

Considerations before Stepping Out the Door

Based on "[Re-Connecting the World's Children to Nature](#)" (PDF) and recommendations originally provided by Sally Clausen, Nurse Clinician at Iowa Department of Public Health, February 2010. Document updated 2026.

1. Check it out

Check out the activity area beforehand. Talk with the site manager, if possible. Look for possible hazards such as sharp objects, stinging insects, poison ivy, bodies of water, etc. Plan how you will keep children safe from potential hazards. Check to see if restrooms and drinking water are available. Try to obtain a map of the area.

2. Be prepared for emergencies

Take a backpack with a cell phone, first aid kit, and emergency information. Optional: wet wipes or hand sanitizer, water, and appropriate snacks.

3. Be weather aware

Before heading out the door, check the weather forecast and plan accordingly. During hot weather, bring plenty of water and take frequent water breaks in the shade. During cold weather make sure children have adequate warm clothing, water-proof outer layers, and footwear. Stay outdoors only as long as is reasonable for everyone's comfort and safety. Have a plan for inclement weather conditions.

4. Dress for success

Make sure everyone is dressed appropriately for the weather conditions - warm clothing (wear wool or synthetic under layers since cotton absorbs sweat and becomes damp), a waterproof outer layer, and closed-toe shoes or boots for cold weather conditions, and lightweight clothing and protective sun hats for hot weather conditions.

5. Be aware of allergies and other known medical concerns

Know beforehand if any child has bee, pollen, or food allergies and plan accordingly to prevent exposure. Bring any prescribed medicines, treatments, and technology.

6. Use the buddy system

Make sure everyone has a buddy and instruct them to always stay with their buddy. Do frequent head counts. Children of different ages have very different needs for supervision and guidance - be alert to these needs. For very young children, try using a rope for everyone to hold to as they walk.

7. Water safety

When you will be around *any* water plan for constant supervision. Be prepared with life jackets if needed. Instruct children to stay away from the water's edge unless accompanied by an adult. Do not allow running or big-body play near water.

8. Animals & Plants

Be aware of possible wildlife you may see and/or encounter. Instruct children not to approach wildlife; teach them to quietly observe the animal and to back away if necessary. Be prepared with insect repellent for mosquitoes and ticks. Cover food and drinks to avoid attracting wasps and other stinging insects. Learn what wild parsnip, poison oak, poison ivy, and poison sumac look like. Instruct children not to pick or touch plants or mushrooms without adult supervision.

9. Wash hands

When you return to the classroom be sure to have children wash hands thoroughly with soap and water.

10. Take only memories; leave only footprints

Teach children about having respect for living things and nature. Set an example for responsible wildlife viewing and nature collecting. Do not litter or otherwise alter the natural area where you are visiting. Nature is an amazing teacher - incorporates memories and observations to extend and enhance learning opportunities when you return to the classroom.

