

## Day Hiking and Backpacking (Higher Care)

### Higher Care

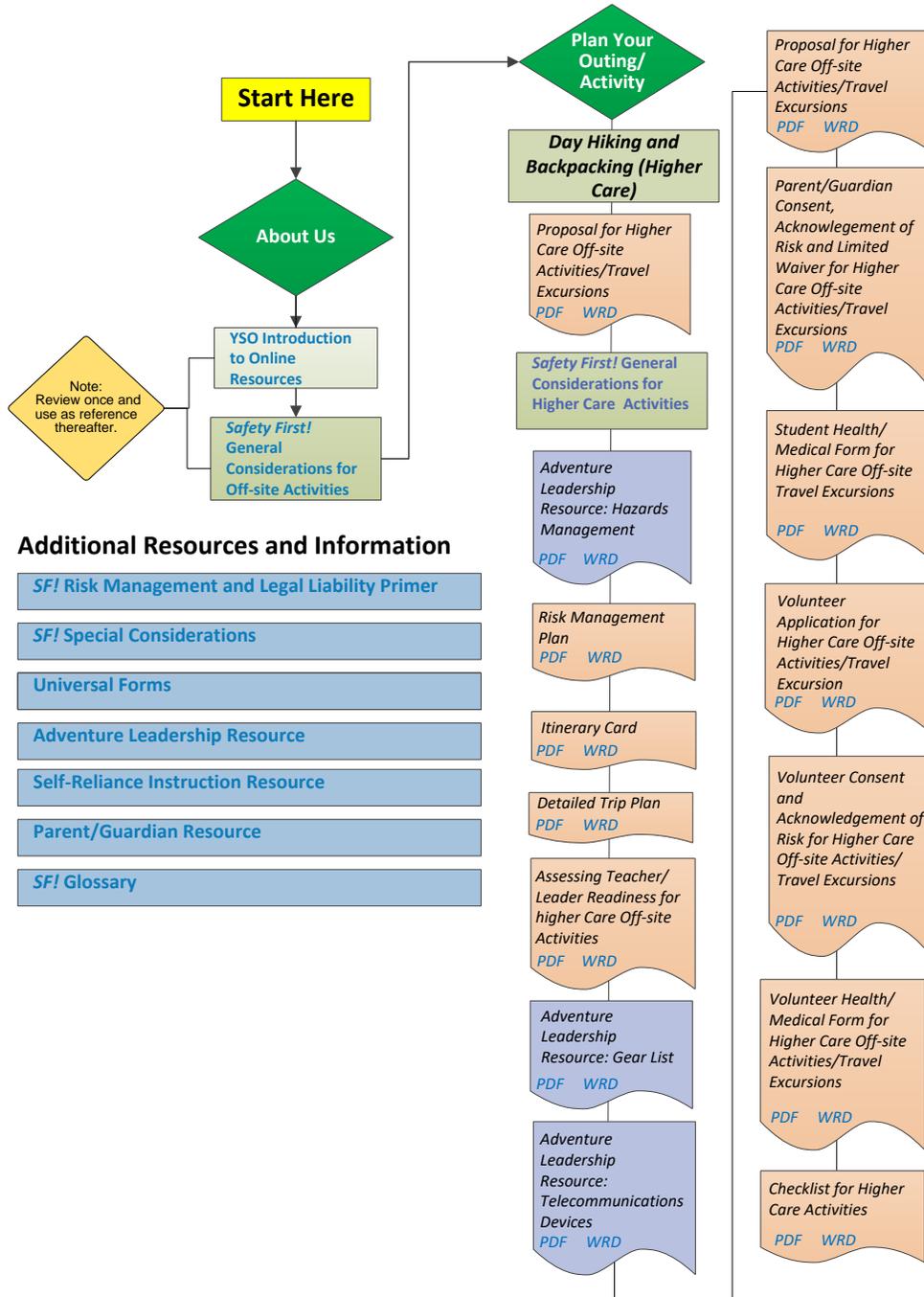
**Criteria:**

- Complex terrain: multiple junctions, long steep climbs/descents, rough trail terrain
- Semi-remote to remote: out of the community (e.g., provincial park; wilderness area)
- Higher inherent risk in the activity
- Significant fitness required
- Lack of clear boundaries for activity: one could be lost for more than an hour
- Long duration: typically (but not always) a half-day to full day
- Support services not close: far from buildings and/or vehicles
- Not close to emergency services: more than 20 minutes from EMS arrival on-site
- Specific leadership training required: some specific technical and leadership training indicated
- Significant preparation time of students: more than an hour of student prep needed

# Day Hiking and Backpacking (Higher Care)

Day Hiking Grade 3+  
Overnight Backpacking Grade 6+  
Extended Backpacking Grade 7+

Flow Chart, Steps to Success, and Safety Guidelines



## Additional Resources and Information

- [SF! Risk Management and Legal Liability Primer](#)
- [SF! Special Considerations](#)
- [Universal Forms](#)
- [Adventure Leadership Resource](#)
- [Self-Reliance Instruction Resource](#)
- [Parent/Guardian Resource](#)
- [SF! Glossary](#)

# Safety Guidelines

Day Hiking refers to walking with light daypacks, without the expectation of camping overnight.

Backpacking refers to carrying the clothing, equipment and provisions the group needs to camp out one or more nights on the trail.

## Day Hiking-Higher Care:

### **Known Potential Risks**

- Injuries related to motor vehicle incidents en route to and from activity area;
- Becoming lost or separated from the group or the group becoming split up;
- Injuries related to slips, trips, and falls in the program area or en-route to/from it;
- Injury or delay related to equipment (e.g., poor fit, improper adjustment, malfunction, improper use);
- Foot, knee or other leg injuries (e.g., blisters, sprains, strains);
- Acute or overuse injuries/conditions;
- Injuries related to the physical demands of the activity and/or lack of activity skill;
- Weather changes creating adverse conditions;
- Hypothermia due to insufficient clothing;
- Loss of manual dexterity in hands during cold and wet weather;
- Hyperthermia (e.g., heat exhaustion, heat stroke) due to insufficient hydration, overdressing, and/or overexertion in a hot environment;
- Allergic reactions to natural substances (e.g., bee or wasp stings);
- Injuries related to interactions with animals and plants in the environment;
- Psychological injury due to anxiety or embarrassment (e.g., re: body size or shape, lack of fitness or skill);
- Illness related to poor hygiene or failure to adequately purify water;
- Suffering an injury while alone on a route/trail;
- Complications of an injury or illness due to remoteness and time to emergency services; and
- Other risks normally associated with the activity and environment.

### **Common Risk Mitigation Strategies**

#### **Teacher/Leader Readiness**

- The teacher/leader must be competent to organize the hiking activity; to demonstrate, instruct and supervise it, and to effect rescue and emergency procedures as necessary. The more remote

and/or longer the day hike or backpack is to be, the more knowledge, skill, fitness and experience the leader must have.

- The teacher/leader must be familiar with the area and/or route.
- Assistant teachers/leaders should have adequate knowledge, skill, fitness and related experience to support the group.
- At least one supervisor should have first aid training, the level dependent upon the time/distance from professional first responders (refer to *First Aid* in *General Considerations*).

## Location

- Guidelines related to travel by bus or walking to/from a site are covered in *Travel to/from Off-site Destinations* in the *General Considerations*. If travelling by a means other than bus or walking, see *Transportation* in *Special Considerations*.
- Have a map of the route (e.g., park or trail map of local area, topographic map if in more remote setting), compass (if relevant – not needed for a hike in a local park), and GPS, if/as appropriate, with thorough knowledge of their use. Have a tide table if on a coastal hike where relevant. Copy of map (and/or itinerary card) should be left with the principal or designate. If day hike originates from base camp, a map and itinerary card should be left with the supervisor at base camp. Have a tide table if on coastal hike (where relevant).
- In general, stay on designated trails as much as possible.
- Be particularly conservative regarding hiking distance and time estimates when pending darkness may affect success and safety.
- Stay on designated trails unless there is a program goal, which requires going off-trail (e.g., exploring a meadow, cross-country navigation practice).
- Stay below 2,500 meters (8,000 feet) to avoid potential mountain sickness or pulmonary edema, unless a very mature group and sufficiently acclimatized.

## Equipment

- All necessary equipment, including first aid kit, and survival and repair kits, as appropriate, should be checked and restocked before the trip.
- Encourage use of comfortable, durable, closed-toe flat shoes (e.g., sturdy running shoes or hiking shoes/boots).
- Each group member should carry their own day pack, complete with water, food, extra clothes, rain gear, and/or other items, as appropriate to the hike.
- Each group member should have a whistle.
- If hiking in known bear country, carry deterrent (bear spray).
- Each student should carry their own pack, complete with water, food, extra clothes, rain gear, survival kit, and/or other items as appropriate to the hike.

## Instruction

- Consider the nature and severity of any pre-existing condition(s) of any group members.

- In an age-appropriate manner, students should be taught about the route and known common or unique hazards on it or in the area (e.g., steep-sided trails, water margins, wildlife, ticks) and procedures for avoiding or dealing with each.
- Students should be directed, as appropriate to the route, to avoid damaging any sensitive areas (e.g., marshes, wetlands, soft earth embankments and/or mossy rocks), and to avoid any machines or wild or domestic animals encountered).
- Wooden surfaces, be they roots or man-made structures can be especially slippery when wet, as can rocky beaches with or without vegetation.
- Consider any potentially disabling chronic knee, foot or other relevant limitations that could be exacerbated. Discuss with parent(s)/guardian(s) to determine if a pre-existing condition could endanger the student and/or the group.

## Supervision

- Ensure students are appropriately supervised (considering age, maturity and context). In addition to the guidelines in *Supervision* in the *Safety First! General Considerations*, apply the following as appropriate.
  - In-the-area supervision.
  - Use lead/sweep, buddy system, head counts, regular rest breaks and/or other appropriate methods to keep the group together.
  - Rendezvous at trail junctions to ensure no one goes the wrong way.
  - Consider the use of communications equipment between lead and sweep or smaller hiking units (e.g., cell phones, Family Radio Service (FRS), walkie-talkies,).
  - Supervision ratio calculated (see *Supervision* in *General Considerations for Higher Care Activities*).

## Backpacking – Overnight/Extended:

### **Known Potential Risks**

- Injuries related to lifting, carrying, walking with, or putting down the pack;
- Burns or scalds related to use of fires, camp stoves and/or the handling of hot food or liquid;
- Cuts related to the use of knives, axes or saws;
- Illness related to poor personal hygiene, failure to purify drinking water, or failure to sanitize dishes;
- Complications of an injury/illness due to remoteness and time to emergency services; and
- Other risks normally associated with participation in the activity and environment.

## Common Risk Mitigation Strategies

### Instruction

- In an age-appropriate manner, students should be taught about the route and known common or unique hazards on it or in the area (e.g., steep-sided trails, water margins, wildlife, ticks) and procedures for avoiding or dealing with each.
- Students should be directed, as appropriate to the route, to avoid damaging any sensitive areas (e.g., marshes, wetlands, soft earth embankments and/or mossy rocks), and to avoid any machines or wild or domestic animals encountered).
- Wooden surfaces, be they roots or man-made structures can be especially slippery when wet, as can rocky beaches with or without vegetation.
- Students, particularly youth under 16, should not carry more than 20-25% of their body weight. This will necessarily limit the duration of backpacking trips that younger or smaller students can participate in unless there is another means of carrying their gear (e.g., a parent/guardian attending with them and carrying their own as well as some of the child's gear and a share of the group's gear as appropriate). Instruct students regarding appropriate packing of their backpacks and adjusting their backpacks for proper fit.
- Instruct students regarding safe procedures for donning and taking off heavy backpacks. Encourage buddy assistance.
- Provide appropriately detailed explanations of hazards encountered (e.g., river crossing, scree slope, etc.) and procedures to follow so that students understand the hazard and what they are to do, including contingencies. The potential impact of some hazards can be much more significant when the weight of loaded backpacks are added.
- Avoid travel in darkness except for emergencies. Try to select a camp spot with sufficient daylight left for everyone to get camp set before nightfall. Accidents tend to happen at the end of the day when people are tired on the trail and while setting up camp before dinner.
- Consider the nature and severity of any pre-existing condition(s) of any group members. Students with leg or foot injuries should not participate in backpacking.

### Supervision

- In-the-area supervision.
- Ratio as per calculation (see *Supervision* in *General Considerations for Higher Care Activities*).

See *Camping (Higher Care)*.

### Notes

1. If, when reviewing the guidelines above, terms and concepts presented are unfamiliar, this is a strong indicator that additional personal leadership preparation (e.g., a training course, reading) or contracting a qualified service provider is advisable.
2. This document is not intended as an instructional guide. The teacher will need to use other references to learn how to teach students the skills (e.g., how to brake when inline skating, how to do a diagonal stride when cross-country skiing).

