PARENTS WITH PREPAREDNESS

Summer Adventures to Avoid

What Every Family Should Know Before Heading Outside

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A Note Before You Head Outside

Summer is supposed to be the good stuff — long days, open skies, kids running barefoot until the streetlights come on. And it usually is. But every summer, families get caught off guard by things that are completely avoidable — a brush with poison ivy that ruins a week, a sunburn that could have been prevented in five minutes, a moment of panic when a child wanders off a trail.

This ebook covers four of the most common outdoor hazards families face. Not to scare you. To prepare you.

Each section follows the same simple format: what to watch for, what to do in the moment, and what to tell your kids ahead of time — because the best protection is always a conversation before the thing happens.

Knowledge weighs nothing. Pack it before you go.

— The PWP Team

Chapter 1

Poison Ivy

"Leaves of three, let it be" — and mean it.

Poison ivy is everywhere — backyards, hiking trails, summer camps, soccer fields. Most kids (and plenty of adults) can't reliably identify it. And you only have to brush against it once for things to get very uncomfortable very fast.

What It Looks Like

Poison ivy grows as a ground vine, a climbing vine (often on trees), or a shrub. Its signature is three leaflets grouped together — the middle leaflet on a slightly longer stem. Leaves are shiny when young, then dull green, turning red in fall. White berries appear in summer and fall. The plant is found in every U.S. state except Alaska, Hawaii, and California (which has a close cousin, western poison oak).

> 🌿 **The rule:** "Leaflets three, let it be." Teach this to your kids before the season, not during.

What Happens When You Touch It

The culprit is urushiol — an oil in the plant's leaves, stems, and roots. It bonds to skin quickly (within 10–15 minutes), triggering an allergic reaction in about 85% of people. The rash typically appears 12–72 hours after contact: red, intensely itchy, often with blisters. It is NOT contagious, and the fluid from blisters cannot spread the rash.

One common misconception: the rash "spreads." It doesn't. Areas with less skin contact or thicker skin react more slowly, which is why the rash seems to keep appearing over several days.

What to Do

If you or your child has touched poison ivy:

- Rinse exposed skin with lukewarm water as soon as possible — ideally within 5–10 minutes. Use soap if available, but water alone is better than waiting to find soap.
- Wash clothing, shoes, and gear. Urushiol stays active on surfaces for months to years.
- Wash pet fur if the pet may have brushed against it — they rarely react, but can transfer the oil to you.
- For the rash: calamine lotion, hydrocortisone cream, and cool compresses ease itching. Antihistamines can help with sleep.
- See a doctor if: the rash covers large areas, affects the face or genitals, there is swelling around the eyes, or the child has trouble breathing (rare but serious).

> ⚠️ **Emergency:** Difficulty breathing or swallowing after exposure to smoke from burning poison ivy requires immediate emergency care. Never burn brush that might contain it.

What to Tell Your Kids

Keep it simple and specific:

- "If you see three leaves together, don't touch it — even if it looks fine."
- "If you think you touched it, come tell me right away. The faster we rinse, the better."
- "Touching it isn't your fault. Don't be embarrassed to say something."

Practice the ID with them before summer hikes. Show pictures. Make it a game if that's what it takes. The habit of looking and not touching starts before the trail, not on it.

Chapter 2

Sunburn

The one summer hazard most families could eliminate entirely — and don't.

Sunburn is the most preventable item on this list. It's also the most common. One blistering sunburn in childhood more than doubles the lifetime risk of melanoma. And yet every summer, kids head to pools, beaches, and backyards underprotected — because sunscreen is annoying, the kids resist, and it's easy to underestimate how fast UV exposure adds up.

The Basics

Sun damage happens faster than most people think. At peak UV hours (10 a.m. to 4 p.m.), fair-skinned individuals can begin burning in as little as 11 minutes without protection. Clouds don't block UV rays. Water and sand reflect them, intensifying exposure. Altitude increases UV intensity — roughly 4% stronger for every 1,000 feet of elevation.

> 🕐 **Timing note:** UV exposure is highest between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Seek shade during these hours when possible — especially for young children.

Sunscreen: What Actually Works

Not all sunscreen is applied correctly — and correct application makes the difference between protected and not.

- Use SPF 30 or higher, broad-spectrum (blocks both UVA and UVB). SPF 50 for children and fair skin.
- Apply 15–30 minutes before going outside. This matters.
- Use more than you think. Most people apply 25–50% of the recommended amount. A full-body adult application is about one ounce — roughly a shot glass.
- Reapply every 2 hours, and immediately after swimming or heavy sweating. "Water-resistant" does not mean waterproof.
- Don't skip the ears, back of the neck, tops of feet, and backs of hands.
- Infants under 6 months: keep out of direct sun; use minimal sunscreen only when sun avoidance isn't possible.

If Sunburn Happens

Treat it promptly:

- Get out of the sun immediately.
- Cool (not cold) compresses or a cool bath ease pain.
- Moisturize with aloe vera or a fragrance-free lotion. Avoid petroleum-based products that trap heat.
- Ibuprofen or acetaminophen reduces pain and inflammation.
- Push fluids — sunburn draws fluid to the skin's surface, causing mild dehydration.
- Do not pop blisters. They protect healing skin.

⚠️ **Seek care if:** Child has fever, chills, extreme pain, or extensive blistering (sunburn covering large areas on a child is a medical situation).

What to Tell Your Kids

For younger children: frame sunscreen as getting ready, not as an interruption. "We put on sunscreen like we put on shoes — before we go out."

For older kids and teens: be direct. "One bad sunburn before 18 doubles your risk of skin cancer as an adult. That's not a risk worth taking for a pool day."

Give them agency: let them apply their own sunscreen (with a check), pick their hat, choose their shade spot. Kids who participate in sun safety are more consistent about it.

Chapter 3

Snake Bites

Most snake bites are preventable. Most are also survivable — if you know what to do.

About 7,000–8,000 venomous snake bites occur in the United States each year. Fewer than 10 result in death — because most people seek treatment quickly, and we have access to antivenom. But bites are painful, scary, and sometimes serious. The best outcome starts with staying calm and acting correctly in the first 30 minutes.

Snakes to Know

The U.S. has four types of venomous snakes: rattlesnakes, cottonmouths (water moccasins), copperheads, and coral snakes. Rattlesnakes are the most widely

distributed. Copperheads cause the most bites — largely because they are well-camouflaged and don't always rattle before striking.

Important: most snakes encountered in the U.S. are non-venomous and beneficial. They eat rodents and pests. If a snake isn't threatening you, leave it alone. Bites most commonly happen when people try to pick up, move, or kill a snake — not when they simply pass by one.

> 📌 **Rule of thumb:** If you can't positively identify it as harmless, treat it as venomous and give it space. A 6-foot distance is generally safe.

Prevention

- Wear closed-toe shoes and long pants in tall grass, rocky areas, and brush.
- Don't reach into rock piles, under logs, or into brush without looking first.
- Shake out shoes, sleeping bags, and gear left on the ground.
- Stay on trails. Snakes often rest near the edges.
- If you see a snake — stop. Back away slowly. Do not panic or try to touch it.

If a Bite Happens

Call 911 or get to an emergency room immediately. Do not wait for symptoms to appear.

While getting help:

- Stay calm and keep the bitten limb below heart level.
- Remove jewelry and tight clothing near the bite (swelling can be rapid).
- Note the time of the bite and try to remember the snake's appearance (size, color, pattern). Do NOT try to catch or kill the snake — this causes additional bites.

Do NOT do any of the following — these are myths that cause harm:

- Do not cut and suck the venom. This doesn't work and causes infection.
- Do not apply a tourniquet or ice.
- Do not give alcohol or pain medications that thin blood (aspirin, ibuprofen).

> 🚨 **In an emergency:** Time is the most important factor. Antivenom is most effective when given early. Don't drive yourself if possible — call 911 and stay calm.

What to Tell Your Kids

Before any hike or outdoor activity in snake territory:

- "If you see a snake, stop and back up slowly. Don't run. Come find me."
- "Never touch or pick up a snake, even if it looks harmless or dead."
- "If you get bitten — stay calm and yell for help. Don't run."

Running elevates heart rate and spreads venom faster. Calm children do better. Practice saying it out loud: "Stay calm. Yell for help. Don't run." Simple, memorable, and correct.

Chapter 4

Getting Lost Outdoors

The most important wilderness survival skill is knowing what to do the moment you realize you are lost.

Every year, search and rescue teams respond to thousands of calls — hikers who took a wrong turn, children who wandered off a trail, families who headed out underprepared for conditions that changed. The outcome often depends on one thing: whether the person knew to stop moving, and stayed where they were.

The Most Common Mistakes

- Continuing to walk when uncertain of direction — this makes you harder to find and uses energy you need.
- Not telling anyone where you were going before you left.
- Heading out with a phone that isn't fully charged, or relying on GPS in areas without service.
- Underestimating how quickly weather, temperature, or light can change.

Before You Go: The Five Essentials

These aren't just for serious hikers — they're for any outdoor outing with kids:

- Navigation: A paper map and compass (phones die; maps don't). Know how to read both.
- Water: More than you think you need. Dehydration impairs judgment faster than most people realize.
- Emergency shelter: A lightweight emergency blanket takes up no space and can prevent hypothermia overnight.
- First aid kit: Tailored to the outing. Include a whistle.

- Communication: A charged phone, but also a plan — who to call, what to say, where you are.

> 📋 **Before every hike:** Tell someone your plan — where you're going, which trail, expected return time. This is the single most important thing families skip.

If You or Your Child Gets Lost

Teach your children the word: STOP.

- S — Stop. Don't keep walking. Sit down.
- T — Think. How did you get here? What do you know about where you are?
- O — Observe. Look for landmarks, water, trails. Listen for voices, vehicles, or water.
- P — Plan. If you have a whistle, use it (three blasts is the universal distress signal). Stay in one place. Make yourself visible.

Search and rescue teams are trained to find people who stay put. Every step you take when lost makes the search area larger.

Staying Overnight If Necessary

Most people who get lost are found within the first day — if they stay in one place. If darkness comes:

- Find or build shelter from wind. Body heat loss is the primary danger.
- Stay dry. Wet clothing against skin accelerates hypothermia even in mild temperatures.
- Stay together if in a group.
- Signal regularly: whistle blasts, bright clothing in a visible open area, or a small fire if conditions are safe.

What to Tell Your Kids

Practice the STOP method with your children at home. Walk through it as a scenario:

"If you ever can't find me, or you're not sure where you are — what do you do?"

The answer should come automatically: Stop. Don't move. Blow your whistle three times. Stay where you are. I will find you.

Children who are given a clear, simple plan are far less likely to panic — and panic is the real danger.

You Are More Prepared Than You Think

Preparedness isn't about fear. It's about the ten-minute conversation you have before the hike, the sunscreen you put on before you leave the house, the three words you rehearse until your kids can say them in their sleep.

None of this requires special gear or advanced training. It requires paying attention — and sharing what you know with the people you love.

That's exactly what PWP is built around: the idea that families who are informed are families who are safer. Not because they avoid adventure — but because they bring a little more knowledge along for the ride.

Parents With Preparedness

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Raising kids who know what to do.