

MacKillop College



Policy: Adventure Activities & Sports

Introduction

There is a significantly greater risk of harm to the health and safety of students and staff when a school provides the opportunity for involvement in adventure sports such as canoeing, abseiling, mountain climbing etc, than there is for regular school-based sporting activities. The higher risks, which are due to the more adventurous nature of the activity, are actually one of the sources of enjoyment of the activity for many people. Schools should not refuse to offer adventure sports on the grounds of risk; rather, they need to put in place measures to manage the risks adequately and to make sure participants are not unnecessarily exposed to risks.

Objective

MacKillop College is committed to establishing a program of adventure activities/sport which challenges each participant. The school aims to follow risk management strategies to eliminate as far as possible the risk of injury to any individual participating in the sport and to anyone who may be affected by the conduct of the activity, such as spectators and other non-school participants.

MacKillop College will ensure that:

- there is a coherent approach to adventure activities/sports which fits into the overall school philosophy
- risk assessment is undertaken for every potential activity and appropriate control measures put in place
- the program is managed and organised by appropriately qualified and experienced personnel
- staff roles and responsibilities are allocated and documented clearly

Duty of Care

The school's duty to ensure the health and safety of participants in adventure sports is part of its general duty of care to students and employees.

The standard of care expected of staff who coach, train and manage any activity is necessarily high because of the element of risk involved, so that required of staff involved in adventure activities/sports, with a greater degree of risk, is considerably higher again. The greater the risk involved in an activity, the higher the standard of care required.

The preparation and training for adventure activities/sports must be such that those who eventually do participate will be able to know the risks and be prepared to deal with them if and when they arise. It will be part of the duty of care of those preparing participants for adventure sports to:

- be competent in the particular activity
- have skills in training
- have access to the most recent techniques
- be familiar with equipment and materials to be used
- know safety routines for emergencies
- be familiar with the site for the activity
- be able to analyse potential risks in a given activity.

Standards

*** *Licensing, certification and training***

For many activities, instructors or supervisors are required to be licensed or certified, and there may be minimum requirements for participants. For example, scuba diving instructors must be fully trained and certified, and potential participants must have undergone minimum training activities (as specified in the Australian Standard, AS 4005.1-1992 *Minimum entry-level SCUBA diving*) and medical checks (AS 4005.1 Supplement 1 - 1992 *Minimum entry-level SCUBA diving — Medical form for prospective recreational SCUBA divers*). The school principal, as well as the supervising staff member, must ensure that any relevant standards for an activity have been met.

*** *Equipment***

Safety in an adventure activities/sport may also be heavily dependent on the reliability of equipment. All such equipment, including ropes, chains and buckles, must be tested and certified to Australian standards. It may not be the school's responsibility to undertake the testing and certification, but the school must ensure it has been done.

*** *Guidelines***

Schools and staff who manage outdoor activities and adventure sports should also refer to any guidelines issued by the school's relevant Education Department, schools association or by the professional bodies associated with a particular sport.

Managing Adventure Sports

In managing the risks to health and safety of participants in adventure sports offered through the school, the principal needs to ensure that:

- proper planning for the activity is done, including appropriate selection of competent supervisors and participants
- the activity itself is conducted safely and without unnecessary risk
- in the event of an incident or emergency, appropriate procedures are followed.

*** *Supervisors and Instructors***

Only suitably qualified staff should be allowed to conduct a particular adventure sport. Where more than one staff member is involved, the levels of responsibility of each must be established and documented. At least one staff member must hold a first aid qualification.

It may be necessary for a school to use specialist external staff if there are not suitably qualified school staff available for a particular activity. When using external providers, the school, through the staff member responsible for the activity, should undertake to:

- check the site to ensure that it is suitable for the intended participants
- know the staff who will be involved with the students, and check their qualifications
- check the equipment which will be used
- review levels of responsibility, roles and procedures with the external personnel
- ensure that the external providers know the school program, its philosophy, practices and procedures.

*** Selection of Participants**

Because of the high-risk nature of adventure sports (and any associated expenses), it will not be appropriate for all students and staff to participate. The initial selection criteria for any activity must be clearly developed and communicated to intending participants. These criteria should be relevant to the activity and would include reference to:

- health matters
- fitness levels
- previous experience in similar activities
- potential to reach skill levels required
- cooperative temperament and ability to work in a team.

As for any sporting activity, it may be necessary to conduct the activity at several levels — beginner, intermediate, advanced — where this is possible.

*** Preparation and planning**

The activity needs to be planned in detail well before it takes place. In some cases, the permission of the school's governing body may need to be sought. Details of the activity should be circulated to all staff and students who will be involved, and to the students' parents, who need to know full details of the nature of the activity and its associated risks before granting consent for their child's participation. This information should include:

- description of activity type, including extent of risk
- details of dates, places, people involved
- degrees of difficulty, level of experience required
- information about any preparation program
- participation selection criteria
- costs (equipment, food/accommodation, insurance)
- permission requirements
- emergency plans
- insurance arrangements.

Approved participants need to be provided with regular updates and should be aware of critical dates for:

- purchasing equipment
- achieving fitness levels
- organising group tasks in preparation
- practising skills required
- discussing and practising emergency routines and contingency plans.

*** Consent forms and liability**

The consent of parents or guardians to a student's participation in an adventure activity/sport must be obtained, for each particular activity. The consent form can also be used to provide medical or other information about the student which may be relevant to the activity (for example, vertigo may not be relevant to most school activities but may affect a student's ability to participate in abseiling).

Some schools have adopted the practice of attempting to exclude liability for injury to students when involved in a school-managed activity. It must be understood that consent forms do not provide indemnity for a school and will not prevent students or their parents/guardians from suing the school if students are injured during activities.

Risk Assessment

Risk assessment needs to be undertaken for every activity, and appropriate control measures put in place for every hazard and potential risk.

For example, one of the risks involved in bushwalking is the risk of getting lost (leading to exposure to extremes of heat or cold or inclement weather, which may result in dehydration, hypothermia, exhaustion etc). Control measures for this risk include:

- training all participants in orienteering skills
- training all participants in bush survival skills
- checking weather forecasts
- plotting an accurate course and ensuring participants are familiar with it
- carrying sufficient supplies of food, water and clothing
- having agreed rendezvous times and places
- having systems in place to ensure the group stays together
- having emergency procedures in place.

Another risk for bushwalking is the risk of snakebite. Control measures for this risk include:

- ensuring participants have adequate footwear
- carrying a first aid kit and ensuring staff are trained in treatment of snakebite
- warning participants of the danger and not to aggravate or touch snakes
- having procedures in place to enable a snakebite victim to be taken for medical treatment without delay.

Managing an Incident

An incident occurring during an adventure sport may be relatively minor or may be extremely serious, even fatal.

First aid must be obtained immediately for any illness or injury, however minor it may seem, and proper medical attention sought where appropriate. Emergency response procedures should be pre-planned and implemented as soon as it is apparent the situation is critical.

Follow up treatment may also be appropriate, particularly if the incident was traumatic. Crisis care and counselling may be needed not only for the victim(s) of an incident but also for other participants who may have witnessed the incident or where a fatality occurs.

*** Records**

Any incident during an activity which requires special treatment, medical or other, needs to be officially recorded by the school. Even a seemingly minor incident may have long-term consequences which are unable to be foreseen at the time. At the very least, a brief record of essential details should be made to ensure that the circumstances of any event are able to be recalled if and when required. This information may also be used by the school and government authorities to analyse the event and to prevent a similar incident from occurring in the future.

An incident record should include:

- date, time and place of the incident
- details of the activity being undertaken
- details of the people involved in the incident
- a brief description of the incident
- a statement of action taken following the incident
- details of people and organisations who were informed about the incident.

Safety Audits

Safety audits should be undertaken regularly if a school includes adventure sports as a significant part of the school's program.

Safety audits will enable a school to defend with integrity its particular programs if ever required to do so. This would include being able to articulate the philosophy, practices and risk management strategies associated with adventure sports activities.

An audit should examine the following elements:

- selection of program activities
- selection and screening of participants
- management systems for the program
- organisation of facilities and equipment
- transportation arrangements
- emergency procedures.

Implementation

Principal Commitment

The principal is responsible for ensuring that:

- the objectives of this policy are integrated into practice
- communication on health and safety matters related to safe adventure activities/sports is promoted
- all staff know and understand their responsibilities and their limitations with regard to adventure activities/sports
- to the extent it may be appropriate, staff are trained in the appropriate areas of adventure activities/sports

Staff Commitment

Staff organising or in charge of adventure activities/sports are to ensure:

- potential participants will undergo an appropriate selection process
- preparation activities will ensure that participants are practised in the skills and knowledge required for each activity
- parents and guardians are informed about the activity and provide consent for their children's participation, and any relevant medical or other information
- the school is aware of and incorporates Departmental/Association guidelines and information from other professional organisations into the planning of the activity
- equipment and sites have been inspected for their suitability and safety

- the activity will not exceed the skill level of each participant
- emergency procedures, including the provision of first aid support, are part of the planning for each activity
- student to staff ratios are determined carefully according to the needs of each group of students and the particular activity and in accordance with Education Department
- any incidents which occur during an activity are investigated and followed up as appropriate, and records are kept.

Review Date

This Policy will be reviewed in: January 2009

Signature

Rory Kennedy
(Principal)

Date: _____