



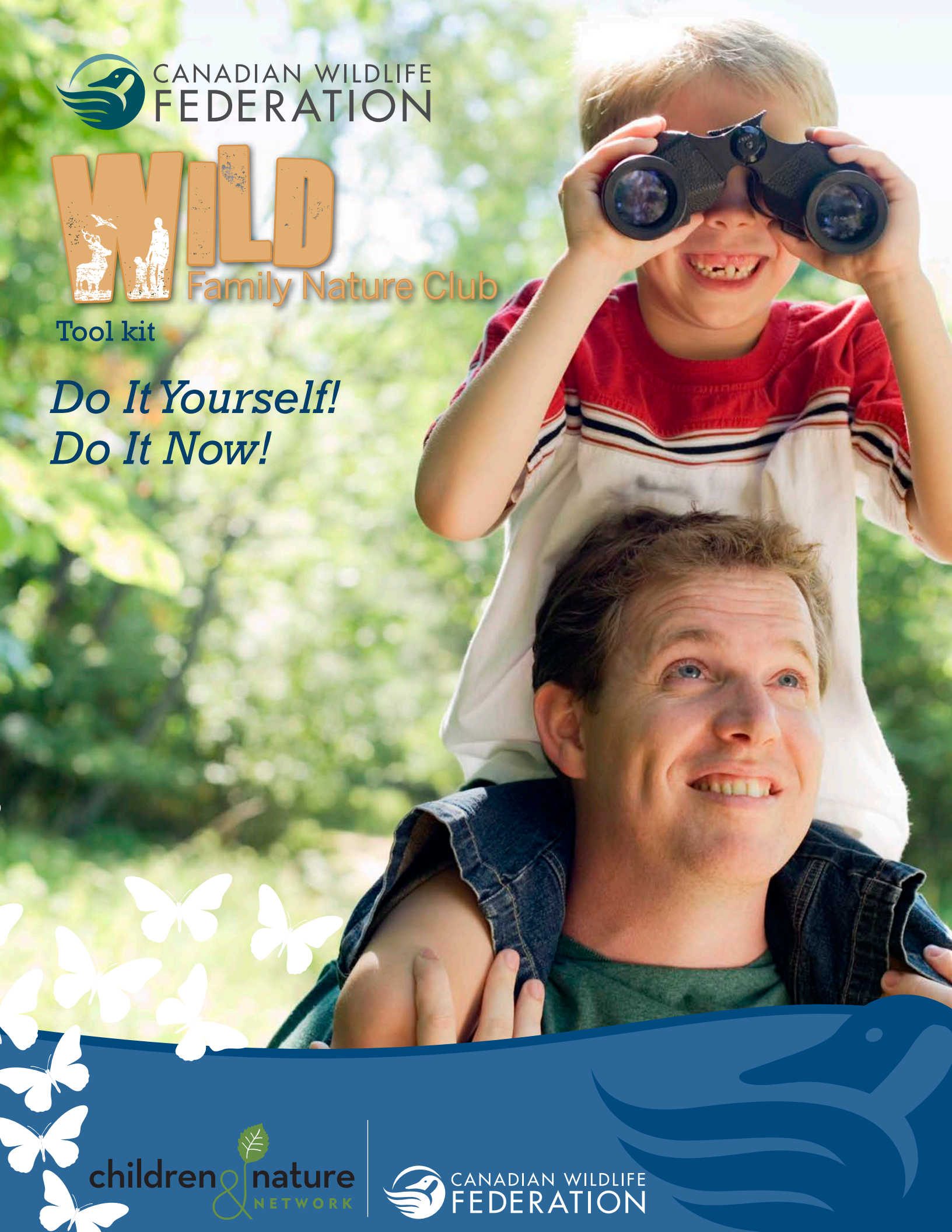
CANADIAN WILDLIFE
FEDERATION

WILD

Family Nature Club

Tool kit

Do It Yourself!
Do It Now!



children & nature
NETWORK



CANADIAN WILDLIFE
FEDERATION



INTRODUCTION

PHOTO: JON BEARD

“What if parents, grandparents, and kids around the country were to band together to create nature clubs for families? What if this new form of social/nature networking were to spread as quickly as book clubs and Neighborhood Watches did in recent decades? We would be well on our way to true cultural change.”

— Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, and Chairman, Children & Nature Network

Families are discovering that having fun outdoors doesn't require waiting for a special event or program. Instead, they are taking the initiative and creating their own local Wild Family Nature Clubs. These clubs go by different names and take slightly different forms, but they all offer accessible, easy, low- (or no-) cost fun, family-oriented activities outdoors.

Why get families outdoors? Quite simply, nature is good for us. Evidence shows that it is important, healthy and fun for children to have frequent and varied opportunities for play outdoors—and especially outdoors with natural vegetation—as a part of their everyday lives. When they do, they are happier, healthier and smarter. They are more self-disciplined and focused. They are more self-confident, creative and cooperative. They are better problem-solvers, more optimistic and more physically fit. Family ties are strengthened, a sense of community is nourished, and a sense of place is cultivated. All in all, nature is good for children and their friends and family, too!

Wild Family Nature Clubs are a great way to get started, get involved, and get the benefits of time in nature. Nature is all around us. It abounds in rural settings and wilderness, but it's even available where we may least expect to find it—from backyards, city neighborhoods, and rooftop gardens to suburban parks and walking trails.

And the good news is that there are lots of ways to connect with nature—and to create lifestyles in which frequent experience in the natural world is a fundamental part of children's lives. The Canadian Wildlife Federation and The Children & Nature Network (C&NN) has drawn on the best available research, common sense, and parents' direct experiences to develop this *Wild Family Nature Clubs Tool Kit: Do It Yourself! Do It Now!* We hope it inspires you to get your own family and friends outdoors for many happy, healthy adventures together.



PHOTO: JON BEARD



PURPOSE OF THIS TOOL KIT

The purpose of this *Wild Family Nature Club Tool Kit: Do It Yourself! Do It Now!* is to provide inspiration, information, tips and resources for those who are— or who might be—interested in creating a Wild Family Nature Club. In creating the Tool Kit, we’ve drawn on what many other families have done and learned. We also encourage you to develop and use your own ideas.

WHAT IS A NATURE CLUB FOR FAMILIES?

A Wild Family Nature Club is a group of people with an interest in connecting children with nature. Each Wild Family Nature Club is unique. Some meet weekly at the same urban park—playing, building friendships, and singing with preschoolers and their parents. Some take homeschooling families on lengthy walks for focused nature study. Some take the form of boisterous family trail hikes that combine



PHOTO: SUSAN SHAFER, INSIDE

kid-driven play with spontaneous nature observation. Whatever their form, all share these basic goals: Get outside in nature on a frequent basis; gather children, friends and community members to share outdoor adventures; and experience the benefits of time spent together outside.

A FEW KEY BENEFITS

- Wild Family Nature Club can be created in any neighborhood — whether inner city, suburban, or rural — and in any economic setting.
- Wild Family Nature Club can be joined or created by any family—single parents, extended families, friends who feel like families.
- The Wild Family Nature Club approach can break down key barriers, including fear of strangers, since there is safety in numbers.
- There is the motivation factor—it’s much more likely you and your family are going to show up at a park on Saturday morning if you know there’s another family waiting for you.
- Shared knowledge: Many parents want to give their kids the gifts of nature, but they don’t feel they know enough about nature to do so.
- And, importantly, there is no need to wait for funding. Families can do this themselves and do it now.



PHOTO: JON BEARD

HOW TO START

“You don’t have to wait for a ‘green play’ prescription from your doctor. You can start today with family and friends by opening the door to go outside to explore the wealth of natural adventures right in your own backyard, neighborhood and community.”

— Cheryl Charles, President and CEO, Children & Nature Network

If you’re reading this document, you’re probably already giving some serious thought to starting your own Wild Family Nature Club. Are you willing to give it a try? According to our experts, being organized, enthusiastic, and committed to sharing nature with families will take you very far in being a successful group leader. And don’t worry if you’re not an expert naturalist: many leaders say they think their own lack of expertise makes other parents feel more comfortable taking part in their outdoor excursions. On the other hand, you don’t have to do it alone. One approach to starting a Wild Family Nature Club is to partner with another family member or friend. Consider enlisting grandparents—they are often a fount of knowledge about nature, and they have the time and resources that parents sometimes find in short supply.

Once you’re ready, start with nearby nature—places and spaces that are in your neighborhood or nearby in the community. You will be surprised how interesting your local parks can be—whether you’re exploring an urban center, a suburb, or a rural region. Schedule a variety of fun outdoor activities and invite others to join you. You might simply take your group on a series of one- or two-hour walks through familiar preserves (and you might be surprised at how few

families have ever visited them before). Don’t be afraid to make repeated trips to the same location: Your group will gain confidence and knowledge as they begin to see a place over many days and seasons. Finally, remember to move slowly and allow the young people to romp and make their own discoveries. You’ll probably find that their learning and their appreciation come in ways you never anticipated.

If you’re feeling more ambitious, consider longer hikes, nature photography expeditions, fishing trips, cookouts, camping trips and nature restoration projects. Learn to track animals, explore local fossil beds, go birding, or start a neighborhood garden. See the rest of this Tool Kit for more details. It is fun! “Do It Yourself! Do It Now!”



PHOTO: JON BEARD

QUICK-START GUIDE

Get Inspired. Get Organized. Get Out.

1

CREATE A PLAN

Where, when, what, how often and how long? Putting it all in writing can help you relax and enjoy the process.

→ [TOOLS / TEMPLATES \(P.12\)](#)

2

CHECK IT OUT

It's a good idea to visit each location yourself before you send out invitations. Note any special features for each destination including details on where best to meet and what to do once there.

→ [TOOL / TEMPLATES \(P.13\)](#)

3

INVITE AS MANY PEOPLE AS YOU LIKE

Start small or invite them all. Just invite a couple of friends to join you for a family hike. Or reach out to neighborhood families, classmates, and community groups like the scouts, 4-H and boys and girls clubs.

→ [TOOL / TEMPLATES \(P.15\)](#)

4

MAKE IT EASY

Informed and prepared parents are happy parents. You'll make it easy to say "Yes" when you minimize prep-time and maximize fun by giving parents a check list for hassle-free outings.

→ [TOOL / TEMPLATES \(P.16\)](#)

5

READY, SET, GO!

Start your adventure on time with a 15-minute grace period for latecomers. Record the number of participants at each event and collect contact information for new participants.

→ [TOOL / TEMPLATES \(P.17\)](#)

PHOTO: BROTHIER VUSUF



1

Schedule and Calendar Decisions

Once inspired, set a schedule that works for (and is fun for) you and your family. Are you interested in one event or ongoing events each week, month or season? Plan each event and be aware of other local efforts. Being organized can help you relax and enjoy this adventure. Have a time frame in mind. Is your event a half-day hike or two hours of exploration at dusk? Decide what length of time and which date works best for each outing.

Determine your level of commitment and available time.

How Often:

- Once a week on _____
- The first _____ of each month
- The first _____ of each season
- Once a Year on _____

How Long:

- _____ hours, from _____ to _____
- Varies by location

Consider your local landscape and seasonal weather conditions. Find out what other outdoor or nature events take place in your region. Gather a list of local nature clubs and other resources and find out whether educators or other special guests might be available to speak to your club while you are outside. Create a list of possible locations. Consider places you've been and places you've always wanted to explore. Include your favorite activities to do in each particular park. Try to plan a full year of adventures.

Date:	Location:	Activity:	Time:

2 Destination Check List



- Travel time to location _____
- Convenient meeting location _____
- Adequate parking for a large group: Yes / No
- Family-friendly loop hike: Yes / No
- Other activity _____
- Seasonal features _____
- Educational opportunities _____
- Fees: Yes / No _____
- Water feature: lake, stream, pond or puddles
- Need permission for groups over 10: Yes / No
- Food, water, rest facilities: Yes / No _____

Plan "B" for inclement weather:

- Alternate meeting location _____
- Alternate activity _____
- Appropriate clothes for being outdoors

Safety issues for small children:

Other Considerations:

3

Opening Doors: Information Sheet for Site Managers



You'll want to contact the park manager or agency that manages the locations you'll be visiting. Tell them your plans and request permission to hold your outing at their location. Provide information about the benefits they'll receive as a host site.

Here is a sample letter you can edit and use to contact the local person in charge of the outdoor area, such as your park manager. Mail, e-mail or phone the manager and use this document as a reference sheet.

Dear Park Manager:

I am writing to introduce myself and to tell you about our local Wild Family Nature Club.

I am a mother of two seven year olds. We have visited your park as a family many times and have participated in your excellent naturalist-led hikes. Over the past year I've become increasingly aware of the fact that our family is an exception. Children in our community are not going outside much anymore. Inspired by Richard Louv's book "Last Child in the Woods" and the Canadian Wildlife Federation's Wild Family Nature Clubs, I've decided to do something about this in our community.

In March of 2015, I started organizing a local club to explore the natural places in our region. I know that many of my neighbors and friends will be far more likely to get outside if I invite them to join us and others for an outside adventure. Wild Family Nature Clubs are a way for me to reach out to them and to others to help overcome the barriers that keep families and children inside and disconnected from nature.

We've selected your park as a perfect destination for our fall hike. I understand that we may be required to have a permit if our group exceeds 20 participants. Please let me know what steps I should take to secure permission for our group.

Group Name: _____

Contact: _____

Date of Visit: _____

Time of Visit: _____

Number of Participants: _____

It is my hope that this introduction to your park will lead to increased awareness of the rich and diverse natural resources that exist right here in our own backyard. To that end, I would welcome the opportunity to distribute information to participants about your programs and events.

Thank you,
Your Name





4

Invitations, Flyers and Notices

Start with your existing networks of friends, family, neighbors and co-workers. Start small or invite them all. Print up a half-page flier and distribute it to the families you know with children. Place a short notice in your local newspaper. When you're ready to expand, go to parenting Web sites and blogs in your region and get on their calendars and in their newsletters. You can also contact a host of other groups, or other outdoor recreation store, neighborhood association or homeowners' association, the local PTA, boys and girls clubs, 4-H clubs, and church groups. Post your flier at the grocery store, library, recreation center, or outdoor sports and camping supply stores. Reach out to special guests like government officials, school board members and nature program leaders. These guests might be willing to speak to your group and talk about what they are doing to help connect children and nature in your community.

To get the word out, you'll want to create a series of invitations, announcements and notices for each outing. Include your contact information so you can send interested individuals an invitation and a participant check list:

- E-mail invitation
- Half-page flier
- Short notice for newspapers and newsletters

5

Safe, Fun and Hassle-Free



Safety first! At the same time, recognize that appropriate risk-taking is good for children’s healthy development. Be prepared. Bee-stings, poisonous plants, allergies don’t have to hold you back. Make sure to bring a first-aid kit and let everyone know where it is. Remind participants that the natural world is full of surprises and paying attention is part of getting to know nature. Use the buddy system if it helps and be prepared to adjust activities for different age groups.

There are many good resources for safety tips in the outdoors. One good one is the [Centers for Disease Control Web site](#). Review the tips in advance of your outing, and always bring along basic first-aid supplies. When you send out the invitations, make sure to mention any special supplies that you want people to bring beyond the basics of water, sunscreen, and hats. If your group will be near a creek, a change of clothes is a good idea. If you are hiking in the woods, you may need to encourage tick checks. These bits of information help parents be prepared. Prepared parents are happier parents.

Check List for Participants

Essentials:

- Water
- Layered clothes appropriate for weather
- Backpack
- Snacks or picnic lunch
- Sunscreen
- Hat

Safety

- Whistle
- Band-Aids
- A participant with CPR training
- First-aid kit

Extras:

- Change of clothes
- Pad and pencil
- Magnifying glass
- Bug box
- Butterfly nets
- Binoculars
- Field guides or ID cards
- Flashlight for night hikes

6

Nature Clubs for Families Leader's Event Day Check List



- Bring pens and pencils for sign-in sheet and forms
- Bring sign-in sheets and other participant forms
- Bring any special equipment needed for the day's activities (field guides, nets, hand lenses, etc.)
- Bring extra water and snacks "just in case"
- Bring a leader's first-aid kit

- Require that parents and guardians stay with their children.
- Be a team. A couple of people, working together, can make the event run more smoothly. Make it a family affair.
- Have fun!

7

Nature Clubs for Families Web-Site Tips, Links and Resources



You'll want to spread the word about your upcoming events, share tips and stories about your adventures, and to keep everyone informed and inspired. The best way is to create a Web site or blog to share news, schedules, stories and ideas. Register your group with CWF by emailing WFNC@cwf-fcf.org and add your group to the Children and Nature Network list at <http://www.childrenandnature.org/directory/clubs/>

Don't be intimidated—the technology is not difficult and there are many examples from other club leaders to point you in the right direction.

You can start a blog for free by using Blogger or Wordpress. These work well if you don't want to pay a monthly hosting fee. Your blog will be hosted by these services, you'll see their logo at the top of your blog page, and the URL will be something like this:

<http://naturestrollers.blogspot.com/>

<http://heednature.blogspot.com/>

<http://iekidsoutdoors.blogspot.com/>

Another option is to create a Web site for your family nature club. Some clubs have both, a blog for updates and a Web site for information that changes infrequently. These clubs purchased their URL and pay a monthly hosting fee:

<http://www.familyadventuresinnature.org>

<http://www.columbiefamiliesinnature.org/>

<http://www.activekidsclub.com>

<http://familiesinnature.org/>

If you have your own URL, your blog address will look like this:

<http://kidsadventuring.org/blog/>

Many Web-hosting services offer Web site and blog templates as part of the hosting package. You'll want to do your own research to find the best hosting service for you. Here are a few links to get you started. The tools and services listed below have excellent documentation for first-time users.

Free blog hosting services

<https://www.blogger.com>

<http://wordpress.com/>

<http://www.typepad.com/>

<http://www.wix.com/>

Web site and blog hosting services

<http://www.networksolutions.com>

<http://www.homestead.com>



PHOTO: KATHLEEN DIAMOND

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We are grateful to each of these contributors—and the many others who are actively working to develop their own nature clubs for families. We hope this resource substantially serves to further and support the children and nature movement.



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