




Adventist Risk Management, Inc.



By: Elizabeth Camps - Writer and Public Relations Specialist

How to Avoid Unnecessary Risk on Your Next Pathfinder Camping Trip

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Growing up, I was quite involved in various church youth groups and activities. Pathfinders was one area where I was most involved. There was always something to do, whether it was drill team and drum corps practice, reviewing with the Pathfinder Bible Experience team, or planning meals and activities for an upcoming camping trip.

Camping trips play a significant part in the Pathfinders year. The trips help the group to bond, to learn about Jesus together, and to acquire new skills and honor patches. It is a unique experience for all those who have taken part.

Camping trips, whether in a primitive site or at a public campground, are meant to be a positive experience for both the Pathfinder members and the chaperones. And while we always hope for a successful trip, we can't always control or predict what may happen. These six areas of preparation are crucial to safeguarding all those who will attend a Pathfinder camping trip.

Chaperones

Your plans should begin with the selection of chaperones for the camping trip. Typically, these will be the Pathfinder counselors and leaders. Make sure a completed background check is on file for each of your chaperones. Once they have been cleared, make sure they are well trained to lead their charges in any activities or honors planned for the trip. Distribute and discuss the [ARM Youth Supervision Guidelines](#) and answer any questions your chaperones may have regarding your particular group.

Review the club's emergency plan as well as contact information for the point person in the event of an emergency. Be sure to distribute copies of the plan and contact information to each chaperone. Provide parents with details of how an emergency will be handled. If there are individual Pathfinders with allergies or prescribed medication, inform the chaperones for those kids of the necessary precautions and times for medication.

Any activity carries the risk of accidents or injuries. Prepare your chaperones by training them in CPR, basic first aid, addressing

concussions, and using an Automated External Defibrillator (AED). Show chaperones where the first aid kit will be housed during the trip and provide them with keys to the kit if necessary.

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Location

Once you have chosen your location, contact the park rangers or overseeing staff of the area to ask if there are any onsite medical staff and if you will have access to first aid and other medical supplies if needed. Request a copy of the campground's protocols for emergencies, and review these with your chaperones. Save and share the campground's contact information with your chaperones for easy retrieval.

Transportation

Conduct a pre-trip inspection of your vehicle(s) before your trip and provide ample time to address any issues as needed. Use [ARM's Vehicle Pre-Trip Inspection form](#) for a thorough vehicle check of all vehicles to be used. Be sure all your drivers meet your local conference requirements. Additionally, drivers should have insurance coverage that meets the required limits set by the North American Division or the division for your area. Drivers should never use 15-passenger vans as a mode of transportation.

Finalize transportation details including time of departure and arrival, drivers, route, and any other details. Will your group arrive at the campsite by vehicle or on foot? Is your designated campsite only accessible via canoe or hiking trail? Relay all transportation details to your chaperones, Pathfinders, and parents.

Activities

Create a list of all activities and honors that Pathfinders are expected to participate in during your trip. Based on this list, determine whether special equipment or orientation will be needed. If so, schedule a time to conduct orientation for your group as well as parents and/or guardians. Provide ample time to answer any questions the group may have and confirm that all participants are clear on the activities taking place.

If using your ministry's equipment for your activities, check the maintenance schedule to confirm the last service date for the equipment. Determine if it is safe for use. If using the campsite's equipment, verify the date of the most recently performed maintenance check and that it is safe for use.

Permissions

Contact your local conference for assistance in creating permission slips for each of your Pathfinders. Before the trip, verify that each slip is signed by a parent or guardian. Only those with signed and collected permission slips should attend the camping trip.

If your honors or activities require special permission slips, be sure to collect the signed slips as well and only allow those with signed slips to participate in the activities.

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Weather

Check the weather forecast for your designated trip days several times leading up to your departure. Take note of any changes in weather and if a cancellation or delay is warranted. Be sure to keep your group up to date on any changes in the trip schedule to give ample time for preparation.

Even if the forecast calls for clear skies and good weather, be prepared for types of weather or storms common in your area. Encourage your group to pack for warm, cold, and wet weather in case of sudden climate changes. Discuss with your club what the plan is if a tornado, hurricane, or flood warning is issued. Review the various campsite protocols for evacuation routes and determine where your group will evacuate to if you are unable to return safely. Chaperones should encourage kids to stay calm and stick to protocol if an emergency or evacuation is needed.

By demonstrating preparedness before any camping trip, you are setting a positive example for your campers and fellow staff. Risk management starts with planning ahead to minimize dangers—known and unknown. For more Pathfinder Safety information and resources,

visit ARM's [Pathfinder Safety page](#).

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