



Engaging Children in Walking and Hiking

A wonderful adventure for a child can begin with simply going on a walk or a hike. Children will not only have fun enjoying the outdoors but experience a wealth of exciting learning opportunities. Listed are ten great ideas that can be used alone or as a springboard to another idea that will engage children in walking or hiking. The first few activities listed are appropriate for children of all ages and the last few may be more appropriate for older children.

1. **Go on a critter hunt:** When you are on a walk or hike, stop a few times to turn over logs, rocks, or pieces of bark to see what's hiding underneath. You might discover beetles, spiders, worms and roly pollies. A magnifying glass is a great tool to bring along to get a closer look.
2. **Animal walks:** This is a fun game of taking turns to decide how to walk until reaching the next landmark (e.g., fence, tree, house). For example:
 - Duck – squatting legs and flapping arms
 - Rabbit – arms tucked into chest and strong hops forward
 - Horse – nodding head and galloping
 - Elephant – bending over and swinging arms like a trunk

Sound effects can be added but be careful of other walkers and wildlife which may like a slightly more peaceful environment.

3. **Can you find it?** A player chooses an object they see on the walk and says, "First one to find a" The player fills the blank with the object (e.g., green leaf). Other players try to find the object first and the winner then chooses the next object to find.
4. **Follow me:** The goal of this game is to follow a partner as close as possible, without running into them, or anyone else. Take turns who gets to be the leader.
5. **Go on a scavenger hunt:** Before beginning a walk, brainstorm a list of objects you think you might find. For example: a feather, animal tracks, a flower, an acorn, a smooth stone, a pinecone, etc. Add to the list during the walk.

6. **Once upon a time:** The aim of the game is to create a story. Everybody in turn makes up a sentence of the story from the surroundings. The funnier the story, the better.



7. **Poetry to go:** Take turns creating a poem-on-the-go. Start the children off with a simple line like "I really love to take a walk" and have them add their own rhymes in turn ("except when I forget my sock" ... "and then I step upon a rock" ... etc.).
8. **Play shadow tag:** Decide who will be "it." Shadow tag is like traditional tag but instead of tagging the person, step on their shadow. They become "it" and the game starts again. This game is most fun to play in the morning or evening when the shadows are longest.
9. **Make a grass whistle:** Select a nice long blade of green grass. Stretch it between the sides of both your thumbs so that it is pulled tight. Blow gently through the space left in the center, making a high-pitched whistle. Whistles can also be made from folding a big tree leaf (cottonwood leaves work best).
10. **String of words:** The first player names an item seen while walking or hiking, for example "Rabbit." The next player must name another item which starts with the last letter of last item named, for example, "Tree." This activity works great to learn and name countries, states, etc.

Resources:

1. Tag...Just Tag (You're It), James Madison University, Department of Kinesiology
2. 10 Games to Play on a Country Walk, Parent Dish

Pat Jones originally authored this article. This publication has been peer-reviewed.