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How to take your toddler for a walk

Take it from our columnist:
It's not as easy as it sounds.

BY CATHERINE RYAN GREGORY

Your dog needs to pee, you've been cooped up in the house all day and it's the first time the rain has let up in a week. It's time to head outside!

Luckily, going for a walk with your toddler is super easy. Just follow these simple instructions for a pleasant stroll down any of Portland's lovely trails.

Pack a diaper bag, because you never know when an epic blowout will require you to change your child's clothes in the back seat while trying desperately not to smear poop on the upholstery. Stuff the incidentals in your coat pocket — keys, dog poop bags, squeezies, cell phone, Kleenex, more squeezies because what if she doesn't want those other flavors? Strap her boots on even though she has recently decided that she never, ever wants anything on her feet ever again. Tune out her screams while you button her coat and usher everyone out the door.

Once you strap your toddler into her car seat, unbuckle her immediately because the dog is nowhere in sight. Yell his name, whistle and tromp around furiously, looking for him. Teach your child a new phrase: "Bad dog" will come in handy for years to come. Don't swear at the dog. If you do, and your child parrots you, tell yourself she's saying "fox."

Get in the car. As you drive, pass books back to your child and listen as she throws them against the car door. Once you run out of books, boxes of granola bars for her to shake and squeaky toys, sing every song you have ever heard in your life. Twice.

Park the car. Put back on your toddler's socks and shoes, which she pulled off during the ride. Wriggle her hands into mittens — you'll need at least six attempts to get those wriggly thumbs into the thumb bits. Offer her soothing words after she starts to cry because the dog whapped her in the face with his tail as he sprinted from the back to the front seat and back again in his excitement to be at the OHMYGOD-THEPARK-ALLTHESEMELLS-LETMEOUT-THEPARK!

Refasten her hat. Hopefully you haven't forgotten the one with the Velcro under-the-chin straps because otherwise you're screwed: She'll pull that sorry excuse for a toddler hat off before you can set her down.

Congratulations, you've now made it to the trail! Get a good grip on the dog's leash because he's about to pull you harder than a team of sled dogs approaching the finish line of the Iditarod. Console yourself with thoughts of the bangin' upper body strength you're building as you prevent him from streaking down the path.



The author's daughter, all bundled up for a "walk."

Cajole your child to take a few steps down the path on her own. When she stays firmly rooted to the ground, jog in place and say "Run run run!" in your best *we're having so much fun!* voice. Keep an eye on your immobile toddler as you scoop your dog's poop.

Hold your toddler's hand and gently lead her down the path. Take special care that the dog's leash doesn't take her out as he lunges at an imaginary squirrel. Walk a few more steps. Pause. Stare at a tree for several minutes. Walk a few more steps.

Notice that your child has shaken off her mittens and her fingers are now frigid. Look back at the trailhead, which is now approximately 50 feet away. Pick up your toddler and head back to the car. That's enough of a walk for today. ■

Catherine Ryan Gregory is a Portland writer and mom to a 1-year-old daughter. She loves hiking, can't keep the house clean and talks about boobs way more often than is socially appropriate. She blogs at TenThousandHourMama.com.