



the art of getting children outdoors

**A Practical
Guide
to Family
Adventures**



by Jen & Sim Benson

1. get planning

Planning adventures is a huge part of the fun and a great learning experience too.

From a picnic in the woods to a week-long camping trip, every adventure needs a plan. Kids are much more likely to be enthusiastic if they've been fully involved in the planning stages, so talk about what they'd enjoy doing and use their ideas as a guide, alongside your own. One of the main challenges of family adventuring is that there's often a big range of abilities and requirements, so getting everyone involved will make sure it's suitable for all.



2. be inspired and inspiring

It's important that everyone's excited about an adventure – that way you'll all approach it with a positive attitude.

It should be something you look forward to all week! Start by looking at your local area for ideas: perhaps there's a nearby hill that you've always wanted to climb, or a beautiful woodland just ripe for exploring. If you find yourself struggling for inspiration there's a wealth of material in books, magazines and online

that's great whether you're just starting out or are seasoned adventurers already. You can even turn a regular adventure into a brand new one, for example doing a favourite walk at night or reversing a regular loop. You'll be amazed how the experience is rejuvenated just by approaching it slightly differently.



3. share the experience

Sharing experiences with others can make them even more special, and a great adventure is something that you'll probably end up talking and laughing about for years to come.

Arrange to meet up with other people, perhaps another family with kids the same age or grandparents, aunts, cousins etc. for precious times and a bit of useful extra childcare! Larger groups work really well for camping adventures, when kit-carrying duties can be shared between more people and campfire stories are even more fun and memorable. Kids tend to stay more excited about the adventure when they have friends to run around with too.



4. set a goal

Kids love to have a point to an outing. They may not be excited by the prospect of simply going for a walk, so try pitching it differently.

Bag a summit, explore a ruin, take a bike or scooter with you, go berry picking or choose a walk that ends at a playground or a café. When they're out and about, kids burn up a lot of energy running around, so an ice-cream on a warm day or a hot chocolate on a cold one can be a great incentive to keep going. Mini goals along the way can be really helpful for keeping things interesting too. How about having a race to the next oak tree or seeing who can spot a squirrel first?



5. finding the wild

Taking children to amazing places like ancient woodlands creates memories to treasure, but wild experiences can be also be found close to home.



Explore wild areas at the edges of parks, or look for wildflowers and creatures on bits of wasteland or at the bottom of your garden. Why not try identifying the trees you see on the way to school? Avoid getting lost by learning to map read or using waymarked trails, and for families with older children geocaching is a great way to explore the outdoors. To find places to explore try wildlife charity websites (like your local Wildlife Trust), local council websites, tourist information offices or ask your friends!



6. be prepared

Kids are great at attacking activities with boundless energy, until suddenly they get tired, hungry, cold – or all three, so it's important to take plenty of food and water.



Keep an eye out for the classic signs: going quiet, stopping frequently or complaining. Make time to all stop for a break, a snack and to add/remove layers of clothing. It's amazing how rapidly a square of chocolate can turn things around! Be prepared to carry younger children: a good, well-fitting sling or carrier is a great investment. A basic first aid kit, mobile phone, emergency rations and extra clothing are essential, and consider taking an emergency shelter if you're heading to a remote, exposed or weather-affected area.



7. team work

Working together as a team is just as important for family adventurers as it is for any other group.



Give everyone a job, for example getting the kids to carry their own snacks and water in a small rucksack if they want to, asking them to help with navigation and seeking their opinions when making decisions along the way. Try not to worry too much if

an argument breaks out – view it as just another challenge to overcome. Fraying tempers are almost always due to something that's easy to fix, such as hunger or tiredness, so stop, hand out some snacks and see if you can work things out.



8. build up gradually

When you're taking your first steps on the way to becoming seasoned family adventurers it's important to start small and build up gradually.



As a general rule, walks over about 6 miles (10km) should wait until kids are at least 10 years old. By aiming easy to start with you'll quickly get used to setting and achieving goals and your confidence levels will increase in line with your challenges. One of the most important things to remember when kids are involved is to take each day as it comes: it has to be fun so don't be afraid to take a step back and plan an easy adventure instead.



9. celebrate every success

Regardless of what your aim was when you started out, any adventure is a success, however small.



If you'd planned to reach a summit but in practice only managed to walk to the stream at the bottom and paddle in it, celebrate that. If you've promised the kids an ice cream at the end of a walk, don't refuse it just because they didn't reach your marker of success: as long as you've all got out together somewhere beautiful, had fun and expended some energy then that's worthy of a reward in our book! And always aim to end the day on a high – that way everyone will be much more enthusiastic about getting out next time.



10. risky play

Many wild places – especially unfamiliar ones – can feel daunting at first.



Most families are used to the risks associated with familiar activities such as crossing roads or playing on the swings. The risks involved in adventuring in wild places are probably less, but they take some getting used to for both children and parents. It's important for kids to be allowed to take some risks

in order to develop awareness and confidence in their own abilities, so although it's sometimes hard to step back and let them get on with it (and of course there are times when it's definitely best to step in!) it's an important way of exploring and learning about themselves and their natural environment.



11. get involved

Wild places are wonderful to explore and play for grown-ups as well as children.



Get involved – it's great fun and the kids will love to see you taking part. Be open to learning new things too: children are naturally questioning and it's ok not to know every species of tree and animal you see. Look up anything you're not sure about and talk about it later – you'll be amazed how much everyone learns. Wild places offer perfect opportunities for the whole family to adventure together and can be tailored to suit everyone's needs – see below for some great suggestions.



12. family friendly wild adventures

A woodland adventure: Simply being in the woods is a magical experience, and there's always plenty to do, from climbing trees and building dens to following a waymarked walk.

Forage for your supper: Pick wild raspberries in summer and blackberries in the autumn and take them home to turn into yummy crumbles or fruity muffins.

Sleep under the stars: Camping is a great family adventure, and even pitching the tent is fun when everyone gets involved. Have supper around a campfire and let the owls lull you to sleep.



Paddle in a stream: Leave your socks and shoes on the bank and wade in. Spot fish; feel mud and pebbles under your feet and watch kingfishers and dippers flying low along the water.

Go on a wildlife safari: Choose a spot, in a garden, field or woodland, and see how many different animals, plants and insects you can see.

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the wildlife trusts

Explore nature - The Wildlife Trusts have a network of 2,300 nature reserves - wild places like hills, marshes, urban parks, woods, and meadows - that are brilliant places to explore and find wildlife. Find your nearest one wildlifetrusts.org.

Join us - The Wildlife Trusts have 150,000 junior and family members. wildlifetrusts.org/join

Every Child Wild - our new campaign about how together we can help to reconnect a generation of children with the natural world. Share your ideas and get involved at wildlifetrusts.org/everychildwild

a wild year

The content for this guide was written by Jen and Sim Benson, who, frustrated by spending their days apart, embarked on spending 'A Wild Year' camping around Britain with their two young children.

Read all about their adventures, challenges and delights on their blog: <http://awildyear.co.uk/>

