

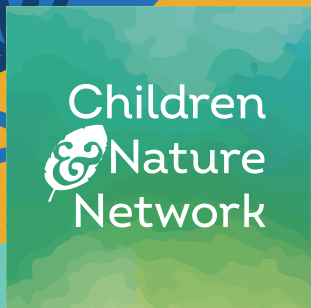


Families
TOGETHER
in Nature



Group Planning Guide

RESOURCES TO HELP FAMILIES
ENJOY HEALTHY OUTDOOR
ACTIVITIES TOGETHER





STEP 1: SCHEDULE AND CALENDAR DECISIONS

Good planning is key to a successful Families Together in Nature gathering. Set a schedule that works for you and your family. Are you interested in hosting a single event or ongoing events each week, month or season? Plan each event well in advance and be aware of other local activities that may affect people’s ability to attend. It’s also important to let people know how long they should plan for your event; is it a half-day hike or two hours of exploration at dusk?

PLANNING GUIDE

HOW OFTEN:

Once a week on _____ (day) _____

The first _____ (day) _____ of each month

The first _____ (day) _____ of each season

Once a year on _____ (date) _____

HOW LONG:

From _____ (month) _____ to _____ (month) _____

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- Consider your local landscape and seasonal weather conditions.
- Find out what other outdoor or nature events take place in your region.
- Gather a list of local nature clubs and other resources and find out whether educators or special guests are available to speak to your club while you are out.
- Consider places you’ve been and places you’ve always wanted to explore; include your favorite activities.

CREATE A LIST OF POSSIBLE OUTINGS:

DATE	LOCATION	ACTIVITY	TIME





STEP 2: PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

With each outing you choose, there are several factors to plan and consider before you begin. Below is a checklist to help you think through the many factors involved with planning an outing. These considerations will vary according to your location, experience and conditions.

LOCATION LOGISTICS:

- Travel time to location: _____
- Convenient meeting location: _____
- Food, water, restroom facilities: yes /no, details: _____
- Fees: _____
- Adequate parking for a large group: Yes / No
- Nearby public transportation options: _____
- Need permission for groups over 10: Yes / No

TYPE OF HIKE/LOCATION:

- Loop hike
- Out and back
- Easy
- Moderately rigorous
- Seasonal features: _____
- Water feature: lake, stream, pond or puddles _____
- Clothing considerations for this destination: _____
- Educational opportunities: _____
- Accessibility features: _____
- Possible safety or accessibility issues (small children, elderly, all, etc): _____

PLAN FOR INCLEMENT WEATHER:

- Alternate meeting location: _____ Alternate activity: _____

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:



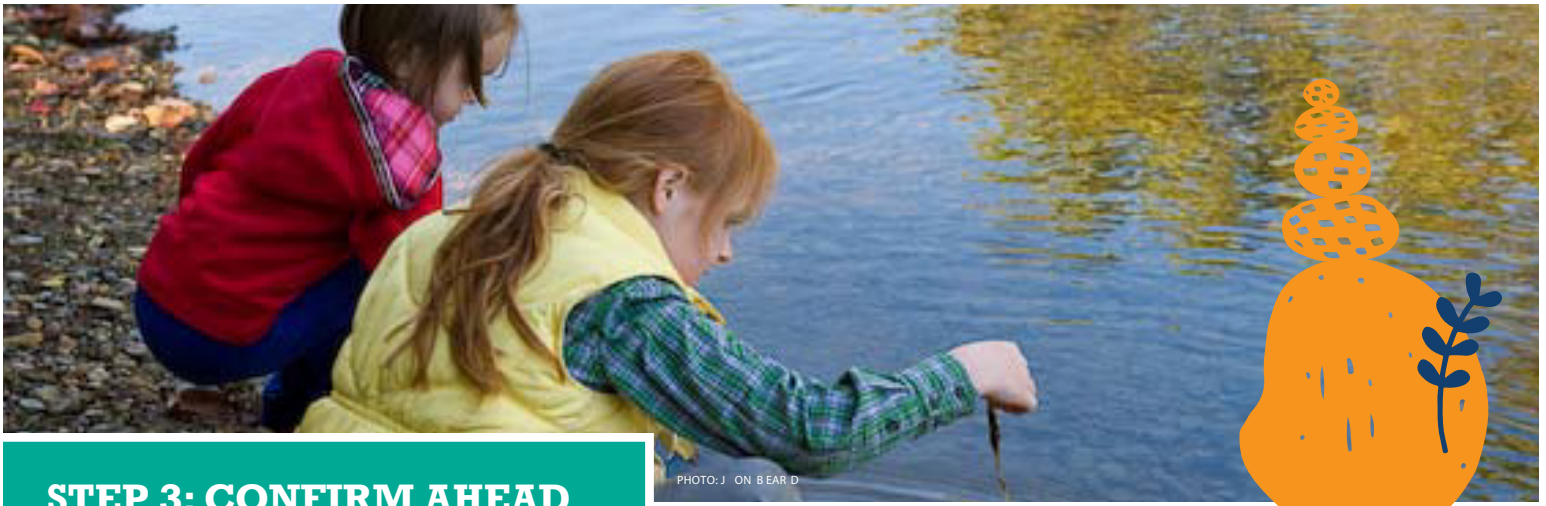


PHOTO: J. ON B. EAR D



STEP 3: CONFIRM AHEAD

It's useful to connect with the park manager or agency that manages the locations you'll be visiting. Tell them your plans and request permission to hold your outing at their location, especially if the group is large. Provide information about the benefits they'll receive as a host site.

Use these prompts to craft your message before you mail, email or call, then log any pertinent notes below.

HELPFUL PROMPTS

FOLLOW-UP NOTES

1. Introduce yourself and your Families Together in Nature Group. Provide a link to your Facebook or other social media page, if applicable.
2. Date of visit: _____
3. Time of visit: _____
4. Estimated number of participants: _____
5. Ask if you need a permit or if any other special arrangements need to be made for a group visit.
6. Is there any other information about your group the park manager should know in advance?
7. Are there any materials (calendars or flyers for upcoming events) that the site would like you to distribute to the group?
8. Thank them for welcoming your group and let them know you appreciate their commitment to helping families get outdoors.





PHOTO: JON BEARD



STEP 4: GET THE WORD OUT!

There’s no “right” size for a Families Together in Nature Group; choose what works best for you. Start with your existing networks of friends, family, neighbors and co-workers. There are lots of great ways to spread the word, including these listed below. Add notes to take these ideas further.

WAYS TO INVITE OTHERS TO JOIN	NOTES
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Share your group’s plans on social media. 2. Visit parenting websites and blogs in your region to get on their calendars and in their newsletters. 3. Contact the host of other groups, like your local REI or other outdoor recreation store, neighborhood association or homeowners’ association, your school’s PTA, scouting groups, 4-H clubs and church groups. 4. Post a flyer at the library, recreation centers or outdoor sports and camping supply stores. 	





PHOTO: GEORGE WASHINGTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, BALTIMORE MD

STEP 5: PLAN FOR SAFE, FUN AND HASSLE-FREE

Age-appropriate risk-taking is good for children’s healthy development but keeping everyone safe is a critical part of your outing.

- **BE PREPARED:** Bee stings, poisonous plants and allergies don’t have to hold you back. Make sure to bring a first-aid kit and let everyone know where it is.
- **SET EXPECTATIONS:** Remind participants that the natural world is full of surprises and paying attention is part of getting to know nature.
- **USE THE BUDDY SYSTEM:** Group families with similarly-aged kids together so they can adjust activities to fit their ability level.

There are many good resources for safety tips in the outdoors. Review your plans in advance of your outing and always bring appropriate first-aid supplies. When you announce the event, make sure to mention any special supplies that people should bring or safety precautions they should consider. If your group will be near water, suggest a change of clothes. If you are hiking in the woods, encourage tick checks. Consider inviting a CPR trained participant.

ESSENTIALS

- Water
- Layered clothes appropriate for weather
- Backpack
- Snacks or picnic lunch
- Sunscreen
- Hat
- Whistle
- First-aid kit

EXTRAS

- Change of clothes
- Pad and pencil
- Magnifying glass
- Bug box
- Butterfly nets
- Binoculars
- Field guides or ID cards
- Flashlight for night hikes





PHOTO: JON BEARD

STEP 6: LEADER'S EVENT DAY CHECKLIST

The day is here. Time to enjoy the outdoors! After all the planning, you want to make sure the day of goes smoothly. Here is a list of things to bring, forms to sign, and reminders—everything you need to build community and enjoy the many proven benefits of nature.

- **SIGN-IN SHEET:** Having participants sign in can help you in future marketing efforts or help if you need head counts during the event.
- **PHOTO RELEASE FORM:** If you plan to take pictures and use them in your marketing, you must get permission from participants who may appear in those photos by having them sign and date a release form.
- **LIABILITY WAIVER FORM:** Beyond bee stings, scraped knees and poison ivy, accidents do happen. Have participants sign a liability waiver, which is a common practice for outdoor events involving young children. Some organizations and venues provide liability insurance to groups visiting their property. That kind of arrangement can be very helpful to your Families Together in Nature Group.
- **COMMENT AND SUGGESTION FORM:** Gather comments and input from participants after the event to help in planning the next one. Online surveys work well too!

THINGS TO BRING:

- Pens and pencils
- All forms for participants to sign
- Special equipment needed for the day's activities (field guides, nets, magnifying glass, etc.)
- Extra water and snacks
- First-aid kit
- A list of housekeeping announcements for the beginning of event, including reminders such as: requiring that parents and guardians stay with their children, where bathrooms are, the route map, etc.
- A team of Leads. A couple of people working together can make the event run more smoothly. Make it a family affair or ask a friend to help lead.
- Energy, curiosity and joy!





STEP 7: MARKETING FOR THE NEXT EVENT!

You'll want to spread the word about your upcoming events, share tips and stories about your adventures and keep everyone informed and inspired. The best way is to create a social media group (such as Facebook), a website or blog to share news, schedules, stories and ideas. You know your community best so maximize what works in your area. That may include printed flyers, events in community calendars and notices in school or church newsletters. Ask your friends and other parents for tips on how they learn about events in your community.

MARKETING ENGAGEMENT TIPS:

Marketing doesn't have to consist of only ads and flyers; a lot of great marketing comes in the form of relational engagement. Using a platform like a Facebook Group can build community with your group in real-time. Here are some ways you can easily grow your group's engagement:

- **Post weekly ideas** of places that might be of interest for future events. By observing the likes and comments, you'll see which places intrigue the most people.
- **Post articles** or resources from the Children & Nature Network website (childrenandnature.org) or Families Together in Nature Trailhead group (childrenandnature.org/trailhead) that reinforce the link between health and nature for families and children.
- **Ask kids to post drawings** from past events.
- **Ask parents to post videos** of their family reflecting on what they liked best about an event.
- **Ask parents (and/or kids) to reflect on different prompts** such as: *What was your favorite childhood memory in nature? What was the most amazing animal you've seen in the wild?*





RELEASE OF LIABILITY:

Families Together in Nature Groups act independently. The Children & Nature Network shall not be held liable for the actions of specific groups, group leaders or individual participants.

When taking part in any outdoor activity, be aware of changing conditions in terrain or weather. These and other variables may increase risk. At any time, when children are outside on their own, or with families and friends, everyone should take safety precautions and be mindful of risks.



**FAMILIES TOGETHER IN NATURE
GROUP PLANNING GUIDE**

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FAMILIES TOGETHER IN NATURE GROUP WAIVER & RELEASE

EVENT:

EVENT DATE:

EVENT LOCATION:

By signing this Waiver, I assume any risk, and take full responsibility and waive any claims of personal injury, death or damage to personal property associated with _____ activities and events organized by _____.

I understand and confirm that by signing this Waiver and Release I have given up considerable future legal rights. I have signed this Waiver and Release freely, voluntarily, under no duress. My signature is proof of my intention to execute a complete and unconditional WAIVER AND RELEASE of all liability to the full extent of the law. I am 18 years of age or older and mentally competent to enter into this waiver.

I am an adult Participant.

I am the parent or guardian of a Participant under the age of 18.

SIGNATURE

NAME

ADDRESS

DATE

FAMILIES TOGETHER IN NATURE GROUP PHOTO RELEASE FORM

EVENT:

EVENT DATE:

EVENT LOCATION:

I grant _____, the right to take photographs of me and my family in connection with the above-identified event. I authorize _____, its assignees and transferees the right to copyright, use and publish these photographs in print and/or electronically.

I agree that _____ may use photographs of me with or without my name and for any lawful purpose, including but not limited to publicity, illustration, social media posts, advertising and online content.

I have read and agree to the above:

I am an adult Participant.

I am the parent or guardian of a Participant under the age of 18.

SIGNATURE

NAME

ADDRESS

DATE

**FAMILIES TOGETHER IN NATURE GROUP
COMMENTS & SUGGESTIONS**

EVENT:

EVENT DATE:

COMMENTS & SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE EVENTS:

NAME & CONTACT (OPTIONAL):

**FAMILIES TOGETHER IN NATURE GROUP
COMMENTS & SUGGESTIONS**

EVENT:

EVENT DATE:

COMMENTS & SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE EVENTS:

NAME & CONTACT (OPTIONAL):

**FAMILIES TOGETHER IN NATURE GROUP
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