

Teaching ours kids what to do



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Imagine being up on a weekend camping trip and all is right with the world. You and the family spent the morning catching a few fish in the stream and enjoyed them fried up for lunch. The grownups are settling in for an afternoon siesta while the kids are off playing.

Then someone says, “Where are the kids?” Panic sets in. They were there a few minutes ago, but now they are nowhere in sight. We at the Montrose County Sheriff’s Posse have played this exact scenario so many times it is frightening. Most often, it is a happy ending, but sometimes ... those are the ones that keep me up at night.

One of the scariest things a parent may ever face is that of a child being lost. You may not realize it, but Murphy will go after kids just as fast as he will come for you. Most of the time it is up to us to watch over the children, but teaching them a few skills is a good idea; and the time to start is now.

Kids do not have the attention span of an adult. My wife will tell you that my span is about equal to a 5-year-old boy. So be it, and I accept that; but I know what to do when I get lost. Our young ones don’t.

A kid will be playing at the creek, looking for crawdads, look up, see a deer, and head off for the deer. The deer runs away, but the kid notices a funny shaped stick ... you see where this goes.

Start out with the basics. Talk to them about the different types of emergencies you may encounter. Talk about family emergencies, like evacuating for a wild-fire or a flash flood. You can create scenarios or role-play situations then come up with solutions together.

Discuss the family emergency plan, and include the kids when making up the emergency kits and bug out bags. Let the kids suggest and include items, and talk about when they might be used. Show the kids where these kits and bug-out bags are stored.

This can then move into teaching outdoor skills, but first, a few rules when working with kids:

- Don’t cover everything in one day. Kids have a short attention span, and when their mind leaves the activity, you are wasting your breath. (My wife has this trouble with me.)
- Teach one skill at a time and don’t overload them.
- Keep it fun for them. Kids are kids and will remember more if it is fun, not torture.
- Make sure your teachings are age-appropriate. You don’t want to teach a 3-year-old how to build a cabin from aspen trees.

The most important thing to teach a kid in a wilderness emergency is to stay put. This will be a direct contradiction to their instincts, which tell them to run around and look for help. It is important to really ingrain this survival strategy until you are positive they will do it in an emergency.

Hypothermia is the biggest danger



Faith and Chance Watkins love the outdoors. Now is the time to teach them some survival/emergency skills. (Submitted photo/ Sarah Watkins)

for lost children. Because of their smaller size, they will cool off faster as night approaches. If they get wet, even in the summertime, this only accelerates the hypothermic process.

You can try and convince them to carry extra clothes in their own pack. Let them learn that the pack goes everywhere they go when outdoors. Throw some water and a few light snacks in the pack with the extra clothes. This sage advice would be good for adults to follow. Remember, kids learn more from what they see you do, rather than what you say.

Teach them how to shelter up for bad weather. As Murphy takes a hand in the proceedings, weather will play a role. If one of those cold summer rains moves in, teach the kids how to find shelter that will keep them dry and safe from lightning.

Probably the most important thing to teach your children is how to signal for help. Have each child carry a whistle on a necklace in the outdoors. Run a few family practice drills and teach the kids how to let out three long, well spaced blasts because this is the internationally recognized wilderness call for help.

You can make a game of the whistle locator idea. Play a game of hide and seek by letting the kids hide and then you locate them by the whistle blasts. Teaching them in a fun way will ensure they remember the skill.

There is a program especially suited for younger children called Hug-A-Tree and Survive. This program helps lost children survive in the woods. The presentation is directed at kids in grades kindergarten to fifth and teaches them how not to become lost in the woods, and what to do if they do happen to become lost.

The program was originally developed following the search for Jimmy Beveridge in 1981 and discusses four simple rules for kids to follow:

1. Tell an adult where you are going.
2. If you are lost, “Hug-A-Tree” and stay put.
3. Keep warm and dry.
4. Help searchers find you by answering their calls.

The presentation uses a video featuring Johnny, who is so excited to explore, he loses his way. Once he realizes he is lost, Johnny uses his head to stay safe and is well prepared.

As your kids get older, more serious

outdoor skills come into play. Teach them the importance of building a fire and the multiple ways to do it. Let them find the wood and build the fire for the evening cookout. Show them what to do in wet and windy conditions.

You can move on to the most important skills of drinking water and shelter building. These are life saving skills that will be with them throughout their adult lives if they choose an outdoor lifestyle.

It is never too soon to teach these skills to kids, and you can probably use the practice yourself. A family that trains together survives together. Remember, if a guy named Murphy shows up in camp and wants to watch your kids, send him down country because he is just trouble. Meanwhile, I am going to catch a siesta while Granny watches the grandkids.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a Director for the Montrose County Sheriff’s Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org.

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