

CAMPING FOR FAMILIES

PLANNING OUT YOUR CAMP OUT ACTIVITIES

JENNIFER DAWSON



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INTRODUCTION

WHEN THE weather starts warming up, families start planning their vacation time. One of the most popular spring, summer, and even fall activities for families is camping. Getting outdoors and close to nature makes everyone in a good mood and it boosts vitamin D levels. And the fresh air tires out children, so that's even better.

But, there is a lot that needs to go into planning a fun, and safe, camping trip for the family. Family campouts require that you understand what type of equipment you need - including clothing, cooking items, and things that keep you safe. Plus, having a plan for fun activities to do won't hurt. After all, trying to do things without a plan can be a disaster, especially with children in tow.

Having said that, if you take a little time to craft a plan before going you're sure to have a lot of fun, stay safe, and build great family-centered memories for everyone. Remember that the ages of your children, the division of duties in the family, and many other factors come into play. Taking these into account will help you all enjoy your family campout even more.

- Jennifer Dawson

Author

PLANNING YOUR FAMILY CAMPING TRIP

Camping takes just as much planning as any other type of fun family vacation, especially if you have kids. In fact, for a camping trip to go well it might even take more planning, because you have to consider so much about the trip to ensure that everyone has a safe, yet fun time enjoying nature.

CHOOSE YOUR DESTINATION

The very first thing to do when planning your family camping trip is to choose your destination. Where you go will inform many of the rest of the decisions that you need to make about the camping trip - including clothing, supplies, and activities. Without knowing the destination, you can't plan anything else. So, pick your destination first.

RESEARCH THE AREA

Once you know your destination, research the area further. That way you'll know what type of camping accommodations exist. Are you allowed to use a tent? Is there a place for your RV? Are there

cabins for rent or toilets and showers? This information will help you know what to bring with you on your trip.

PLAN What You'll Do There

Once you know what's available taking your children's ages and everyone's likes into consideration, start planning what you'll do there. You don't want to plan every single moment of the trip because you want to allow for time to hang out and read or just enjoy nature. But having at least one planned activity each day will help everyone enjoy their trip.

CREATE BACKUP PLANS for Inclement Weather

It doesn't really matter what the weather is today, because your vacation dates might end up being during inclement weather. Find things that you can do if the weather is bad, because it's not likely you can just go to a movie. Make sure you bring plenty of reading material in case that happens. You can still have a relaxing time reading real books and connecting as a family.

CONSIDER the Ages of Your Kids

When you are planning anything, it's imperative that you consider the ages of your children. If you have many ages, then you can switch up activities often so that no one gets bored or upset. Think about planning activities around young children's nap times and bedtimes. Even though you're on vacation, children do thrive with normal schedules and it'll make it easier on the family.

PLAN How You'll Prepare Your Meals and Snacks

Taking into consideration the ages, likes, and dislikes of your kids, also take time to plan meals and snacks that everyone will enjoy. If you're doing a lot more physical activity than normal, you may need

more snacks. Some good choices are trail mix, fruit, and even boxed cereal like Chex and Cheerios.

PACK THE RIGHT Clothing

The other important thing to plan for is packing the right clothing. That means for everyone. You're not going to have a way to wash anything while you're camping, so make sure to bring extra clothing and shoes for each person for each day. You may not need them all, but most of the time you will need at least two outfits for each day.

TAKE the Right Gear

Whether it's hiking boots, water shoes, or a raincoat (depending on where you're going), you need to bring the right gear to keep everyone safe and comfortable. What you bring is highly dependent on what is available from the campsite, or whether you're roughing it in the backwoods or not.

CREATE a Checklist So You Don't Forget Anything

During your planning process, create a checklist for everything that you want to bring with you so that you can pack everything a lot easier. Once you have the checklist, you can start packing for your trip, marking off the things you've packed. For older kids, you can let them oversee their own checklist, but do check it to ensure that nothing is forgotten.

PLANNING IS an essential component of a successful fun family campout. It doesn't matter if it's just a weekend or longer; planning will make everything go more smoothly, even if you end up doing your backup plans instead of the main plans for good weather.



OUTDOOR GEAR YOU'LL NEED

Be sure to check with the campground to be sure you can have a campfire outside of designated areas. Many locations have their own grills and adhere to fire restrictions. Taking that into account, here is a list of things you may need to bring on your camping trip.

- ***Tents and Chairs*** – If you don't have an RV or camper, then you'll want to bring a tent. Chairs are also great for relaxing around the fire or for resting and reading in the fresh air. It might not hurt to bring a covering to set up so that babies and older people can get out of direct sunlight during the day too.

- ***Sleeping Bags*** – Sleeping bags are better than just blankets. If you want more comfortable sleeping accommodations, you can also bring a blow-up mattress. But having a sleeping bag will help prevent critters from crawling inside and under your blanket. Always shake out all blankets and sleeping bags before getting inside too.

- ***Flashlights*** – It's nice if everyone has their own flashlight to bring along. It helps younger children feel safer and can keep them from hurting themselves if they need to use the bathroom at night while everyone is sleeping. You'll need one too, because if it's dark

you won't be able to see in an outhouse or the woods at night once the fire goes out.

- **Cooking Equipment** – You may need a grill if your camping site doesn't have one. You may also need charcoal unless you're using a gas grill. Plus of course, pots and pans. The best thing to do is bring at least one large pot and one large skillet. Iron is best for cooking over a fire. Also, consider bringing foil. You can wrap a potato in foil, put it over a fire and have baked potatoes easily.

- **First Aid Kit** – Anything that can happen, often will happen, especially if you don't bring a first aid kit. Get a special first aid kit designed for camping so that you have butterfly tape and other supplies when you're a distance from medical care. In this way, you can take care of even big emergencies until you can drive to a hospital.

- **Multipurpose Tools** – You don't need to bring tons of tools, but one of those multipurpose tools that include a knife is very handy for many tasks that may need to be completed while camping - such as putting together tents and other equipment.

- **Simple Tools** – If you plan to set up an awning or tent, you may need a hammer to anchor your tent to the ground. Often it can be safer to anchor tents or awnings if you're in a windy area, so know the area.

- **Two-Way Radios** – Your cell phones might not work, plus, it would be nice to collect them and put them away during your camping trip. Camping is about enjoying nature, and while it's good to have an emergency cell phone, two-way radios are effective and fun and will allow for fewer distractions.

- **Lighter or Matches** – More than likely you're going to need to start a fire. If the place you're going offers gas grills, you may not need a lighter or matches though. Check the area first before you go so that you know what's available.

- **Fire Extinguisher** – Some campsites already have them, but you might want to consider a safe camping fire extinguisher in case your fire gets out of control for some reason. This can happen when it's windy; in fact, be prepared not to have a fire at all if it's too windy.

- ***Citronella Candles*** – One of the worst parts about camping sometimes is the bugs, but you don't need to let them ruin everything for you. Three or four citronella candles placed strategically can keep bugs off everyone for hours.

- ***DEET*** – If you're going to go hiking, the best choice is really insect repellent with DEET. It might feel dangerous, but the truth is that getting bit by mosquitoes is more dangerous. You can spray the DEET around your socks, shoes, and pants if you don't want to put it on your skin.

- ***Toilet Essentials*** – You'll need to be able to keep your privates clean on camping trips too, so make sure you bring all the right things like toilet paper with you, and feminine supplies just in case.

- ***Baby Wipes*** – Whether you have babies or not, baby wipes are gentler than some of the alcohol wipes that adults use to keep the face, hands, and other body parts clean between showers.

- ***Sunscreen*** – While getting sun is good for you due to vitamin D, getting a sunburn is not. But keep in mind that using sunscreen doesn't mean you should stay out in the hot sun all day without some form of covering like big hats, sleeves, and other methods to avoid burning.

- ***Allergy Medication*** – A good antihistamine can help avoid serious problems and itchiness with many bug bites, pollen in the air, and even accidental poison oak or ivy contact. Learning to identify these plants can also help.

- ***Pepper Spray*** – If you're going to camp in a place known for its bears, and it is legally allowed where you are, you might want to consider taking pepper spray. You can use it to avoid being attacked or bitten by not just bears but also wild dogs and other creatures.

- ***Can Opener*** – Seems obvious, but you'd be surprised at how many people forget to bring a can opener and then have to find creative methods for getting cans opened so that they can eat the food they brought.

- ***Bucket or Basin*** – You'll need containers to clean your dishes in. You can, of course, use paper plates instead, but you'll still need to be

able to easily wash your cooking utensils. A nice bucket or basin will do the trick for many jobs.

- **Water** – Don't assume fresh water will be available. The rule of thumb is that you'll need at least one gallon of fresh drinking water per person, per day. Research in advance what is nearby in terms of fresh water, and don't drink water from a river or stream unless you are ready to get sick.

The best way to determine what you need is to figure out the things you'll do, then write down what you need to bring so you can do those things. Make a list of what you need so that you won't lose track. Then compare your list to what the campsite already offers so that you don't duplicate things.

The trick is to only bring what you really need, take back what you brought and leave the land in better condition than how you found it. We only have one Earth, so you don't want to contribute to environmental damage if you don't have to.



DRESSING FOR YOUR CAMPOUT

One of the most important considerations for camping is what to wear. It's not the same thing as going to the beach where all you need is a swimsuit and a towel. With camping, you need to consider so many other factors so that your clothing keeps you warm, safe, and dry.

- ***Consider the Weather*** – The time of year, the place you're going, and the closest weather forecast you can get should inform the type of clothing you take on your camping trip for every member of the family. You may need raincoats, boots, water shoes, and other types of clothing to be comfortable and safe. Flipflops really aren't right for camping.

- ***Think about the Terrain*** – Each camping destination has its own terrain to consider. Is it flat or mountainous? Are there cliffs? Is there water? What is it about the place that will help you choose the type of clothing you need to bring?

- ***Always Wear Shoes*** – Going barefoot isn't really a good idea no matter where you are, because it's easy to hurt your feet and ruin your entire trip. When camping, it's imperative that you always wear shoes, including when getting into lakes and rivers. A good pair of

water shoes with gripping soles on the bottom can work for a variety of types of environments.

- ***Dress Appropriately for the Activity*** – Also think about what you plan to do. If you're going to go horseback riding, you need long pants and some kind of boots to wear. If you're going boating, you'll need water shoes and a swimsuit. Think about what you want to do and get the clothing for the activity.

- ***Wear Layers*** – The best way to dress when you're outdoors and the weather could change without warning is in layers. Also, there is clothing designed for camping, such as long pants that zip off into shorts that are handy to have when you're hiking and get hot.

- ***Keep Shoes Ready*** – Even if you're sleeping, you need shoes nearby in case you need to get out of your bed. Shoes are important to wear outside always because you might cut yourself or step on a snake or other creature.

Dressing for your campout doesn't have to be expensive, though. Often you can find used items at flea markets and second-hand stores, or wear something you already have that is old and you don't care if it gets ruined.



THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN SETTING UP YOUR CAMP

There are many aspects to consider when you are setting up your camp: the rules of where you're camping, the environment you're in, and what you're planning to do while you're there.

- ***Where You'll Cook*** – This is important, because it can inform how you set up everything else. In some cases, where you sleep might be different from where you cook depending on the rules of the area. Some campsites offer grills, picnic tables and that type of thing, and prefer that you use them for cooking.

- ***Where You'll Wash Up*** – Some campsites even have public showers, but some don't. You can bring baby wipes, or lake safe soaps so you can wash up in the lake if you don't have a source of other types of water available. Remember to follow the rules, though.

- ***Where You'll Go to the Bathroom*** – This is simple if toilets or outhouses are around but if not, you'll need to pick a spot away from your campsite to prepare for toileting. You need to bury your business so that you don't attract animals or ruin the experience for everyone else.

- ***The Size of Your Group*** – Where you set up really depends on the size of your group. It's better if you and your group stay close together

when sleeping and eating so that you can monitor your litter and safety better.

- ***What Type of Wildlife Is in the Area*** – In some areas bears are common, which means you'll need to have ways to lock up your things to keep them safe from bears when you're out exploring away from your campsite. Other areas have snakes, spiders and other creatures that you need to know how to protect yourself from.

- ***The Rules of the Campsite*** – It's been mentioned a few times, but if you don't follow the rules of the campsite you could be fined hundreds of dollars. Even if you don't agree with a rule, follow it. For example, if you're allowed to bring your dog, but one of the rules is to clean up the doggie doo, ensure that you do it.

- ***How You'll Store Food*** – One of the most important considerations about your campsite is how you're going to store food. Remember that you could attract bears, raccoons, and other animals if your food is not put away securely.

- ***Health and Illness*** – If anyone in your family has an illness that needs to be considered, make sure you plan for that. For example, some types of diabetes medication have to be kept in a refrigerator and some types don't.

- ***Fire Safety*** – The best course of action is to use existing equipment for fires and not to try to make a new fire pit. If you do need to make a fire pit, use rocks and keep the area free of leaves and other debris. And don't have a fire when it's super-windy.

Setting up your campsite is the first thing you're going to do when you get there. Know how you're going to do it in advance so that you bring all the right equipment with you and are prepared for issues as they arise.



STAYING SAFE WHILE CAMPING

Camping is a lot of fun until someone gets hurt. That's why following basic safety rules is important for everyone. Don't do activities that you're not dressed appropriately for, aren't physically fit enough for, and don't have someone to teach you how to do.

- *The Type of Animals in the Area* – It won't hurt to familiarize yourself with the type of animals that you may deal with in the wild where you plan to go camping. If there are bears, snakes, and even scorpions, it's good to know about them so that you stay safe, including how to spot them and what to do if you encounter these animals.

- *The Type of Terrain* – Know what type of landscape you're dealing with so that you can bring the right tools and clothing. For example, if you're going to be camping on a mountain, wearing flipflops would not be ideal. Even sneakers could be a problem. Knowing what you can about the area will help you stay safe and avoid an accident.

- *Implementing a Buddy System* – One way to keep your older kids safe is not to let them explore anything alone. Everyone should have a buddy to go to the bathroom with, go swimming with, and do other

activities with. This is a good reason to consider allowing friends to tag along.

- ***Dressing Appropriately*** – Again, know where you're going and what you're going to do so that you can bring the right type of clothing that will keep you safe. A snake-prone area is not the right place to wear sneakers and shorts.

- ***Defense*** – For defense against wildlife, you take pepper spray as mentioned earlier, but you can also carry a stick when walking to help protect yourself from wild dogs or other creatures if you need to. Also, choose areas that aren't known for criminal elements so that you know your family will be safe.

Staying safe while camping is about common sense. Understanding your environment, bringing the right tools and equipment and then staying aware all times will keep you a lot safer than going in without a plan.



CAMPING CUISINE

The type of food that you eat while camping is totally dependent upon the type of storage you have for your food. If you have an RV, you can store and prepare meals that aren't much different from home. But if you only have access to a cooler, a campfire, and maybe a grill, then everything is different.

- ***Consider Storage*** – Can you keep cold food cold and hot food hot? If not, then you may want to opt for safer raw food ingredients like salad and fruit, along with canned items. One way to do it is to eat well the first night (something like steak and potatoes cooked over the fire), and then the latter days eat more canned food since food in a cooler will only last as long as you have ice.

- ***Prep before You Go*** – However you decide to do it, always prep everything before you go. Get all the prep for each meal and snack out of the way because it'll be a lot easier to pack and store this way. Plus, it'll make fixing it a breeze. You don't want to spend all your vacation cooking and cleaning, so make it easy for yourself.

- ***Think about Where You'll Be Cooking*** – Another thing to think about is where you'll be cooking. If it's a hike from your sleeping site due to rules and regulations of the area, consider how you'll tote everything there and back.

- ***Bring a Backup*** – When something can go wrong, it will. While a campsite might advertise that they have gas for gas grills, what if they're out and there is no one to call? What if your camper fridge breaks? You don't want to have to cancel your trip due to starvation. Consider packing potatoes, bread, peanut butter and canned items that are easy to cook and prepare regardless of the situation.

- ***Keep It Light and Easy*** – No one wants to spend their vacation cooking and cleaning. If they did, they'd likely prefer to stay home to do that because it's easier with all the conveniences. It's just a short time, so you don't have to worry about perfect nutrition every day. An apple and a peanut butter sandwich tastes delicious when you're hungry from having fun.

Last, but not least, don't forget the marshmallows, graham crackers, and chocolate. No camping trip is complete without s'mores. Remember, it's all about having fun and providing your family with an experience of togetherness that they will carry with them throughout their lives.



FUN ACTIVITIES TO DO WHILE CAMPING

One of the reasons people love camping is the fun activities they do. What you do on your camping trip depends on the place you go. If you pick a place with planned activities, that is easier. Activities like ziplining, horseback riding, white water rafting and so forth are all great to do with the experts in charge.

- ***Take Photos*** – Don't forget that this is a great time to practice your photography. Plus, good pictures of the kids having a good time are always fun to look back at years later. You can imprint the memory on your brain and in a picture for generations to come.

- ***Wildlife Watching*** – Whether it's bird watching or watching other types of wildlife, you can learn so much when you're out in the wild. If you have a good phone that still works out where you're camping, you can take pictures and use software to identify the animals you're looking at if you desire to.

- ***Hiking*** – If you have mountains nearby, it's fun to hike up the mountain so that you can take in the cooler weather and views from the top. It's exhilarating and fun to do, and good for you. Just make sure you know what you're doing and dress for the terrain so you don't fall.

- ***Swimming*** – Most camping areas offer some form of swimming opportunity. Whether it's a lake or a river, swimming is always fun for most kids and adults. Plus, it lets you cool off and feel refreshed.

- ***Fishing and Boating*** – Some people like to catch their dinner, so if you have a boat you have many additional options while you're camping. Even if you don't have a boat, you still may be able to fish for your food. Check licensing requirements before fishing, though.

- ***Reading a Good Book*** – When you're camping, it's okay to be lazy. You can sit in a chair, or if you have a hammock stand, lie in there while you read a good book. It's easier to read a book outside if you wear glasses or use a Kindle Paperwhite.

- ***Canoeing*** – If you're camping near a river, it's likely that you can also enjoy canoeing. You may not even need your own canoe. You can often rent them, or you can try rafting, tubing, or even white-water rafting depending on where you are.

- ***Singing around a Fire*** – Even if you can't play guitar, you can use a battery-powered radio or your phone to play music while you're sitting around a fire enjoying s'mores. Singing together is always a fun thing to do.

- ***Ziplining*** – Many camping site areas have planned activities nearby, and one fun thing to do is to go ziplining. Ziplining allows you to see the view from up top and also get a thrill from going down fast.

- ***Trail Walking*** – Many campsites have walkable trails. Some of them have history, and others have exercise points where you can stop to do a different exercise. The most fun ones have a mixture of scenery, history, and exercise.

- ***Climbing*** – If you don't know how to climb, sometimes you can pay an expert to teach you. Often there are experts near camping sites with businesses that do just that. When you do climb and explore, leave nature as you found it by remembering to remove all equipment.

There are so many things you can do while camping, including just sitting back and relaxing with a good book. Don't underestimate

good downtime as well as fun planned activities. Don't overpack your days, because you want to have fun and relax too.



CLEANING UP BEFORE YOU LEAVE

It's very important to be a good land steward. It doesn't matter whether you're camping in a park, campground, or the backwoods; it's imperative that you clean up. Part of the beauty of nature is the clean air, land, and lack of noise and traffic. To clean up properly, be prepared with the right equipment.

- ***Bring Trash Bags*** – The best choice is to bring trash bags and take most of your trash home with you instead of leaving it. Of course, some campsites offer trash bins. Follow the rules that they have and recycle when you can by taking home or using the right bins to place plastic, glass, and paper waste.

- ***Know How to Dispose of Waste Properly*** – For example, when you wash dishes, don't pour the water into the local water; instead, try to pour it on the ground at least 200 feet away from any water sources.

- ***Bring Safe Cleaning Supplies*** – Don't bring any type of cleaning supplies with you that can ruin the environment. The best cleaning supplies don't have any harmful chemicals in them and will usually say that they are sulfate free, all-natural, environmentally friendly or something like that. It's important that shampoos, soaps, and dish-cleaning soaps be safe so that you don't ruin the groundwater.

- ***Clean Grills and Fire Pits*** – If you used campground supplied

grills and fire pits, you should also clean them out in a safe way. Don't dump the grills out while they are still hot. There are normally receptacles that enable you to put your coals and ash in them safely so that you don't start a forest fire. If not, bring something with you so that you can dispose of this safely. Forest fires are devastating for people and wildlife and can be prevented.

- ***Cigarette Butts*** – Don't leave your cigarette butts around. Bring a can with you to extinguish cigarettes instead of smashing them out on the ground. First, it's a fire hazard and secondly, it's littering.

- ***Compostable Waste*** – Don't leave any compostable waste at your campsite, even in the woods. The best thing to do is take it with you unless they have recyclable containers made for composting.

- ***Cans and Bottles*** – Don't leave behind any cans or bottles. Put them in the recycling or bring them with you to recycle at home. The more trash you can take with you, the less expensive it is for the state to take care of your campsite.

The main thing is that you should leave the area as you found it, or better than you found it. Helping by picking up garbage from the ground is going to make camping a lot more pleasurable for everyone. But, at the very least don't leave your own garbage behind. You would be shocked to learn how bad some people are at cleaning up after themselves when camping. Don't be one of those people.

If you want to have a fun camping trip with your whole family, start planning now. There are so many ways that you can go with camping. You can rough it with tents and sleeping bags, or you can rent cabins or bring an RV. It's up to you and your family what constitutes fun. At any rate, it's something that you should try at least once with your family.

If you're a novice, considering going to a camp that has planned activities, equipment you can rent, and experts to show you the ropes. That way you don't waste money on buying things that you're never going to use again if you don't like it.



GETTING STARTED

First, figure out where you want to go, then research what is available in the area. Also, consider your experience with camping and the ages of your children. Put safety first. Don't overbook yourself too much for the first trip. Try a short three-day weekend camping trip before doing a longer trip.

Without a doubt, most young children love playing outside, so they'll love camping. Older children and teens who haven't ever done it before may not be as certain, but if you go to a campground with experienced experts and planned activities they probably will have a lot more fun, and so will you. After all, it's your vacation too.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jennifer Dawson's life feels like something straight out of a novel.

Raised by her teenage mother and her grandmother in a small, tiny apartment in downtown Baltimore, young Jen never had it too easy.



Using books to escape from her situation, she developed a love for reading and writing at an early age.

Graduating with honors from her high school and eventually granted a scholarship from the University of Maryland where got her MBA, she proved that anyone who dreams big can fulfill dreams with a lot of hard work and a little luck.

Having ghostwritten a New York Times best-selling self-help book for a well-known guru, she has since made a good living writing eBooks in various topics such as family and relationships, business and entrepreneurship and self-development.

She lives in New York with her husband Chris, two kids, Jeremy and Anne-Marie and their two chihuahuas.

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