Family Hike

Select a route
Part of the fun of going hiking is choosing the route. It's a good idea to get the whole family involved at this stage. Consider: What will you see when you're walking? Are there places to rest along the way? How busy is your route? For safety reasons, be sure to thoroughly research your plan. Choose a route that’s the right length and terrain for the youngest child. Ask the local park employees and get maps where necessary. Know what plants and animals you will need to watch out for on your hike. To start, a shorter, well-marked route is generally the best option. Lots of city parks have excellent shorter walking routes to explore.

Make it fun
Keep in mind this isn’t just a walk, it’s an exploration. Here are ways to keep the kids enjoying putting one foot in front of the other.

- Halfway or three-quarters along, plan an “energy stop” that will allow everyone to refuel with a drink, snack or lunch.
- If you’re walking in a city park, collect a couple of items like pine cones, rocks and sticks to make crafts later. If you’re in a national park or conservation area, the general rule is to leave everything as you found it, so taking items for crafts will likely not be an option.
- Keep young hikers busy by encouraging them to count how many of a particular animal, flower or tree they see along the way. Singing songs also makes the journey fun, especially hiking or camping tunes.
- If you have a digital camera, take it along. You can encourage the kids to take pictures for a handmade book or story board. Inexpensive disposable cameras are also an option.
- In preparation for your walk, talk about what kinds of wildlife you might encounter, or head to the library to get a book and read about it.

Be safe and be comfortable
- Get each member of the family a whistle.
- Clearly explain the rules of the trail before you go. Depending on your route, these might include that everyone has to stick together (no going ahead or lagging behind), that children cannot touch certain things and that you should use your whistle if you lose sight of the group.
- Everyone should wear a hat, sunscreen and sun glasses. Also, be sure to take insect repellent.
- Take lots of water. One quart per person is the general rule for adults. Do not drink any water from streams along the route. Bring energy snacks such as granola bars or trail mix for the whole family.
- Have proper footwear.