KSL Studio 5
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"Keeping it Safe At Camp"
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It's that time of the year when we all "head for the hills"!! Hiking, mountain biking, and of course camping all beckon us this time of the year. Somehow being outdoors provides a great temporary escape from the stresses of suburban and urban life. However, the camping experience has its own set of dangers. The wise camper must take these into account and prepare in advance how to make safety in the woods a high priority and counter the inherent risks. Unfortunately some of us head out a bit unprepared and unaware of some of the safety concerns we should be prepared for.

Basic Safety Precautions:

Planning ahead is the first step to a calmer and more assured response in case of an emergency, and an overall safe experience. First, stop and consider what kinds of natural and/or man-made disasters and emergencies could occur while camping. Make a list of them, then discuss each one and what you should do as a family in each situation. Role play with your kids how they might respond. Have them consider a number of alternatives and "what to do" choices and discuss which would be the "best" alternative in each situation.

Developing and rehearsing a safety/emergency action plan will add precious time needed for response to a crisis. This is true on a day hike, overnight (or longer camping experience), and all other outdoor activities. Take the time to review with your children possible scenarios and situations. For each type of emergency, establish responsibilities for each member of your household and plan to work together as a team.

Because some family members might not be at your base camp at the time of an emergency, designate alternates in case someone is absent.

Here are some of the top considerations:

1. Plan your trip so you arrive while it is light enough to check over the entire area and acquaint your family members with where roads, rivers, trails, drinking water sources, etc. are located. Help them get their bearings—mountains, directions, they way they come and go from camp, etc. Also look around for, and clear, any broken bottles, glass, or other dangerous objects possibly left by previous campers.
2. Get a "lay of the land"—contours for water run off during a heavy storm, flood potential and outlets, etc. Also check for poison ivy or poison oak, stinging nettle, etc.
3. Dispose of all trash properly and in appropriate containers or dumpsters. Improperly handled trash and food attracts animals, so consider carefully how you need to handle them.

Always stay on the safe side when setting boundaries for family camping; the more remote you are, the more care you should take in choosing your activities.

Food and Drinking Water Safety

Wash your hands with hot, soapy water for at least 20 seconds before handling food, and after handling raw meats or poultry, using the bathroom, changing diapers, or touching pets.

When camping, or going on a picnic, find out if there will be a source of clean water. If not, bring water for preparation and cleaning, or pack disposable wipes and/or sanitizing lotions and paper towels.

Take clean plastic bags or containers to store leftover food.

Always wash raw fruits and vegetables in clean water. You cannot tell whether foods carry surface bacteria by the way they look, smell, or taste.

When you pack a cooler, wrap raw meats and poultry securely, and put them on the bottom to prevent juices from dripping onto other foods.

Wash all plates, utensils, and cutting boards that touched or held raw meat or poultry before using them again for cooked foods.

Perishable foods that are normally in the refrigerator, such as luncheon meats, cooked meat, chicken, and potato or pasta salads, must be kept in an insulated cooler with freezer packs or blocks of ice to keep it at 4° C (40° F) or below.

Refrigerate or freeze food the day before you pack it for a trip. I also like to purchase dry ice.

When packing a cooler, put your meat or poultry on the bottom, and then pack food in reverse order, so that the foods packed on top are the ones you expect to use first.

Keep the cooler in the coolest part of the car, and place it in shade or shelter, away from direct sunlight. Keep the cooler closed as much as possible. We also like to have one cooler for the drinks and the other for perishable foods. That way the frequent opening of the cooler for drinks is not compromising the safety of your food.

Put leftovers back in the cooler as soon as you are finished eating, and plan for ways to replenish ice during an extended and warmer weather trip. Discard all perishable foods once the ice or freezer packs in your cooler have melted.

The simple rule is: When in doubt, throw it out.

Be sure not to collect drinking water out of rivers or streams—no matter how "clean" they may appear. Or if you do, be sure to have the appropriate water filtration devices or ability to boil water before consuming. Nothing ruins a camping trip faster than a case of "Montezuma's revenge".

Fire Safety

Fire is of prime concern at the campsite. Always check and obey the fire danger warnings/postings and limitations on building fires.

1. Be sure you have a large enough area for a fire that cannot spread laterally or vertically.
2. When ever a fire is lit at the campsite be sure that someone is assigned to watch it at all times.
3. Keep water nearby for emergencies. Be sure that when you put the fire out you use water and soil and be certain that the fire is completely out, cool to the touch. Embers buried within the pile of ashes have a tendency to reignite later.
4. Keep your campsite fires to an absolute minimum at all times.
5. Keep lit lanterns and stoves away from tents and other flammable objects. Never use them in a closed tent because of the danger of carbon monoxide gas. Carry and store your fuel in approved containers away from the tent area, and in a shaded area of your camp. I prefer to purchase battery operated lanterns.

Animal Safety

Teach your children that animals in the wild are strong and agile, and will defend themselves and their young if threatened. Children should not approach wild animals, even small ones, and should **never** feed them. Don't leave your children unsupervised - small children are vulnerable. Instruct your children to stay calm and call loudly for help if they

encounter a wild animal. Always ask the park rangers about wild animals in your wilderness park--sightings and recommendations of what to do if there is an encounter.

1. Make some noise while hiking and exploring away from camp. You are more likely to avoid an encounter with a wild animal if it knows you're coming. Wear bear bells and/or talk loudly to your mates or even yourself to make your presence known. Don't surprise a bear or other wild animal or sneak up on it to get a photo, etc..

2. Bring a friend. Travelling in a group is much safer than travelling solo. Always hike with one or more partners when travelling in bear country.

3. No dogs. Leave your dog at home if there's a possibility for a bear encounter. Dogs and bears don't mix, and can lead to needless encounters.

4. Keep your campsite clean and odor free. Store all food and other fragrant items like toothpaste in a vehicle or in a properly hung food cache. Use bear proof dumpsters for your garbage when available.

5. Don't disturb any wild animal. If you see a wild animal and they have not noticed you, back away, go back or circle far around. Do not try to get its attention for pictures.

Water Safety

If you are camping where there are water ways—rivers, lakes, reservoirs, always be sure to have life jackets suitable for the type of water and water craft options you are using. Our rivers are full, cold, and fast at the beginning of the summer—watch your children closely and be careful yourself. I like to have my children wear life vests even near seemingly safe rivers—you never know.

Weather Condition Safety

The risks of many outdoor activities vary substantially with weather conditions. Potential weather hazards and the appropriate responses should be understood and anticipated. Always check the weather forecast in the area you are headed. Wear layers that can be shed as the temperatures or conditions “warm up”, but that can protect you from the elements should you become lost or stranded.

Severe summer storms can creep up quickly and produce not only lots of rain, but lightning. Review with your family the expected response.

While moving indoors at the first sign of a thunderstorm may be your best option, it's not always possible when you are camping. Here are some actions you can take to reduce your risk of exposure while in the backcountry.

1. Teach your children to watch and listen to the weather. Teach them to begin their process of protection when you hear thunder (which means lightning is one to ten miles away).

2. Set turnaround times that will get you off of exposed terrain, or water before storms hit. Observe the changing weather and discuss its status with your group.

3. Next, move to safer terrain as soon as you hear thunder, not when the storm is upon you. Avoid peaks, ridges, and significantly higher ground. Your safest choice is a building with both electricity and plumbing - these amenities will draw lightning toward the ground. A truck or car is the second safest choice if you are caught in a thunderstorm. Close all windows to your vehicle. Wide open ground offers high exposure during an electrical storm. Avoid trees and tall objects—easier said then done while in the mountains. So, avoid trees and bushes

that rise above the others. Be especially cautious of trees at the edge of the water. Your best bet is to look for an obvious ravine or depression.

4. Do not seek protection under a tree. If you are with others, spread out at least 30 feet from each other. This will lower the chances of multiple strikes. Also stay away from metal fences, tents or canopies with metal poles, or power lines, railway tracks, and metal bridges.

5. Lastly, assume the "Lightning Position". That means you squat (or sit) and ball up so you are as low as possible without getting prone. Wrap your arms around your legs. Close your eyes. Keep your feet together. If you have any insulated objects handy, like a foam pad or a soft pack full of clothes, sit on them. Do not keep your body up by holding on to the ground or other objects. If you cannot hold this position, try to find a low rock to place your bottom on to help you keep this position. Avoid backpacks with metal frames since the frame may concentrate current. Don't touch metallic objects like ice axes, crampons, tent poles, or jewelry.

Hiking Safety

Even when hiking consider not only carrying sufficient water, but also a small plastic rain poncho, or even a mylar blanket. They are so small, fold up, and fit nicely in a back pocket. Carry a cell phone or even some sort of GPS device. Basic hiking tips include:

1. Never allow children to hike alone. Teach children to always hike with an adult.
2. Map out your hiking trail ahead of time. Be sure any trail you choose is well marked and do not stray from it.
3. Learn to use a compass.
4. Make sure children are physically capable of the hike in terms of distance, pace and difficulty.
5. Bring high-energy snacks.
6. Bring extra layers of clothing and rain gear in case the weather suddenly changes.
7. Wear proper hiking boots and clothing that covers as much exposed skin as possible to protect from scrapes, bites and poisonous plants.
8. Tell others where you're hiking and when you'll return.
9. Keep first aid supplies accessible at all times, even on short hikes.

Additional Items for a Camper's Pack List:

Doctor's phone number, along with any other emergency contact information
Allergy medication—like Benedryl
Poison Oak or Poison Ivy lotions—like Calamine Lotion
Basic first aid kit, including sunscreen, and insect repellent
GPS units
Walkie-talkies
Map of the area and compass—teach everyone how to use them—review each trip
Whistles for each camper to wear or carry in their pocket--whistles can be heard farther away than the human voice, teach kids the universal help signal of three loud slightly extended blows.
Bear spray
Board games or card games for playing inside the tent in bad weather

There are many other considerations for safety while enjoying the out-of-doors this summer. This is a good start!!

Sources:

Boy Scouts of America
American Camping Association
USDA—Food Safety