



TRACKS

SAFETY & QUALITY MANUAL



SUMMER CAMP 2019

TRACKS

Safety & Quality Manual

Summer Camp 2019

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Part 1: Introduction

Please Note: Contents and policies of this manual are subject to change.
All staff are responsible for staying up to date with policies.

WELCOME

Welcome to our community. We are here to embark on a great adventure. It will never be perfect. It will always be challenging. It will often be incredible. We journey deeper, explore thoughtful dreams and help create a world that needs to exist. We are champions of the land and our **Village**. We are a community who celebrates hearth, family, and the human story.



Common Purpose

Noun – [kāmən pərpəs]

Our common purpose is what defines our organization. The common purpose of outdoor education is simple:

Greater connection to community, nature, our heritage, and future.

Our Story

We help children feel like that group of kids wandering through rural backyards over 50 years ago: independent, tired, muddy, and happy from their time in the wild. After years of working in outdoor education we are aware of the real hazards found in the outdoors. We work to move away from the limits of conventional environmental education; to teach kids how to be safe living with the wild, not phobic of nature. We offer thoughtfully guided, yet real experiences. We believe it is okay to be thirsty at times, cold at times, wet at times. These experiences build empathy and care for the gifts of life. They allow for adventure and true accomplishment. We also believe it is critical for children to feel supported and cared for as they explore their passions and responsibilities. Through a healthy immersion in nature, children test the great potential of their often-untapped physical and emotional resiliency.

Common Sense Versus Policies

The policies in this manual are meant to contribute to the greater health of the participants we serve, our employees, and the organization. You must be always vigilant, always thoughtful, and always alert. Your own critical judgment is your most important safety tool. By paying attention you can foresee and anticipate risk. You can help limit that risk before it leads to challenges or trauma.

You can help us always improve and do better. When you see opportunities to improve safety, share them immediately with other staff, especially Coordinators and Directors. Together we are always striving to improve.

SAFETY FIRST

Safety is the most fundamental part of caregiving. Our capacity to care for children is a measure of our maturity. Violation of any safety policy is grounds for dismissal. As educators we follow this critical safety tenet:



REMEMBER

Nothing escapes our attention. Nothing is left to chance.

Safety is not just a set of rules: it is a conversation. We encounter many opportunities for risk in our daily adventures. You have to be nimble, always seeking to eliminate risk and increase the opportunity for the success of your students and your team.

Our safety procedures are framed around Check-ins and assessments. It is the responsibility of your Coordinator to audit you and your team, but you, too, must be your own critic. Be the person who asks: "Am I thoughtful? Am I keeping my students safe?"

How We Reduce Risks

DO NOT start camp until all these requirements are met:

- ▶▶ **Hire the most qualified, safety-conscious staff:** Our staff protects the Village. Anyone who does not practice safe behavior is subject to review or dismissal.
- ▶▶ **Require all staff members attend safety trainings and meetings:** Continue your education and learn best practices. Stay fresh and up to date.
- ▶▶ **Scout sites:** Develop evacuation directions with contacts for emergency services. Assess all site-based hazards and discuss how to mitigate them with staff and students.
- ▶▶ **Create Site Safety Reports:** This is a documented assessment of a site for directions, evacuation, and hazards.
- ▶▶ **Identify high-risk activities and participants:** Mitigate risk by following safety procedures. Work with staff to develop procedures for new activities not addressed in this manual. Do not implement an activity without clear safety procedures in place.
- ▶▶ **Have daily Safety Check-ins:** Before each program day begins, staff members meet for a Safety Meeting. Repeat this meeting with your students.
- ▶▶ **Never be alone with a student:** This protects you and the student. Always have a Truddy present. A Truddy is a group of three (including you).



THE TRUDDY SYSTEM

A Truddy is three people. Campers must always be in a Truddy when they are in open areas or away from the main group. When a staff member takes a student to the restroom, they should bring a Truddy with them.

Got Whiskers?

Whiskers is one of the single most important skill you can cultivate.



Whiskers

Noun - wis-kers

1. Your peripheral vision and the edges of all senses.
2. Perceiving more than the obvious. Living by the awareness that small and minor details can be life-changing.

Our modern world teaches us from an early age to focus on one thing: chalkboard, TV, computer, the “right” answer. In reality, there is another world moving, unpredictable, on the periphery.

If you limit your thoughts on safety to what’s right in front of your eyes (or in this policy manual), you miss critical information. If you are always using your Whiskers, considering more than the obvious, you will be much better at keeping everyone safe. Be aware of everyone in your group at all times.



Activity

Place your hands together out in front of your eyes. Focus straight ahead. While wiggling your fingers, spread your arms apart until you can just barely see movement on both sides. This is your wide-angle vision— your Whiskers.

Your Choices Have Impact

Remember whom we serve. This is vital to caring for and protecting the Village. When making decisions while teaching, keep in mind the following groups. This will lead to healthier choices:

Students: Your students, especially children, are our priority.

Team: An injury to a staff member is just as concerning and damaging as an injury to a student. Care for yourself and your fellow staff as you would your students.

Organization: Your organization offers livelihood to dozens of families. The smallest mistake can have serious repercussions to all members of the Village.

Patience—We Are All Human

We often forget that we are normal humans with normal pressures, fears, and challenges. If someone is having a bad day, ask if you can lend a hand. If you are having a bad day, ask for help. Don't blame others. It is critical to not be controlled by our moods. The lives and livelihood of many people are in your hands. Empathy and compassion are two of our most powerful tools.

Truly Helpful Creativity

Be creative and voice original ideas in appropriate ways. There are two kinds of creative choices:

Indulgent Creativity: Creativity done just for yourself or to show how awesome you are. When you don't consider the needs of the Village, your creativity may not be effective and can even be damaging.

Helpful Creativity: Creativity chosen with forethought that leads to benefits for the entire Village. The more creatively relevant, the greater and more positive the ripple effect in the community.

Decision-Making Priorities

When making any safety decision, take the following into account in this order:

- ▶▶ **1. Physical well-being of participants.** This takes precedence and should be the foundation of all safety policies and procedures.
- ▶▶ **2. Emotional well-being of participants.** Consider participants and their different responses to activities. Ask questions, observe body language to decipher their emotional, and calibrate your response accordingly.
- ▶▶ **3. Well-being of the Village.** Everyone in your team is important. Every choice you make can greatly impact the healthiness of your team. Patience, effective communication, and forgiveness are key.

CODES & RULES

If you ensure the following happens at all times, you are protecting the Village.

The Big 3 Rules

- 1 No one dies.**
- 2 No wounds that don't heal in four days.**
- 3 Follow the Code of Common Sense.**

The Code of Common Sense

Our ancestors could light fire, create tools, and build shelter from the land. Those abilities live on within you. Rediscovering them takes time, practice, and patience with yourself—along with the Code of Common Sense:

#1: Pay Attention

Push the edges of your awareness: eyes, ears, and all your senses. Keep an open mind and heart. Don't restrict yourself with a narrow view of things. The challenges and opportunities Nature provides often go unseen. Pay Attention to the spaces and places most people ignore.



REMEMBER

When you CHOOSE to be unaware, you CHOOSE not to care.

#2: Be Truly Helpful

Understand the difference between what you believe is helpful and what is Truly Helpful. Complaining about being cold and hungry is not helpful. Building a campfire or catching fish is helpful. When you put the needs of your community first you become Truly Helpful.

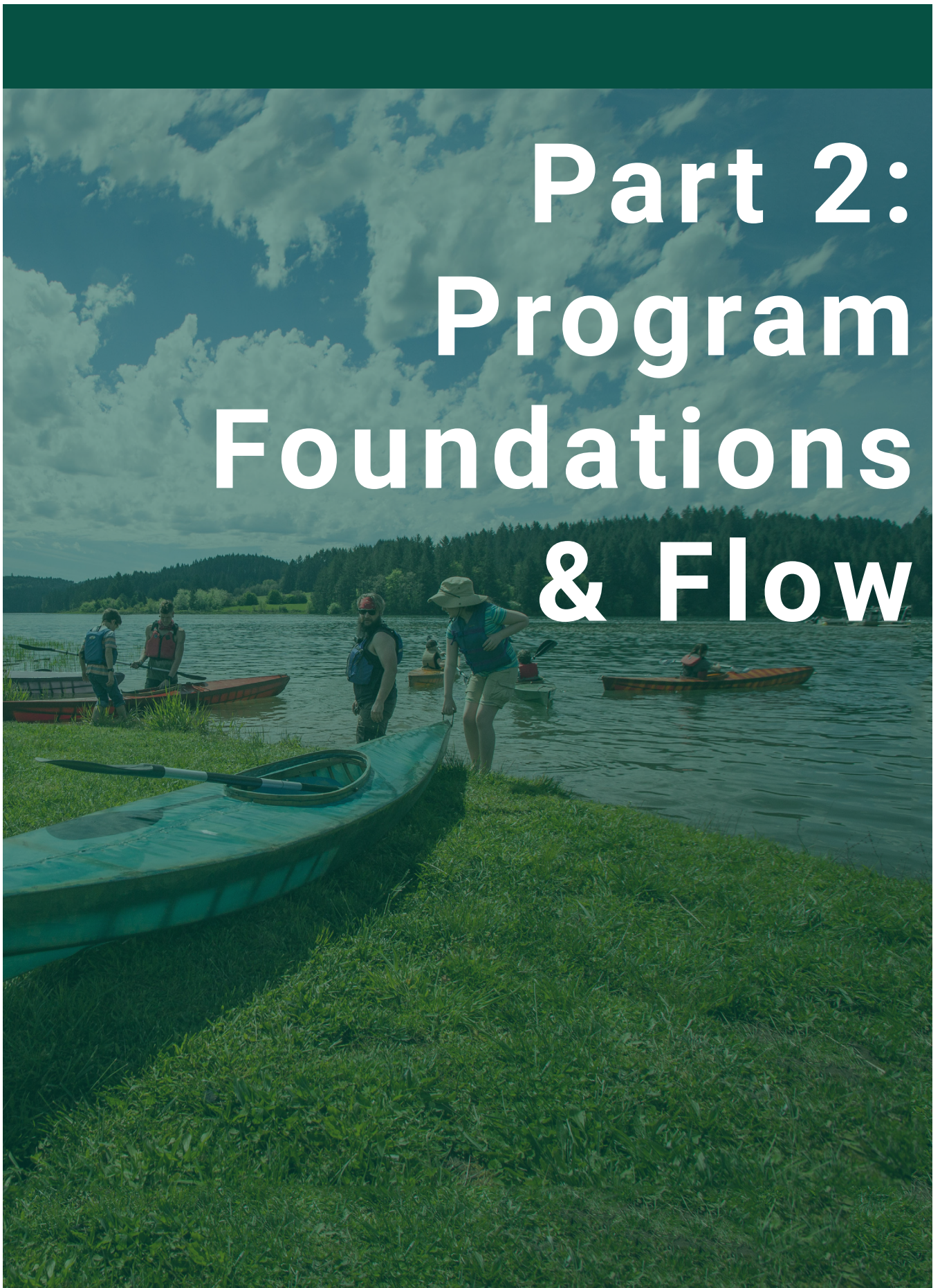
#3: Respect

Many think surviving in nature means struggling against it. Yet, like a Mariner sailing the currents of the sea, we can Flow with nature. Take the time to experience the true way of things: creeks, plants, animals, birds, trees, wind, clouds, stars, sun, and moon. By giving your time, appreciation and Respect, you become part of their Flow.

#4: We're Doing It Wrong, Do It Better!

Perfect is boring. There's no perfect way to shoot a bow or weave a basket. There is only progress. Be excited that you're always doing it wrong and there are countless ways to improve. Like the plants, animals, and even mountains, you never stop growing. You can always *Do It Better!*

Part 2: Program Foundations & Flow



Each program has specific protocol and requirements to ensure safety and quality that must be met before the program begins.

Protocol & Requirements For Every Site

Command Center

A Command Center is required for all programs. It could be the office. It could be a vehicle. On expeditions it could be a backpack carried and tended to by the on-site Coordinators. The Command Center includes:

- A fully-stocked first-aid kit and, if in a vehicle, a vehicle safety kit (see page 127 for list).
- A secure place (ideally lockable) to store roster information and/or medications.
- Key operational gear (i.e. charging walkie-talkies, printers, etc.).
- Communication tools.



A COORDINATOR IS:

A Coordinator is someone who organizes a program, which could include supervising other educators or teaching the program themselves.

Communication Tools & Strategies

Staff must be able to stay in touch with one another. Equipment and strategies include:

- Charged walkie-talkies: required. See Radio Protocol on page 71.
- Cell phones: all staff should have the numbers of all Coordinators and administrative staff, as well as emergency services.
- Satellite phone: carry when service is not available and you are more than 15 minutes from a landline or reliable cell signal.
- Agree-upon “calls:” any loud cry that carries through the woods.
- Safety whistles: a very loud whistle that indicates distress when blown three times.

Rosters

Rosters include copies of student waivers and medical information.

Procedure:

- Copies of all rosters are kept at the Command Center or with a Coordinator.
- Copies are kept with staff person currently leading students on field activities.
- All waivers are shredded at the end of program, as they contain private information.

Site Safety Sheet

Every staff member must have a copy of the Site Safety Sheet. It includes:

- Contacts and driving directions to all Emergency Medical Services.
- A copy of EMS protocol: know when to self-evacuate and when to call for EMS help (see page 124).
- Current assessment of site and activity hazards.
- Radio channel(s) used and cellphone contacts of everyone working on site.

Program Fundamentals

There are important tools to remember before, during, and after any programs:

BEFORE THE PROGRAM

Review student rosters: Focus on medical and behavioral concerns and go to your Coordinator if you have questions. Ask and answer how you are keeping each participant safe. Remember that the information on the rosters is confidential and may not be shared with anyone outside of staff or EMS.

Scout sites: Do this ahead of time to craft a site safety plan. This is typically the role of the Coordinator or other administrative staff. Use these notes in the Site Safety Sheet (see appendix) and at Safety Meetings (see page 20).

Review program schedules: Know what you are doing and when. Coordinators will provide copies of schedules before programs, including locations. If you have questions, ask them before the first morning of the program! When you do change plans, review changes verbally with your Coordinator and make notes on your paper schedules.

Gather and care for your equipment and materials: Last minute scrambling to prepare is unacceptable. Make sure you have all your gear, materials, and vehicles ready to go well before your program begins. No matter what your role is, don't assume someone else will get everything for you – be proactive! If it is shared equipment, check with a gear Coordinator before using it.

Do vehicle pre-trip check: A procedural check of all buses, vehicles, and trailers is required. See page 127 for instructions.



Part 3: Policies & Procedures

SUPERVISION OF STUDENTS

Outdoor organizations must have strict guidelines for student supervision that are designed to protect both students and staff. The most important rule is:



REMEMBER

Never, ever be alone with a student.
Ever.

We don't care how urgent it seems or how well-meaning you are. Always follow this rule and enforce it with fellow staff.

Constant Witness

A Constant Witness is someone who is keeping eyes and ears on participants at all times during the program. We can never know everything, but a Constant Witness seeks to eliminate all unknowns. This is the key to proper, safe supervision. It helps verify the facts of student-to-student, staff-to-staff, or staff-to-student interactions. It also helps in tracking group dynamics.

Level of Supervision

Adapt to the Circumstances

The level of direct supervision (where the student is in eyesight) needed varies based on many factors. The Coordinator establishes the parameters of supervision after assessing participants, activity, and area. Different individuals also have different levels of experience. Take into account the following features when assessing level of supervision:

- ▶ **Age of students.** What is an accepted level of supervision at their age? For example, a 6-year-old needs almost constant supervision, while adults are more capable of caring for themselves (usually).
- ▶ **Activity.** Different activities require different levels of direct supervision. For example when a student is carving for the first time the teacher should watch carefully and remind them of safety practices for that activity. If a student is drawing or journaling, there is less risk and less need for direction and supervision.
- ▶ **Experience-level of students.** Students come from different backgrounds, leading to varied levels of capability and experience. In shorter-term programs it's best to organize the team to create one standard for all, starting at the level of your most basic student.
- ▶ **Public or private areas.** Private areas can be more predictable regarding public interactions. Public areas may be less predictable and pose a higher risk of unplanned interactions with the public. But never take

anything for granted. For example, even on a private wilderness property you may have hunters wander into its boundaries. A private wilderness site may connect to larger tracts of land where a student could disappear or wander onto a road with high traffic.

In the presence of even minor doubt, begin with the most intensive level of direct supervision. This is where students never do anything or go anywhere without at least one staff person and a second witness.

Baseline Supervision During Camp

In a typical youth day camp setting, we always provide a Constant Witness, the highest level of direct supervision. This only changes with the approval of your Coordinator.

- Staff must always be aware of the exact location and activity of all participants.
- When traveling, participants may not leave the group. This will vary with age (see Adapt to Circumstances). If supervising adults, give them clear return time.
- Teachers never cede supervision to staff in training (interns, youth leaders-in-training, etc.) for primary activities or for longer than 3 minutes.
- Students should take bathroom breaks with a Truddy and a staff member.

Head Counts

Head Counts should be performed often with all groups, especially youth (and even adults). Here are some tips for effective head counts:

- Take care to not miscount a staff member as a student. This could result in falsely assuming you have all your campers.
- To avoid this possibility, include staff in your total tally.
- Give each student a number. When needed, ask them to “count off,” with each student calling out their number in order. This can even be a game to see how clearly and quickly they can count off. Make sure you know you know where all your participants are: Be creatively relevant—once they master the count down you can vary things (e.g. count off backwards, time the count down and try to improve the time each count down).
- Remind students that they are part of a team and everyone is responsible for head counts.

Times to perform Head Counts include:

- In your gathering space or camp.
- Before a vehicle leaves any site.
- After bathroom breaks.
- During transitions.
- Anytime you’re not 110% certain of the number of people with you.
- Anytime you pass through a crowds and public areas (see Urban Sites).
- If a student is missing in a Head Count follow the Missing Student Protocol (see page 44).

A photograph showing a person's hands lighting a fire made of sticks and twigs. The person is wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt. The background is a natural outdoor setting with dry twigs and earth. The text 'Part 4: On Teaching & Learning' is overlaid in white on the image.

Part 4: On Teaching & Learning

CARING FOR CHILDREN

Children represent an extra degree of care and thoughtfulness in our interactions and tone. While our goal is to foster maturity, children are still learning what that means. We want our programs to expand the edge of our participants' capabilities while not pushing our them over that edge. These teaching techniques concern our role as caretakers. They are common sense and can also apply to adults and all the members of our Village.

Tone

Keep It Age Appropriate:

Keep your tone age appropriate. The humor or themes that are fun for a teen could be disastrous for a younger child. While teens dig zombie camp, many 5-year-olds would never sleep again after hearing tales of the undead. This includes the stories we tell and the skills (e.g. Zombie blood trailing) we train in our camps. Adapt schedules and activities to fit the age you are working with.

Keep it Positive:

Many of us had enough negativity in our childhood—tests at school, difficult family life—and as we grow older, life never turns out exactly how we expected. Camp should be a compelling adventure that's reinforced with positive communication. When teaching, consider these points to create a more positive experience:

- ▶ Give clear and concise directions, and be consistent.
- ▶ Make sure the surrounding areas are safe.
- ▶ Participate and show your own interest in activities.
- ▶ Provide choices that encourage self-discipline and self-direction.
- ▶ Focus on the desired behavior, not the undesired behavior.
- ▶ Set high expectations and ask participants to do their best.
- ▶ Immediately, proactively and respectfully maintain expectations.

Problem-Solving with Students

Whenever possible, talk in private about sensitive matters (have another witness, never be alone with a student). Don't embarrass students in front of their peers. If you are having a challenge with two or more students, first discuss the issue with each student separately, then bring those students together to discuss solutions.

Listen to and understand their problem (that doesn't mean you must agree with it). Ask them to use critical thinking skills to determine a solution. Try to guide the student to the right answer—don't just give it away. If you need to discuss a student issue with the group, do your best to keep it anonymous. Generalize and have students discuss appropriate behavior overall.

Keep Your Cool

Students feed off of your energy (positive and negative). Keep your cool. Students will test the boundaries and limits. Learning what they are capable of is a natural part of childhood.



REMEMBER

Don't surrender to begging or repetitive questions. Giving in leads to more begging. Make choices because they are functional, not just because you are pressured into it.

Raise the Bar

Turn the Code of Common Sense into an ongoing conversation. Explore your goals and how to cultivate a higher purpose in your program, your organization and your Village. Explore deeper reasons for learning the skills we teach.

