



National
Guidance

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Facilitating Learning and Development

The primary purpose of an outdoor learning activity or off-site visit is often one or more of the following:

- recreation (fun, enjoyment, physical exercise);
- education (knowledge, understanding and skills);
- development (attitudes, behaviours, social skills);
- therapy (personal change, reducing dysfunctional behaviour).

For most establishments, the purpose of most activities is education and development, although some activities are also used for recreation (for example 'after hours' during a residential visit). For more information about the use of activities for therapy, see OEAP National Guidance document [6v "FAQs – Mental Health"](#).

Briefing and Reviewing

Although the choice of activity should be determined by its purpose, many activities can be used to achieve a variety of different outcomes. Whether an activity is actually recreational, educational, developmental or therapeutic is largely dependent on how the leader facilitates it, and in particular how they use briefings and reviewing:

- briefings for recreational activities tend to concentrate on what is needed to make the activity safe and enjoyable, and reviews, if any, tend to be about what would make it more enjoyable;
- briefings for educational activities tend to concentrate on what is to be learned and how the experience can contribute to that learning, and reviews tend to be about what participants learned and how that learning might be useful;
- briefings and reviews for developmental activities tend to focus on personal responses and group process, and on helping participants to transfer the learning to their everyday lives;
- briefings and reviews for therapeutic activities should use the expertise of leaders trained in counselling or psychotherapy.

See OEAP National Guidance document [4.2c "Reviewing"](#).

Challenge, Stretch and Adventure

Research has shown that learning and development are maximised by placing the participant in a situation where they experience just the right amount of challenge to match or go slightly beyond their present skills and experience. This situation is known as the 'Stretch Zone'.

Too little challenge means that the participant is in the 'Comfort Zone', where the problems posed are easily solved without full engagement. This can be appropriate when the purpose of the activity is recreational, but in other circumstances it can lead to boredom and disengagement.

Too much challenge puts the participant into the 'Panic Zone', where failure, or fear of failure, can lead to disengagement or even misadventure, including physical or psychological harm.

See also OEAP National Guidance document [7a "Adventure Activities"](#).

Differentiation

Individual participants differ in many ways, including their:

- physical ability;
- intellectual ability;
- knowledge, understanding and skills;
- emotional intelligence and social skills;
- preferred learning styles;
- background and experience;
- cultural norms;
- self-esteem and self-confidence.

It is important to differentiate between individuals when leading an activity, rather than to treat the whole group as if all the participants are the same. This can be done by, for example:

- providing choice;
- varying the level of challenge to match individuals;
- giving individual encouragement and feedback;
- using peer learning or collaborative learning, where participants work together in pairs or small groups and help each other learn;
- having more challenging 'extension' activities for those who need them;
- using different teaching styles to match different learning styles, for example:
 - providing information in different formats – written, spoken, visual;
 - allowing participants to learn new skills in alternative ways, e.g., by 'diving in' and experimenting, or by observing a demonstration, or by first gaining a theoretical understanding.

Rather than the leader choosing the level of challenge, a more empowering approach is for the participants to choose it. The leader's task then becomes to help the participant to choose the right level of challenge, and to reflect upon the experience – thus learning how to learn.

Progression

When planning a programme of activities, or selecting a programme from a provider, it is important to ensure that participants experience progression, so that they can build upon the knowledge and skills that they acquire. Progression can come from the nature of the activity itself (for example, each activity requiring knowledge learned in a previous activity), or from the way that it is facilitated (for example, increasing the amount of responsibility given to participants during the activities).

By facilitating a progressive participation in knowledge, skills and decision-making, a leader can help participants move through a series of stages from dependence to independence, with supervision changing from direct to indirect to remote. Such an approach is particularly powerful when working towards unaccompanied expeditions such as with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. See OEAP National Guidance document [7k "Unaccompanied Expeditions"](#).

