

The National Center on Physical Activity and Disability

Exploring Family Adventure in the Outdoors

If you have a family member who has a disability, the idea of taking your entire family on an outdoor adventure may appear to be a bigger risk or larger task than you are willing to



Courtesy of University of Minnesota and Wilderness Inquiry. Photo by Kathy Scholl.

take. You may have a number of concerns. However, the first step in getting out with your family is to realize that a person with a disability is not precluded from participating in an outdoor adventure. Families that include members with disabilities can venture into the natural environment together, improve their skills, overcome natural obstacles, gain a sense of accomplishment, and incorporate integrated outdoor recreation as a life-long family pursuit. Information to properly design family-based outdoor activities may persuade your family to consider outdoor recreation activities as a viable family leisure option.

FAMILY EXPECTATIONS

What do you consider important for your family outing? Family fitness, seeing a historic/cultural site or a different part of the country, or maybe a short getaway from daily routines for some relaxation? It is highly likely that there will be a variety of capabilities and interests to coordinate, but outdoor excursions and camping can provide adventurous opportunities for the whole family.

ASSESSING YOUR FAMILY'S ABILITIES

It is best to start with small, manageable outings to build on your family's confidence and skill. First, think about all of the individuals who will be going on the outdoor

adventure and their functional abilities. Evaluating the abilities of each member of your family along with their support needs may indicate that there is enough strength with all members of the group to balance any limitations of a single member. For example, if you are traveling with three small children, their stamina for the distance needs to be considered. Is the chosen trail for a day hike to a nearby waterfall and the parents' strength balanced with the children's stamina limitations? Maybe you have a teenager in your family with a spinal cord injury. When traveling together in a canoe, another person can temporarily be their legs and can carry them piggyback over a short portage.

PRE-PLANNING FOR YOUR FAMILY ADVENTURE

Pick easy routes: For individuals who lack physical endurance pace strenuous activity, rest frequently and plan extra time. Small children may lose their interest quickly. Camping in one location and taking short day trips can make it easier on the entire family.

Bring fun supplies for the kids: When kids are traveling away from home, it is important that during driving times or down times for them to have a few of their own special amusements. Put together a surprise bag or a recreation box that contains a collection of entertainment items. Be sure to let each child bring at least one comfort item for times when your child might be faced with a new situation

Adaptive equipment: Make adaptations as simply as possible. There may be decisions beforehand of whether to bring a manual or motorized chair. Not all trails are paved, but they can be negotiated in a manual chair with some creative



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problem solving between all family members. The more times you get out, the more your imagination and ingenuity will come up with ways to modify equipment for participants with functional limitations to be included in the activity.

HEALTH CONCERNS FOR FAMILIES IN OUTDOORS

In any outdoor experience, it is important to anticipate potential problems.

- Frequently check for hypothermia.
- Everyone should maintain adequate hydration by drinking plenty of water.
- Maintain same eating schedule and the same bowel bladder routine.
- Bring enough medication to last at least three days beyond the time you will be away.
- Bring an extended family member or personal care attendant (PCA).
- Let other people know your route and your overnight locations.



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ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

Depending on your family's outdoor experience and functional abilities, you may need information or extra support when attempting your first family outdoor adventure. Several organizations can help identify options.. Before heading out the door, ask specific questions about the accessibility of the trails, camping and bathroom accommodations, programmed activities and other possible resources.



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ORGANIZATIONS SPECIALIZING IN INTEGRATED OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

When families, and especially families that include a person with disabilities, go on their first few outdoor adventures it is sometimes helpful to do so in a group with others. Outdoor recreation organizations provide a great way for families to get extra support and assistance as they begin trying outdoor recreation activities. Many of these organizations will have the necessary outdoor and adaptive equipment, experience in working with all ability levels, and knowledge about exciting places to visit. These organizations also may be helpful in answering questions or providing advice to families who are interested in planning their own outings. Here are a few sources to get you connected with family friendly programs.

Through participation in outdoor activities, families can experience increased cohesiveness and heightened sense of confidence in their abilities. Planning is the key, then just do it. It is important that all families find their own particular way to having fun and enjoyment for a rewarding return on their leisure time investment.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Wilderness Inquiry, 808 14th Ave SE, Minneapolis, MN 55414, (612) 676-9400, (800)728-0719. <http://www.wildernessinquiry.org>

Disabled Sports USA, 451 Hungerford Drive, Suite 100 Rockville, MD 20850, (301) 217-0960 (voice), (301) 217-0963(tty), <http://www.dsusa.org>

Access Sport America, 119 High St, Acton MA 01720, <http://www.windsurf.org>

National Sports Center for the Disabled, Winter Park, CO 80482, (970) 726-1540, <http://www.nscd.org>

Northeast Passage, PO Box 127, Durham, NH 03824-0127, (603) 862-0070, <http://www.nepassage.org>

National Ability Center, PO Box 682799, Park City, Utah 84068, (435) 649-3991 (voice/tty), <http://www.nationalabilitycenter.org>

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