

WILDERNESS PRESS presents

Three Easy Ways to Prepare Your Child for Sleeping in a Tent

By Goldie Silverman, author of
Camping With Kids: The Complete Guide to Car, Tent, and RV Camping

While parents may have fond memories of falling asleep in a tent, warm and snug in a sleeping bag, listening to the tent walls moving softly in the night breeze, young children on their first camp-out may find the unfamiliar surroundings disconcerting, or even frightening. It needn't be. You can take easy steps before camping that will make the tent a comfy, and even fun, place.

Indoor Campouts

The best way to help your children adjust to the tent out in the wild is to let them spend time in the tent before you go camping. If you have a self-supporting tent—and enough space in your playroom or family room—keep the tent set up for several days for your child to play, nap, and just spend time in. If you can't set up your tent in the house, create a makeshift tent by draping a blanket or bedspread over a card table. Invite your kids' friends over to play in the tent. You can even set up the sleeping bags so the kids can spend the entire night in the tent. Turn the lights out and make a pretend campfire using a flashlight and crumpled red tissue paper. After a few days the kids will not only get used to the tent, they might even prefer it to their own bedrooms.

Practice in the Store

A second way to familiarize your children with a tent is to visit tents already set up in an outdoor store. Usually, the stores have all kinds of sizes and styles set up. Wear loose clothing, take off your shoes, take off your kids



shoes, and crawl inside. Talk to your children about sleeping in the tent. Let them practice opening and closing the door and window flaps. If the tent has interior pockets for storage, talk about what you will put inside—mom's glasses can go here, a flashlight will go there. While you're at the outdoor store, you may find some special camping gear that your kids can pick out, like a small backpack or a tiny flashlight to keep nearby during the night.

Teddy Bear Tenting

A fun game that will help the kids get used to a tent is teddy bear tenting. Make a tent for a doll or a favorite animal by draping a towel over two metal bookends, a small box, or a stack of blocks. The teddy bear can sleep in the tent, come out to play, eat, and go for a hike or a swim. As the kids play, talk to them about how you will do the same type of activities when you go on your own camping trip. And when you finally go on your first camping outing, be sure that teddy comes, too!



Seattle resident Goldie Silverman learned to camp in Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho, and Arizona. In Camping with Kids, Goldie shares her wisdom and that of more than 120 expert kid and adult campers. Mother of three grown children and two grandchildren, Goldie now hikes all over the world, but still backpacks and camps with her family near her home.

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