

Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center's
Wilderness Investigations
High School

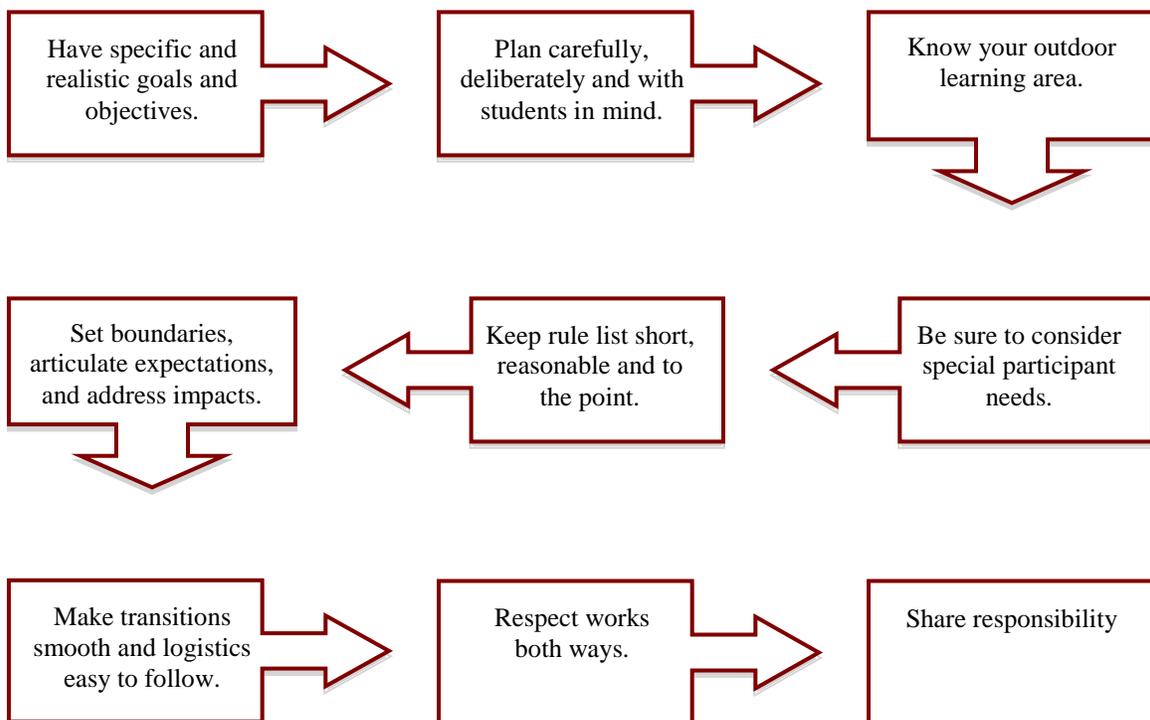
***Tips to Help Facilitate Successful
Outdoor Experiences for Students***

Introduction

Participant leadership, organizational strategies, and safety concerns are somewhat different when teachers expand classrooms to include outdoor settings. There are, however, several considerations that, if used, may insure a more productive, safe, and enjoyable experience for students and teachers.

The following guidelines will help teachers meet their educational, leadership and safety objectives. Not every guideline is applicable to every outdoor teaching situation. Use the following *Guidelines* as a checklist to help you prepare for and facilitate your next *Wilderness Investigation* experience.

Guideline Flow Chart



Guideline Details

Guideline #1: Have specific and realistic goals and objectives

Outdoor learning experiences should have well thought out goals (both physical and educational) so that student time is well spent and use of the outdoor setting can be seen as the best possible use of time and energy. If you know your students you will be able to set specific goals suited to the needs of everyone.

Guideline #2: Plan carefully, deliberately and always with students in mind

Teachers who *wing it* often fail to meet their goals and are less able to take full advantage of unexpected teaching/leadership opportunities that may arise in outdoor settings. Be deliberate about your planning and then let go when something better comes up. If you have planned well you will return more easily when the time is right. Good planning includes consideration of the needs of students and how to involve adult volunteers. If planning as a team, be respectful of one another's ideas, strengths, and insights and incorporate as many as possible.

Guideline #3: Know your outdoor learning area

Teachers who lead activities in outdoor settings need to visit the outdoor location well in advance of the activity so that they understand special circumstances and opportunities presented by the place (safety, noise, travel time, etc.) and are able to address and utilize them. In designated wilderness this includes knowing rules and regulations that address maximum group size, area closures for restoration or safety, special wildlife considerations and so forth.

Guideline #4: Be sure to consider special student needs

All students (and even adult volunteers) have special needs. Some are obvious and some less so. Consider these special needs (physical, behavioral, learning, etc.) as you consider where to go and what to do. These needs change from group-to-group, year-to-year and place-to-place. Don't base current outdoor activity plans on previous experiences only.

Guideline #5: Keep the outdoor rule list short, reasonable and to the point

You may feel uncomfortable even thinking about rules since these outdoor activities are meant to be fun. Call them rules, guidelines, or recommendations but have some ideas in mind at the very least. You won't need a lot them in the outdoor setting and they will only be meaningful if they really matter and are reasonable. Always be clear and respectful in rule presentations. Allow adult assistants to help you with reminders or, sometimes, consequences. You will need fewer rules if you keep participants busy with meaningful tasks/activities and if you have planned carefully.

Guideline #6: Set boundaries, articulate expectations and address impacts

The following areas deserve special attention and communication with and to students:

- It will sometimes be important for teachers to set physical and behavioral boundaries for students. By stating boundaries up front and explaining why (when appropriate) students *can* be successful because they won't always have to second-guess where to go and how to act.
- The teacher who articulates what they expect as behavioral and educational outcomes is much more likely to get what they need. The outdoor activity setting is, for some, a new learning atmosphere and one that requires a direct approach by teaches so that students can adapt their own learning paradigms.
- Be sure to address potential harmful impacts on the outdoor setting in your planning and then, based on your knowledge of the place, articulate appropriate behaviors so that negative impacts can be minimized.

Guideline #7: Make transitions smooth and logistical instructions easy to follow

Teachers sometimes get in trouble when transition times are not well thought out and logistical instructions are not explained in simple and easy-to-understand language. Visualize these important periods and be prepared to communicate directly and clearly with participants BEFORE the transition happens.

Guideline #8: Respect works both ways

Teachers who want their young (and older) participants to respect them, the outdoor experience, and the places where outdoor activity takes place must always realize that if they show respect their charges are much more likely to do the same. Respect the students by being well prepared, open to learning from them, and do the positive little things (picking up a dropped paper, avoiding negative behaviors) that they will notice and emulate.

Guideline #9: Share responsibility

Allow students and adult helpers to share as much responsibility as possible. This may be as little as helping to carry equipment, motivating others during difficult times, or as big as teaching a concept. Take advantage of the skills others have. More often than not, the young person who sometimes challenges you can become an ally if they are allowed to contribute to the group's success. However, if you expect a participant (young or old) to teach, lead, use special equipment or skills, etc. be sure to train them so that they can be successful and have a positive experience.