

Things you wish someone had told you BEFORE you took the girls camping!

Bedtime Tips

Just like when they were toddlers stage the bedtime. Put up the tents, eat their snack, maybe some star gazing or a night hike, pj's and wash up, a campfire some songs that gradually get slower then gently sent to bed. From busy to quiet - from fast to slow. It won't work with them all but it will with most. Remind them to be quiet and they have full day the next day and they will be getting up at whatever o'clock. Remind them to buddy up for trips to the bathroom. Don't expect them to go to sleep that first night too early. They will be very excited and bouncy.

Put the early to bed and early to rise kids together if you can. Make sure these kids understand the rules about leaving the campsite! you will be amazed at how early these guys get up (yep I am a night owl!) - break of dawn came with singing birds and giggling girls. Encourage them to bring stuff animals, blankets, etc.

Make them get up on time on Saturday. Keep them busy and they will sleep for you on Saturday night...



For younger girls, bring a bedtime story. Something that takes a while to read, like a chapter of Winnie the Pooh. Get everybody settled into their sleeping bag, give them a little while to giggle, light the night light, and read! It gives them a settle down time. Some may even fall asleep!

Problems of the night owls... As I said, I get grumpy if I don't get enough sleep. I let the girls know that -- then, if they keep me awake, I feel that I have every right to be grumpy the next day. (They usually try to be good, but....) I never tell a girl that she must go to sleep -- I can't enforce it. I *do* tell them that they must be in their sleeping bags by a certain time, and that they must whisper after that. This will allow the ones who can/will go to sleep to do so. If necessary, I employ the old teacher trick of catching the girls being good. I'll never forget the pleased smiles on the face of some active little ringleaders when I went over to them and whispered, "I *like* the way that you're whispering. You're being so considerate of the girls who are tired!" I got positive feedback from the mother of one of those girls -- the child had been so pleased at the compliment that she'd reported it to her mother at the end of the campout!

Things left behind!



Be aware of the fact that *nobody* leaves underwear behind -- or, to be precise, nobody will admit to it. You may have a whole troop of size 5 girls except for the one size 10 -- and she'll hotly deny belonging to the size 10 panties that you found! Throw the unclaimed leftovers into the washing machine, give the parents a reasonable amount of time to claim them, and then donate them to Goodwill or some other charitable organization.

Food is NEVER allowed in the tents or cabins



Send a note home to the parents **in a really big font** that food is NOT allowed in the tents. It will encourage visitors in the middle of the night. In the midwest a raccoon can get into almost anything - a tent is no protection and candy/granola bars are as much of a treat for them as it is for the girls. No to mention ants - yuck. The best protection is no food in the tent. So make this a really big thing. Oh and it also can damage the tents! Nothing like finding a jolly rancher glued to the tent bottom by a girl's heat as she sleeps on it. So make sure everybody know about this rule and be ready to enforce it since it is almost guaranteed someone will send their darlin' off with a enough sugar to supply an army for a week.

Not just candy or gum, or lip balm, but critters love the scent of toothpaste and anything that has even the faintest of scents. Only sleeping bags. And clean clothing allowed in the tents. Clothing that has been cooked with, should be removed COMPLETELY from the tent.

Night hikes



Night hikes may be inappropriate for younger girls -- you know yours best, of course. I have painful memories of the conversation I had with a group of Brownies who were lodge camping for the first time... "What if we walked down that trail at night, and a bear jumped out and got us?" My glib assurances that there **are** no bears at camp (in the Memphis, TN suburbs!) did no good whatsoever. I was asked about the bears, the wolves, and I can't remember what else! They were **petrified** of being outside the lodge! (I finally solved the problem of the fear by promising that if a bear, wolf, etc. tried to get them, I'd SIT ON IT! Since I'm a **large** woman, this promptly alleviated the fears!

Flashlights can be a blessing or a curse



I constantly counsel that flashlights should be pointed at the ground -- I HATE lights flashed in my eyes. I particularly hate it when I'm trying to sleep -- when some girls will not be parted from their flashlights. Since some girls **need** that light -- it's much darker than they're used to, they're hearing strange noises, they need some form of comfort -- I made the rule that flashlights could be used **all night** if they wished -- but only in the sleeping bags, pointing at the user's toes. This offers a nightlight for those who need it, and spares the grumpy leader of a light shining in her eyes at 2:00 AM. (Of course, they may use them for trips to the rest room, etc.)

Have the girls carry their own gear!



Insist that the girls carry their own supplies. This is a wonderful way of keeping them from showing up at camp with seven 10-ton bags. This "carrying their own" should start at the meeting point. Don't let parents get their girls' bags out of the car and bring them to you -- that's for the girls to do. When you get to camp, let it be known that nobody's personal gear goes anywhere until all of the troop supplies, food, etc. are carried in to the camp. This will prevent a girl from carrying her own gear, and "forgetting" to come back for the communal supplies...and makes life **much** easier for the adults.

Health Forms and Medication



A suggestion that you check out the health forms in advance. When I go through them, I'm free with my highlighter. I highlight anything I might need to know about a child (or another adult) -- chronic health conditions, bed wetting, meds they take, and any type of allergies. Information that I may need to know *fast* is written by me at the top, right-hand corner of the form – and highlighted there, too. It's amazing how this helps when (heaven forbid) you have to let the ER doctor know about a child you've just brought in.

Double check medical records. We had one girl show up with a ton of meds and we had no idea why she was taking them! It occurred to me afterwards that a simple note card placed with the drug (in its original bottle please!) with dosage instruction (time, amount), and what they are taking it for would help in an emergency with that child if, heaven forbid, it was needed. So many doctors these days proscribe meds for not always what they are approved for. This stuff is off the top of my head and based on 10 years camping with the girls. They are things I wish I had known when I first took my girls camping.

Careful about the Ghost Stories



Night noises can be terribly frightening to city girls on their first camping trip. A squirrel walking by sounds like a bear -- or a madman! Acorns falling on the cabin roof are totally unidentifiable -- and, therefore, scary. Have a little talk about the noises they can expect to hear -- and repeat it the first night! Speaking of being scared -- if you show that *you're* nervous about being out at night, the girls will be frightened, too. So here's your chance to earn your very own Academy Award. Put on your calmest, happiest face, and let the girls know that the out-of-doors is the very best place to be. We made a no ghost story rule because it wasn't fair to the imaginative ones to have their sleep ruined and I wasn't willing to stay up all night with them. As the girls got older that rule relaxed.

Tips for packing up and getting out of camp



When they wake up Sunday morning, make them get dressed and packed before breakfast. You will be amazed how that "encourages" everyone to get the packing task accomplished quickly. It also gives you some time to go through the tents and look for those spare socks and things before they are swept out. Oh and bring the big garbage bags - the ones with the yellow drawstring loop in the top are great. Or on the other hand encourage parents to invest in stuff sacks - easily available at stores like Kmart and Walmart - you stuff the sleeping bag into the stuff sack in an unorganized manner. It is easy enough for any child to do and is actually better for the sleeping bag to be stored in this manner (the stuffing is not under stress in any one spot like under a tie) so you win and they win on this one. While it is important for a girl to learn to roll her own sleeping bag it is also a skill that comes with time and repeated exposure. The stuff sack is stress free for you and the girl.

Camping with Mixed Ages Works!



One of the best times my troop of 5th and 6th graders had was when a troop of 2nd grade Brownies went with us camping. We grouped 2 older and =2 younger girls together in a tent and did a survivor games weekend. The Brownies thought the Juniors were cool and the Juniors loved taking a leadership roll. We taught them many camping skills they did not know and planned surprise for them. This is an excellent way of having someone other than parents go along. Plus there were lots of girls for Kapers and 4 leaders to supervise. It was great and now these 2 troops know each other at all Neighborhood Events and ask all the time to camp with them again.

Parents!

The most important lesson I ever learned, though, was this: TAKE AS FEW ADULTS AS POSSIBLE! Parents can be a pain if they insist on doing things for the girls or expect to be entertained.

I used to take all parents that wanted to go camping with the troop along, then we had a problem, they wanted to do the stuff the girls were supposed to do, they wanted to rough house around the campfire, they didn't want to do Girl Scout camping with Girl Scout rules. So the new rule for the troop was any parents that wanted to go on camping trips were welcome, after they received training from Council. That way all the adults were on the same page and we could work together instead of me trying to explain to them why we do things the way we do and missing out on time with the girls.



Yes, some of my parents took the Outdoor Skills training with me. Others have been at meetings when we have worked with the girls. You have to be a registered adult to go camping with my troop. It is just a safety precaution. If something happens we are all covered. Plus my parents don't mind paying the \$7.00. We will have to see about next year's \$10.00.

I train my girls, and I have a Booklet that I give to the parents outlining what will be expected of the girls, and them if they chose to go camping with us.

I will take any adults who are willing to register, and take either First Aid or Troop Camping training. There is nothing worse, in my opinion, than an adult who counters your advice because "I've camped for years, and never did it that way," or even better, "but the BOY Scouts don't do it that way." And no, that is not a flame of Boy Scouts, just the thought that the two organizations do things very differently.

Packing List Tips

I have all the girls double bag (zip lock) their toothpaste - same will go for sanitary products. Both attract critters. I've been checking their packs before we depart. I called one mom to replace her dd's scented lip balm with no scent (as per the packing list). She was quite upset with me. I told her it would attract bees (she's very worried that her dd is allergic) and that stopped her whining.



Our packing list contains taboos. In addition to food, it lists scented lip balm, hair spray & perfume. I laughed but there have been leaders showing up at Camporee in all white wanting to know where an electric outlet for their hairdryer would be located.

As part of pre camp training I like to show how to pack! I would put my clothes, etc. into my daughter's school back pack, to prove that it could be done! Sleeping bag traveled separately.

General Advice for First Time Leaders

I'd like to add one thing that I haven't seen mentioned yet for those 1sttime leaders going camping..... Be flexible! Even the best of plans don't always turn out right. Make the necessary changes and relax & enjoy yourself. My previous co-leader used to get really upset with the girls who just couldn't get to sleep. It was almost comical looking back now on how she used to get so upset. This was when they were Brownies and we were cabin camping. I agree with the leader who said that you have to expect that they will be up late the 1st night. My girls, who are now Cadettes, know very well that Mrs. Higg's favorite thing to do at camp is wake them up! Especially those who chose to stay up too late! Wake 'em up early, keep 'em busy and you won't have that problem the second night! After all these years, probably the most important thing that I have learned through my camping experiences is to relax and enjoy the girls, enjoy watching them try new things, succeed with the plans they made for their camping experience.

Now that I think of it, remember to have the girls evaluate their camping experience. This proved to be a great learning tool for them. What did you like/dislike, what would you bring, leave at home? That kind of stuff.



It took me a long time to realize that boring old camp activities were new and exciting for the Guides. When they programmed, telling the Guiders what food was wanted and what program/badges were to be worked on, everything went MUCH more smoothly.

One of the first weekend camps I went to as a new Guider was rainy and cold and miserable. The big tent had been pitched sideways-on to the north wind and had its big poles bent all along one side. We came back to our site, after a hike, to see this tent apparently trying to lie down for a nap. There were so many things wrong, I nearly broke down and wept. Well it's a long story, but Revelation came at Sunday morning breakfast. The girls said they'd had a BLAST and when were we going to go camping again?? Conclusion: If you don't tell them they're having a horrible time, they won't figure it out. Treat every setback as an adventure. After all, that is camping in a nutshell: learning to deal with whatever comes up.

If you are doing outdoor camping for the first time, try to have a Training day where the girls learn about cleaning latrines, sweeping tents/cabins and how dish lines work. It will save you from trying to teach all that and have time for fun as well. We've done this with first graders who had a great time at camp because they knew some of what to expect. If you are lucky enough to do it in the evening and it gets dark, have them sit in a tent or cabin for a few minutes with no lights.

Plan ahead – Bring a Rainy Day Game Box



Plan as if you expect rain and thunderstorms all weekend. Have a rainy-day box -- cards, games, puzzles, inexpensive craft supplies, whatever. Hopefully, you'll never need it. If you *do* need it, though, it'll be heaven-sent!