



Top Tips for Leading Children's Groups on the Trails

- ❖ Safety first. Before anything else, your first concern should be for the safety of your guests. Clearly articulate expectations, procedures and boundaries *before* you get into a situation. Here are some things you should cover with your group in advance:
 - Poison Ivy identification
 - How to approach/avoid dogs
 - Bring water on long hikes
 - Be aware of any allergies in your group
 - What to do if you hear thunder or a storm siren (basement of Rowe Visitor Center)
 - How to dress appropriately (closed toed shoes, dress for the weather)
 - The Rowe Visitor Center restrooms have doors on both ends. Be aware of this so that you don't lose children if they exit out a different door!
 - Feel free to leave your cell phone number at the front desk in case there are latecomers or someone needs to contact a group member

- ❖ Use multi-sensory experiences when possible:
 - When providing something for guests to smell, allow each guest to bring his/her nose to your hand (to avoid shoving it up their nose) or pass it around.
 - Edible plants can easily be confused with poisonous look-alikes so avoid sharing edible plant tips, especially with young children.

- ❖ Experiences in the natural world should always be "challenge by choice." We can do more harm than good by forcing someone to do something.

- ❖ Use appropriate questions to guide the interest and thinking of the group. Use more questions than statements. Guide and facilitate. Don't tell/talk about it. The process of discovery and curiosity are more important than a bunch of facts. Answer the question "So what?" Provide relevant meaning in your hike/program

- ❖ "I don't know" is an appropriate answer when you do not know the answer to something. Discuss where you might find the answer together, and then follow up. Likewise, never tell someone their answer is wrong. Doing so will shut down their desire to explore further. Be encouraging and guide them to the correct answer.

- ❖ Be sure everyone can see and participate. Walk only as fast as the slowest person in your group and make occasional stops so everyone can catch up/rest.

- ❖ Model and encourage respect of equipment, each other and the natural world. Attitude is everything. Enthusiasm and modeling genuine interest in a subject are more critical than what you say.

- ❖ Phrase rules/expectations positively. Example: instead of "Don't run." Try "Walk." Instead of "Don't kick the rocks on the path," try "Pick up your feet, please."

- If you have to raise your voice, you've lost control. There are many quiet ways to capture attention and redirect inappropriate behavior. Save your loud voice for situations that require that behavior/movement cease for safety reasons.
 - Try starting the hike with "if I cross my arms, you're making too much noise." Children will figure out what they need to do if you cross your arms and wait a short while.
 - In a normal speaking voice, try "if you can hear me, put your right hand on your head." Keep adding actions and speaking more quietly until the group is focused on you.
 - Start whispering. People quiet down when they think they're missing something.
 - Try "could everyone please look at me." This out-of-the-ordinary statement captures attention.

- Always have more to do than you think you'll need and be flexible. If something you've planned isn't working out, change to something else. If they're engaged, stay with an activity/exploration longer. Stop while they're still engaged/enjoying the experience.

Below is a partial list of things you can do as a self-led group at Rowe Woods:

- Use the tree identification key (available in the lobby) to identify trees along the Discovery Trail
- Make your own scavenger hunt or use one of ours
- Have children sit quietly in a "solo sit" and reflect/journal/draw
- Watch the birds from the Thayer Viewing Window, the bird blinds along Edge and Discovery trails, or along the trails. Borrow or bring binoculars, ask for a bird behavior bingo sheet at the Front desk.
- Look for living things at Matt's pond with a net and bin available at the front desk
- Try Letterboxing! Details available at the front desk.
- Check out the self-guided hike brochures available in the Rowe Visitor Center
- Visit the Nature Playscape and let the children use their imaginations as they play!
- Consider contacting our Volunteer Coordinator in advance about volunteer opportunities for your group, such as weeding in the Nature PlayScape.
- Visit the maple syrup operation in the Outdoor Learning Center on weekends in Feb-March
- Feed the fish and turtles at Crosley Lake from April – October
- Hike the Discovery Trail and experience the educational exhibits
- Give each child a Hike for Your Health passport available at the front desk, and return repeatedly so that your group can hike all of the trails and win a prize.
- Enjoy the educational exhibits inside the Rowe Visitor Center.
- We have many relevant books in our Nature Shop to enhance your visit.

When groups schedule in advance they can take advantage of our group discount. Please note that self-led group leaders may also request a free, one-hour consultation to lead a group on CNC grounds. Whether hiking the trails or visiting the PlayScape, our staff can assist group leaders with ideas and techniques to effectively guide a group. Scheduling is based upon availability. Please contact Sharon Renner at srenner@cincynature.org or (513) 831-1711 ext. 129 at least 2 weeks prior to scheduled visit for a consultation.