



4-H Risk Management Checklist for Backpacking

Risk Management

Risk management is a process of steps. These include:

1. Identify potential risks
2. Evaluate those risks
3. Determine what you can do to reduce the risks to an acceptable level
4. Continue to monitor the activity and make changes as needed

Overview

This checklist is intended to support 4-H volunteers when groups are planning backpacking activities. It is crucial for 4-H volunteers to share with 4-H members and families the importance of following all safety guidelines and to identify and address potential risks ahead of time. Encourage youth to help you identify potential risks and work with you to make the environment as safe as possible for everyone engaging in the activity.

Hiking and backpacking can be fun and rewarding activities for 4-H youth when appropriately managed. Please keep the following points in mind as you plan and prepare:

- Generally, 4-H backpacking experiences occur at three different levels:
 1. **Beginner**
Example: A day hike on a nearby, familiar trail.
 2. **Intermediate**
Example: Overnight backpacking trip. Camping in a modern campground.
 3. **Advanced**
Example: A 4-H Club focused on environmental and outdoor education going on a multiple day backpacking trip. Possibly staying at rustic campgrounds or dispersed camping in permitted areas.
- This checklist includes considerations that apply to all three levels of backpacking. Some are specific to overnight backpacking and will not apply for day trips.
- Volunteers should work closely with their Program Coordinator to discuss all the considerations on this tip sheet when planning a backpacking experience, who in turn should consult with the Outdoor Education and Risk Management Educators if there are any questions.

To contact an expert in your area, visit extension.msu.edu/experts or call 888-MSUE4MI (888-678-3464)

"Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status. Issued in furtherance of MSU Extension work acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Quentin Tyler, Director, MSU Extension, East Lansing, MI 48824. This information is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names does not imply endorsement by MSU Extension or bias against those not mentioned."



Checklist

Prior to the trip:

- ☐ Review and complete this [General Risk Management Checklist](#).
- ☐ If your trip includes overnights, complete and submit a [4-H Trip Plan](#).
- ☐ Consider the following and use this information to select an appropriate trail and experience:
 - The skill level of both 4-H members and adult volunteers, including:
 - Previous backpacking/outdoor experience
 - Overall fitness/health
 - CPR/1st aid knowledge (having at least one CPR/1st aid certified adult volunteer is **recommended** in all situations. First aid and anaphylaxis/epi-pen training are **required** in some situations- see the [General Risk Management Checklist](#).)
- ☐ Plan for communicating a cancellation to all participants and families.
 - A change in weather conditions may necessitate cancelling and/or rescheduling your activity. Weather conditions should always be evaluated at the time of the activity and a decision made whether conditions are safe for hikers.
- ☐ Determine what equipment will be needed for each participant and who will be providing it. Inspect equipment prior to the trip to ensure it is in good working order. Equipment may include:
 - Backpacking pack
 - Appropriate, sturdy footwear
 - Appropriate clothing, including rain gear
 - Sleeping Bag
 - Sleeping Pad
 - Water bottles
 - Tent(s)
 - Tarp(s)
 - Camp stove
 - First aid kit in a waterproof container, including contact list for relevant authorities (area DNR officer, Sheriff, etc.) *Additional information on first aid kit contents can be found [here](#).
 - A map of the area you are hiking.

*Additional equipment will be needed depending on the length of your trip and other factors.

- ☐ Provide relevant information to parents/guardians ahead of time, including:
 - A trip itinerary that includes information on how to contact the group during the trip. (The 4-H Trip Plan that is submitted to the 4-H Program Coordinator can also be provided to parents).
 - Equipment list
- ☐ Consider hosting a pre-trip orientation to provide details and answer questions.



For additional information, visit extension.msu.edu

During the trip:

- ☐ Provide an orientation before beginning:
 - Review the trip itinerary.
 - Review expectations (staying on the trail, staying with the group, etc.)
- ☐ Utilize a staff member or volunteer as a “sweep” – have them remain at the back of the group to ensure no one falls behind.
- ☐ Utilize a staff member or volunteer at the front of the group to scan for upcoming hazards.
- ☐ Actively monitor hikers to determine if breaks or pace adjustments are needed.
- ☐ Ensure proper food storage to avoid attracting wildlife. Depending on where you are hiking and/or camping, this may include storing food in a vehicle, in a bear locker (if provided), or hanging food.

☐ **After the trip:**

- Ensure that all equipment is returned and properly stored.
- Reflect and debrief with youth. Some questions you can ask are:
 - How was the trip?
 - What was challenging?
 - What was fun?
 - How does backpacking relate to the 4-H Life Skills Wheel?
- Reflect and debrief with your trip leaders:
 - What went well and what can be improved?
 - Was there anything that you weren't prepared for?

Support:

As you are working out the details of your trip, please reach out to the Outdoor Education and Risk Management Educators with any questions. We are happy to help you plan an enjoyable, safe experience for your group.

For more information contact:

Joe Kreider
4-H Natural Resources and Outdoor Education
Kreider4@msu.edu

Dorothy Munn
Policy and Risk Management Educator
munnd@msu.edu

To contact an expert in your area, visit extension.msu.edu/experts or call 888-MSUE4MI (888-678-3464)