

Raising an Outdoorschild

By Chris Anderson

My wife pointed something out to me awhile back as we were driving past a newer subdivision. She said, "Look at all the swing sets and play equipment. I drive by here all the time, but I have never seen any children outside playing". Children just do not spend as much time outside as they used to. We are often quick to blame television, the internet and video games but is that really the problem? When I was growing up, the internet wasn't broadly accessible but television and video games sure were, yet I still spent a majority of my time outdoors playing and exploring. Why wasn't I inside playing video games and watching TV? My parents, God bless 'em, wouldn't let me. At the time I looked at it as cruel and unusual punishment and I envied my friends that had the latest gaming system and could sit inside all day. So to make a short story long; rather than rant against television, video games and the internet I think I'll lay the blame at my feet; the feet of a parent...

Why is it important to get our children outdoors exploring? People tend not to care a great deal about things of which they have little to no understanding. If we want our future generations to have a vested interest in the natural world, they need to be encouraged to actively learn about it. That being said, if you want your children to have a vested interest in the natural world **you** need to lead by example.

Parents don't like to let their children run around outside alone for two reasons: they are worried their children will become lost or hurt on their own, or that someone else will harm or take their children. I have no claim to expertise to keeping your children safe from others. The best advice I can give is to teach your children to be aware of their surroundings and to avoid suspicious people and situations. What I can speak to is keeping your child safe in the woods when it comes to situations they get themselves into. In this article we are going to discuss a basic kit that you can assemble at home that will help give you piece of mind when your children are out on their own. In future articles we will cover more specific skills that will hopefully further your confidence in the ability of your children to explore on their own. As you put your child/children's kit together be sure to make one for yourself too. Before you send your children out alone with the kit go with them a few times. Learn with your children how to utilize the different items in your kits for their intended purposes, and work together to come up with other uses too.

The Kit:

The first item you will need is something to carry the kit in. You could go out and purchase a new day pack with a "hydration system", but in order to teach fiscal responsibility we aren't going to do that, are we? Of course not. Instead we are going to grab an old pillowcase, a couple of pebbles from the driveway (or landscaping), and a few feet of rope. Place the two pebbles into the corners of your pillow case and tie the ends of the rope securely around the corners just above the pebbles. The pebbles will

keep the rope from sliding off the pillow case. The rope will become the straps to your pack once the pillow case is filled.

Now set aside your pillow case, I mean pack, and we will gather a few other items before we head outside. Go and grab two large garbage bags (black is preferable). Unfold one of the garbage bags and line the interior of your pack with it, the other leave folded and place in the bottom of your pack. Now we need an old CD. We all have old CD's laying around that we don't listen to anymore either because they are scratched, or we have them downloaded as mp3's. Throw the CD into your pack. Now venture to the recycling bin and pull out an unlined tin can, and a plastic bottle with the lid (a 20 oz. bottle is a good size). Take your tin can and poke two holes near the open top and try to get them centered and opposite each other. Once you get your holes into the can you'll need a piece of wire about a foot long or so. Bend the wire into a large "U". Insert the ends of the wire into the holes from the outside of the can and bend them over on the inside. Place the bottle inside the can then place both into your pack. Now if you have a spare fleece blanket, fold it into a square and slide it down into your pack. Tie the top of your pack shut and then lash your rope just below this knot. And voila, a basic survival pack made from recycled items at home!

So what are all the items for? The garbage bags serve as rain gear and shelter. By ripping a hole in the bottom and the two corners, you have a serviceable poncho. The other bag can then be pulled up over your feet. Combine the poncho, the foot bag and the fleece blanket, and you have greatly increased your comfort on a damp windy day in the woods. Also the bag that isn't being used as a poncho is the bag you line your pack with which essentially makes it waterproof. The CD is an inexpensive signal mirror.

Practice signalling to each other by reflecting the sun. Make it fun and challenging by coming up with a code to send messages, or if you have older children learn Morse code. The recycled bottle is your canteen and the tin can with the bail handle is a pot to boil water and cook in. Even if your kids are not old enough to learn how to build and safely manage fire, you are. Make lunch with your cooking pots over a fire, and build a shelter in the woods while it cooks. Add a length of cord, or light rope to your kit which is indispensable for shelter building. Return to the shelter regularly and explore the surrounding area together.

By going out and exploring with your kids and using your kits together hopefully you will become more comfortable with them being outdoors. Also, by spending time outdoors with your children you will learn together and foster a vested interest in our natural resources. I hope you have found this entry to be helpful and that you try at least some elements of the kit with your kids. I also invite you to challenge yourself and your children to come up with different ways to utilize the items in your kit, and to add other items from around the house that you can re-purpose. Make a game of it. See who can come up with the most uses for an item, or who can find the most unique re-purposed item. Just remember to keep your kits simple and lightweight, a heavy kit is likely to be left home where it does no good.

Now grab your kids, assemble your kits, and go exploring!