



National  
Guidance

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## Camping

All young people should have the opportunity to go camping. Camping can be an activity in its own right, or can be a means of taking part in other activities and in travel, exploration and expeditions. Its benefits include being close to nature and developing independence and self-reliance. It can be a great way for young people to learn life skills such as cooking, hygiene and the use of tools.

Two different groups can have very different experiences of camping in the same weather conditions. One group can have a great time, while the other has a miserable one. The difference is usually a result of the quality of planning, preparation and leadership.

See also OEAP National Guidance document [4.2b "Residentials"](#).

## Coronavirus

Government guidance about residential visits during the coronavirus outbreak applies to camping – see OEAP National Guidance document [4.2b "Residentials"](#) for details. The number of participants sharing a tent should be decided as part of risk assessment, taking into account the government guidance (including guidance about 'bubbles') and other factors including safeguarding and supervision.

## Where to Camp

The choice of campsite is vital. Camping can take place, for example:

- On a public campsite - this is likely to be shared with other groups, individuals and families, but a suitable separate area for a group might be available;
- On a campsite specifically intended for youth groups etc., such as one advertised for Duke of Edinburgh Award groups - this might be shared with other groups, or be available for exclusive booking;
- On a site by private arrangement, such as with a farmer or other landowner;
- On the establishment's land, such as a school's playing fields;
- In the wild.

In deciding where to camp, you should consider:

- The nature of the group;
- The purpose of the activity;
- The experience and competence of the staff, including their familiarity with the site and its surroundings;

- How the group is likely to interact with other campers or local people;
- The need for appropriate security, safeguarding and privacy arrangements;
- Whether drinking water, toilet and other facilities (e.g. safe food storage, a washing up area) are suitable, or whether special arrangements are necessary (e.g. portable toilets, latrines);
- Access and support for those with special educational needs and disabilities;
- Possible weather conditions;
- The availability of shelter or alternative accommodation in wet or windy weather, and of shade from the sun;
- Where cooking will take place (and whether this will be done by participants or staff);
- Suitability of the terrain for camping (e.g. drainage, shelter from wind, level/sloping ground, surface conditions);
- Any nearby hazards (see below) or unwanted attractions (e.g. shops; pubs; local teenagers);
- Access by emergency services if required;
- Travel arrangements.

There are particular considerations if considering wild camping, including:

- You should check the legal situation: in England and Wales the landowner's permission is normally required;
- Appropriate toilet arrangements are needed, for hygienic, environmental and privacy reasons – in some areas digging a pit well away from water sources might be acceptable, in other areas it may be necessary to pack out human waste;
- The quality of the water supply;
- The need to avoid environmental damage including erosion and litter – 'leave no trace';
- Alternatives if another group is found to have camped at the planned site.

## Local/Environmental Hazards

It is important to be aware of any hazards on or nearby the campsite, and to plan how to deal with them if they pose a significant risk. For example:

- Flooding;
- Traffic;
- Hazards associated with farms - see OEAP National Guidance document [7g "Farm Visits"](#);
- Water – see OEAP National Guidance documents [7i "Group Safety at Water Margins"](#) and [7o "Natural Water Bathing"](#);
- Bees, wasps, midges, ticks, snakes, etc.;
- Poisonous or stinging plants;
- Cliffs, quarries, etc.;
- Overhanging tree branches.

## Safe Camping

It is essential to maintain good hygiene while camping. Poor hygiene can lead to sickness quickly spreading through the group. There should be adequate facilities for washing hands with soap and water after using the toilet, after outdoor activities, and before handling food. Anti-bacterial gels are useful, but are not as effective as washing with soap and water.

Safe food handling is important:

- Perishable food should be stored in a fridge or other cold place unless to be used in a short time;
- Raw meat or fish should be stored and prepared away from other foods, and any utensils used in its preparation must be washed immediately with hot water;
- Food must be cooked or reheated thoroughly.

There are serious hazards associated with camping stoves and their fuels. If participants are to use these, they should be trained and directly supervised by a competent leader until they are sufficiently competent to operate the stoves safely themselves. Liquid fuels must be kept in containers specifically designed for the purpose. Leaders should ensure that they are aware of up-to-date good practice and the manufacturer's instructions regarding the type of stove and fuel used.

The same considerations apply to kettles and ovens, such as those commonly used for bushcraft.

Open fires and barbeques can be a great source of pleasure and the focal point of a campsite. Their associated dangers must be managed carefully. They should only be used in designated areas or, especially if wild camping, in such a place that they cannot cause a wild fire or cause environmental damage such as scorch marks. They should not be used at all when the risk of a wild fire is high.

Stoves, barbeques and open fires can produce deadly carbon monoxide if used in an enclosed space (such as in a cooking shelter, caravan, camping pod or bothy). Good ventilation is essential, and a carbon monoxide alarm should be used if ventilation is limited.

If participants are to use tools such as knives, saws or axes, they should be trained to do so properly. Particular consideration should be given to the use tools which could be used as an offensive weapon, and how their availability is controlled, taking into account the nature of the group and the location of the campsite. It is a criminal offence to carry a sharp or bladed instrument in a public place or on school premises, with the exception of a folding pocket knife with a blade of less than 3 inches (7.6 cm), unless there is a good reason to do so.

There should be adequate first aid provision at the campsite – see document 4.4b "First Aid". Particular attention should be given to cleaning wounds, and medical attention should be sought for deep wounds or if dirt remains in the wound, or if there is a possibility that someone has not had a tetanus vaccination.

## Leader Competence

There must be enough competent leaders to supervise a camping group effectively - see OEAP National Guidance document [3.2d "Approval of Leaders"](#). Depending on the circumstances, the competencies required could include:

- Group supervision and leadership;
- Diplomatic skills to deal with people such as a farmer or member of the public;
- Familiarity with the campsite and the surrounding area;
- Familiarity with the equipment to be used;
- Hygiene;
- Safe use of camping stoves and fuel;
- Cooking and food safety;
- Leadership/supervision of any activities to be undertaken while camping;
- Dealing with emergencies;
- First aid.

## Supervision

See OEAP National Guidance document [4.2a "Group Management and Supervision"](#).

Direct supervision is not always possible while camping, and so it is often necessary to use indirect supervision with clear boundaries.

The responsibility for supervision extends to 24 hours per day, including when the participants are asleep. In certain circumstances it may be necessary for at least one leader to be awake throughout the night, perhaps on a rota basis, in order to provide adequate security and supervision.

The positioning of tents can help with good supervision. It can be useful to have the entrances of participants' tents within sight of leaders, and close enough to hear, especially when the campsite is shared with other people or there is concern about behaviour.

A code of conduct for camping may need to include requirements about 'out of bounds' areas, noise at night, smoking, alcohol, drugs, sexual behaviour and not going into others' tents. There should also be a clear expectation of the behaviour of leaders: for example, around the use of alcohol.

If parents or volunteers are accompanying the group, there must be clarity about their role and what is expected of them, and of their behaviour – including 'after hours'.

If a group is to camp unaccompanied by staff, such as on a Duke of Edinburgh's Award expedition, see OEAP National Guidance document [7k "Unaccompanied Expeditions"](#).

