



## Friday Night Hike @ Home Activity Guide

Sad we had to cancel our Free Friday Night Hike? So are we! Use this guide to enjoy a nice spring evening with your family in your own backyard for your very own nighttime adventure! Here are some fun nighttime activities that you can enjoy to practice using your senses, just as many nocturnal animals do to survive at night:

### **Activity: What's that sound?**

Practice using your listening skills at night to distinguish between natural and unnatural sounds!

**What you need:** Nothing!

**What to do:** Have your family gather in a circle and listen for any sounds they hear for 1 minute. Allow each person to share a few sounds that they heard. Then have the group decide whether the sounds are natural (made by plants and animals) or unnatural (made by people or machines). Some natural sounds to listen for are owls hooting, trees squeaking, wind in the trees or grasses, water gurgling, ice cracking, falling objects, etc. Unnatural sounds may include radios, cars, people talking, airplanes, etc. Using their hands cupped around their ears, have children listen to see if they can hear any animals.



*Explanation:* Their hands funnel in sounds making it easier to hear. Many predators and prey have large ears to help hear other animals including deer (prey) and coyote (predator). Also, sound travels farther at night because of the wind dying down. We are acutely aware of sounds as our world closes in due to the darkness.

### **Activity: Color Blind**

Challenge your eyesight to determine if you can see color in the dark!

**What you need:** small pieces of white paper and a crayon for each person; Or small pieces of colored paper

**What to do:** After you have been outside in the dark long enough for your eyes to adjust, hand out a small piece of colored paper to each person. Ask them to look at it (in the darkness) and guess what color they think it is. Have the group put the paper in a pocket. When you return to light, have them check to see if they were right. OR pass out a small piece of white paper and an unlabeled crayon. Have each person look at the crayon and write the color they think it is on their white sheet of paper. Later when you are back inside, check to see if you were right! It is harder than you may think.

*Explanation:* Nocturnal animals' eyes are designed different than animals that are diurnal (diurnal means active during the daytime). Eyes have cells called rods and cones. Cones help us see color (cones and color both begin with "C"), and rods help us see well in the dark. Humans have lots of cones in our

eyes because we are diurnal. Nocturnal animals have mostly rods; therefore they are usually color blind. You actually need light to be able to see colors, so seeing in color is not important when you're a nocturnal animal.

### **Activity: Owl & Mouse Game**

Owls use sound to locate their prey at night. See if you can survive as an owl (or a mouse!) while pretend hunting!

**What you need:** 2 blindfolds and flashlights; 4+ players

**What to do:** Choose 2 people to be the designated owls. The owls should stand facing each other on opposite sides of the yard/trail with flashlights and blindfolds over their eyes. The other players are mice and will try to sneak past the owls. When they hear a mouse, owls should flash their lights on the sound. If the "mouse" is hit by the flashlight beam, they have been caught for supper. (A parent/guardian may have to act as the official for any decisions.) Discuss the impact of noises from different ground covers (i.e. dry leaves versus hard-packed trail vs soft grass). What other animals might be tasty prey items for owls besides mice? (Answer: lizards, snakes, voles, crayfish, skunks)



*Explanation:* Some owls have ears located directly across from each other, in symmetrical placement. Others have asymmetrical placement, where an ear on one side of the head is located above the one on the other side of the head. These owls use their uneven ears to judge exactly where sound is coming from. If an owl hears a mouse rustling, perhaps even below a blanket of snow or leaves, the sound may reach one ear before it reaches the other ear. The owl moves its head until the noise reaches both ears at the same time. Once an owl has done this, it has pinpointed the location of the sound and is ready to pounce – even if it has not seen its prey.

### **Activity: Lifesaver Surprise**

“Spark” your sense of wonder with a new way to enjoy Lifesaver candies!

**What you need:** Wint-O-Green Lifesaver Mints (1 per person)

**What to do:** In a darkened area, have partners pair off and face each other. Give each person a mint. One member of the pair should watch the mouth of his/her partner to observe what is going to happen. The other member is instructed to put the lifesaver into their mouth and crunch down on it, keeping his/her mouth open so the partner can observe. (Do not tell them what they will or should see.) The participants will be surprised to see sparks occurring with every bite! Then the other partner in each group can take a turn.

*Explanation:* When sugar is fractured, charges jump from one side to the other. When electrons hit nitrogen in the air they cause the emission of tiny blue-white bolts of light the same wavelength as natural lightning. Wintergreen, like the paint on a black light poster, is fluorescent. When the candies are cracked, some of the light emanating from the sugar is ultraviolet and that gets absorbed by the wintergreen and is re-emitted as bright, blue-green light that our eyes can see.

### **Activity: Touchy Feely**

Experience the world around you through touch & feel.



**What you need:** natural objects of various textures (examples include pinecones, shells, feathers, moss, rocks, etc)

**What to do:** Ask each family member to pass the objects around the group, feeling each of the objects as it passes by. Using just their sense of touch, ask each person to identify the object in their hand. Another option is to ask each person to describe how the object feels and have others guess what the object is, to make it more

challenging! Then use a flashlight to check your answers. Some animals use their sense of touch to find their way. For example, the Virginia Opossum has sensitive whiskers on its snout to feel around while moving in the dark since their eyesight is very weak.

### **Activity: Wet Noses**

What are some animals that have a good sense of smell? What is a dog's nose like? (It is usually wet.) This activity will help you to discover if having a wet nose improves your sense of smell!

**What you need:** a film canister, empty medicine bottle, or other small container filled with a scented cotton ball; essential oils, spices, vanilla extra, citrus zest, herbs, etc are great items you can use for this activity that you likely already have in your kitchen!; water bottle or cup of water



**What to do:** Have participants stand or sit in a line or circle. Walk by them with a scented film canister (or other container filled with a scent), allowing them to smell the cotton ball/other material inside. Next, direct participants to use the water you will pour from a water bottle (just a few drops is fine) into their cupped and outstretched hands to wet the outside and insides of their nostrils. The wetter and more thorough the better! Repeat the smell test again, this time with the wet nose. Ask: Was the scent stronger with a wet nose or a dry nose? Why does having a wet nose help dogs smell better? Why is having a strong sense of smell a good adaptation for nocturnal animals?

*Explanation:* A wet nose helps to pick up scent particles in the air and allows the scent particles to stick to scent receptors better. Dogs have roughly 200 million scent receptors, whereas humans only have 5 million. Nocturnal animals often have a hard time seeing in dim light. Having a strong sense of smell allows them to use another sense to “see” what is going on around them. Predators can sniff out where their prey has been in the past, and prey animals can pick up hints that a predator is coming.