



HOW TO... GO ON A NATURE WALK

Planning a short series of nature walks is the perfect way to introduce children (and their families) to the great outdoors, helping them deepen their relationship with the nature on their doorstep.

This guide will show you how to create a walk that children will want to do again and again. It is recommended that parents join you at least for the first walk, so they know where their children are going and might want to take them (and their friends) again!



WHAT YOU NEED...

FOR PLANNING

Online Ordnance Survey maps, Google Maps or a paper map.

A Risk-Benefit Assessment (RBA) form (download it from the Backyard Nature website if you don't have your own version).

Around six outdoor challenges (plan for one per group walk).

A local spotter guide for plants, trees, birds, mammals and insects.

A camera.

A list of what participants should bring/wear.

FOR LEADING A WALK

Your Risk Benefit Assessment.

A map.

Appropriate clothing for the conditions.

Basic first aid kit and extra water.

Extra hats and rain ponchos for children who don't have them.

A camera and phone.

Any resources you need for activities (magnifying glasses and binoculars for spotting; a frisbee or kite for playing).

A tarpaulin for everyone to sit on if needed.

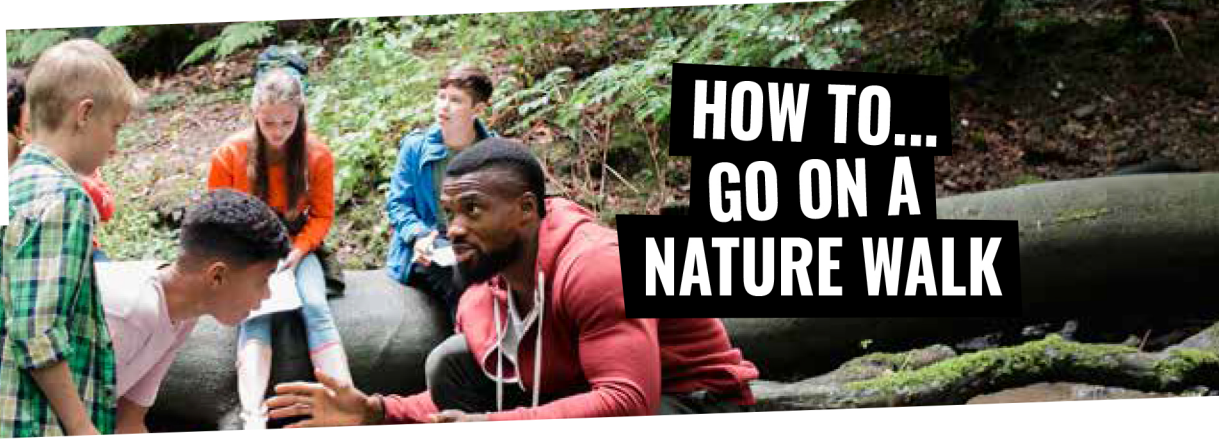
STEP-BY-STEP

First choose your start and end point. Walks should be around 3 miles (4.8km). It is easiest if you plan a circular walk that's close to public transport if your group is coming from more than a ten minute walk away.

Identify three locations on the map that will make good stopping places. These might be:

- a large green space (suitable for bird watching or a group game)
- a point of interest like a hill, riverside, church, statue, big tree or bridge
- a playground or picnic spot.





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AT LEAST ONE WEEK BEFORE LEADING A GROUP WALK

Plot the walk, avoiding busy roads as much as possible and using green footpaths where you can. Take into account the children's interests, any special needs and accessibility issues. Use your map to work out how long your walk will be. For 6 to 12 year-olds, the aim is for a pleasant one-to-two hour wander, not a six-hour trek. Children can generally walk one mile less than their age with ease (so nine miles at age 10). Shorten the walk if it includes steep climbs.

Start the RBA considering the children's needs, and adults that will be attending. Include safeguarding considerations, observe children's resilience and stress levels, along with their parents when possible, and recognise the mental health benefits of encouraging them to love nature more.

AT LEAST TWO DAYS BEFORE THE GROUP WALK

Do the walk yourself slowly, assessing the route from the point of view of an average eight to nine year-old, who'll be about 122cm tall.

ON THE DAY

- Check the weather! If it is dangerous (over 35 degrees, hailstorms, deep snow) you may need to postpone.
- Get to the start point at least ten minutes early; keep an eye on your phone in case anyone is late.
- Before you set off, make sure everyone introduces themselves, that they have appropriate clothing, and they know what to do if there are any problems. Invite them to share how they feel.
- If possible, have an appointed adult or a responsible young person at the rear of the group.
- Walk at the pace of the slowest, so if the group notices a particular feature, you can stop and investigate.
- Remember this is just a walk, if you only get half way round, that's OK, you can finish the route another time. The goal is to have fun and notice nature. Likewise, if you miss out some of your planned activities, you can always save them for another day.
- Before you finish, find a green space to enjoy a quiet moment. Ask everyone to share how they feel after walking in nature.
- Suggest returning in four to six weeks to do the walk again as a group, and say that you'd love to hear about what they notice if they come back to do the walk again with their family. Ideally, you will want to take the group on this walk three to six times.

TOP TIPS

Check the weather forecast. Remind everyone coming of where to meet, what to wear and what to bring.

Make a note of places for nature spotting – trees, bird roosts, good spots for bug hunting, wild flowers or woodland. Do some homework... if you take people for a nature walk, they'll expect you to know the more common trees, plants and birds.

Look for any opportunities for play – places to hide/climb/run/splash/fly a kite.

Make sure you know where there are public toilets/water stops/snack shops on the route. This is especially important for children in wheelchairs or if you have parents with babies with you. Think about an alternative route, just in case you need to cut the walk short.

If you want to offer children a visual route finder, take photos of each key intersection. Make any amends to the route map, and update the RBA.