Hiking with children is a rewarding venture for parents and kids alike. The feeling of being self-sufficient for a few days, getting back to nature and enjoying the fresh air, away from the sanitised grounds of caravan parks is great for mum and dad.

And kids love the sense of adventure, animal-spotting, and discovery of new and exciting campsites – and of course, the marshmallows over the fire. With that in mind, here are 5 great tips for taking children on a hike.

1. Carry-On Camping

Inevitably, kids may need to be carried. There are a number of harness child carrying systems on the market, designed for kids or toddlers who can’t walk for any significant distance. These are great for day-hikes.

For kids who are a little older, they can be carried on shoulders, where is it safe to do so. It’s important for Mum and Dad to realise that they may need to take the additional weight of their children as well as the weight of their rucksacks.
You can pack a little heavier when hiking with kids, as you won’t be hiking long distances.

Photo: Peter Inverarity.

2. Parents pack heavier

One key thing to remember is that parents will not be covering the distances they might normally walk with other adults. So they can afford to ‘pack heavy’ with a little more emphasis on water, food, and luxuries like toys or games.

This weight would not be comfortable over 10-20 kilometres, but over 3-5km in a day, it is quite manageable.

3. Helping the adults out

Kids love helping out, and will often want to take a back-pack along. This is great, and you can always pack something light in their bag like their favourite soft toy. Sometimes a small thing (like the first-aid kit) can also make your child feel like they are carrying something important, and be contributing to the team.

However, expect your child to feel some discomfort after a while, and perhaps they may want to shed their load. It’s a good idea to select a kid’s bag which can be strapped or clicked onto mum or dad’s rucksack if this is required.
Get the kids to help out with carrying a little day pack with some snacks or something small.  
Photo: Peter Inverarity

4. Sleeping Arrangements

There are a number of options when accommodating sleeping arrangements, and it all comes down to the size and/or number of tents you’re prepared to carry. Two parents and two kids 4-6 years old can comfortably fit into a 3-man hiking tent of generous proportions. Alternatively, you could pack a 1-man tent for the kids to sleep in, and a 2-man tent for mum & dad.

Be careful not to overestimate the size of your tent though - it’s a fine line between ‘snug’ and ‘cramped’! If buying a tent for family hikes, make sure you see it set up in the shop first, and preferably have your family with you to check the floor-space!
When you’ve got kids in the tent, you want to make sure it’s not too cramped! Photo: Peter Inverarity.

5. That’s Entertainment

It’s a good idea to take a few travel games for the campsite too – a pack of UNO cards, for instance, and a storybook or two for around the fire. There are always games that you can make up too – for instance, a few small stones and a line in the sand will give you a perfectly good game of ‘bush bocce’.

Or why not see if you and your kids can find some animal tracks nearby – the easily recognisable kangaroo, wallaby or emu prints, or the disturbed earth dug up by a foraging Echidna. Remember to supervise the kids though, the excitement can carry them away from camp all too easily!

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Family hikes = Memories for life

Kids who have positive experiences hiking will grow up to be confident and conscientious explorers of the natural world. Moreover, their experience of self-sufficiency and teamwork will instil a resilient streak in your child which will serve them well throughout their life.

Hiking with kids takes them to unique and special places which stay with them forever, and create unique and special memories which kids and parents will enjoy for the rest of their lives.

How do you prepare your kids for outdoor adventures? Let us know in the comments below.