

Hiking with Kids

Resource for The Chapel of the Cross Vacation Church Camp 2020

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How to use this

- At its heart, spending time in the woods is one of life's simple pleasures and a place where God's presence sometimes is easier to feel.
- When hiking with younger children, the experience can be more enjoyable with a bit of forethought and allowing everyone to be in the moment on the trail, enjoying the journey in their own way. Or, just head out to the trail.
- As a child, I spent a lot of time exploring in the woods. It only has been as an adult that I have become a hiker.
- The advice here is from our time hiking with our children, who are now 20-somethings, as well as many Girl Scouts and Cub Scouts.
- Just like the Vacation Church School curriculum, you can pick and choose how much of this to follow.

Before the hike

- Decide what park or trail to go to
- Print a map and review it
- If you will be driving more than 10 minutes to the trail, consider picking a hiking location where there is a bathroom by the parking lot.
- Make a plan for how long to hike. Instead of thinking about distance, you might think about how much time to spend hiking. Keep in mind, it's better to hike for a shorter time and have everyone enjoy it than to watch your child hit exhaustion before you are finished.
- Select your hiking route. Some trails are a loop. Some trails you hike out, then turn around to return. Whichever type of trail you select, you may want to plan to walk for half of your total hiking time and then turn around to head back to the trailhead.
- Talk with your kids about going for a hike
- Think about what time of day your kids have good energy and plan to hike then.
- Decide which shoes to wear. Sneakers or other closed-toed shoes are best.
- Remember that clothes that are worn hiking may get dirty.

What to bring

It can be easier to pack everything up ahead of time so that you don't delay leaving and potentially miss the best 'window' for the hike. Here are some items you might tuck into a backpack:

- Map
- Water for everyone
- Snacks
- An extra layer (if it's not summer)
- Sunscreen
- Hat
- Bug spray
- Band aids
- Wipes
- Fully charged cell phone
- Toilet paper

Before you leave home

- Eat a meal or a hearty snack
- Check the weather by looking at either hourly predictions or the weather radar to check for the possibility of rain or thunder storms.
- Have everyone go to the bathroom

At the hike

- Use the bathroom, if one is at the trailhead
- Think about a hike as a journey that is enjoyed in each moment and not about statistics of how far to hike or how quickly to hike it. Let the kids set the pace and the tone. Some kids want to examine the natural world, stopping and looking at what they see. Other kids find joy climbing on every rock. Still other kids take pleasure in covering a lot of ground. Allow your kids and their curiosity to be your guide.
- Help kids to look at the world around them. Look up at the tree tops and the sky. Look down to find bugs and small plants.
- Let kids help navigate. Younger youth can look for trail markers. Maps for state parks indicate what symbol marks the trail. For example, the Mountain to Sea Trail is marked by white circles nailed on trees. Ask the kids to help find the route. Older youth can be given a map orientation and can help with directions.
- Ask everyone where they see God and the teachings of Jesus out on the trail
- Remind kids that what is found on the trail needs to stay on the trail. A hike is not a time to pick up souvenirs.
- If your child needs to go to the bathroom and cannot wait, go off the trail a ways.

After the hike

- Look for ticks
- Talk about the hike. What did they like? What surprised them?
- Ask “I wonder” questions about the hike that link with the vacation church school curriculum. A few examples:
 - If you went up a mountain: I wonder what it was like for people who were on the Temple Mount, far above the city?
 - If you walked through the woods: I wonder what it was like for Jesus to walk through the forests when he was traveling from one town to the next?

Making family memories

- Our children's personalities shown through on the hiking trail. On one hike, our younger child, had to be out front and she was fiercely determined to make it up Moore's Wall trail, an ambitious climb for her short legs, and snacks kept her fueled. Meanwhile, our eldest was far behind as he stopped to look for bugs and sought out critters as we crossed small creeks. What made the hike great was different for each child.
- May you and your children make your own memories and find God with time spent outdoors.