

Long drives may be more challenging with kids than without them, but remember: it doesn't matter where you are, it's who you have beside you! Camping with children can be one of the most rewarding and memorable experiences. In this blog, we collate the top tips for camping with young children, detailed by some of Snowys' most seasoned adventurers and experienced family campers.

Before we begin, it's important to remember that every kid and every family is different – so the tips mentioned in this blog may not work for everyone. Some of you may have already been through the camping stage with kids under five and have had different experiences. If this is true, comment your 'dos' and 'dont's' in the comments below – we'd love to hear them!

Ben and Lauren also discuss camping with kids on the Snowys Camping Show:



Camping with children can be one of the most rewarding and memorable experiences.

Image: Zempire

Travel Short Distances and Take Regular Breaks

Most kids don't like to sit still in a car for hours on end. Yes, books, music, drawing, and iPads can help entertain them – but the younger they are the less help they are. We've found the best method of travelling is to break the trip up into short sections of no more than two hours.

If your kids are still having multiple sleeps a day try and cover the most distance while they're asleep. Older kids will appreciate a good break at a roadside playground, so factor these into your planned route. If longer car expeditions are new to your family, it's also a good idea to plan ahead by searching for any day trips on the way to your destination, so that you can find a suitable campground or park for a short break.

Two hours on the road, and 30 minutes to an hour break is a loose rule to adopt. Sure, we cover fewer kilometres in a day – but as we get older, we enjoy the rest. It's important for cutting down on driver fatigue too.

Listen to Audiobooks

Downloading audiobooks is a fantastic idea for a long car trip. Many libraries offer free e-books which you can borrow before you leave. There's also the option of streaming apps like Stan and Netflix, which allow you to download and view offline without the use of data.

These are a popular option for a rainy day when there's not much else to do. I'd recommend using earphones, as it may mean less arguing over what to watch – and should focus the children's attention while you get a break too!



Break a long drive up into smaller, more manageable sections. Or, if you're feeling a bit tired, let the baby drive! Image: Xan Holyoak

Caravan Parks are a Good Place to Start

When it comes to your first trip away, there's nothing wrong with a caravan park if you don't

want to start with a drop-pit loo experience. Most will have a playground and a pool, which is a social hub for both parents and youngsters.

A good camp kitchen is also a bonus if you'd rather not cook at your campsite, or you just crave some adult conversation to maintain your sanity over a glass of something strong!

Familiarise Them with Each Site

No matter how hard you try, you can't keep an eye on them all the time. A quick chat in the car on arrival can help everyone's anxiety levels. Walk around the campsite as soon as you're set up. This way, everyone is familiar with the place, and where everything is.

Explain the Park Rules

Caravan parks will always have a few rules, so ensure that you discuss these and make sure everyone understands any no-go zones and where they should and shouldn't play. If you're camping in the great outdoors, set a few physical boundaries and point out any dangerous areas to be wary of.



Two hours on the road, and 30 minutes to an hour break is a loose rule to adopt. Image: Xan Holyoak

Establish Where Basecamp Is

When your kids go off with their new friends, check that they know how to get back to camp before they head off. If you've got a site number, make sure you tell them. If not, ensuring that they know what kind of car, tent, or van you're in makes their return much easier when they ask someone for help.

Plan Meals and Snacks

Pack plenty of water and healthy snacks that are easy for kids to eat in the car. These could include carrot sticks, trail mix, popcorn, dried fruit, muesli bars, yoghurt pouches, and fruit.

I would recommend buying a double insulated bottle for each family member. You can refill your bottles using tap water or with a 10-litre water container from a supermarket.

Before doing a grocery shop, write down a list of snacks and meal ideas. Make sure the meals are quick and easy, as this will save room in your fridge and also reduce wastage.



Pack plenty of water and healthy snacks. Image: Amie Duncan

Simple Meal Ideas

Breakfast:

- Cereal and milk (Coconut + Cranberry Weetbix blends are favourites. Chop up some banana and strawberries to throw on top)

- Yoghurt and fruit, and/or muesli (yoghurt pouches are a great healthy option for kids, and can also be used as snacks for the drive)

Lunch:

- Wholemeal sandwiches or wraps (peanut butter and honey, vegemite and cheese, BBQ chicken and avocado, etc.)

Dinner:

- Ravioli (add pesto or tomato-based premade pasta sauces)
- Wholemeal rolls or wraps (add steak, chicken, falafels, or sausage, etc. – plus salad and cheese)

Snacks:

- Carrot and cucumber sticks, dips, breadsticks, nuts and trail mix, rice crackers, plain popcorn, individually wrapped cheese, dried fruits, muesli bars, yoghurt pouches, and fruit (grapes, apples, and bananas are great).

Also, don't forget to pack plenty of water.

Expect the Unexpected

If you get stuck on an isolated 4WD track in the blistering sun, it can be really hard to find enough shade to keep your little ones cool. Always make sure that you have sunblock, water, hats, and a shelter (such as a quick-shade, car awning, or umbrella).

Or, if you're stuck for so long that it becomes dark and cold, then you'll want to make sure you have warm clothes, blankets, and closed shoes.



Do your research and find the perfect car seat. Image: Amie Duncan

Invest in a Comfy Car Seat

Young kids don't enjoy sitting still for long, let alone being strapped in! If you plan on spending lots of time travelling in the car, do your research and find the perfect car seat. You want your kids to be comfy enough to fall asleep if they need to.

Big, Easy-to-Pitch Tents are Key

There is nothing worse than being stuck at camp in cold, wet weather, and not having the space to keep the kids entertained! With the amount of stuff you end up bringing for the kids, you need ample space to store and organise it (so you don't keep tripping over everything)! Let's face it, roughing it in remote locations tends to slow down a bit when the kids come along. Rugged, out-of-the-way locations are replaced by caravan parks with jumping pillows, pools, and playgrounds. It's nice to maintain a bit of privacy by having a large tent, so you can get changed or have a space to chill out.



Kids get to learn about and experience things when camping that they just can't at home or

 in the classroom. Image: Emma McPherson

Invest in a Porta Potti

Once the kids start toilet training, having your own toilet becomes a huge advantage. Running across the campground with your three-year-old with a crowning 'number two' isn't adding to the enjoyment of your camping trip!

The convenience of having a portable chemical toilet around the side of your tent can't be overestimated. Toilet training can be an extremely difficult process. A Porta Potti can change this. The novelty of using a new, funny-looking toilet can mean your toddler wants to go every hour or so.

Glow Stick Night Lights

This can help if your little one wakes up in the middle of the night. They can find their toys, blanky, or water bottle, and get themselves back to sleep without calling for you. Not only are glow sticks fun and something for the kids to play with when it gets dark, but hanging a couple in the tent above their heads gives them enough light to see if they need to without keeping them awake.

 Swags are the perfect bedding option for kids. Image: Barry Peters

Swags - The Perfect Bed for Kids

One of the most frequent questions we get asked at Snowys is what bedding we recommend for young kids.

An Oztrail Biker Swag is compact in size, and just rolls in the tent without the hoops and poles.

Bedding can be rolled up inside, keeping set-up time quick and simple. During the day, just pull the canvas right up so your child can run and jump around without getting their bedding dirty. If it's really cold at night, they'll sleep with the canvas pulled right up to trap in as much warmth as possible.

Then there are the Coleman Hybrid Hooded sleeping bags, rated from -5 to 5 degrees. Always choose a bag that's warmer than you think you'll need.

If your kids are still quite small, fold the sleeping bag in half so they don't wiggle down too far. This puts more padding and insulation underneath and makes their bed cosier.

Slip, Slop, Slap and Cover Up

We've all heard it, but it's easy to get complacent, especially about re-applying sunscreen. Ensure the sunscreen is broad-spectrum (blocks both UV-A and UV-B), sunglasses are good quality, and the hat has a broad brim.

Loose fitting, lightweight, long-sleeve tops, long pants, and shoes protect them from sunburn. They also help avoid insect bites and are better protection against snakes.



 *Slip, slop, slap! Image: Amie Duncan*

Drink, Drink, Drink

Provide your kids with drink bottles that they can carry easily, maybe on a lanyard or belt. Let them decorate it with stickers to personalise it, and remind them to top it up regularly.

Take Note of the Geography

Before your kids go exploring, ensure there are no unforeseen hazards. Cliffs, water, and old mine shafts can be especially dangerous, so be aware.

Stay Vigilant

Don't let kids, especially young ones, wander too far from camp. In some environments, every direction looks the same, especially in desert or forest areas. As a good rule of thumb, ensure the campsite is always in view.

Be Aware of Area-Specific Hazards

Some areas have their own specific hazards. As well as disguised dingo traps (like some found at Dog Fence), another hazard to be aware of is bait aid for foxes, dingoes, and feral cats. All these precautions are simple and part of the brilliant learning that comes from time out in the bush.

 *Keep an eye out for dingoes. Image: Barry Peters*

Use a UHF Radio

Handheld UHF radios are now quite inexpensive, so give one to your kids – they'll love it! Check-in with them regularly, and carry one yourself to monitor communication. This will enable them to feel quite adventurous, but with the knowledge that they are in contact. Just remember, kids should not be scared – just prepared!

The Kids *Will* Get Dirty!

Knowing you'll cope when the kids get dirty is a great start – just grab a stash of darker clothing and don't worry about it! Cleanliness is the last thing you need to stress about when the kids are happy.

If you think you'll need to do laundry when on the road, pack some detergent, and make sure you have some gold coins for the machine and pegs for the clothesline. Get in early to do your laundry so that you can have the load hung out. This also means that you can enjoy the rest of the day too.

An op-shop is a good place to select a camping wardrobe. It's also a treasure trove of

inexpensive toys and books to take. Plus, if you think you'll go to town or out to dinner, you can always pack some 'good clothes' if you feel that you need to.



Let's face it – the kids WILL get dirty! Image: Emma McPherson

Bring Toys

Allow the kids to bring some small toys that are suitable for playing with around the camp. Kids can play in the dirt with cars, trucks and action figures for hours on end. Provide a tarp that can be laid out for playing card games, board games, or with other toys requiring a cleaner area.

That said, kids at camp run around till lunch like lunatics – then disappear with other campers' kids till dinner! They don't always play like they do at home, so likely need only half of their usual gear. Some will spend hours building a sand mine with sticks, stones, and a mound of sand. You don't always need to overload your vehicle with toys and gadgets, a couple for each child will be fine – and maybe their bikes, if you've got the space.

Bring along some toys so that the kids can play with them in a new environment.

Go for Walks

This is especially good for younger kids. Point out interesting things around them, teach them the safety of keeping the campsite in view, let them use a UHF radio to talk to someone back at camp, and let them do a talk to the group about what they saw.



Take the kids for walks, and point out interesting things around them. Image: Barry Peters

Watch Out for Animal Tracks

Help the kids to identify what animals are nearby:

- How many legs?
- How many toes?
- Where do the tracks lead?
- How far apart are the footsteps?
- How big might the animal be?

Have a bird and animal reference book handy to help identify the animal.

Be Animal Aware

Teach your kids to watch from a distance. While we don't want to discourage the fascination kids have for the animals they see around them, it is important to ensure they understand that we are in their territory and they can become frightened by us. Some animals such as dingoes may be protecting their young and can attack if we get too close.



Look out for animal tracks! Image: Barry Peters

Get Them Involved

Kids love to help out! Try to include them in everything, from packing the car to setting up the tent. It may take twice as long but there won't be anywhere near as much complaining from boredom.

Make sure they have defined responsibilities when setting up and breaking camp. This keeps them involved and gives you time for your tasks. Explain to kids why you do things a certain way so they can learn while they're helping. Don't forget to acknowledge their efforts so that they feel a sense of accomplishment and will happily help again next time.

If the kids are old enough too, get them to plan and make at least one meal for the family. Let them find a recipe, buy the ingredients, and prepare the meal. Perhaps even do a miniature 'MasterChef' by taking some photos/video while they explain what they are doing. *Go for a walk with your kids... they'll be fascinated by all the wonders Mother Nature has to offer.*

Take Photos

Young kids can take photos with the relatively cheap and automatic digital cameras available. Even an old phone with a built-in camera could be used.

Encourage them to take photos of things of interest, and later make a presentation on the computer. You will be amazed at the skills even very young children demonstrate with programs such as PowerPoint.

Take photos for the children to create a presentation with later on. Image: Emma McPherson

Fly Kites

Modern kites fold up into a very small space and are easy to carry. Ensure that they are used in a good, clear space to avoid having to untangle and retrieve a kite stuck high up in a tree!

Don't Drain the Treats or Rewards Too Quickly!

Pack these separately, so that they're not discovered earlier than you wish! Keep some up your sleeve in a hidden spot for when a reward or distraction is required, or maybe if you need one for yourself!

Family car games can help stave off boredom! Image: Xan Holyoak

On the Road: Family Car Games

The Alphabet Game

Objective:

Work through the alphabet from A-Z with each occupant in the car naming something from the topic to match their corresponding letter.

Method:

Begin by selecting a topic. Something as simple as having to name a type of animal, a capital city, a country or more in-depth topics such as names of fashion designers or a clothing range.

Next, take it in turns (generally clockwise) to name something from the mutually agreed topic in alphabetical order. For example, the chosen subject may be, *name a country*, which would generally begin with the first person (usually the driver in our situation) answering with *Australia* or *Angola*. The person next-in-line would then respond with something like *Botswana* or *Brazil*, then the third with *Canada* or *Cambodia* and so on.

Rules:

The Alphabet Game sounds relatively simple; however, when you add some weird and wonderful topics into the mix, it does become a little tricky and is always good for a laugh. Further still, if you include a time limit (e.g. ten seconds), it elevates the challenge and creates further entertainment. Watch out for geographic slips too – sometimes you can catch a player out when they incorrectly answer with a city instead of a country!



If you're nowhere near approaching traffic, you could choose themes that suit your environment. Image: Xan Holyoak

First to Find

Objective:

To earn the most points or rewards by being the first to find the nominated object.

Method:

Each person appoints an item which all occupants must look for along the way. The driver starts the ball rolling, eg. I would determine that everyone, including myself, finds a green Volkswagen beetle.

The next person in line could suggest that we all find a blue tractor but include the specification for it to be driving along the road, the third could be a fishing boat, towed or stationary (a tough find for those landlocked Outback journeys). Once a person finds one of the nominated objects along the trip, they receive a point or reward. The person who initially suggested the located object then chooses a new item to find, and the game continues.

Rules:

There are no defined rules for this game, and only your imagination limits you. You can have this game continue for days, sometimes even weeks, where just minutes from home, someone will shout out-of-the-blue, 'look! There's that pink stretch hummer filling up at the petrol station!'

This is a great game to stave off boredom and can be played wherever you go. So, if you're nowhere near approaching traffic, you could choose themes that suit your environment: 'first to find... a kangaroo, a wedge-tailed eagle or its nest, a wombat hole, a sign...?'



'Pick a Colour or Company' is not a game to play when you are off the beaten track. Image: Xan Holyoak

Pick a Colour or Company

Play this game at any time, but it does require approaching traffic – so perhaps save it for highways, motorways, or the industrial areas skirting the city outskirts.

Objective:

The race is on to accumulate the highest number in a set timeframe.

Method:

Each person chooses a vehicle colour or car company, then counts how many cars they see on the road in that colour or by that particular manufacturer, within the set time or distance. For example, the driver may pick the colour blue and suggest that they will see more blue cars over the next hour than any other colour.

Alternatively, the driver may suggest that there will be more Toyotas on the road before entering the next town. It requires a bit more attention and vehicle knowledge, but it's a fun way to learn about the makes, models, and emblems of car manufacturers.

Rules:

Place parameters around colours, so that no one is allowed to choose the most common shades of white, black and red. For added interest, you could include types of paint finish, e.g. metallic, pearl, etc.

This game is not one to play when you are off the beaten track. However, it is a great way to keep everyone alert and interested in what is up ahead.



'Tootie Frootie' is a game where parents can choose to be involved or have a break. Image: Kevin Laminto

Tootie Frootie

A game invented by kids for kids, and it's one where parents can choose to be involved or have a break and indulge in their own quiet time.

Objective:

Initially, this game was a spin-off from *Pick a Colour or Company*, with the competition set on who can create the most colourful fruit salad within a specified timeframe, i.e. counting each winning point.

Method:

Determined by the colour, each vehicle becomes a type of fruit or an ingredient within the bowl of fruit salad. Feel free to get creative and use your interpretations based upon your favourite fruits, or the kid's favourites.

Here are some suggestions to kick you off:

- a purple vehicle becomes a *grape*
- orange is an *orange*
- yellow is a *banana*
- green is *lime*, and
- pink is a *strawberry*

When an 'approved' coloured car is spotted, the person calls out the name of the fruit and if first, they earn a point. If there are multiple simultaneous calls over the same car, thus a

piece of fruit, the players either each receive points or the round becomes void.

Rules:

Similar to the previous game, we omit the most popular colours of white, black, and red. For this game, we also 'ban' silver-coloured cars for the same reason.

These family-friendly games are not only a great way to stave off boredom, but they also ensure that the family who plays together, stays together. And if you need a few extra supplies for your trip, [check out our range of kids gear](#) to suit your favourite little people.

Short or long drives, car games are a great way to entertain the kids without devices. Image: Xan Holyoak

Camping with Kids: An Insight From Ben

Camping used to be simple. A two man tent, a couple of bags with essentials, a fridge with some food and beer, cooking gear, two seats, and a table.

We'd sometimes drive as far as the 4WD track would let us, before packing our rucksacks and walking the rest of the way to some far-out location away from anything remotely civil.

What Changed?

Our beautiful daughter came into the world.

'That's okay. We've lost a bit of space on the back seat for a child restraint and box full of toys, and we need more space to sleep. Plus more room for food and drink. But we're still going camping. I'll just have to embrace some changes – just not push as far.'

So, we upgraded to a family dome tent, another camp mat, and a sleeping bag. Plus, we added an icebox to our kit.

...Then we realised we need to provide more shade to make things comfortable during the day, and if everyone is going to enjoy camping we need more seats. AND to upgrade the bush toilet.

So, we added a 4WD awning, another camp chair, and a toilet seat.

As your family grows, your car, tent, and kit will grow too! Image: Robyn Jay, Flickr

...Then our family grew again

Three years on, and our family becomes four with the birth of our second daughter.

Now we've lost *all* the back seat space to child restraints and *toys, toys, toys!* We need to take the port-a-cot, more food, more water, another bag of clothes, and more facilities to store rubbish.

The boot is full and it's taking a long time to tie everything securely onto the roof rack!

So we added a rooftop bag. Surely that's enough? We may need to add another camp chair in the not-too-distant future, but I can accommodate for that on the roof.

Turns out young kids don't like creepy crawlies either, and I've avoided the topic of my wife being attacked by mosquitoes every evening for far too long now.

I must embrace change. So, we added a mesh room that clips in under our 4WD awning.


Our Current Set-Up

Now, by the time I've set up a family tent, three mats, and a port-a-cot, plus dug bush toilet, checked the bush toilet for stability, extended the 4WD awning, attached the screen room, set up the camp table and chairs, created a camp kitchen, and conducted a full pest inspection to ensure we are as free as we can be from anything resembling an insect – I'm well and truly ready for a beer.

What used to be a 15-20-minute set-up that took equally as long to pack, is now an hour-long set-up that takes an entire day to prepare for!

That said, I wouldn't have it any other way. Watching kids explore their surroundings, observe the resident sleepy lizard, do some stargazing, and wake up to the sound of birds are some of the best things in the world.

...And it's not like I'm in a rush to set things up anyway.

 *A school holiday trip is fun, challenging at times, and rewarding! Image: Emma McPherson*

Got teenagers?! That's a whole new ball game. Ben and Lauren discuss camping with teenagers on the Snowys Camping Show:

Any tips we missed? Comment below!