

Getting Ready for Weekend Camping? Start with a Backyard Campout!

Start your camping progression by camping out in the backyard. If someone can't make it through the night, it's not a problem to go inside and make a quick call. Here's how to get started:

1. **Make a plan** - Just like any other trip, you need to plan. How many girls will be attending? What are the rules or limitations of your location? From there, determine the activities, food and space you'll need. Make a tentative schedule with your campers to start the process.

2. **Cleaning up** - Before camping in your backyard, be sure to clean it up. From picking up sticks and rocks to trimming bushes, you'll want everything neat and tidy. This will minimize the chances of anyone getting hurt in the dark.

3. **Night safety** - Moving around at night can be hazardous. There are steps you can take to make it less so. Walk around your backyard at night. What things might your campers need to be aware of? What safety concerns might come up in your backyard? Can you do something to minimize these?

4. **Insects and allergies** - Many people have allergies. This includes insect repellent. If you are planning on using anything your campers might be allergic to, be sure at least two people know what to do in case of an allergy attack.

5. **Camp buddies** - Insist on the buddy system. It keeps anyone from wandering off on their own. Also, when one person is in the bathroom, another can stand outside the door.

6. **Glow bracelets** - Kids love glow bracelets, and they can have a multitude of uses.

- Mark cords or tripping hazards
- On outside door to identify someone is using the bathroom / is indoors
- Play hide and seek with sticks in the dark
- Place in balloons, glasses of water, etc. to add glow to a theme

Find other ways to use glow sticks for safety and fun.

7. **Parent partners** - If you have a potential camper who is completely terrified of backyard camping, you may want your first experience to include a same-sex parent. Evaluate your campers. Will they be able to make the entire night? Are there other ways you can include parents at the beginning or end to help reduce camper stress?

8. **Rules** - Everyone has rules for their house. Classrooms have rules. Troops and groups have rules. Make a set of rules for your backyard campout. Include your campers in the creation of your list.

9. **Kaper charts** - With a larger group, be sure to make kaper charts (or the equivalent) so everyone knows what jobs they are to do. For smaller groups, you can do everything together, but the practice of making and following a kaper chart is good practice for anyone.

10. Tents - Do you have enough tents for everyone? Are you doing large tents or will everyone have their own small pop-up? Discuss tents and how everyone will be sleeping.

11. Food - Not only do you want to plan for any meals or snacks (including s'mores), you may want to limit the snacks that are brought in by your campers. A lot of sugar may keep them up late and disturb others. Some foods may attract wildlife. Review how you plan to handle food.

12. Night games - Choose a game or two and see how you can adapt it so you can continue to play after the sun goes down. Alternatively, you can check out the Enrichment Project badge program "Night Games" for more on games you can play at night.

13. Camp crafts - Explore camp crafts. Pick one that you'd like to do before or during your backyard camping event. These might include:

- Sit-upons
- Lanyards
- SWAPs
- Water bottle holder
- Bracelets
- Group flag or banner

Brainstorm a list of crafts you've made at camp or ones you'd like to try. Make samples and get feedback from your campers.

14. Edible fire - Don't want a real fire? Or perhaps you want to practice before doing the real thing? Teaching how with food is a great alternative. It can also serve double duty as a snack. Look at how to make an edible fire.

15. Fire pits - Most people don't have a specified area for burning in their yard. Fire pits have become popular, so you no longer have to damage your lawn. Prepare to instruct your campers on fire safety, how to start a fire and how to put one out.

16. Storytelling - You may think ghost stories are the only stories worth hearing at a camp fire. Some people don't like ghost stories and younger campers may be too scared to sleep. What rules might you put in place to determine the stories you tell? Should you limit who tells the stories or should you take turns?

17. Sing along - Singing around a fire is a lot of fun. From traditional songs to popular ones, there are way more songs to sing than you can do in a single night. Brainstorm ways you might choose which songs to sing.

18. Stargazing - Planning on looking up at the sky? Be prepared to identify at least a couple constellations and know the story behind at least one.

19. More to do? That's great! Be sure to check and make sure the activities are safe and review the safety checkpoints from GSUSA.

Sites to Explore:

<http://www.parenting.com/article/14-ideas-for-camping-out-in-your-backyard>

www.nwf.org/great-american-backyard-campout/get-ready.aspx

<http://lifestyle.howstuffworks.com/family/activities/backyard/10-backyard-camping-activities5.htm#page=1>

www.howipinchapenny.com/2013/05/backyard-camping-with-kids

<http://www.kidsdiscovernature.com/2010/09/must-haves-to-make-overnight-camping-in.html>

<http://www.sheknows.com/living/articles/967853/how-to-camp-in-your-own-backyard>

www.pinterest.com/angeltoste/backyard-campout

www.pinterest.com/explore/backyard-camping