

Safe supervision procedures for walking expeditions

Introduction

This document contains the Safe Operating Procedures relating to all aspects of supervision our DoFE expeditions and other hill-walking ventures. It details the various methods Adventurous Horizons plans and provides supervision of teams. The information relates to planning for safety, staff ratios, team supervision guidelines for different levels of award and team experience.

The safety of participants is of the highest priority in the leadership of expeditions of this nature, and all reasonable precautions are taken to prevent participants coming to harm. At the same time, it is recognised that one of the key benefits of expeditions of this nature is the opportunity they provide for young people to become self-reliant and to assume a measure of responsibility for their own safety, commensurate with their age, maturity, training and ability. Teams making navigational errors or encountering problems and then learning from them, is to be allowed but staff will be 'nearby' to provide support, extra-training and emergency assistance.

Staff qualifications

The minimum qualifications required for this activity depends upon type of terrain to be encountered. Staff will work within the remit of their awards:

Bronze expedition areas (Lowland Walking) takes place on non-hazardous terrain which is typically farmland, forests, country parks, some low hill-side, with lots of road network access. Leader need to hold the MLTB Lowland Leader Award as a minimum.

Silver expedition areas (Upland / moorland walking) is defined as above 300m but non-mountainous (less than 500m), long sections of walking on hill tops. Easily exited terrain (30 minutes' walk down to a road) Leader require either Hill & Moorland Leader as a minimum.

Gold expedition areas (Hill walking) involves remote, exposed, mountainous terrain. Staff will require the MLTB Mountain Leader Summer Award.

Staff Ratios

We have one trainer per team on Training Expeditions – with a floating Event Manager.

We have a maximum of two teams to one assessor, on Qualifier expeditions. With a floating Event manager. And teams are often on same or similar routes. Staff are never expected to assess two teams that are on very different routes.

School staff are not to be counted as part of these ratios as they may not have the adequate qualifications, first aid or navigational ability.

There will always be at least one support vehicle available on all expeditions. Schools may or may not also provide a minibus, to supplement this.

Staff will be advised to use their own vehicles but to walk and cycle if desirable at some sections of a route.

Supervision factors at the start of expeditions (and monitored during)

Clothing & Equipment

- Staff must carry out Critical kit check prior to the group being permitted to walk.
- All participants must wear appropriate clothing and boots (not shoes). Adequate spare clothing and waterproof outer garments must be carried.
- Each group must carry at least two maps, and compasses. Maps must cover the intended route, and sufficient terrain either side of the intended route to include all planned escape routes.
- Emergency equipment must be carried including at least one first aid kit, GPS tracker, emergency phone (ours and theirs) and emergency shelter.
- Medical details must be checked and any participant without their asthma inhaler or EpiPen will not be allowed to start walking.
- These are in our risk assessments, Safe Operating Procedures and parent and participant information. So please do not take it on yourself to allow a participant or team to walk in contradiction to these guidelines.

Leader packs & Student information

At the start of each event, during the staff briefing, and before teams arrive staff are given:

a Leader folder (team member list with medical details / emergency procedure / accident report form / Training framework aid memoire / map of the area)

Team emergency pack (group shelter, emergency phone, foil blanket and laminated crib cards on what to do in an emergency) The team's GPS tracker will be in that drybag.

Teaching materials pouch for each team. It contains 3 maps and compasses, blank route cards (laminated) and markers for marking up routes)

Critical kit check – at initial meeting

The leader pack has a Kit list in it for staff to do a kit check before setting off. Too often this can be treated as a DofE tick box exercise when, in fact, it's a crucial part of our safety plan for an expedition. Hypothermia, asthma attacks and ankle sprains are amongst the most common reason that kids go home. Don't take kids walking without:

- Their Inhaler or EpiPen
- Properly waterproof jacket and over-trousers (taped seams)
- Boots with ankle support (not shoes)
- Beanies and gloves.
- Worth knowing if sleeping bag is going to be inadequate for that evening.
- Check kit is waterproofed (rubble bags will be provided)

In the past we have sent students home, or got their parents to come back with better kit for them, either in by lunch time or by campsite. We have a small amount of stuff to hand out. The decision to allow a team to start walking without an item is based on the forecast. This may all seem a bit unfair

but to one or two kids but it is for your protection and the protection of our company and event safety management. Every year we have bad weather events and these small things make the difference between a team continuing to walk or needing to go to ground and putting strain on the staff team. These kit points and the consequences are repeatedly hammered home in the Planning day, the Student handbook, Kit advice book, workbooks and letters parents get week before expedition. We are not 'being unfair' to a child – we are exercising our duty to the company, the child's welfare and a safer working environment for our staff.

Emergency Planning

- All teams must carry the telephone contact numbers needed to make contact with their team leader, and/or the Event manager. Write these on the card in their Emergency pack.
- The group must be competent to affect emergency procedures before being set off for check-pointing or remote supervision. Practice scenarios before deciding to 'set them off'.
- Participants' parental contact and medical information must be carried by the team leader in case the team leader needs to support a situation where the Event Manager cannot be contacted.
- Escape routes to locations from which the emergency services could be summoned by landline telephone must be pre-planned for all sections of the route. Discuss these with the teams.
- Immediately prior to walking under remote supervision the group must be reminded that they are now responsible for their own safety and that they cannot rely upon help from their group leader even if he or she is planning to meet them en route or be present in the area. A brief reminder of emergency procedures is advised at this point.
- Set up a system of using text SMS messages with the team. Insist they periodically text you with the time, their location and if they are 'on time', 'having a break', and time to be expected at next check point. This will drill into them who to contact and how, making it more likely that they will do this when they have problems. Brief teams that by doing this they must play their part in aiding the supervision of the whole event. This will make their Qualifier easier to supervise, and encourage them to walk to a plan.

Team emergency Phone & participant's phone policy

Teams are given an Emergency Phone from our company. They may also have their own phones. The Leader pack will include the mobile number of the team's emergency phone.

Staff will give the team their own mobile number. This will be written on the laminated cards in their emergency pack. In the first team brief, give the team the phone and ask them to add the staff number and make a phone call to transfer the number to the staff phone. This will also check the phone has credit.

This emergency phone must be left so staff can ring or text them. Please teach teams to do this so they let assessors know if they will be late or lost.

Students have been allowed to bring mobiles to enable them to ring their parents at the end of the expedition in case they need early pick up.

One student in each team is allowed to keep their phone for photos. Select on the basis of who's phone has the strongest network signal and battery life. Make a note of this number. If necessary, staff can charge this phone at night.

All the other phones are switched off and sealed in a plastic mail bag. This is kept in the bottom of their bags and the seal checked at the end of the expedition to ensure they adhered to this Expedition Condition.

These students normally do not let phones be a distraction but they have been told if a student cannot respect that, then the phone will be taken off them and given back at the end of the expedition. A single warning is usually enough. The school support this.

Electronic Supervision Aids: - WhatsApp, GPS trackers & checkpointing.

Please have WhatsApp on your phone.

On each expedition there will be a staff team, group chat on WhatsApp. Please make sure you have this app on your phone. This helps in a number of ways:

- GPS tracker –share the link to the tracker map on WhatsApp for you to see all teams.
- We add photos of teams to this, then keep each other briefed on team movements, welfare, FAQ, etc.
- We share info with everyone throughout the event and you too can let others know info
- there are some patches where we get 4G but not mobile network and so we could still make WhatsApp calls.
- This chat is downloaded afterwards as evidence of our dynamic supervision decisions – should anything ever go wrong. Small details that may not seem important throughout the day, can become important later, if there is an incident. So we add notes about when you saw a team and how they were. Or if a participant is experiencing difficulties.
- We also let people know where we are located so we can support each other or a team if necessary.

Supervising with trackers

Trackers are not used to allow staff to be more than 25 minutes away from a team. They are to allow you to know you are close enough to help if there is an asthma attack, but not so close that they can see you.

Without trackers staff often feel they need to walk right up to a team and interact – we use them to avoid that. You can be nearby and watch them make mistakes and give them time to sort it out. And then know where to be to catch them and turn them around without the day becoming too long.

A good thing to remember (to stop yourself becoming complacent) is, if a team's flag stops moving – you should always imagine that to be an asthma incident, not a break, and ask yourself:

“Can I run there in 15 minutes?” Our primary job on this event is safety cover.

A tracker will never tell you how well a team are feeling or enable you to discuss their mistakes and teamwork.

Supervising as a staff team

We supervise all teams as a staff team. Staff will have a maximum of 1 team to train or 2 teams to 'Assess' (write reports on) but we work together to look after the welfare of all participants, regardless of whose team they are in.

We encourage staff to support each other, share information and support each other's teams. Your teams will walk a similar route to some other teams, through checkpoints. You will work with other staff to meet your team and theirs at these checkpoints.

Staff on the same route will decide a checkpointing plan amongst themselves and then adapt it when teams need sweeping up or slowing down.

Please refer also to our Risk Assessments and Operating Procedures for:

- Emergency Procedure
- SOP for training & supervising 'Safe cooking'
- Risk assessment – Cooking & camping
- Risk Assessment – Walking events
- Leader folders – scenario training materials (asthma / hypothermia / what to do in an emergency)

Late Back Procedure

If a group is late back / late to checkpoint (20+ minutes) and their tracker dot has shown no progress, then the team's supervisor should attempt to make contact with the team on their emergency phone at regular intervals via call and SMS. (both phones). And should consider relocating to perform welfare check. Or ask other staff who are nearer to 'get eyes on them'.

The team supervisor will commence this procedure 30 minutes after the contact time for the group is exceeded. The team supervisor should contact the Event manager. And should be relocating if possible to intercept.

+20 minutes late to CP Try to establish mobile contact (SMS or call) – this continues until outcome. Also relocate or ask another member of staff who may be nearer
+45 minutes late to CP Route, emergency and possible deflection routes checked by staff Event manager again informed and he/she relocates.
+2 hours Police notified of need for further assistance Routes/Emergency Routes & venues re-checked by Supervisors. Event manager coordinates with emergency services.
+3 hours, and with emergency services approval – Group's Next of Kin & Group Organisers contacted (school) Event staff liaise with Emergency Services and assists as required

General notes:

Our company policy is to use agreed routes and checkpoints for staff and teams. Teams are also asked to agree rest stops and / or text staff if they are having unagreed breaks or realise they have gone wrong.

Staff do a 'lost/emergency scenario with teams' and make them send text as part of this process.

Teams all have a GPS tracker on them, so staff should be able to predict if teams will be late, even before a team realises. Staff should assess if they need to relocate to intercept teams to minimise lateness. These are training events and there is no extra benefit to a team if they are 30 minutes late to if they are 1 hour late. But this can have serious consequences on their welfare (dehydration) and the supervision of the wider event (cooking in the dark). We are also professional staff that need to control the length of day we have before working or driving again that night or following day.

If the team's tracker dot has not moved in 20 minutes, the team supervisor must not assume the team is having a break – 'what if they are having an asthma attack or? Are you in the best position to carry out your number one priority as staff on the event?

Supervision of clients (DofE)

The level of supervision provided by staff will vary on expeditions. For a successful Qualifying Expedition, DofE require the team to be 'Remotely supervised' as they journey independently through unfamiliar terrain, on a route that they have planned and trained for. And so to prepare them for that they are trained via intensive direct supervision but then we move progressively adopt more 'remote' supervision. Other factors such as weather, a particular section of a route, the level of award, the nature of the group and individuals may mean more close supervision is needed.

Here is a brief overview of different levels of supervision:

Direct: This will involve the Staff member being directly involved with the team at a team ratio of 1:7 participants or smaller. This method can be used for training expeditions and journeys, for certain parts of practice expeditions and it may also be appropriate at a particularly hazardous section on an expedition, such as a railway, dangerous road or exposed section of hill or mountain. Staff should maintain a line of sight with all members if possible during direct supervision.

Campsites: This is also the form of supervision during training sessions on campsite (cooker safety)

Indirect (Check pointing / Shadowing): This is where the team are judged to be competent enough to navigate short sections of a route without supervisor walking with or within sight of the team. A number of meeting points and meeting times are agreed with the supervisor. The supervisor monitors the team via GPS tracker and stays close enough to intervene if necessary, offer support and guidance and/or to stop mistakes from being made. Teams are usually aware of the instructor's presence and are normally in visual or hearing contact at all times during Bronze or Silver. Bronze staff are about 20 minutes max away. Silver 30 minutes max away.

Campsites: for the majority of situations, this is the main form of supervision on campsites. Staff are nearby and regularly patrol the campsite. But, as in a school setting at lunchtime, the participants are teens that are there to show they can be independent, operate on their own, and seek help when necessary.

Remote: This is when the team walk almost exclusively by themselves for most of the route. They agree the route and meeting points with their DofE assessor. The assessor will meet them at those points but if not there allow them to get on with the expedition without having to wait. Assessor may drop in at other points along the route for welfare checks, and to gain information for their assessor report. This method of supervision is only used on Qualifying expeditions. Staff will have access to GPS tracker info for the teams and often be nearby (30-40 minutes away). Staff will still choose to supervise hazardous sections of a route.

The Supervisor/Team Leader will have a good idea of roughly where the team is located and how they are progressing. This is the norm for sections of the practice expeditions and all qualifying expeditions. It allows the supervisor/assessor to:

- Periodically observe the team without intervening
- Allow the team to make mistakes and to recover from them without outside intervention, and so build confidence in route finding and problem solving. (independence)
- Support the team by remaining remote yet in the expedition area and able to intervene if necessary or if requested by the team

Supervisors will make decisions about the level of remote supervision based on the competency of the groups.

Some decisions should go through the Event manager.

Supervisors are able to make their own decisions as to whether to walk, cycle and use cars for remote supervision.

Why do we need remote supervision on a D of E Expedition?

In order for participants to have a successful qualifier expedition, the team must meet the DofE's 20 conditions for expeditions. The first condition is that the expedition is unaccompanied and self sufficient without outside assistance. For this objective to be met groups cannot be "led" by their instructor, rather be under their own steam making decisions themselves along the way. But of course we are still responsible for the safety of the group, so they must be monitored throughout, and we do this by remote supervision.

Adventurous Horizons work hard to achieve the correct balance of safety and supervision, so that the group "feel" like they are on their own rather than knowing they are being closely shadowed.

How does Adventurous Horizons "remotely supervise" D of E groups?

1. We train the groups appropriately in all of the skills they will need to be self-sufficient in their chosen environment.
2. We gain a good knowledge of their ability, so that we are able to predict their reactions when we are on the hill. We have confidence in what they know and what they don't know, and develop faith and trust in their ability. This is why ALL of our Open Gold Expeditions, and any of our tailor-made programmes, involve an element of training before embarking on an expedition that involves remote supervision.
3. We will have direct and current, personal knowledge of the expedition area. We have carried out a full location specific risk assessment and are aware of any potential hazards. Where appropriate we will pass this knowledge onto the group.
4. Using a combination of experience in the field, extensive prior knowledge from working with these groups, and constant review of our procedures we are able to make sound judgements, and position ourselves appropriately throughout the expedition in order to maintain safety and risk management. We will then use a level of supervision appropriate to the group and the conditions.
5. We make a full assessment of their route and continually make dynamic risk assessments once on expedition taking into consideration prevailing conditions.
6. We have the ability to move fast and efficiently on the hill, something we believe is essential to remote supervision, in order to get to the group quickly should they need us. Where terrain allows we will use bikes to aid this process.
7. Where appropriate we will make use of modern communication systems (Radios, Mobile Phones, GPS), both between instructors, and the instructor and the group. But we are firm believers that nothing can replace competence and technology will only assist, and will pass this message on to our DofE groups.