

The way to ensure a positive field trip experience is to prepare!

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Many teachers are hesitant to take their class on a field trip. We have found three main reasons for this: 1) It takes too much time/effort to plan a field trip; 2) The class gets out of control, making it more of a headache than it's worth; 3) The school and/or district won't pay for/allow field trips.

Here are some suggestions to alleviate these problems.

Teacher Preparation

- Complete **at least one** pre-activity before arrival (several is better). Students should also be somewhat familiar with the vocabulary words (the better understanding of the words they have, the more time they can spend enjoying the activities).
- Conduct the **environmental briefing**, included in this document, before arrival (briefly review before stepping off the bus).
- Choose your chaperones carefully (see Chaperone's Preparation below).
- Set up an itinerary and let the students and chaperones know what it is before you leave.
- Notify parents well in advance so you can begin collecting donations (see "Funding a Field Trip" below). Let them know your itinerary and begin garnering their support several weeks in advance. Let them know exactly what core curriculum objectives will be met on the field trip. (We will try to list the Utah Core Objectives for each activity.)
- Sometimes the toughest sell is to your administrators. Get your principal's and district's blessing/permission if they are hesitant about field trips. Their biggest concern probably deals with the field trip's relevance to the district/state's core curriculum. Let them know exactly what curriculum objectives will be met on the field trip. (We will try to list the Utah Core Objectives for each activity.)

Student Preparation

- A field trip should be treated as a privilege. Let the students know how lucky they are to go. As with most privileges, there are certain responsibilities that go along with it. Most important of which is behavior. (One teacher we know spends at least an hour, spread over several days, preparing his students on how to walk in nature, communicate with adults other than the teacher, and similar behaviors. He finds field trips an enjoyable addition to his classroom experiences!) Once again, we refer you to the **environmental briefing** page.
- It is important that students have an understanding of what will happen and why. Therefore, the need to complete the pre-activities, vocabulary words, itinerary, etc., is imperative.
- A field trip does not equal "free time." Let students know that they are still having school, it just happens to be in a different location from usual. Let the students know they will have an opportunity to write about their experiences the day after the field trip. Then remind them a couple of times during the field trip (this helps them focus a bit better).
- It is amazing how many students will show up to school wearing shorts and a T-shirt in the middle of winter (but we don't need to tell *you* that). Make sure students understand the need to be prepared for possible outdoor activities no matter what the weather conditions might be.

Chaperone Preparation

The purpose in having chaperones is to help minimize possible behavior problems. Chaperones should be told this from the outset so they know exactly why they are coming along.

- Let potential chaperones know what you expect of them when you send letters home seeking help. Then brief the chaperones on their responsibilities when they arrive at the school.
- Let chaperones know that since you (the teacher) have prepared the students thoroughly for this field trip, there should only be a minimum need to help students refocus on what they should be doing (a word here, a "look" there, etc.).
- A minimum number of chaperones are more desirable than a lot (through sad experience we have found that having too many chaperones can encourage the type of behavior we hope to avoid). One adult per group (including yourself) should be adequate. We ask that you do not bring more than that to the Stokes Nature Center because of limited room.
- Do not have chaperones in charge of the group their child is in. This is like teaching your spouse or child to drive--a sure formula for disaster.
- If possible, do not allow chaperones to bring additional children with them. Once again, because of space constraints and distractions.
- Students are often asked questions as part of their learning experience. We don't want to find out how smart the adults are. Adults may ask probing questions of the student to help the student answer questions, but should not blatantly give answers.

Additional Preparation items

- Bus permission slips: Request a bus from the district at least two full weeks in advance (then double check a day before the trip to make sure they have you scheduled properly).
- School lunches: Contact your cooks at least a week in advance so they know to have the correct items ordered for that day (many kitchen do not have the right items on hand for a sack lunch on the spur-of-the-moment). Determine how many student and adult lunches will be needed before contacting the cooks.
- Does your school/district require you to take a first aid kit or mobile phone?
- Let the secretary, and any teachers who might be effected (PE, Art, Computer, Media, Resource, etc.), know you will be gone.

Funding a Field Trip

Most schools and/or districts will not pay for your field trip. However, check with your principal or district representative first--you might be surprised.

- Ask parents for donations. Our local county district cannot demand that a child pay or not go. Teachers can ask parents to pay a donation to make the trip possible, but if they can't, their child can still go. Most parents are supportive of well-planned field trips, and politely asking for a donation rarely fails.

Environmental Briefing

Environmental briefings are an essential part of any field experience and are important for the protection of both teachers and students. It is critical to consider how to communicate the rules to participants, especially children. With older children, give them some of the responsibility to come up with the rules on their own and in enforcing them. With all ages, explain why the rules exist, and that they are there to insure our safety. Provide examples of situations that may arise and behavior that is appropriate in those situations.

Standard Environmental Briefing

The goals of environmental briefings are:

- to become aware of the environmental hazards that might be encountered during a program;
- to understand how all people involved with the problem are potential human hazards;
- to understand that accidents happen when human and environmental hazards combine with each other;
- to help brainstorm a list of ways in which the group can reduce the chance of accidents happening.

Delivery of an environmental briefing should occur:

- just prior to the activity (be pro-active, not reactive);
- with the complete attention of the group (have them write the rules in a journal);
- without distractions (perhaps in the classroom or on the bus);
- with interaction from the students (ask them questions);
- with a preview of desired behavior (perhaps do a scenario with the students).

Content to include:

- the setting of the activity (point out the boundaries);
- an explanation of the environmental hazards (the river, bees, other wildlife, holes in the ground, old fencing, etc.);
- an explanation of the procedures, directions, and rules, **and** the consequences of inappropriate behavior if appropriate.