



UTAH ROCKS! CHALLENGE | *And so do you!*

FOR THIS ADVENTURE, EXPLORE UTAH'S GEOLOGY

Preschoolers are naturally curious about rocks, which sparks their interest through hands-on exploration, this Adventure promotes climbing, touching and exploring rocks of all shapes and sizes!

WHY CLIMBING?

Climbing is a natural part of a young child's development, fueling their need for exploration, physical growth, and skill-building. Risky play, such as climbing, is crucial for 3 to 5-year-olds because it builds essential skills in physical development, cognitive function, and emotional regulation.

● CLIMBING SAFETY TIPS FOR PARENTS ●

Parents should strike a balance between close supervision and allowing for some thoughtfully considered risk, which facilitates a necessary growth of independence. These guidelines apply to all climbing, scrambling, and rock exploration activities for children aged 3-5.

- **Provide a Safe Environment:** Ensure the climbing structure (boulder or playground) is age-appropriate and hazard-free. Before climbing, verify the boulder is stable, and the landing zone is clear of sharp objects or jagged rocks.
- **Boulder Height Rule:** Only allow climbing on natural boulders that are no taller than the child's chest or waist.
- **Footwear:** Always ensure the child is wearing closed-toe shoes with good grip (sturdy sneakers or hiking shoes).
- **Supervise Safely:** Maintain close proximity and keep your child in sight, ready to intervene, but resist the urge to hover or intervene immediately if they are safe.
- **Promote Problem-Solving:** Observe from a short distance to allow your child a chance to solve a problem on their own, building confidence.
- **Talk About Risk:** Promote thoughtful decision-making by asking reflective questions like, "How did that feel?" or "What's a safer way to do that?"
- **Climb Down, Not Jump:** Teach the child to descend feet-first, facing the rock, feeling for footholds to prevent injury.

ROCK CLIMBING

What To Do

Indoor Climbing: Visit a gym that offers bouldering (low-wall climbing on thick pads, no ropes needed), auto-belays, or classes for 3 to 5-year-olds, providing a safe, supervised environment.

Playground Rock Wall: Use a low, safe rock-climbing wall at a local park or playground.

Nature's Boulders: Find a large, stable, and low boulder (no taller than the child) in a safe, flat area of a park.

Learning Goal

Motor Planning & Whole-Body Strength: Plan a short route by visually identifying the next hold, while using leg-pushing and arm-pulling to support body weight.

Goal Orientation & Grip Strength: Successfully climb from bottom to top, building a sense of accomplishment and increasing hand and finger strength by gripping holds.

Risk Assessment & Balance: Learn to safely test the stability of a surface before committing weight to it, improving body centering while traversing the top of the object.





SAFE MOVEMENT & EXPLORATION

What To Do

Rock Exploration Hikes: Plan a short, kid-friendly hike to discover unique formations, such as exploring a simple, wide slot canyon (like Willis Creek or Little Wild Horse Canyon—hike a manageable distance and then turn back), viewing canyon walls, or fun red rock scrambles (like those found in Snow Canyon State Park).

Make the Most of Visiting Geological Landmarks: Visit a natural landmark known for unique rock structures or accessible areas for safe play, such as Goblin Valley (free-roaming valley floor), Bryce Canyon (viewing hoodoos from paved Rim Trail), or Coral Pink Sand Dunes (sand-dune scrambling).

Learning Goal

Coordination & Body Control: Improve navigation of uneven outdoor terrain by using careful hand and foot placement for stability, and learn to describe textures (rough, smooth, hard).

Observation & Agility: Increase **unstructured running and whole-body movement** for vigorous activity, while building visual discrimination skills by comparing and describing the unique rock shapes (e.g., hoodoos, arches)

HANDS-ON & SENSORY FUN

What To Do

Simple Rock Collecting: Go on a simple nature walk to collect pretty pebbles or rocks. Use a magnifying glass to inspect and sort your finds. (Check local collection rules where applicable.)

Fossil Finders: Go on a gentle hike to view fossil remains or visit a museum with a simulated fossil dig experience. Look, do not touch or remove fossils.

Petroglyph Pointers: Take a short, easy hike to view ancient rock carvings (petroglyphs) at one of the many sites located throughout Utah, particularly in the canyons and deserts.

Learning Goal

Comparison & Strength: Collect and sort objects by a simple property (e.g., color like red or gray, or weight like light or heavy), while building strength from carefully lifting and carrying their collection

Historical Awareness & Motor Skills: Understand the concept of "long ago" and practice squatting, kneeling, and using small tools (brush/scoop) to gently explore the ground.

Cultural Respect & Quiet Movement: Understand the importance of **NEVER** touching or writing on rock art to preserve these irreplaceable artifacts, while practicing walking gently and quietly along a path.

STEM & DISCOVERY

What To Do

Ranger Rock Talk: Attend a geology or paleontology talk/tour led by a park ranger or expert at a National/State Park.

Museum Marvels: Visit a museum with geology or paleontology exhibits. Bring a nature journal to sketch a favorite rock or fossil. *Many museums in Utah participate in Museums for All, providing free or discounted admission for people receiving food assistance (SNAP benefits).*

Learning Goal

Cognitive Focus & Endurance: Increase the ability to focus and listen for 10–20 minutes, while learning 1–2 new facts about rocks or mountains.

Observation & Fine Motor Skills: Sort and describe objects based on a single, simple attribute (like color or size), while developing pencil grip and fine motor control through sketching.





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This challenge can be met in a variety of ways. From rockhounding to rock climbing, you're sure to find something you love because Utah Rocks!

Indoor Bouldering - Fun, low-wall climbing involving short, challenging "problem" routes, usually without ropes.

Slacklining - A fun balance challenge that involves walking on a flat piece of webbing stretched between two anchor points, like trees or rocks. Start with a low slackline to practice walking across and see how long you can balance.

Take a Walk with Dinosaurs - Utah is home to several trails that include fossilized dinosaur tracks. Take a walk into history and connect with Utah's prehistoric wildlife.

Rock Exploration Hikes - Utah is known for its stunning rock formations, including hoodoos, arches, and canyons. Plan a hike to discover these natural wonders, selecting a trail appropriate for your group's age and skill level.

Petroglyph Hiking - Offers the chance to view ancient rock carvings in natural landscapes like rock faces. Southern Utah is home to several well-known petroglyph sites. Please visit respectfully, preserving their cultural significance for future generations.

Rock Exploration Hikes - Utah is known for its stunning rock formations, including hoodoos, arches, and canyons. Plan a hike to discover these natural wonders, selecting a trail appropriate for your group's age and skill level.

Rockhounding - Search your local area for igneous, sedimentary, and metamorphic rock. Take a look at where in your local geology they may have come from. Check out public lands like those managed by the BLM or National Forests, which allow rock collection in reasonable quantities. Check local rules before collecting. Visit this site for more information. Then use an app to help you identify your rocks!

Local Geology - Get to know your local geology! Utah's landscapes boast a variety of geological masterpieces. Dig into how your local topography was formed.

Wet Canyon Hiking - A unique way to explore narrow, water-carved canyons like the Narrows in Zion National Park. Always check weather and water conditions for safety.

TAKE IT UP A NOTCH!

Via Ferrata - Via Ferrata routes combine hiking and climbing, making them ideal for beginners. Using steel cables and ladders, these routes make climbing more accessible to a wider range of people. They offer families a great opportunity to experience technical rock climbing in a safe, controlled environment. Via Ferrata routes can be found in Kane, Washington, and Uinta Counties, with most requiring a guide service for access.





Rock Hopping / Stream Scrambling - Involves exploring natural stream beds, hopping from rock to rock, or scrambling across large boulders. Rock hopping is more about balance and coordination, while stream scrambling is a more rugged adventure requiring strength and careful foot placement. Just be sure to stay safe and choose spots with manageable water conditions. For younger kids, start with calm, shallow streams to explore creek beds.

Scrambling Hikes - Scrambling means using your hands to navigate over rocks and boulders on the trail. Try beginner-friendly trails with light scrambling. Only experienced adventurers should attempt steep trails with challenging scrambling sections.

Rappelling - A technique used to descend steep rock faces or cliffs. Many climbing gyms and guiding operations offer programs that help climbers transition from indoor climbing to outdoor climbing. Consider signing up for a 'gym-to-crag' program or hiring a local guide to learn the ropes.

Adaptive Climbing - Several non-profits and climbing gyms offer adaptive climbing opportunities for people with disabilities. A few opportunities: National Ability Center, Wasatch Adaptive, Ogden Valley Adaptive, the Front and Momentum.

Cave Exploration - An adventurous way to explore the hidden world beneath the surface. Explore easy, safe caves like Timpanogos Cave and learn about the cave ecosystem and amazing rock formations from the ranger.

Fossil Hiking - Embark on a hike to witness ancient remains in their natural setting, leaving them undisturbed and preserving their legacy. Utah is home to numerous paleontological treasures, from fossil beds and deserts to ancient seabeds. Explore these awe-inspiring sites and connect with the past at places like Raptor State Park, Dinosaur National Monument, and Jurassic National Monument.

Slot Canyon Hiking - This takes you through narrow, winding passages carved by water. Utah has several stunningly beautiful slot canyons, like Peek-Boo Canyon and Willis Creek Narrows.

Canyoneering - An adventurous activity that combines hiking, climbing, and rappelling through canyons. For a safe introduction, start with rock hopping or shallow stream exploration. Safety: Canyoneering requires route finding and the use of technical equipment. Hire a guide outfitter to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience.

