

Managing Groups Outdoors

General Tips:

- Consider the impact of your activity on the environment and how many people you can take, and whether additional planning is required to minimise environmental impact. This could include seasonal factors, like ground nesting birds, and trampling issues if a lot of feet, or if 'gathering' as part of your activity.
- You may need to set some informal ground rules, like 'dogs on leads' or in this area no gathering or single file through a particularly sensitive spot. The main thing is to consider it before hand, and explain your actions.
- If volume of people is likely to be an issue you may need people to book in advance and set a limit.
- Make sure you have **risk assessments** to cover your planned activities and a first aid kit and mobile phone. More advice on Risk Assessment can be found at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/assessment.htm>

Before the session:

WHO are your participants?

- Know your group – what are they interested in? What methods of communication will you use?
- Know why you are there – what key points do you want to get across to them?
- You will know what the participants want to learn as they have signed up for a particular session, but if you can find out a bit more about them it will help you to pitch the session at the right level.
- If there is a booking system, you can use this to ask simple questions, but if you only meet your group on the day you will have to ask a few questions then and do some fine tuning if necessary.
- It might be helpful to know why they are attending – what do they want to get out of it, and what level of knowledge they have already.
- Plan to cater for any special needs the participants might have.

WHAT are you going to deliver?

Think through the session to ensure that the aims and objectives are clear, and that you will have all the resources that you will need.

- Aim of session – what do you want your participants to learn?
- Objectives – how are you going to achieve this.

WHEN and WHERE will the session take place?

- How long will you have?
- Where will the session take place?
- Might the environment pose any problems for you or your group?

- What will you do in case of bad weather?
- How will you deal with any physical disabilities in your group?

WHY are you delivering this session?

- Can you achieve your aim?
- What resources and activities will you need to prepare in advance?

HOW will you deliver your session?

- What methods and activities will you use?
- Remember to use a variety of methods as people learn in different ways.

Do you need a crib sheet with key points to take out with you?

Practicalities – group management

- Gather group together – do a quick head count then try and remember what number you got to!
- Cast your eye over the group for suitable clothing for where you are going/ the activity. Have a quiet word (or a general word) if necessary.
- Wait until all the group are together before you start talking about the event/activity/site. It is truly amazing how many people forget to do this.
- Stand upwind of group to speak, so the wind takes the sound to them, and try not to have the sun in your eyes, or theirs. If at night, shine a torch on yourself.
- Introduce yourself and the activity – give them the basic outline: what where when why and how. Invite them to ask questions, but keep an eye on the time!
- Agree ground rules eg if people decide to turn back (or go back to find their lost...whatever it is) they should let you know.
- Tell them basic health and safety info, if they need to know it – eg concealed hazards. Gauge the group – you probably don't need to tell them to look where they are going or really basic info – but if you have just given them a leaflet and then start walking you may well get people tripping up while reading it! Give them a chance to look at it before you move off. Use your common sense to decide what to say and do.
- If your group are all strangers to you/ people on their own – it might be worth mentioning that if anyone has any health issues they think you should know about, (eg that might affect what tasks they do or how far they can walk) then ask them to tell you at some point.

- If you are doing physical work, it might be worth putting something on the advert about the level of physical activity required and any protective clothing needed (or provided).
- Also make it clear that if they want to stop the physical work at any time, they can.
- Go at the pace of the slowest member of the group, possibly dividing the group into smaller groups, each with a leader and a purpose if necessary.
- Get to know the group and what they are interested in/ want to learn.

Be alert to:

- people getting bored
- people getting frustrated if they don't understand, can't hear, can't do something
- people getting too hot or too cold
- individuals dominating the group or dominating you. This may be fine, as long as the others aren't fidgeting! Again, use your common sense but don't be frightened of asking someone to talk and walk (or talk and work) if they are holding the group up because of their extreme interest...
- Generally you need to know a bit more than your group- but don't be afraid to say you don't know something, but do remember to find out/ look it up if you can, and let them know – or delegate someone else to do it!

Communication skills:

Not everyone thinks, understands and learns the same way.

- Do your best to try and explain things in different ways, and try and enable people to use more than 1 sense – ie listening and doing, listening and touching, listening and feeding back.
- Check that people have understood by encouraging questions. If you are showing people a skill, get them to show you they can do it.
- Try and listen to questions carefully, as often when you are leading a group your head is full of the next thing you want to tell them, so you do not always listen effectively! This is when a crib sheet can be very handy, so that it doesn't matter if you lose your train of thought.

Timekeeping

Is this important? Usually it is!

(light levels/ mealtimes / transport issues/ convenience of your group members etc)

Make sure you work out rough timings when you plan the event/activity.

Photography – take a camera, but get permissions before using it for people shots!

Evaluation- this can be as simple as asking for verbal feedback – did people enjoy the session, did they learn what they wanted to, any suggestions for future improvements? The group may be too big for this to be practical, or you may want some permanent record. A brief questionnaire should cover the above points and anything else you would like to know, but evaluation should aim to gather information which will allow you to put right any problems and to improve your sessions in the future.

Insurance - get advice

Permission/ access – make sure you know whose land you are on, and have permission if applicable (or let them know out of courtesy).

Working with children – this is a whole different area.

Key points are:

- Under 16s should be with a responsible adult that they know. Preferably someone other than you if you are leading the group overall. If you are the 'responsible adult' for friends or relatives' children, make sure the parents know exactly what you are planning to do and send them with appropriate clothing, snacks etc. Make sure you check about medication eg inhalers etc.
- If working with schools, make sure the teacher understands that they are in charge of the group and you are just providing the information, unless you have experience of working with school groups.
- If working with schools, get the teacher to look over the risk assessment beforehand and add anything in that you might have missed, as they will know their group.
- If working with schools, there are adult:child ratios which the local authority will insist that the school adhere to. The ratio varies depending on the age of the children and the activity they are doing. Find out what ratio the school are planning to bring and check with them that that is the ratio they are insured for

Further advice:

- If you have any concerns or questions about working with school groups you are welcome to ask the Environmental Education Project team, just give us as much notice as you can as we are not in every day.
- Or you can ring your local education authority (usually Derbyshire County Council) and ask to speak to someone in the school trips advisory team. However if your question is about a specific school and their trip then ask the school first as there is a protocol for trips outside the school grounds and you do not want to be speaking to the LEA before the teacher has registered the visit! Private schools and nurseries will not come under the LEA but they will have specific guidance from their insurers.