

# What do children learn when camping?

Perceptions of parents and children

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**RESEARCH  
WITH  
PLYMOUTH  
UNIVERSITY**

  
**The  
Camping and  
Caravanning  
Club**  
*The Friendly Club*

## How we did the research

An electronic survey *Do you think camping helps your child to learn?* was sent to over 11,000 Camping and Caravanning Club families for return within a fortnight. Within this time, 585 returns were received and their responses are summarised in the following pages.

## Who responded?

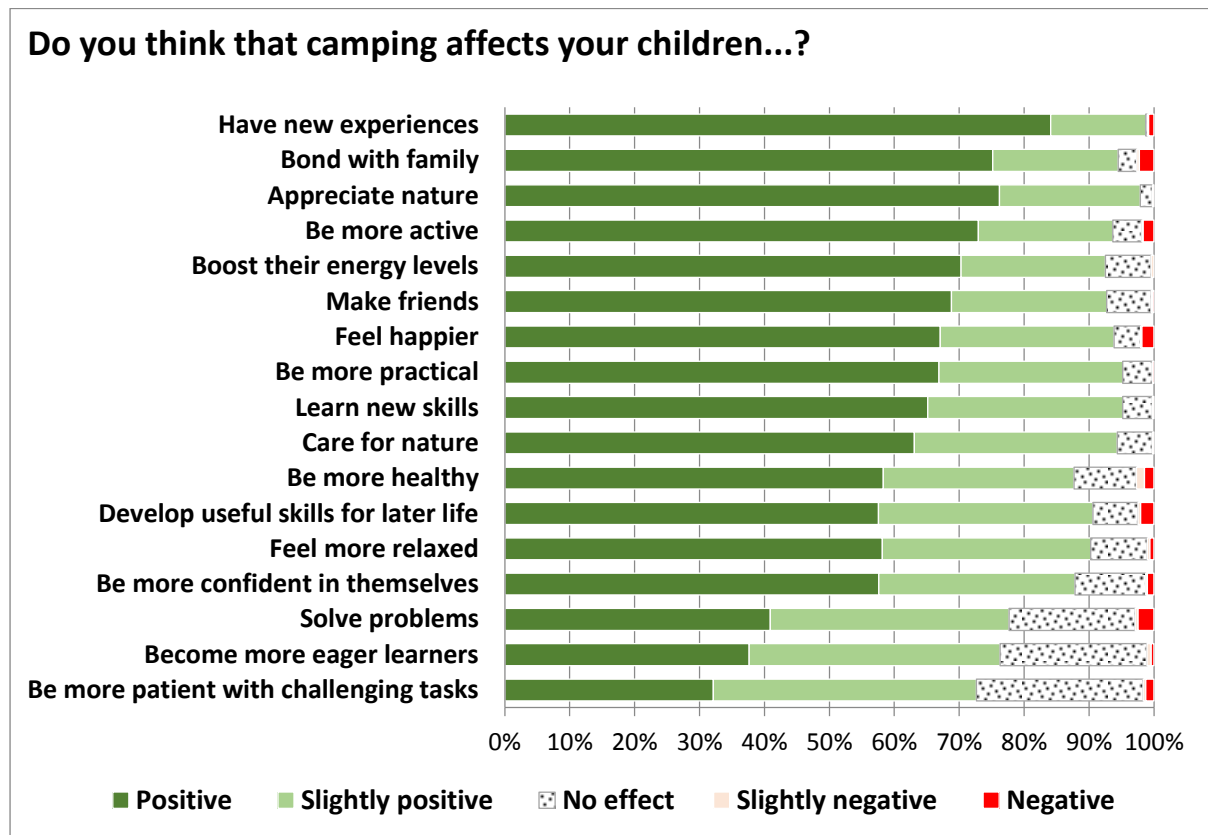
The majority of the camping families who responded live either in a suburban area (40%) or village (32%). They usually camp in a caravan (41%) or tent (44%). These families tend to go camping for a weekend (46%) or a week (33%) and usually go camping more than three times a year (59%). As a family, over 70% of respondents said they preferred campsites with toilets and washrooms, but a further 16% liked basic or no facilities (wild camping). A few families mentioned play areas, electricity points and swimming pools as desirable.



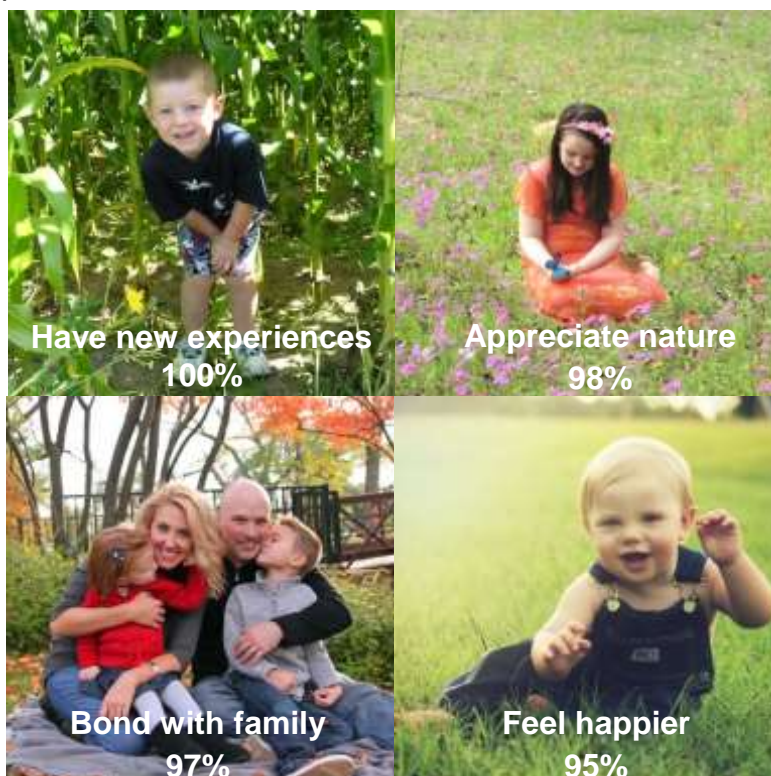
We found it doesn't matter if you are an urban or rural family, **about 4 out of 5 of all parents in our survey thought camping had a positive effect on their children's school education.**

## What did parents think about links between camping and education?

The vast majority of parents responding thought that their children were affected in the following positive ways.



The **top four** responses for how children were positively or slightly positively affected by camping experiences were:



All the top four are important foundations for learning. Parents also added their own ideas about how camping affects children and these fell into four main themes:

- Freedom and independence
- Escape from technology
- Simple life, nature, active
- Family interactions

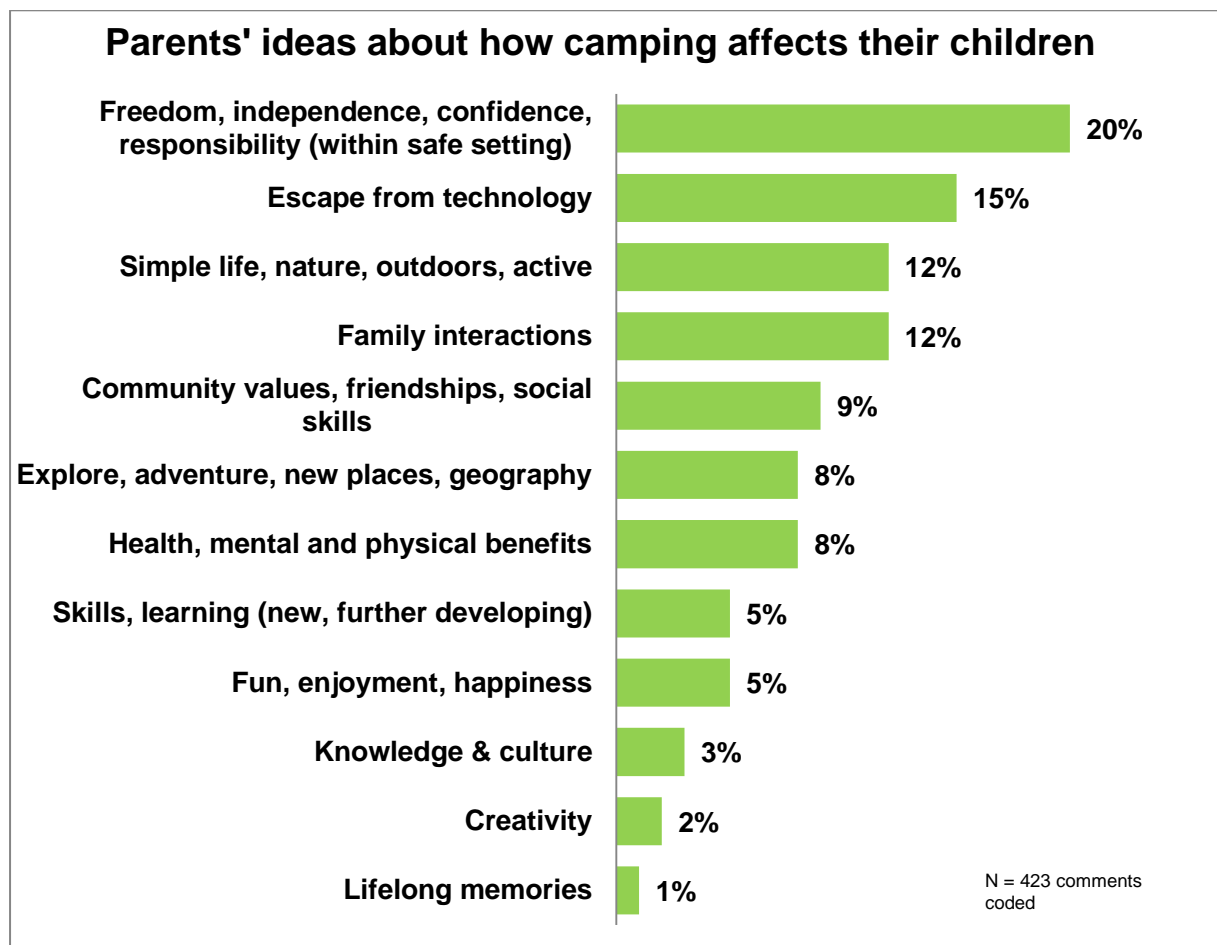


**Parents said:** *“Freedom on sites to run and play climbing trees till it’s dark”*

*“Gets them away from screens, i.e. TVs, computers, tablets and games consoles”*

*“The experience of living if only for short periods in a more basic and less cosseted manner”*

*“Quality time with family, learn patience and teamwork”*



Parents responding to our survey also strongly endorsed a **positive effect of camping on their children’s education**. 82% overall felt that it had a positive effect, although about 1 in 5 thought there wasn’t any effect. Tent camping parents were more likely to say there was no effect (22% against 15% in caravans and motorhomes). It may be that it depends on whether learning is narrowly defined. Some comments showed a broader understanding of learning than simply that associated with school.

**Parents said:**

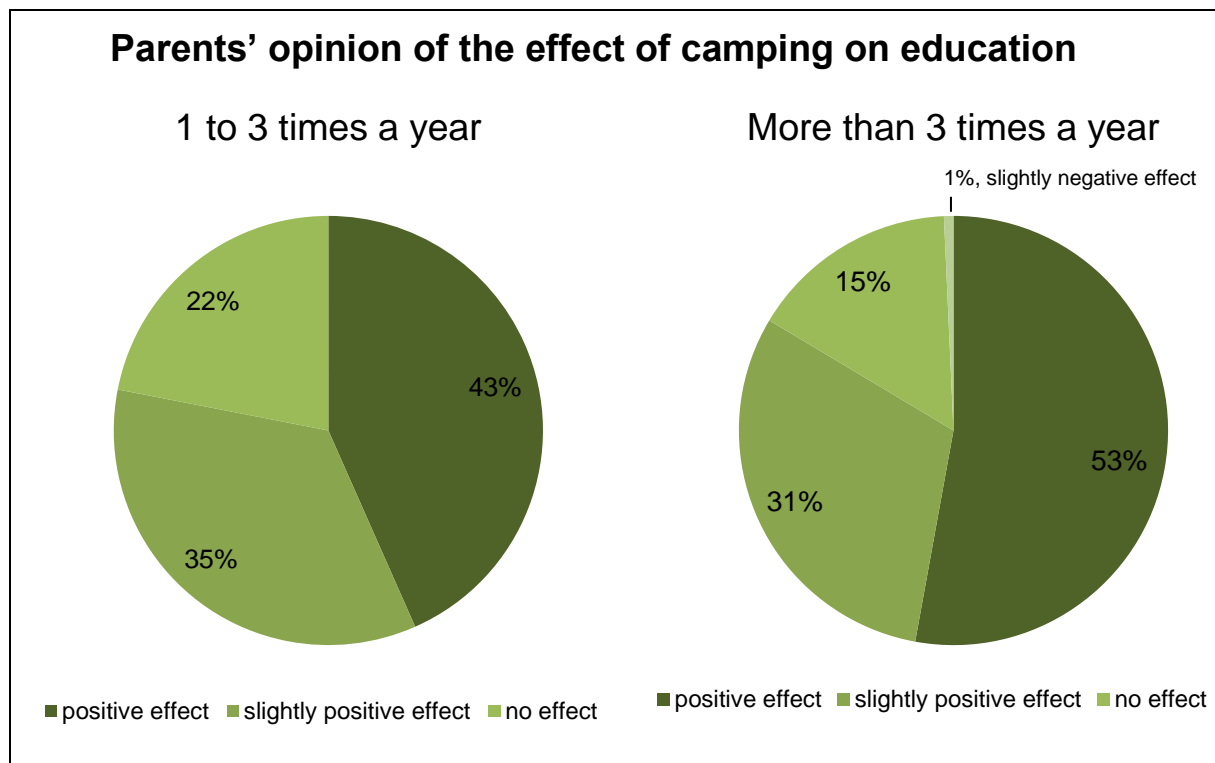
*“Gives them a broad range of experience that can only be positive”*

*“Allows them to learn a lot of basic common sense information about the world that gives them a head start when learning at school, e.g. nature and geology”*

*“It encourages them to think for themselves”*

*“Camping engenders a ‘can-do’ attitude in my children which they take into the classroom with them. We live in a socially deprived area and many of the pupils at my kids’ school struggle academically. I firmly believe that camping has helped my kids to achieve higher levels of success at school”*

Those who camped more frequently (more than three times a year) rated the benefits for their children’s education through camping more highly than less frequent campers.



Note: 1% of respondents camping more than 3 times a year felt that there was a slightly negative effect.

Parents suggested ways that camping helped their child to learn and the **top four themes** in these comments were:

- **Adds learning opportunities**

*"They have seen a lot of Great Britain and interesting places and historical sites"*

*"It give them experiences that schools can't in their restricted environment"*



- **Experiences to share with the class**

*"My daughter is frequently the centre of attention when returning to school. Telling her class and teachers about her adventures in France"*

*"Shared stories and experiences are hot topics after the summer holidays and school returns"*



Image courtesy of <http://www.wildlifetrusts.org>

- **Reinforcing or practising school learning**

*"We get to do homework in the motorhome as well as visit educational sites such as castles, zoos and geographic phenomena"*

*"We try to visit campsites near visitor attractions/historical areas that will enhance their education (e.g. camping near Stonehenge whilst studying the stone age at school) to give them practical experience of the area"*



- **Transfer of learning to school**

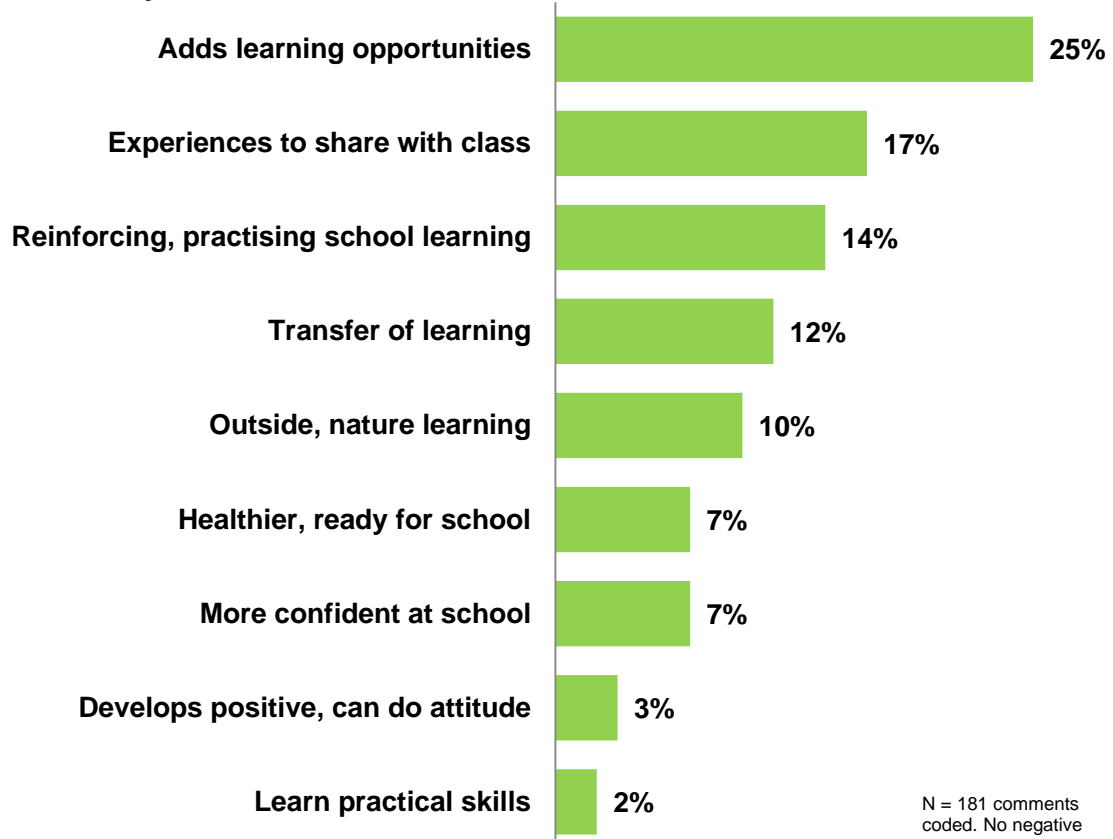
*"Our children have learned a lot about England. This is important and has helped with school projects"*

*"My child's camping experiences can contribute to their school in a very positive way, e.g. we stayed at and visited Glencoe and talked about Jacobites and what he learned, he would not have shared the same experience learning from the internet or book"*



Image courtesy of [queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk](http://queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk)

**Parents' own ideas about how camping affects school education in a positive way**



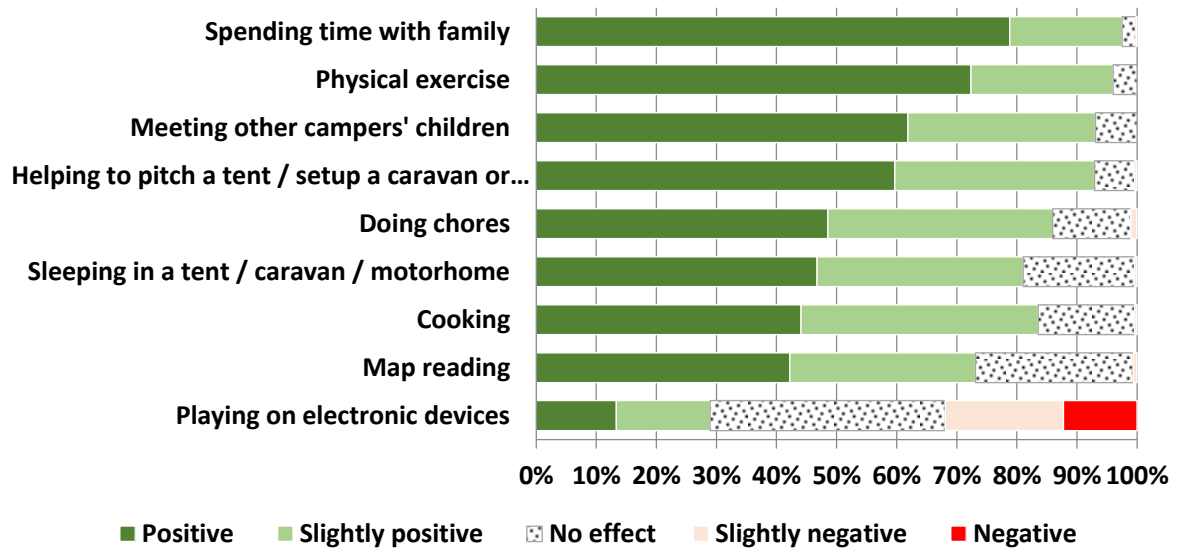
We also asked parents about how they thought different typical camping activities affected their child’s learning in general. The **top four** camping activities that were deemed beneficial to learning were:

- Spending time with the family
- Physical exercise
- Meeting other campers’ children
- Helping to set up tent/caravan/motorhome

A more ambivalent attitude was expressed about playing on electronic devices. 29% of respondents felt that it had a positive effect on their children’s learning, 39% felt that it had no effect and 32% felt it had a negative effect. This could be due to some respondents misunderstanding the question. Alternatively, it may reflect the simple fact that technology is everywhere and that for some families it is an accepted and acceptable part of camping and learning experiences. It seems that opinions on the use of electronic devices when camping may be split amongst respondents.

The next table shows the different responses to camping activities and their effect on children’s learning.

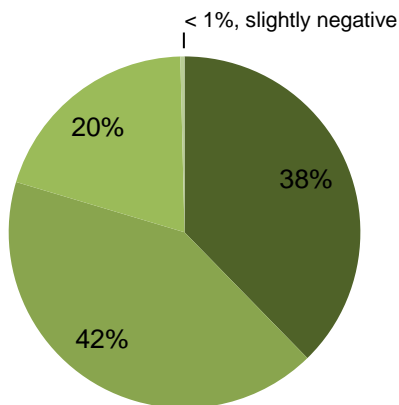
### Do you think these camping activities affect your child's learning in general?



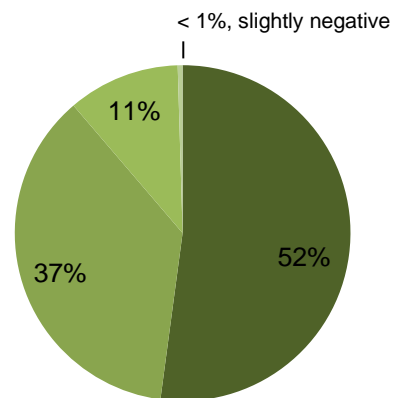
The responses for campers who usually stay in tents or caravan and motorhome, were fairly similar, with the only major difference being their views on how cooking affected their children's learning in general. 52% of tent users felt that cooking when camping had a positive effect on their children's learning compared to 38% of caravan or motorhome users. 20% of caravan or motorhome users felt that it had no effect compared to 11% of tent users. These differences are most likely to be explained by the different cooking methods that tent campers use compared to caravan or motorhome users. Caravan and motorhome users may have more similar facilities for cooking to what they use at home. No-one felt cooking when camping had a negative effect on children's learning.

### Parents' perceived effect of cooking when camping on children's learning

Caravan and motorhome



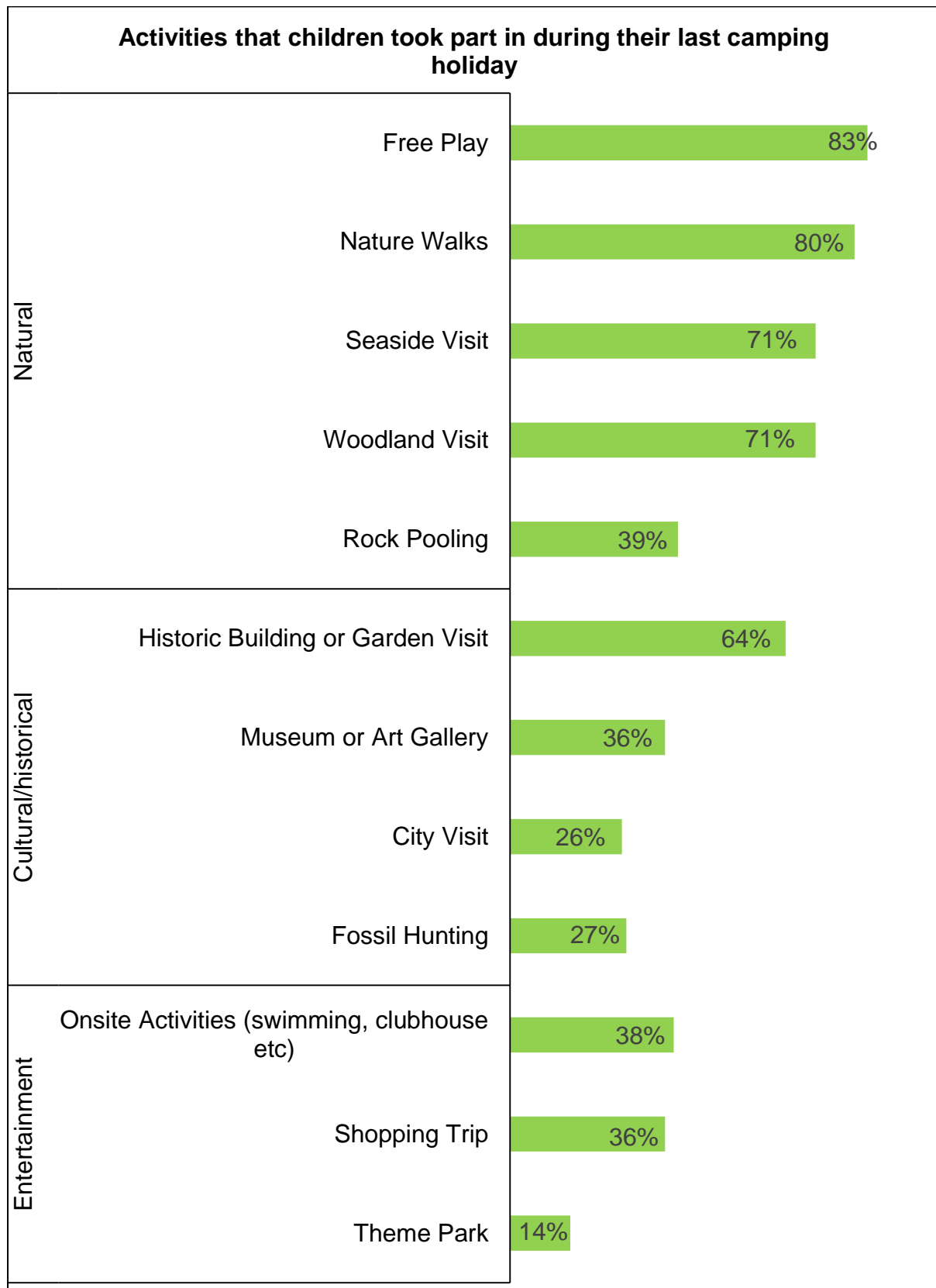
Tent



■ positive effect ■ slightly positive effect ■ no effect ■ positive effect ■ slightly positive effect ■ no effect



It is clear from the following table that natural activities are the most common form of activity when camping.



## Parents said:

*"Free play allows time for creativity to develop"*

*"Rock pooling/nature walks - understanding ecosystems, identifying lifeforms, respecting nature and the environment"*

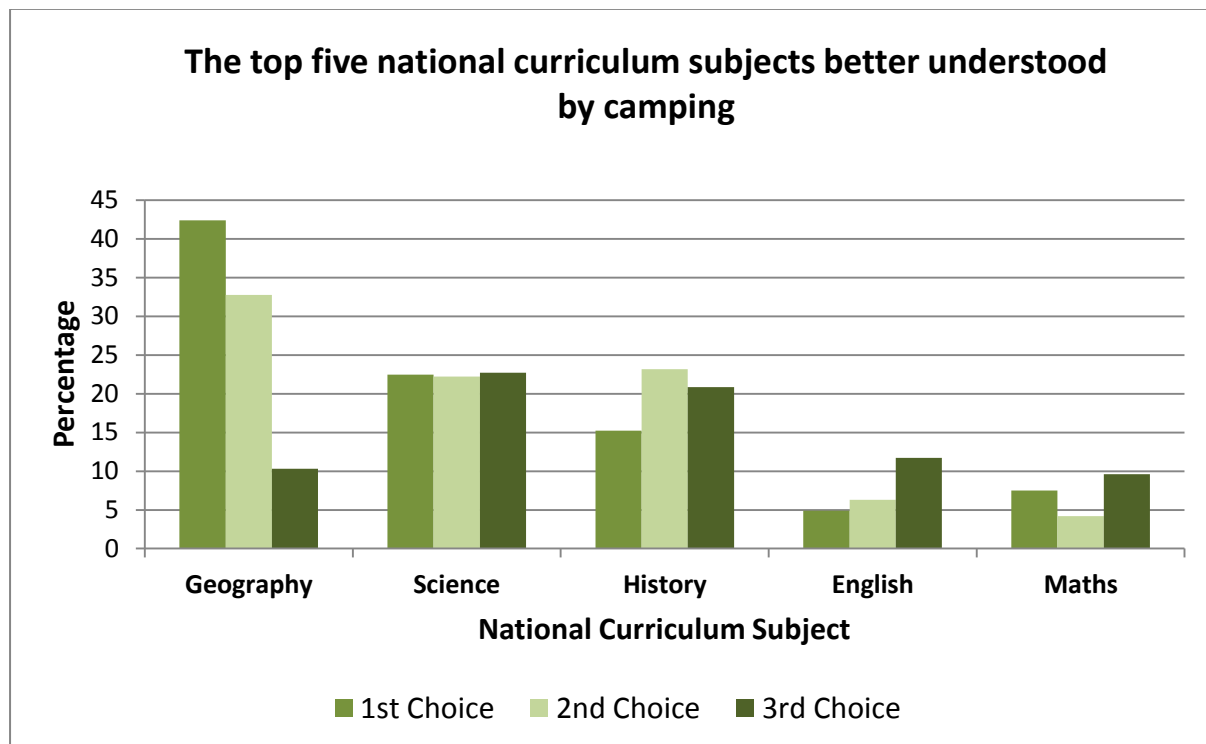
*"Free play because within reason they have only the limits they set themselves"*

*"Free play- creativity and responsibility"*

*"Just living differently teaches how to adapt and understand other ways of life"*

This dominance of free play, nature walks and seaside visits corresponds with the response of 98% of the camping parents saying appreciating nature was a positive effect from camping for their children. Interestingly, children camping in tents were more likely to have taken part in natural camping activities during their last trip.

Parents in our survey thought camping supported these curriculum subjects.



## What did the children think?

The top four areas of support through camping for their curriculum learning according to children, ranked in order of prevalence, were:

- History
- Geography
- General problem solving and positive attitudes towards learning
- Science and the environment.

These choices correspond with the types of activities that the majority of children took part in during their last camping holiday such as nature walks (80%), seaside visits (71%), woodland visits (71%) and historic building or garden visits (64%). However, the activity that most children participated in was free play (83%), which corresponds to the theme identified as how camping affects children in terms of *freedom, independence and confidence building*. Comments suggest that these are also associated with creativity and the development of the imagination.

Children who camp 1 to 3 times a year appear more likely to have taken part in the activities they were asked about in their last camping holiday than those who camp more frequently, although they may well have taken part in them over the course of the year. The majority (60%) of respondents who camped more than three times a year are weekend campers and therefore are less likely to have been able to take part in as many activities on each individual visit. Campers who usually go 1 to 3 times a year tended to go for a week or more (74%), giving them much more opportunity to undertake a range of activities.

Many of the children also commented on their experiences of visiting new places, such as historical buildings.

Children said:

*"How a beach is constructed on a river"*

*"I learned to read a map and we did that in geography"*

*"In DT, which sticks are strong for making things"*



Image courtesy of en.wikipedia.org



*"Insects and bugs"*

*"Going in the castles and houses, when they have a history they know what it looks like and not just looking at pictures"*

Image courtesy of www.visitcornwall.com

When children were asked what they remember most and think they have learnt from camping, the most common themes were making and meeting new friends, having fun, playing outside and learning various camping skills. Children said what they remembered most and learned from camping was:

*"Being outdoors instead of being sat at home"*

*"Having fun everyday"*

*"Enjoy seeing nature"*

*"Fun of meeting friends, climbing trees and things, and exercise"*



*"Happy being with family and that mum and dad trust us"*

*"Helping out but having fun"*

*"How to put down the tent and put one up having fun"*

*"Imaginative play in the woods- playing without toys"*

*"Making new friends all over the world"*

*"Meeting new friends, being out in the fresh air and getting dirty and muddy and it doesn't matter! Having fun without my Hudl and phone"*

In summary, in the simple words of one camping parent:

*"Learning is about providing new, exciting and fun experiences – camping provides this."*