping offers your kids a chance to explore their natural surroundings for themselves, to appreciate the wonders of the flora and fauna that thrives in Huntsville/Lake of Bays. It lets them have some autonomy and to meet new lifestyle challenges head on. Learning to camp when they are young prepares your children for all types of travel. They can adapt to entertaining themselves more fully, and they will begin to appreciate the natural wonders each new environment has to offer

A huge advantage for parents in taking kids along is the slower pace. You may come to appreciate things you would otherwise not notice without them. Pretty stones, fallen leaves, and even simple sticks take on fresh importance. What's more, kids don't filter out the bird song, shadows, insects, and sunsets we have all come so accustomed to. With children in tow, your senses are revived. You might even learn something about your child that you didn't know before.