

Safety Tip of the Month: Camping and Woods Safety for Kids

You're very excited - your mom promised to take you on a fun camping trip this year. Or maybe your scout group is gearing up for an awesome canoe trip. Whatever the circumstances, enjoying the beauty and nature of the woods is fun - if you are careful. Before you head out on your great adventure, check out the article below for some safety tips that will keep you safe for your entire trip.

Packing Basics

Before you leave, pack these few important things that will make your trip more comfortable and safe:

- Map of the area
- Compass (learn how to use it beforehand)
- Whistle
- Bottled water and food
- Sleeping bag
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- Sunscreen and sunglasses
- Waterproof matches
- First-aid kit with gauze pads, adhesive bandages, tape, tweezers and antiseptic
- Waterproof tent (set it up beforehand to practice)

Into the Woods

Staying safe in the woods means using common sense:

- Be aware of your surroundings and always camping with an adult. Never go into the woods by yourself - besides, nature is best shared with another person.
- Some things you need to be careful of while you're camping are insects, poison ivy, extreme hot or cold temperatures, and rain or snow.

Bugs

If insects bug you, ask an adult to set up camp away from the water and build a small fire. The water attracts bugs, and the smoke from the fire will keep most of the bugs away. Another thing you can do is to remember to keep the tent door zipped at all times, even if you're just going in for a minute. Also, turn off your flashlight before you enter your tent because insects such as moths are attracted to the light and will follow you.

Always check for ticks at the end of the day when you're in the woods. Ticks can carry disease and germs. Deer ticks are grayish or black with black legs and can be as small as the size of the head of a pin. Those ticks like to hang out in places like behind your knees and ears, under your arms, and in your groin. Other ticks are larger and may latch onto your scalp, so you should also check your hair carefully. If you're camping with a pet, have an adult check your pet for ticks, too - dogs and cats can pick up ticks in their fur even more easily than humans. If you do find a tick, don't try to remove it yourself; get an adult to help you. He or she should grab the head of the tick with tweezers as close to your skin as possible and pull it off in one slow, smooth motion.

Poisonous plants

The best way to avoid running into poison ivy is to recognize the plant. Poison ivy can grow on a vine, flat on the ground or as a tall plant. You can remember what poison ivy looks like by the saying, "leaves of three, leave it be." That is because the leaves, which are usually 2 to 4 inches long, grow in groups of three. All parts of the poison ivy plant release a poisonous sap when damaged. It is contact with the sap that causes an allergic reaction. This can happen if you touch the plant or something that has touched the plant - like your clothes or your pet. If you accidentally touch poison ivy, wash the area with soap and cold water as soon as possible. You may need to change your clothes and wash the dog, too!

Staying Safe Outdoors

Your Campsite

Roasting marshmallows and singing songs by an open fire are favorite camping activities. But to enjoy your fire, you have to practice a few safety tips:

1. First, always have an adult help you start the fire.
2. Make sure you never leave the fire burning without someone watching it.
3. Keep a bucket of water and a shovel nearby.
4. Also, don't forget to put out your fire by dumping water or shoveling dirt on it when you sleep or leave your campsite. Feel the ground around the area where the fire was to make sure it isn't warm.

Your Food and Water

Although it's fun to enjoy food and water in the great outdoors, you should take a few precautions before taking a sip or bite:

1. You should only eat or drink what an adult says is safe. It could be dangerous to drink water from a stream or lake because it could have bacteria (say: back-teer-ee-ah) or parasites in it. It's best to bring bottled water to drink.

2. You should also think ahead and bring some easy-to-carry food, such as fruit, trail mix, crackers, granola bars, bread and peanut butter.
3. Don't eat any wild berries you see outside as a snack! Some berries are poisonous and you may not recognize which ones are safe to eat and which ones are not.

Your Clothing

1. It's smart to wear clothing in layers that can be taken off when it gets hot or put back on when the temperature drops at night. If you pack a variety of tank tops, short-sleeved shirts and long-sleeved shirts, you'll be able to add and remove layers easily.
2. Wear bright colors, so if you get lost, it will be easier for others to spot you.
3. Wear comfortable boots when hiking so your ankles are well-supported and you don't get blisters.
4. Keep your arms and legs covered while hiking to avoid ticks and insect bites and wear knee-high, loose-fitting boots when you are in an area with snakes.
5. Make sure to take rain gear, such as ponchos and waterproof jackets, to keep you dry if an unexpected shower occurs.

The Wildlife Around You

Although animals are cute to look at, wild animals are best enjoyed from far away. Here is some advice if you encounter wild animals:

1. Don't go near or try to feed a strange animal. It's better to enjoy these animals at the zoo, in books or on the Internet.
2. To keep animals such as bears or wolves away from your campsite, keep it clean.
3. Scent is very important to animals in the wild because they use their sense of smell to hunt. Don't leave anything that is scented, such as deodorant or toothpaste, out in the open.
4. Keep food packed away so that if a furry friend does come along, she won't smell it and eat your dinner.
5. Most importantly, when you're in the wilderness, remember that you're on the animals' turf and you should respect her home as if it were your own.

What to Do if There's a Problem

1. If anything unexpected happens to you while you're on your camping trip, always tell an adult and get help as soon as possible.
2. If you get lost, wait in a safe, sheltered place for an adult to find you. Don't move around; they might miss you.
3. And always carry a whistle with you because a whistle's tweet will be heard farther away than your voice.

Camping and hiking can be lots of fun if you know how to play it safe - remember to bring marshmallows, good songs, and ghost stories along with all your other gear and you're sure to have a great time! *Source: Kids Health at www.kidshealth.com.*

