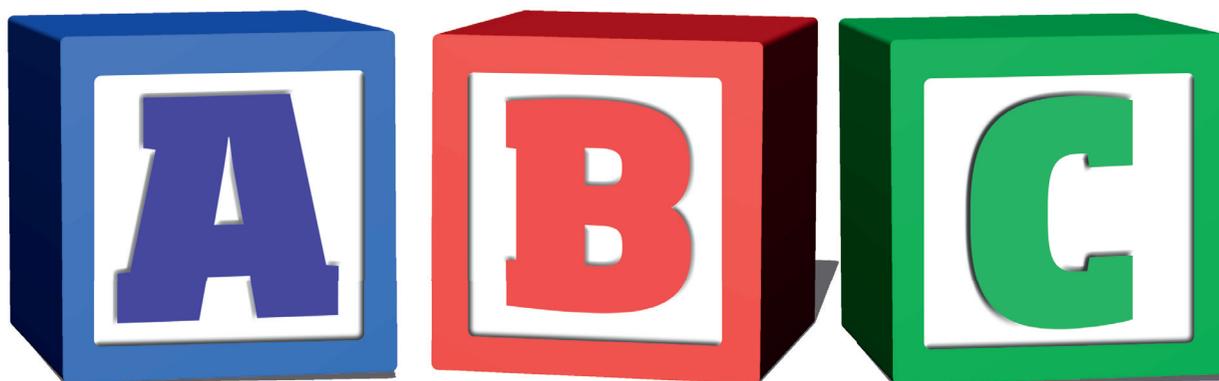


# AS EASY AS



Camping with kids can be a daunting task but there are certain things that will make life much easier. **Iain Duff** provides the building blocks for a successful trip



Camping is a great chance to spend time playing with the kids

## **A**TTITUDE

The key to a successful family camping holiday is ensuring that everyone has a good time and that's not going to happen if you go into it with a negative attitude. There's always going to be something that tries your patience but positivity and tolerance are the big thing here – you simply have to leave your usual hang-ups at home as there's no room for them in a tent. So if it's raining, shrug your shoulders, put on the waterproofs and get on with it. If the kids are driving you demented, count to 10 before losing the rag. And leave the mealtime and bedtime battles at home.

## **B**ABIES

Taking a very young child camping isn't for everyone but there's no reason why it can't be done if you prepare well. If you're bottle-



## **E**MPowerMENT

Keep the youngsters involved and give them some equipment they can call their own – even if it's just a torch. A small daysack each is handy – with the added bonus that you can get them to use it tidy away their junk. At mealtimes, you could even let the children have their own little table for even more independence.

## **F**OOD & COOKING

Cooking your own meals rather than eating out is a way of keeping costs down but if you can, try to factor a couple of dinners in the local pub or restaurant into your budget. If you do decide to do all the cooking, get the kids involved in planning and preparing meals and, unless you're a Guyrope Gourmet, try to stick to simple, one-pot meals. Keep a varied selection of snacks and drinks hand for the kids to graze on throughout the day.



feeding, think about using disposable bottles for the length of your trip and premixed formula can be easier than powdered. Jars of baby food are an easy way to provide quick meals. It's all a bit more expensive but worth it if it allows you to get away. Portable travel cots like LittleLife's Arc 2 are good but remember the temperature can plunge at night, even in summer so make sure you have enough blankets to keep your baby warm.

## **C**LOTHEs

Be prepared for any weather and bring more clothes than you think you'll need. It's a fact of life that kids will get dirty, and while most good campsites have laundry facilities, you don't want to waste a day washing clothes if you can avoid it.

## **D**ESTINATION

Unless you're desperate to go somewhere very special, think about a destination that is within easy reach of home. The longer the journey, the more boring it can get for your children and you don't actually have to go far to get that away-from-home feeling. And of course, if you're within easy reach of home, you'll have the fallback of leaving early if the worst comes to the worst. Whatever the journey, make sure you have a good selection of distractions – from snacks and sweets to games to play. And for longer trips, in-car DVD players are a really good way of keeping youngsters occupied.



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## **G** GETTING AROUND

Campsites can be big places, so if you have the opportunity, take your children's bikes with you.

Most sites are safe places for youngsters on two wheels and as long as they follow the rules, your kids have a great time whizzing around the site. Our eldest learned to ride his bike during a camping holiday, helped along with the encouragement he got from fellow campers. Chances are they will quickly hook-up with other kids onsite so if the weather is kind, they could be out playing from breakfast until bedtime – just like we were when we were young.

## **H**OME COMFORTS

For smaller children, familiar bedtime soft toys are comforting and don't underestimate how important a pillow from home could be in settling youngsters at night. Within reason, try to stick to home bedtime regimes, but again, it's vital not to get too stressed out if they refuse to go to sleep straight away. If you find after a couple of days your youngster won't drop off early, there's no point in trying to force the issue. Go out for a walk round the site or even take a drive somewhere.



Embrace technology - though a satellite dish might be a bit extreme

## **I**NVOLVE THE KIDS

Get them involved right from the start, and that means before you've even booked a site. Build up the sense of anticipation by planning things together, from choosing where to stay to picking equipment. If you're buying a new

tent, take them along to the shops and get them involved in choosing which one to buy. In big showrooms they can get inside the tent and test out bedrooms for size etc. Ask them what they want to do (or learn) when they are away. Depending on their ages get them to write a list and plan things you can do each day of your trip.

## **J**OBS FOR THE BOYS (AND GIRLS)

Again, it's all about keeping everyone involved – whether helping to pitch the tent, fetching water, washing-up, keeping the tent tidy or preparing meals. Although be prepared for delights like sausages and jam. Not only does it give them something to do and gives them a bit of responsibility but it takes a little pressure off of you as parents. It's your holiday too, remember!

## **K**ITTED OUT

The amount and type of gear you take will be entirely down to your own tastes, and a lot of it will come down to experience. See our feature on page 34 for some ideas of what you should pack. It's a sign of the



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Let kids help plan activities - and prepare for lots of theme park trips!

times and the purists would be horrified, but we couldn't travel without a charger for electronic games and phones. At the opposite end of the scale, a dustpan and brush is also an essential for keeping the tent clean and tidy.

### **L**IGHTING

For some reason, kids love to have their own torch and there's plenty of options available. Head torches are good but fun dynamo powered flashlights might be the best option, as kids tend to leave the light burning, which can mean batteries run down pretty quickly. In the tent, a nightlight for young children might be worth considering and a small lantern is a good option for older kids once they have gone to bed. A few minutes' reading will allow them to wind-down after a frenetic day on site.

### **M**AKE A LIST

Draw up a full list of what you think you'll need. The content of the list will depend a lot on how long you're going to be away but there are some essentials that you'll need for every

trip. We've included a checklist at the end of this feature, but you'll probably want to adapt it for your own needs.

### **N**IGHT-TIME WARMTH

For everyone, keeping warm at night is probably the most important aspect of a camping trip and for children it's doubly



important. You might be tempted to go for a big, thick airbed but surprisingly they actually offer very little insulation. A good sleeping mat is what really helps keep the warmth in when camping, whether a foam mat or, preferably, a self-inflating model. Kids are also less likely to roll off a mat than an airbed. Lay a fleece or blanket between the airbed and the groundsheet as an extra layer of insulation. A decent quality sleeping bag is a must, and you should consider the addition of a duvet on top if it's cold.

### **O**NLINE RESEARCH

Research the facilities on your campsite before going and read reviews online to find out what other parents think. Does the site have a kids' play area, a shop or a baby changing room? Or are there potential hazards onsite, like an unsupervised fishing lake or a precarious cliff edge? Once you've found your perfect site, you can often book in advance online and on some sites you can even pick the specific pitch you want. This is another source of debate and usually revolves around the distance to the toilets. Some prefer to set up as far away as possible to avoid being

disturbed by others during the night, but my preference is to find a pitch pretty close to avoid lengthy treks to the loo in the dark.

## **P**RACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Try a practice run near home, or even in the back garden, before you take the plunge and make that first, full camping trip. It will help them get used to the tent – putting it up and taking it down – and generally being outdoors.

## **Q**UEUING

Shower blocks can get busy in the morning and evening peak times, so try to avoid the inevitable queues by making wash-time a little earlier or later than usual.

## **R**AIN

There's no point in pretending otherwise, eventually, you're going to encounter a downpour at some point on a camping trip. But being prepared is all-important and can take the pain out of rain. So make sure you pack the right waterproof clothes, and even if the site you choose doesn't have much in the way of facilities, chances are the nearest town will have a cinema, ten-pin bowling or a leisure centre and making use of them is not a sign of defeat.

## **S**AFETY FIRST

A basic first aid kit is a must for camping with kids but make sure it's well stocked up before you leave. Essentials include plasters, antiseptic cream, insect repellent and sunscreen.

## **T**EENAGE KICKS

Assuming you can persuade them to come along in the first place, try to let teenagers off the leash to make new friends and allow them to give the family outing to the beach a miss. Cut them some slack and consider extending curfews.

## **U**P ALL NIGHT?

If your kids are anything like mine were when they were very young (and if they are, you have my deepest sympathies) then you're going to have to deal with them waking up - loudly – during the night on the campsite. There's not an awful lot you can do about it, other than try to comfort them and settle

them as quickly as possible, just as you would at home. Of course noise travels on a quiet campsite, especially at night, but don't assume that fellow campers are as bothered by the noise as you think they must be. Most are pretty tolerant and will be able to sympathise, because they'll have been there too.

## **V**IDEO STARS

Videos, photographs and diaries all help towards remembering some special outings so make sure you take plenty of holiday footage and

write down what you've done. Sitting down around the table to chat about the day just gone is a great way to end the day as well as a good time for agreeing future adventures.

## **W**ASHTIME

Good campsites have family-sized washrooms, which have a shower and plenty of space for drying and getting changed. If not, bring a large plastic tub for baby bath-time (you might even get away with a washing-up bowl, or bucket). Hand sanitiser sprays and wet wipes are a must for around the tent.



Pack plenty of games to keep you occupied onsite



# ▶▶ CAMPING WITH KIDS A TO Z

## CHECKLIST

Ideally you could have many of these items packed away in a large plastic box, ready to be loaded into the car.

### ESSENTIALS

- Family tent
- Sleeping Bags
- Pillows
- Airbeds/sleeping mats
- Pump
- Lantern
- Washing line
- Torch
- Spare batteries
- First Aid kit
- Bottle opener and corkscrew
- Washing-up liquid and scourer
- Carrier for dirty dishes
- Fire extinguisher/fire bucket
- Tea towel
- Matches
- Dustpan and brush
- Bin bags or carrier bags
- Water carrier
- Mini toolbox
- Penknife

### FURNITURE

- Table
- Kitchen unit
- Folding camping chairs
- Storage cupboards

### COOKING

- Double gas stove and gas bottle
- Pots and pans
- Kettle
- Plates, bowls, cups
- Cutlery
- Sharp knife
- Chopping board
- Plastic glasses
- Tin opener
- Barbecue and tools
- Coolbox
- Kitchen roll
- Coffee, tea, sugar

### PERSONAL

- Wash bag
- Toilet paper
- Disinfectant wipes
- Toothbrush and toothpaste
- Soap/shampoo/shower gel
- Towels
- Insect repellent
- Sun screen and after sun

### OPTIONAL EXTRAS

- Electrical hook-up lead
- Kids' games
- Camera/camcorder
- iPod and speakers
- Solar charger

## XENON

OK, we're struggling a bit now. Er, it's a good word for Scrabble and Scrabble is a good game to play on camping trips. In fact there are lots of travel versions of board games that are perfect for camping. Some parents insist on banning electronic games and MP3 players completely - we'd prefer to let them bring them along but make the holiday so much fun that they don't take centre stage.

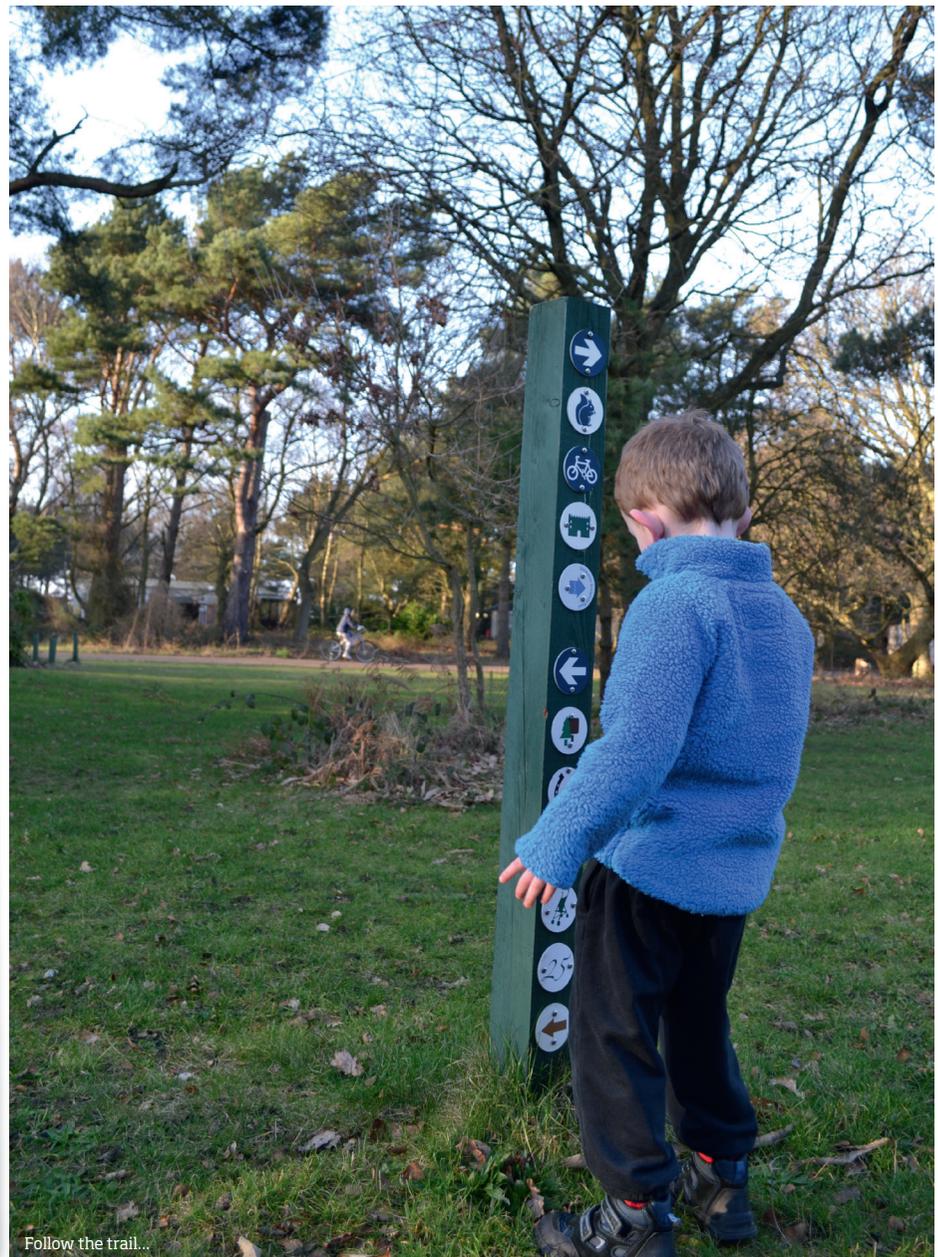
## YOMPING

Many campsites are close to coastal or country walks and these are great ways to get youngsters to see some wildlife and burn

off some energy at the same time. Bear in mind that few young children can handle challenging walks day after day, especially in the hills, so shorter walks every few days with things to do en route are your best bet. Youngsters often need an incentive, so if you can, find a route with an ice cream van at the end!

## ZIPS

Small children have a habit of trying to escape from places and, no matter how secure we think they are, they are often successful. Zipping them inside their bedroom or in the tent isn't quite enough - make sure you pull door zips round to their highest point so they can't work them open and make a break for freedom. ■



Follow the trail...