



How to get

KIDS



in Nature

Preparation Means Family Fun!

*A caregiver's guide to
getting kids in nature,
and nature into
the hearts of kids.*

The Nature
Conservancy 

Protecting nature. Preserving life.

What we know

Children (of all ages, including adults!) benefit from time spent outdoors. Nature helps kids:

- Sleep better
- Feel more relaxed
- Experience calmness, feel centered
- Be energized for learning
- Exercise
- Connect classroom lessons to the real world
- Have an adventure in a safe setting
- Be independent and prepared
- Build confidence
- Develop their imagination
- Face fears
- Think creatively
- Problem solve and think analytically
- Develop science skills through observation in nature
- Find beauty in the world around us

Learn more

[Children & Nature Network](#)



Why we are hesitant

Getting outside can feel hard! We get it.
Here are some common concerns:

- Bee stings
- Allergies
- Too cold, too hot!
- Bumps and bruises
- Poison ivy
- Poisonous plants
- Snakes
- Ticks
- Spiders
- Mud
- Needing a bathroom
- Diaper changes
- Sunburn

Nervous?

That's totally normal! The trick is to prepare mentally and physically for the adventure.



What we can try

The key is preparation.

- **Make it easy - spend time in your yard or at a nearby park**
- **Make it safe - ask around about good places to go. Your local library can often suggest a place.**
- **Start small - spend just a short time outside as you get started, and slowly increase the length of your outdoor adventures**
- **Go often - try to get outside together to play and explore three to four times per week. The more you do it, the easier it will be, and the more normal it will be to you and the kids**
- **Come over-prepared - if you travel away from your yard, pack up a bag of the following for each person who will be attending:**
 - extra clothes and shoes in case kids get muddy and wet
 - SNACKS!
 - water bottle
 - plastic bag for wet/dirty clothes or soiled undies (it happens!)
 - Band-aids, antibiotic ointment, sunscreen and a cell phone too! (Yes, it's a lot of work and preparation, but you'll rest easier knowing you have what you need to care for the kids)
- **Learn about what you might find before you go - what type of a place will you be visiting and what might you find there? Be sure the place you are going feels easy and comfortable.**
 - Will there be walkways for strollers, or rugged paths?
 - Will there be shallow slow-moving water where we can play?
 - Will there be places my child can run, or will I need to keep a close eye on them the entire time?



What we can try

The key is preparation.

- **Wear protection - Depending on the weather and the activity, you and your kids might feel more comfortable wearing**
 - Gloves. If you don't want to get your hands dirty, gloves can help you still have fun.
 - Boots. You'll feel more confident hiking in boots that can get wet and muddy
 - Hats. Keep your hair protected and sun off your face.
 - Long-sleeves and long pants. Keep the tickly feel of grasses and insects off your skin.
 - Sunscreen
- **Smile and laugh - it can feel stressful to be taking on something new and different with the kids! We know! Try smiling and laughing together, and allowing the experience to be real, no matter how monumental or mundane the experience**
- **Find a friend - Contact a friend who has taken their kids out and can either give you advice and talk through ideas and suggest good places to go, or better yet, join you! When kids are involved, the more hands on deck the better.**
- **Call your pediatrician - Let your pediatrician know that you and your kids will be spending time outside and ask if they have suggestions on how to prepare for the experience based on your child's health.**

**Find
places
near you**

- [Nature Center Network](#)
- [Indiana Department of Natural Resources locations](#)
- [The Nature Conservancy's Nature Preserves](#)



I'm outside. Now what?

You made it! Now, what are you going to do? Try these easy and simple, yet usually very fun activities:

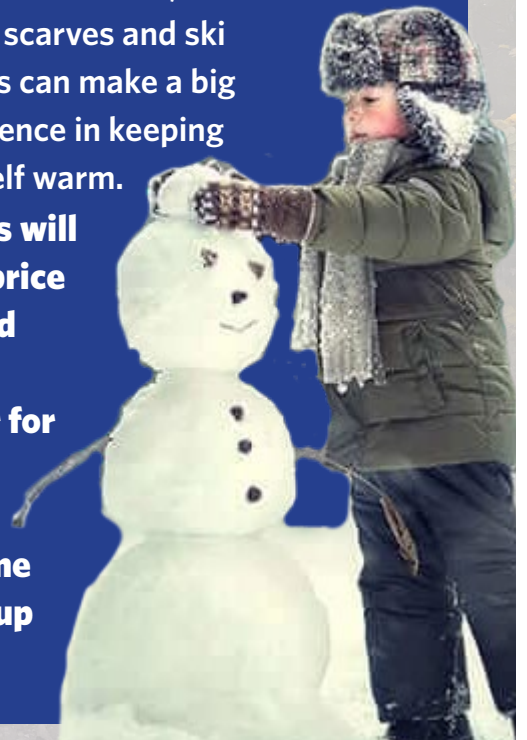
- **A picnic-style snack.** Take a small amount of food that can be eaten in a short amount of time, and nothing too sweet to attract flies, wasps or ants. Sit out on the grass or a blanket on the grass and enjoy.
- **Cloud watching.** What shapes do you see in the clouds?
- **Read a book together outside**
- **Watch ants!** Ants are really fascinating.
- **Go for a short walk and really look at the little things that you otherwise might miss, such as the color of the leaves, little bugs and birds singing.**
- **Run! Kids love to run.** Make sure you have a large open area with no hazards like roads or moving water.
- **Kids do love water.** Consider going to a shallow, slow moving creek and let them wade and explore. Be sure to go into the water with them to help them be safe.
- **Play a game of catch, frisbee, leap frog.** It doesn't have to be hard, just fun.
 - **For older kids, you can have them pick a place, maybe even their own yard or park, and write down all the kinds of life they see like trees, plants, animals, insects and then map it out.**
 - **Plant a garden or plant garden plants in pots outside.**
 - **Borrow a tent and try taking a nap outside.** If it goes well, and you have a yard of your own, you could try camping outside for the night. Be prepared to not make it all the way through the night in the tent the first time.



It's winter... Who goes outside in the winter?

We do! It's all about being prepared and ready for the colder temperatures. Here are some tips from our seasoned staff:

- **Watch the weather and choose the sunny, low wind days to get outside.**
- **Remember that the warmest part of the day can often be between 2 and 4 pm, if the winds are low.**
- **Remember that even just a few minutes of outdoor time can do a person some good! It's worth all the time and energy to get bundled up, even if you are only out for 15 minutes.**
- **Bundle up!**
 - Getting kids bundled up in warm clothing can be a chore. Try putting on coats in a location of the house that is a little cooler so that everyone does not over-heat while getting their layers on.
 - Be sure that parents have extra layers on, too! Kids run around and generate heat, while parents often stand still.
 - There is nothing wrong with wearing two coats at the same time. Maybe not the coolest or most fashionable, but it is warm!
 - Hats, scarves and ski masks can make a big difference in keeping oneself warm.
- **When purchasing winter gear, remember that kids will likely lose a glove and a boot, so buy within your price range and be prepared to replace. Purchasing used winter gear can help keep costs lower.**
- **Be sure to invest in high quality warm winterwear for the caregivers that will be out with the kids.**
- **Kids. LOVE. snow.**
- **After time outdoors, spend a little warming up time together with a warm beverage and/or a snuggle up and read time.**



Just remember

Most importantly, when planning to spend time outside, remember:

- **Not to fear! Learn about what gives you the willies, be it snakes, ticks or spiders. You might just find them fascinating.**
- **Try not to pass on any fears you may have about critters in nature, but do pass on your sense of awe and wonder at our beautiful natural world.**
- **When you are outside, you are in nature's home. So along with beautiful flowers and cute bunnies, you will find bugs. It's their home! Please do not kill bugs outside, and teach your child not to either.**
- **That dirt is not filth. Dirt can be wildly fun to play in. Just be sure to take a bath when you get home.**
 - **Every experience—even a bad one—is a learning opportunity! We learn a lot from our mistakes, so it's okay to sometimes lose a boot or get rained on when camping.**
 - **Teach your kids that nature needs our help. We can take good care of it by following park rules, such as staying on trails, not picking flowers and not squishing bugs. It's an important concept.**
 - **Never litter. You don't want your kids to think that nature is an unclean place to be. You can even bring a small bag to pick up the trash that you see.**
 - **You do not need to know everything to teach your child; you just need to wonder alongside them.**



Advice from Indiana Chapter staff of The Nature Conservancy

We've been there. We know.

Walking sticks are great fun!

- ALYSSA NYBERG

My kids love finding insects of all kinds. They are fascinated with them. My daughter found a Luna moth caterpillar, named it "little caddie" and the next day it turned brownish/pink and spun a cocoon. That was cool to see.

- ANGELA HUGHES

My son had fun "playing music" with a stick and a log, and came up with this on his own.

- MARIA STAHL

Start with very short walks in case your kids get tired. That way you won't be stuck halfway through a hike and have to carry them the rest of the way.

- BOB NEARY

Start teaching them at a young age what poison ivy looks like. Eventually they'll point it out to you!!

- ANGELA HUGHES



Advice from Indiana Chapter staff of The Nature Conservancy

Take a guess at how much time your outdoor adventure might take, and then double it.

- ALYSSA NYBERG

Start when they are young if you can. If you don't have a backpack carrier, consider borrowing one from a friend or buying one used (look on places like nextdoor.com or a local consignment shop). Make sure you wear it so the majority of the weight rests on your hips, not your back.

- MARIA STAHL

My kids love playing in shallow water and skipping stones!

- AMY DEHAVEN

My 12 year old daughter loves kayaking so much she begs to go! Instead of the typical 12-year old Christmas gift requests she wants a kayak!!

- ANGELA HUGHES

We think the kids' daily routine goes much smoother if we get outside at least once a day for 30 minutes to an hour. The kids are calmer and less prone to tantrums.

- KATHY KAPHEIM



Advice from Indiana Chapter staff of The Nature Conservancy

Diaper changes can happen in the back of the car. Remember those plastic bags.

- MARIA STAHL

Learn about ticks. If you or your child gets a tick on them, save it. Tape it to a piece of paper with the date and time and where it was on your child so that you can show it to your doctor if the child shows symptoms of illness.

- ALYSSA NYBERG

When my daughter and I would go for walks, we used to sing fun songs to take her mind off the length of the trail.

- ALYSSA NYBERG

This past spring, our son was ready to be done with the backpack carrier, so we let him walk. We weren't sure how he would do, but he walked faster than us and was able to easily walk over a mile.

- MARIA STAHL

At 2 ½ years old, my son could walk faster than us and much farther than we expected!

- MARIA STAHL





When children play in natural spaces, they're far more likely to invent their own games than in more structured settings—a key factor in becoming self-directed and inventive as children and later in life.

Richard Louv

Author, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*



The Nature Conservancy believes that it's worth the time, effort and hard work to get kids to spend time outside.