



FOLLOW A TRAIL CHALLENGE | *One step at a time*

FOR THIS ADVENTURE, FOLLOW A TRAIL

This challenge is designed to help your preschooler discover the joy of nature, build fundamental safety skills, and engage in physical activity while exploring Utah's beautiful trails.

WHY HIT THE TRAIL?

Hiking and nature walks provide an excellent opportunity for active family time, which is vital for physical and mental well-being. Getting outside builds strong muscles and endurance, and the varied terrain of a trail improves motor planning and balance. For preschoolers, the outdoors is the ultimate sensory classroom, helping them develop observation skills and a lifelong appreciation for nature.

PACING GUIDE FOR PRESCHOOLERS

For successful, complaint-free hikes, focus on time spent exploring rather than distance covered. A general rule of thumb for this age is that kids can comfortably hike about 1/2 mile per year of age.

- **4-year-old:** Target distance up to 2 miles round-trip.
- **5-year-old:** Target distance up to 2.5 miles round-trip.

Remember: these are *maximums* for a good day. Always be prepared to turn around sooner! The adventure is in the journey, not the destination.

The American Council on Exercise recommends that children get approximately 60 minutes of physical activity each day, which can be broken into short intervals.

TRAIL & SAFETY PREPARATION SKILLS

These activities use role-playing and hands-on preparation to build confidence and teach essential safety habits before you even step onto the trail.

What To Do

Whistle Practice & Lost Drill: Explain that the **whistle** is a tool for emergencies, not a toy. Practice the "Stop, Stay, Blow" rule. Role-play: Have your child hide, call their name, and have them blow the whistle repeatedly until you find them.

Learning Goal

Teaches a critical personal safety skill and promotes an immediate response to emergency calls (auditory processing).

DIY Trail Mix: Work together to choose ingredients like dried fruit, seeds, cereal, and small crackers. Let your child scoop and mix them into a small baggie for their pack.

Develops fine motor skills (scooping/pouring) and teaches the importance of bringing trail fuel (nutrition/planning).





TRAIL & SAFETY PREPARATION SKILLS

What To Do

Learning Goal

Map & Trail Markers: Look at a simple trail map together (even a hand-drawn one). Point out and look for trail markers (signs, cairns, ribbons) on a short walk. Ask them, "Which way does the arrow point?"

Introduces basic navigation skills and symbol recognition for following directions.

The "I've Got My 10" Checklist:

Adult Responsibility: Review the "10 Essentials" (like map, water, extra layers, first aid) that the adult must have. **Child Involvement:** Let your child carry a few non-essential items in a backpack (e.g., their snack, a bottle of water, a hat, a small stuffed animal).

Encourages memory, responsibility, and the planning habit of checking their pack before a trip while ensuring adult safety preparedness is the priority.

ACTIVE & GROSS MOTOR SKILLS

What To Do

Learning Goal

These activities turn a simple hike into a fun, full-body workout that builds strength and coordination on varied Utah terrain.

Picnic on the Trail: Hike to a comfortable picnic spot. If your child is interested, have them help choose non-perishable food items and pack them into the backpack before you leave. Sit and enjoy the reward!

Provides a motivational goal for the hike, teaches planning, and helps build endurance for the round-trip journey.

Trail Jumps & Leaps: Find flat, safe sections of trail. Mark off distances with sticks and encourage them to jump over a stick, leap from one spot to another, or step high over small roots or rocks.

Develops leg muscle strength, balance, and motor planning by adjusting their stride to the terrain.

"Color Match" Hiking: As you hike, challenge your child to look for specific colors in the landscape: something red (rock/flower), something brown (bark/dirt), something green (leaf/moss).

Encourages close observation, attention to detail, and simple color identification while walking.

TRAIL WISDOM & GOOD STEWARDSHIP

These activities and tips are designed to enhance the experience for your preschooler and teach your family how to be respectful, responsible visitors on Utah's trails.

What To Do

Learning Goal

Go at Their Pace (Fun, Not Distance): Be prepared to stop often! Let your child set the pace and lead the way. A 10-minute walk with three fun stops is a better success than a forced 30-minute march.

Encouraging self-regulation and ensuring the experience is positive builds a lasting love for hiking.

Incorporate Mini-Goals: Before setting off, agree on small destinations along the trail, like "the big tree," "the funny-looking rock," or "the bridge." Celebrate the achievement when you reach it.

Provides visual motivation (the end is always in sight!) and teaches the concept of breaking a larger goal into manageable parts.





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Whether you're walking, rolling, running or strolling, getting on a trail can be one of the easiest, cheapest ways to enjoy the outdoors. Explore all kinds of trails during this Adventure, and be sure to map your favorite in your Adventure Passport!

LEAVE NO TRACE PRINCIPLES

Plan Ahead and Prepare - Check the weather in the area. Then, make sure you are prepared for possible extreme weather.

Pack What You Need - There are 10 essential items you should pack as a good starting point for any outdoor activity. These include: food, water (½ liter per hour of activity is a good baseline), emergency shelter (a reflective space blanket works great), extra clothes or layers, multi-tool, navigation (map/compass), light (flashlight/headlamp), first aid kit, fire (lighter or match), and heat/sun protection (sunglasses and hat).

Bring a Trash Bag - Make sure you dispose of your waste appropriately. Also, pay it forward and contribute to others' outdoor experience by picking up trash you find.

TRAIL ETIQUETTE

Share the Trails - It is likely you will meet other people while enjoying Utah's trails. If you are hiking or running, uphill users always have the right of way. If you are riding on a bike, yield to hikers, runners, and horseback riders. Everyone yields to equestrian users or people using an assistive device. If you need to move off the trail, make sure you step on a durable surface like rock or dry grass.

Water Exploration - Explore your local stream, pond, or river from the shore to learn about the plants, animals, and ecosystems that thrive there. Identify species of fish, birds, and aquatic plants, and understand their role in maintaining healthy waters. Practice responsible behavior by respecting wildlife, avoiding pollution, and following "Leave No Trace" principles. This is a great way to get your Observe Wildlife and Plant Discovery badges as well!

Use Respectful Noise Levels - Be aware of the noise you create or invite into the outdoors. If you'd like to listen to music, use one earbud and keep the other ear open to help you be aware of your surroundings. Respect quiet hours and guidelines at campgrounds and lower the volume of your phone ringer.

Be Kind - Everyone is welcome in and has a right to use public spaces. Share a kind word or quick smile with those you meet.

Use Tools - Utah is full of fantastic hiking trails, many close to large populations. You can explore the outdoors and enjoy nature by hiking along a marked trail. There are also great apps like AllTrails and local guidebooks to help you find the perfect trail for you!

Mountain biking - If you want something more adventurous, you can ride your bike on a mountain trail. If you haven't tried it before, choose a beginner-friendly trail. You'll see it's fun to test your balance and coordination while enjoying the challenge of going over bumpy terrain.

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Nature Walk - Enjoy a nature walk and take your time to look at the plants, trees, and animals around you. As you walk, take in the sights and sounds of nature- the rustling leaves, the chirping birds, and the breeze in the trees. Take your Nature Journal along and record what you see.

Horseback Riding - A great way to explore the trail. Be sure to follow trail rules for horseback riders, watch for obstacles, keep your horse comfortable, and ensure they can access water to drink along the way.

Follow a River - Some popular trails follow river corridors. The rich soil and land around rivers is called a riparian habitat, which creates a home for diverse species! Trails along the Virgin River, Jordan River, Logan River, or Little Cottonwood Creek are usually flat and accessible. Try finding a river trail near you and follow it as far as possible.

Summit a Peak - Utah is home to high peaks, the tallest mountain being Kings Peak in the Ashley National Forest at 13,528 feet. See if you can find a trail to the summit of a mountain near you! Follow the trail to the top, and depending on the time of year, check for signs of snow or bad weather.

Snowy Trails - Many parts of Utah see snow for much of the year. If you're hiking on trails covered in snow, wear shoes or boots with good tread; microspikes can be used on icy trails. Don't ride or walk on muddy or wet trails, as that will damage them.

Orienteering - All about using a map and compass to find your way. You can follow the trail while learning how to navigate and solve challenges, testing your skills in both direction and teamwork.

Off-Highway Vehicle - Ride in an OHV and enjoy some of the miles of motorized trails.

Geocaching - Geocaching is a great way to practice using a map to find a specific location in and on trails near you. Do some research on potential geocaches in your area, and then get on the trails and see if you can discover a hidden treasure!

Make a Map - As you spend time on a trail, try to draw a map of the route. These maps could be of your climb to a high peak or just a simple walk through your neighborhood trails. As you build your map, include landmarks, topographical lines, and distances.

Design your Trail - Look at the mountains or hills around your home. Do they already have trails? If not, imagine where you might put a trail. How would you navigate the steep rocky sections? Switchbacks? Will you need a bridge to cross rivers or gullies?

Scavenger Hunt - You can turn your hike or walk into a scavenger hunt. Look for certain things in nature, like specific plants or animal tracks. It's a fun way to see who can find everything on the list first. Or see if you can find every color in the rainbow as you hike.

Play Tree Huggers - While you're out on a trail next time, see if you can identify a species of tree (use iNaturalist for help identifying!), and when you call it out, see who can be the first one to go and hug that kind of tree.

TAKE IT UP A NOTCH!

Topographic Maps - Learn to read a topographical map and use it to navigate a trail. This site might help!

Backpacking - Combine hiking and camping for the ultimate adventure.

