

Outdoor Education (Backpacking/Hiking - Backcountry)

Single Day Or Multi-Day Trips, That Travel More Than 2 Hours From The Arrival Of Emergency Medical Assistance.

SECONDARY - CURRICULAR 2025

- Consult [Disability-Centred Safety](#) if your groups of students include students with disabilities.
- For multi-day trips, also consult [Outdoor Education \(Camping\)](#).
- Consult [Risk Management](#).
- The safety standards for this activity must be presented to the activity provider prior to the activity taking place. The activity provider must meet the minimum requirements listed in the safety standards. For more information on planning trips using outside providers, consult [Outside Activity Providers](#).
- Consult [Outdoor Education \(Swimming - on Watercraft and Land-based Trips\)](#) if swimming is to take place in a non-designated swim area while tripping.
- Also consult [Outdoor Education \(General Procedures\)](#).

Equipment

- Determine that all equipment is safe (for example, no sharp corners, cracks, or splinters) and all assistive devices (e.g. a walker) are in good working condition and properly adjusted for the height and mobility needs of the student prior to participation.

- A complete set of maps for the route. A copy of the map (photocopies are acceptable) and one compass per participant. A GPS to be used as a back-up only.
- One whistle per participant.
- A means of hydration must be available, accessible, and appropriate for the activity, location and duration of the trip (direct access to potable water, filters, purifier, chemical).
- For emergency purposes, trips must not rely solely on campfires. A camp stove must be available, accessible, and appropriate for the activity, location and duration of the trip.
- Sun and insect protection.
- Waterproof matches and/or matches in a waterproof container.
- Where appropriate, animal repellent (for example, bear spray, bear bangers, whistles).
- Backpacks appropriate for the torso size and weight of each student (for example, approximately 25% of body weight).
- Tarp(s) for shelter and ropes to secure.

Refer to the [First Aid](#) section for first aid equipment requirements.

Clothing/Footwear/Jewellery

- Determine that all necessary clothing and footwear are included prior to departing on the excursion.
- Comfortable and durable closed-toed shoes or boots appropriate to the route (for example, hiking boots) must be worn. Students and parents/guardians must be informed of the importance of wearing footwear that has been broken in prior to the trip (for example, not wearing new footwear).

- Clothing (in layers suitable for season) appropriate to the location, activities and environmental conditions must be worn.
- Rain gear and a dry change of clothing kept in a watertight bag/container must be accessible.
- When long hair poses a safety risk it must be secured. Devices (for example, hair pins, elastics and barrettes) used to tie back long hair must not present a safety concern.
- Students must not participate when the length of fingernails poses a safety risk to themselves or others.

Facilities

- Only designated trails to be used.
- Trip Guide must be familiar with the route (for example, length of route, terrain).
- Check with local authorities for current information regarding route safety.
- Appropriate environmental and sanitary practices (for example, washroom routines) must be taught.

Environmental Considerations

- When environmental conditions may pose a risk to student safety (for example, thunderstorms [lightning] or student(s) with asthma, triggered by air quality), Teachers must take into consideration their school board/school's protocols and procedures related to:
 - environmental conditions (consult [Weather](#)); and
 - insects (for example, mosquitoes and ticks [consult the school/school board's protocols and/or regional Public Health Department's website]).

- Students must receive instruction on safety procedures related to environmental conditions and be made aware of ways to protect themselves (for example, sun burn, heat stroke, poisonous plants).
- At all times the school board's weather and insect procedures are the minimum standards. In situations where a higher standard of care is presented (for example, outside activity providers, facility/program coordinators), the higher standard of care must be followed.

Special Rules/Instructions

- Be aware of students whose medical condition (for example, asthma, anaphylaxis, casts, previous concussion, orthopaedic device) may affect participation. Consult [Medical Conditions](#).
- Students must not participate in the activity until they receive information on concussion prevention specific to the activity, inherent risks of the activity (for example, outline possible risks and ways to minimize the risks), and procedures and rules for safe play. Students must receive instruction on the importance of reporting symptoms related to a suspected concussion.
- Refer to school board policies and procedures (i.e., transportation, excursion/field trip) for communication with parents/guardians, the location of an off-site activity, means of transportation, supervision ratios, and parent/guardian permission.
- Activities must be modified according to the age, ability level, language, and experience of students, number of participants, and the facility available.
- Previous training, fitness level, and the length of time and intensity of physical activity must be taken into consideration.
- Activities must be based on skills that are taught.
- Skills must be taught in proper progression.
- Parents/guardians must be informed that backpacks are to be appropriate for the torso size and weight of the student (for example, approximately 25% of body weight).

- A Principal/Designate in the school, each Teacher (and Trip Guide [where appropriate]) on the excursion, and a local emergency contact (for example, park official, area police station) must have: a map of the route and an excursion itinerary including an emergency action plan (for example, supervisory chain of command, emergency evacuation plan, emergency access points, local emergency contact phone numbers)
- Daylight hiking only, except in emergencies.
- A system for keeping track of students must be in place (for example, buddy system).
- Students must be informed that the use of equipment and the gymnasium are prohibited without supervision. In addition to verbal communication, the doors must be locked or signs must be posted indicating that students are not allowed to use the gym unless appropriately supervised.

Safety Rules and Emergency Procedures

- Prior to students crossing or wading through water:
 - Teacher/Trip Guide must assess the following conditions to mitigate potential risks to select the safest and most accessible route for a safe crossing:
 - Environmental (e.g., air, wind, water temperature)
 - Water (e.g., speed and direction of current, visibility)
 - Riverbed (e.g., available traction, slope, evenness, firmness)
 - Visible obstructions (e.g., sticks, roots, rocks)
 - Distance between shores
 - Ease of access to enter and exit water

- Teacher/ Trip Guide must have a rescue throw rope readily accessible to assist students to cross safely and/or in case of emergency.
- The depth of water at the established route for crossing must not be deeper than a student's knee.
- All crossings must occur after sunrise and one hour before sunset.
- Student must receive instruction on the safety rules and precautions before entering the water:
 - Cross only at the designated area
 - Strategies to maintain balance
 - Face direction of flow
 - Do not remove footwear
 - Stay with the group
 - Unbuckle sternum and hip pack straps and loosen shoulder straps for quick removal in the event of a fall

Supervision

- All activities must be supervised.
- The type of supervision must be commensurate with the inherent risk of the activity. The level of risk is related to the number of participants, the skill level of the participants, the type of equipment used, and environmental conditions.
- On-Site Supervision is required during the safety and initial skill instruction.

- On-Site Supervision is required by the Teacher when a Qualified Instructor(s) is providing safety and initial skill instruction, and monitoring.
- In-the-Area Supervision is required when students are hiking on trails while being monitored by a Qualified Instructor(s)/Volunteer(s).
- On-Site Supervision is required for the duration of all other components of the activity (e.g., rest or snack breaks).
- A Volunteer, under the direction of a Teacher, can monitor students during physical education activities. Refer to your school board's policy on Volunteers assisting with students' physical activities.
- Responsibilities must be clearly outlined for additional Teachers and Volunteers who are monitoring the activity.
- Where a Qualified Instructor is used and the Teacher is not directly with the Qualified Instructor, the Qualified Instructor must provide safety and initial skill instruction, and monitoring for the safe application of skills and student behaviour for the duration of the activity.
- The Teacher must assign a leader to the front and back of the group. A leader could be a responsible student.
- The front and back of the group must be within whistle contact of the Teacher(s)/Trip Guide(s) at all times.
- If the group is divided into two or more excursions, each excursion must have a Trip Guide with the required certifications.
- For all overnight excursions, two Teachers/Monitors are required as a basic minimum, one of whom must be a Teacher.
- Where males and females participate on an excursion, both male and female Teachers/Monitors are required.

Supervision/Monitoring Ratios

- 1 Teacher/Monitor per 8 students

First Aid

- A fully stocked first aid kit must be readily accessible. (Consult [Outdoor Education Sample Kit Contents](#))
- A working communication device (for example, satellite or cell phone, or satellite GPS messenger) suitable for the activities/locations must be available. This device must be maintained, waterproofed, protected and dedicated for emergency communications only. The phone number for the device, and phone numbers for emergency services and school contact people (for example, the principal) must be included with the phone.
- At least one Teacher, Trip Guide, or Monitor must have a minimum of one of the following current advanced wilderness first aid certifications:
 - WMA Wilderness Advanced First Aid
 - St. John Ambulance Wilderness First Aid Level 3
 - Canadian Red Cross Advanced Wilderness and Remote First Aid
 - Equivalent to any of the above.
- Follow the school's first aid emergency response ((consult [First Aid Plan and First Aid Emergency Response](#)) and the school board's concussion protocol (consult [Concussions](#))).
- An emergency action plan and response to deal with evacuations and lockdowns, including specific direction for participants with accessibility needs, must be followed and communicated to all students.☒

Information for Students

- Prior to backpacking, students must receive instruction on safety procedures related to:
 - route for the trip, and the route for the day (reviewed each morning)
 - emergency procedures
 - signal to assemble
 - the importance of treating their feet for hot/sore spots
 - risks of the activity along with strategies to minimize those risks
 - an adequate supply of nutritious food preserved and packed to suitable weight for carrying
 - an adequate supply of safe water for one day (the group must have a water purification method and must be made aware of water sources prior to embarking on trip)

Definitions

- **In-charge Person:**

- Some activities refer to an “In-Charge” person. While the teacher is in-charge and responsible for the overall safety and well-being of students under their care, sometimes there are other personnel who must be identified as “In-Charge” related to specific situations (for example, a pool lifeguard). In activities where an “In-Charge” person is designated, that person, in consultation with the teacher, must make final decisions regarding safety of the students

- **Monitor:**

- An individual who assists the Teacher with a group of students, (e.g., Volunteer, Qualified Instructor) and has a responsibility to monitor student behaviors for the duration of the activity.

- **Monitoring:**

- The role of monitoring is to observe, identify, act, and report:
 - Observe: Observe with attention to detail the actions of the students.
 - Identify: Identify the student and the unsafe behaviour.
 - Act: Take appropriate actions to safeguard students and others (e.g., stop the activity).
 - Report: Provide the name of the student and the unsafe behaviour to the teacher for management and direction.

- **Outside Activity Provider:**

- A commercial company, volunteer organization, or individual, not associated with the school board, who possess the required qualifications to provide safety and initial skill instruction, and monitoring for the duration of an activity.

- **Qualified Instructor:**

- An individual who provides safety and skill instruction, and monitoring for an activity, and possesses the required qualifications (e.g., experience, certifications). This role could be fulfilled by a teacher, volunteer, or an employee of an outside provider. An instructor does not have the authority to supervise.

- **Supervision:**

- The vigilant overseeing of an activity for management or direction. Activities, facilities, and equipment have inherent risks, but the more effectively they are supervised, the safer they become.
- The Ontario Physical Activity Safety Standards in Education includes three Types of supervision, Direct Supervision, On-Site Supervision, and In-the-Area Supervision. These types of supervision take into consideration the level of risk, which is related to the number of participants, the skill level of the participants, the type of equipment used, the environmental conditions, the age, and developmental stage.

- The three types of supervision described are not hierarchical but represent the type of supervision that activities require and the type of supervision that is inherently possible.
- Some activities in OPASSE transition from one type of supervision to another type of supervision (e.g., Direct Supervision to On-Site Supervision OR On-Site Supervision to In-the-Area Supervision).

- **Supervisor:**

- A supervisor is a teacher, parent/guardian/volunteer, or trip guide. This term is used only in relation to supervision ratios.

- **Trip Guide:**

- An individual who has the required certifications and/or knowledge/skills of the route and activity. This role could be fulfilled by a Teacher, a Volunteer, or an employee of an Outside Activity Provider and must be approved by the school/school board. Trip Guides have been instructed on their monitoring responsibilities.

- **Types of Supervision:**

- **Direct Supervision:**

- Direct Supervision requires that the Teacher is physically present at the activity, providing visual and verbal oversight for management and direction of both, the activity and student safety.

- **Provisos:**

- No other activity can occur when part of the activity or the entire activity is under Direct Supervision when there is only one Teacher supervising.
- The Supervision section of the relevant activity safety standards page in the Ontario Physical Activity Safety Standards in Education describes when parts of an activity are under Direct Supervision.

- Where a Qualified Instructor(s) is providing the safety and initial skill instruction and monitoring for one activity and requires the Teacher to be present at that activity for management and direction.
 - An activity may be under Direct Supervision:
 - During the entire duration of the activity;
 - During the set up and take down of equipment; .
 - During the safety and initial skill instruction;
 - During the performance/practice of the activity skill; and
 - When the activities transition from Direct Supervision to On-Site Supervision.
- **In-the-Area Supervision:**
 - The Teacher is located in proximity to a combination of locations where the student activities take place, is circulating, and is accessible for providing management and direction of the physical activity and student safety.
 - Provisos:
 - The Teacher is circulating between the activities occurring at separate locations, and is readily accessible, or the location of the Teacher is communicated to the student.
 - Where a Qualified Instructor(s) is providing the safety and skill and instruction and is monitoring at a combination of locations, the Teacher is located in proximity to where the student activities take place, is circulating between the activity locations, and is accessible for management and direction.
 - Students may be out of sight for periods of time.
 - An activity or a component of the activity is under In-the-Area Supervision:

- Where the same activity is located in separate locations (e.g., Fitness activities);
 - Where two or more activities under In-the-Area Supervision occur in separate locations (e.g., Badminton, Table Tennis, Handball (Wall));
 - Where the skill application of the activity takes place at a separate location from the teacher (e.g., Cross Country Running, Skiing (Alpine), Cycling, hiking on trails);
 - When the activities occur in double or triple gymnasiums; and
 - Where more than one Qualified Instructor is providing activities at a combination of locations.
- **On-Site Supervision:**
 - The Teacher is present at one location where the student activity takes place (e.g., gymnasium, sports field, climbing wall at an Outside Activity Provider’s facility, campsite) and is accessible for providing management and direction of the physical activity and student safety.
 - Provisos:
 - Where more than one activity occurs in one location, the Teacher is circulating between the activities and is accessible for management and direction.
 - Momentary presence in adjoining rooms (e.g., equipment room, outdoor storage shed, boathouse, staff tent) is considered to be On-Site Supervision.
 - Where a Qualified Instructor(s) is providing the safety and initial skill instruction and monitoring for an activity or a combination of activities at one location and the Teacher is present and is circulating and accessible for management and direction.
 - An activity may be under On-Site Supervision:

- During the entire duration of the activity;
- During the safety and initial skill instruction;
- With activities using multiple stations while the Teacher is circulating;
- When combining two or more activities at one location while the Teacher is circulating; and
- When activities transition from On-Site Supervision to In-the-Area Supervision.

- **Volunteer:**

- A responsible adult (e.g., Educational Assistants, Retired Teachers, Co-op Students, Parents/Guardians, Teacher Candidates) approved by the Principal/Designate who is under the direction of a Teacher and has been instructed on their monitoring responsibilities. Refer to your school board's policy on volunteers assisting with student's physical activities.

Last Published

Fri, 03/27/26 11:33 am