GUIDE

Introduction to Risk Management For School Camps and Excursions
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Camps and excursions are also by their very nature risky activities. Camps, in particular those involving adventure activities, entail a very high degree of risk, however it is through their involvement in these inherently risky activities that young people learn valuable life lessons.

It would be impossible to completely eliminate risk on a camp or excursion. Instead, the goal is to strike a balance between acceptable risks, those with clear educational benefits which may be managed or controlled through risk management, and unacceptable risks, which should wherever possible be eliminated.

Is a risky activity an acceptable activity? Often this will depend on whether a school can adequately explain its educational benefits and how it relates to the school’s curriculum. It will also rely heavily on whether a school can effectively manage the risk.

As part of the planning process for all camps and excursions schools must conduct a risk assessment and implement a risk treatment plan. This publication has been developed to help everyone involved meet his or her obligations.

Duty of care

A school’s duty of care to its students exists whenever the school ought reasonably to exercise control over students, including when they are on school camps or excursions.

Under workplace health and safety legislation, the term “workplace” will be interpreted quite broadly to include out of school environments. This means that the school’s duty to provide a safe place of work for its employees, volunteers and students extends to camps and excursions.

A school’s duty of care is non-delegable. This means whilst all parties involved in camps and excursions including teachers, service providers and venue operators owe a duty of care to participants, a school cannot delegate its responsibility to another individual or body. Schools must conduct a risk assessment and develop a risk treatment plan even if camp or activity operators have their own risk management plans in place.

Introduction

Camps and excursions are an important and enjoyable part of school life. Away from the daily classroom routine teachers and students have the opportunity to engage in new experiences and master new skills.
Managing risk is your responsibility

Under workplace health and safety legislation and the common law duty of care, schools are required to manage the risks associated with camps and excursions. They must take adequate steps during the planning, organisation and execution to minimise reasonably foreseeable risks.

What is risk management?

Risk management is a systematic approach that can be applied to an activity like a camp or excursion to understand the environment in which it will operate and the risks that may be encountered during the course of the activity.

The idea is that by preparing the organisation and its people for what could happen (good or bad) it is possible to choose the level and type of risk that can be tolerated and proactively treat risks with the potential to lead to harm or liability.

The risk management process for camps and excursions should include:

- Gaining the support of senior leaders within the school
- Collaborating with all stakeholders (internal and external) including parents, staff, venue operators and the Catholic Education Office (if applicable)
- Establishing the context within which the activity will take place. Where will you go? When will you go? What will you do? What are your educational goals? What are the skill and ability levels of the students?
- Conducting a risk assessment in order to
  - identify potential risks
  - analyse your risks to determine the potential consequences and the likelihood that these consequences will occur
  - evaluate the adequacy of any existing treatments, assess available resources and set priorities
- Implementing a risk treatment plan which sets out the ways risks will be managed, also known as controls
- Establishing a system for regular monitoring and reviews.

Risk management

- Should be carried out well in advance of the camp or excursion
- Is best approached collaboratively
- Should be applied to all elements of the camp or excursion not just those activities perceived to be high risk
- Must be well communicated to all stakeholders including teachers, students and parents
- Is not a static process. Circumstances are constantly changing and evolving and therefore it requires regular monitoring and reviews
- Must be appropriately documented and integrated into school policy.

CCI’s publication, Managing Risk in Catholic Organisations - Conducting a Risk Assessment, Developing a Risk Treatment Plan, provides details of the risk management process, including a step-by-step guide to:

- conducting a risk assessment
- identifying and analysing your risks, including how to use a consequence and likelihood rating and risk matrix
- developing a risk treatment plan.

For your copy go to www.risksupport.org.au
Policy and planning

All schools should have a policy for camps and excursions and individual policies for standard activities conducted on a regular basis. We recommend that schools nominate an individual or group to be responsible for applying the policy and overseeing risk management in relation to each camp and excursion.

Wherever possible planning should involve an inspection of the site for the camp or excursion and a face-to-face meeting with providers, regardless of whether this is the first time the school has used the facilities or if it has been part of the curriculum for many years.

Policies should include guidelines on:

- Establishing purpose. Camps and excursions need to have recognised educational benefits and be relevant to the curriculum
- The approval process. In most cases the principal will need to provide approval however in some cases it may be necessary to gain further approval from the Catholic Education Office (or equivalent), school board or council
- Training for staff
- Compliance with legislative and regulatory requirements
- The standard of care required. This will differ depending on the level of risk. For example the standard of care, skills and qualifications required on a school camp involving swimming would differ greatly to a museum excursion
- Supervision guidelines and minimum staff-student ratios
- Requirements for volunteers
- Police, Working with Children and any other applicable checks
- Details regarding insurance cover, any exclusions or separate policies required
- How to obtain consent from parents/carers
- Means of communication, for example in remote areas
- Roles and responsibilities
- Minimum first aid requirements
- Communication with parents/carers
- Implementing a code of conduct for students
- How to integrate this policy with the school’s emergency response plan.
- A date by which the policy is to be reviewed.

Guidelines on the development of policies are widely available, check with your Catholic Education Office (or equivalent), state or territory department of education or contact CCI.

A detailed, thorough and well-documented plan is likely to improve outcomes in terms of health and safety, the quality of education and your responsiveness should an accident or incident occur. Documentation is essential and will also be advantageous should the school face litigation.
### Identifying your risks

There are common risk areas that will apply to almost all camps and excursions but within each of these areas are risks that will relate to the specific and unique circumstances of each camp.

One way to approach your risk assessment is to work through the likely risk areas and examine the related risks that apply to each. In the following example we have identified several of the common risk areas for an adventure camp and provided an example of a potential risk and example controls for each.

A Catholic school is planning an adventure camp for 40 Grade 6 students. The students, along with teachers and several volunteer parents will travel by bus to a mountainous region where they will stay in a privately owned and operated camp near a National Park. Students will participate in a range of physically challenging activities including water sports, rock climbing and abseiling, orienteering and mountain biking.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk area</th>
<th>Example risk</th>
<th>Example risk controls</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| **External providers**  | An external provider engaged to teach abseiling has not been adequately trained to teach young children. | • Check instructors have the correct qualifications and/or experience for their specific role/s.  
• Require all providers to have a current public liability insurance Certificate of Currency.  
• Ensure all providers have a risk management plan that has been reviewed and approved by the school prior to the camp. |
| **Environment**  | The group disturbs and damages rare native vegetation.                      | • Observe the guidelines for use of the National Park and develop a plan to minimise impact on the environment.  
• Communicate this plan and the seriousness to students, teachers and volunteers. |
| **Communication** | A student is injured during an activity and teachers are unable to call for emergency services due to poor mobile reception. | • Develop a location specific communication strategy for day-to-day operations and emergencies.  
• Carry satellite phones whenever outside of the camp. |
<table>
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<th>Risk area</th>
<th>Example risk</th>
<th>Example risk controls</th>
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</table>
| **Weather**  | Students are caught in a severe storm during an overnight activity.         | • Check weather forecasts prior to the camp and each day before commencing outdoor activities.  
• Ensure all students carry appropriate, warm clothing.  
• Train staff in navigation and supply them with appropriate equipment i.e. portable GPS units.  
• Check emergency services alerts i.e. bushfire, snowstorm, flood, cyclones. |
| **Transport**| A bus transporting students to the camp is involved in a road accident.     | • Ensure vehicles comply with road authority’s registration requirements.  
• Ensure drivers comply with all licensing requirements.  
• Ensure that equipment carried inside vehicles is securely stowed so as not to create a risk of injury or damage. |
| **Students** | Students participating in a canoeing activity are not competent swimmers.   | • Check the swimming levels of all students prior to the camp.  
• Work with students to improve their skills.  
• Ensure lifejackets and any other safety equipment required is worn at all times. |
| **Volunteers**| A volunteer acts outside of the scope of his or her duties by taking a large group of students on an unscheduled nature walk. | • Provide adequate training for all volunteers before the camp.  
• Require all volunteers to show evidence of a current Working With Children Check. |
| **Informed consent**| A student participates in a water-based activity which his or her parents have not consented to. | • Provide parents with sufficient information to enable them to make an informed decision.  
• Ensure all consent forms are completed.  
• Ensure all staff and students complete a medical form. |
| **Allergies**| A student suffers a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a meal served by the camp kitchen. | • Ensure the parents of the food-allergic student supply information about their child’s allergies, including an up-to-date action plan for anaphylaxis signed by a doctor. Make sure this documentation is brought to the camp.  
• Ensure all staff attending are trained and know how to respond.  
• Communicate with camp operators and the camp cook in advance. Ensure details are confirmed in writing. |
Adventure activities

A program-specific risk assessment and risk treatment plan should be completed for each adventure activity, taking into account the specific conditions and unique participants.

Using the same example above here are some of the risks to consider when students will be abseiling and possible controls.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk</th>
<th>Example risk control</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall from height</td>
<td>• Conduct a safety briefing on belay systems and cliff environment prior to the activity.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Ensure direct supervision of students at all times by qualified staff.</td>
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<td>• Ensure all participants wear correctly fitted helmets and harnesses.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Students briefed to remain at least two metres from the cliff edge.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Anyone who is operating within two metres of the cliff edge must be on belay or tethered to a secure anchor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student belaying</td>
<td>• Choose an appropriate system for use by students. Instructional staff should directly observe belaying by students.</td>
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<td>• Provide a clear belay brief and then assess each student’s ability to belay.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slips and trips</td>
<td>• Ensure students wear correct footwear.</td>
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<td>• Provide clear instruction on how to descend.</td>
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<td>Entanglement (hair, clothing, jewellery)</td>
<td>• Ensure students remove all jewellery prior to the activity.</td>
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<td>• Students with long hair must tie their hair back prior to abseiling.</td>
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<td>• Ensure all clothing is tucked in.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Ensure belay devices are free of potential entanglements.</td>
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<td>Falling objects (including rocks)</td>
<td>• Review site for loose rock prior to abseiling.</td>
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<td>• Do not drag ropes or other equipment which may dislodge rocks.</td>
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<td>• Teach students specific calls to warn of rock fall and appropriate protective response.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Excessive speed while descending</td>
<td>• Appropriate belay system to slow descent.</td>
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The publication, *Managing Risk in Catholic Organisations Guide - Conducting a Risk Assessment, Developing a Risk Treatment Plan* provides details on the risk management process including how to identify the risks specific to your camp or excursion. For your copy go to [www.risksupport.org.au](http://www.risksupport.org.au)
# Checklist for school’s camp or excursion coordinator

This Checklist is intended to provide general information to assist schools in managing risks relating to camps and excursions. This is not an exhaustive list. A ‘no’ response to any question indicates that further planning and investigation is required to effectively manage risk.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Is there a school policy on camps and excursions?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>If No, actions required</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>2. Have all the necessary approvals been obtained?</td>
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<td>3. Has an individual or group been nominated to be responsible for risk management?</td>
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<td>4. Is the school’s insurance policy adequate or is a special policy necessary?</td>
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<td>5. Has the educational purpose been clearly documented?</td>
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<td>6. Have you consulted with all relevant stakeholders, encouraged them to be part of the risk management process and understood their needs and objectives?</td>
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<td>7. Has a risk assessment been conducted?</td>
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<td>8. Has a risk treatment plan been developed?</td>
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<td>9. Has the site been checked for hazards and risks?</td>
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<td>10. Have the skills, qualifications and safety arrangements of all staff, volunteers and external providers been identified, verified and documented?</td>
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<td>11. Has parental permission (consent forms) been obtained?</td>
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<td>12. Has health information (medical forms) been collected?</td>
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<td>13. Are emergency procedures and contingency plans in place?</td>
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<td>14. Have all those involved been advised of their roles and responsibilities?</td>
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<td>15. Has all required training and/or instruction been carried out?</td>
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<td>16. Is there a process for monitoring and reviewing the risk treatment plan?</td>
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<td>17. Has all of the above been appropriately documented?</td>
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</table>
Where to from here?

Hopefully this publication has introduced you to the key elements you need to consider to effectively manage risk on a camp or excursion. The next step is for you to conduct a risk assessment and develop a risk treatment plan based on your individual circumstances.

We recommend you read the publication, Managing Risk in Catholic Organisations - Conducting a Risk Assessment, Developing a Risk Treatment Plan, and contact CCI if you require further information or assistance. For your copy go to www.risksupport.org.au

CCI has a range of other risk management publications available on their website which may also be of help.

How CCI can help

If you would like further information please call the risksupport Helpdesk on 1300 660 827, email helpdesk@risksupport.org.au or visit www.risksupport.org.au

Useful resources

♦ HB:266, Guide for managing risk in not-for-profit organizations
♦ The Catholic Education Office (or equivalent)
♦ Your state or territory workplace health and safety authority
♦ Department of Education (if applicable)
♦ Peak bodies such as
  Australian Camps Association
  www.auscamps.asn.au
  Volunteering Australia
  www.volunteeringaustralia.org
  Royal Life Saving Society of Australia
  www.royallifesaving.com.au
  Anaphylaxis Australia
  www.allergyfacts.org.au
  SAI Global site
  www.saiglobal.com

If you would like further information about School Camps and Excursions, please contact the risksupport Helpdesk on:

1300 660 827
helpdesk@risksupport.org.au
www.risksupport.org.au

www.risksupport.org.au
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