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Family & Relationships

The Down and Dirty Guide to Camping with Kids: How to Plan Memorable Family Adventures and Connect Kids to Nature
Helen Olsson
Roost Books
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A freelance travel writer and regular contributor to the *New York Times* Travel and Escapes sections, Helen Olsson provides parents with a comprehensive guide to car camping with children, from infants to preteens. Illustrated with examples of camping with her own family, the author knows the best camping trip leaves little to chance. Through her extensive advice, Olsson enables readers to thoroughly organize a trip prior to leaving home, allowing families to enjoy the outdoors with confidence.

Written with the complete novice to camping in mind, Olsson covers a wide range of topics, such as when and where to camp, purchasing the right equipment (tents, sleeping bags, cooking gear, lanterns, day packs), the proper clothing and food, and how to handle camper boredom. Once a place to camp has been chosen and the gear packed, Olsson addresses the next stage—how to properly set up a campsite. Once again, the author offers ample instructions on how to handle this task, from pitching the tent on a flat, high, and smooth spot to building a campfire. Recipes (i.e., fruit and nut bars), fun games to play (from ghost stories to knot tying), and activities (such as scavenger hunts, bird and wildlife watching, or star gazing) assist parents in turning children away from technology and toward the natural environment. Rounding out this thorough handbook is helpful advice on safety and first aid.

Numerous checklists in each chapter and an extensive packing list at the back of the book keep parents organized and on track. Common sense and practical “smart tips” throughout the pages add helpful tidbits of advice such as “make a hearty stew or soup ahead of time and freeze it. The hunk of frozen dinner will help keep the cooler cold and will defrost in time for the second or third night’s dinner.” A broad list of resources includes other books on camping with children, a directory of camping websites, and places to shop for specialized gear designed for children.

Knowing that “camping can have the transformative power to shape a child’s future experience,” the author wishes that readers become “a family of happy campers,” finding as much enjoyment in the activity as she does with her own family. With the help of this all-inclusive guide, greenhorn parents will quickly evolve into knowledgeable campers, capable of offering their children rewarding experiences in nature that will last a lifetime.

Lee E. Cart