

A close-up photograph of a person wearing a blue denim jacket. They are holding a silver digital camera in their right hand and a smartphone in their left hand. The person is also wearing grey pants and white sneakers. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

Field Trip Risk Management Guideline



OSBIE
ONTARIO SCHOOL BOARDS'
INSURANCE EXCHANGE

Introduction

Some level of injury risk is inherent to any activity.

The guidelines contained in this document are intended to assist members of the Ontario School Boards' Insurance Exchange in identifying and managing the risks of school approved field trips or excursions.

These guidelines are not to be interpreted as an endorsement for school boards to organize or participate in any activities referenced in this material. School boards should only undertake to organize field trip activities in accordance with board policies/procedures and after careful assessment of the risk factors and their ability to manage those risks.

Risk Identification

It is not possible to list every risk associated with hundreds of possible school activities. However, by setting a systematic and consistent process in place, organizers of any school activities can identify most foreseeable risks as the first step in planning a school trip.

Consideration should be given to the risks associated with several components of any school trip, as follows:



Mode of Transportation

It is well known that transportation poses one of the highest daily risks for most people. Because the purpose of a school field trip is to achieve an educational experience by leaving the school grounds, some form of transportation risks will always exist and should always be considered in the planning process. The following risks associated with the more common forms of transportation should be considered:



Walking – Field trip destinations that are within walking distance of the school will have various risk profiles to consider, depending on factors such as traffic density, crosswalks, sidewalks, rugged terrain, weather conditions, hilly terrain, student age, ability, special needs and distance being travelled should also be considered.



Cycling – Factors to be considered include age/experience of students, traffic conditions, helmet use, nature of terrain, weather conditions, etc. Since this mode of transportation is also a formalized physical education activity, it is recommended that the OPHEA Physical Education Ontario Safety Guidelines be referenced when planning this mode of transportation.



Passenger Car – Student Trip Driver – This is the highest risk form of student transportation and is NOT recommended by OSBIE. According to the Insurance Bureau of Canada statistics, inexperienced drivers under age 25 may be involved in as many as 4 times more crashes than drivers over 25 years of age.



Passenger Cars/Vans (Up to 8 passengers) – Parent Volunteer Driver –

Risk factors to be considered include driver experience, driving record (i.e. accident and conviction record), vehicle condition, weather conditions, distance, traffic density, etc.



Passenger Vans (9+ Passengers) - These types of vehicles, which come in various seating configurations (9, 12 and 15 passengers) have been associated with safety concerns in both the United States and in Canada. Under full-load conditions, the handling characteristics of these types of vehicles make them very unstable in emergency situations (skids, crash avoidance, braking, etc.) and they have a high roll-over crash history as the result of a high centre of gravity.

Although OSBIE does not recommend the use of these vehicles for student transportation, in Ontario, the Highway Traffic Act contains regulations that apply to the use of these types of vehicles for school purposes, including a provision for a higher category of driver license.



School Buses - School buses are engineered to provide the highest level of passenger protection. The design of a school bus includes more than 30 safety features that are not present in other passenger vehicles, including a safety compartment that surrounds a student with energy absorbing material to reduce injuries in collisions.



Tour Buses and/or Transit Buses- These vehicles are not required to meet the same safety and design criteria as a North American built school bus. Caution should be exercised when booking tour buses or using transit buses in foreign jurisdictions, as safety standards and driver qualifications may not meet North American standards.



Watercraft – Commercial watercraft operated in Canada are subject to Transport Canada regulations, however, craft below 100 feet may not be required to meet certain safety standards for larger vessels, such as crew evacuation training, lifeboat capacity/drills, etc.

Caution should be exercised for watercraft being operated in foreign jurisdictions, as safety standards and operator qualifications may not meet North American standards.



Aircraft - Commercial airlines regulated by a federal authority should be the only form of aircraft transportation acceptable for school excursions.

Private aircraft are not recommended for school excursions.



Rail - Commercial rail lines that are regulated by a federal authority are recommended for school excursions.

Shuttle trains, monorails, etc. operated by a private operator associated with amusement parks, etc. may not be licensed or regulated and should be approached with caution – ask for documentation on licensing, maintenance, inspection and insurance.

Foreseeable Hazards

It is not possible to list all hazards for all possible school excursion destinations.

For simplicity, the risks for any school activity can be sorted into three major categories – Low, Medium and High, based on the following criteria (See Figure 1):

Low: There is an identifiable risk of a loss occurring, but it is either unlikely to occur or would not cause serious injury/damage. Some characteristics of low risk factors include, but are not limited to sedentary classroom activities, low impact exercises, walking, computer studies, reading activities, etc.

An event or situation may also be considered a low risk if the likelihood of an occurrence is rare or atypical for a school environment or location. Events with low

statistical probability of occurring, such as hurricanes, earthquakes, nuclear war,

radioactive fall-out, students experiencing fatal heart attacks, etc. are examples of remote risk that rarely occur, and unless situations or conditions suddenly change, would not warrant an allocation of resources to manage such risks.

Medium: There is a known risk associated with the activity that may cause a loss to occur regularly, but you can take steps to remove or reduce the risk. Some characteristics of medium risk factors include, but are not limited to physical contact sports, transportation, water transportation, downhill sports (ski, toboggan, tubing, etc.), water activities (swimming, sailing, canoeing, etc.), physical education programs, etc.

There is also a sub-class in this category called “**High Medium**”, which applies to activities where relatively few losses occur, but because of the nature of the hazards, any loss that does occur will result in a catastrophic injury. School excursions/activities that fall in this sub-category need to be carefully considered as to whether they are an appropriate activity, and if selected, managed with more caution. This sub-category

includes activities such as extreme sports, wilderness excursions, rock climbing, high ropes, canopy walks, etc.

High: The nature of the activity or the presence of obvious hazards results in a high probability of a loss occurring with catastrophic results, it is foreseeable that a loss will occur, and/or you have no control over the risks that are present. Some characteristics of high-risk factors include, but are not limited to:

Fall heights exceeding 8 feet;
Exposure to weather elements – sun, wind, extreme heat/cold;
Extreme tidal conditions, currents or wave action (including white water); High speeds;
Uncontrolled free fall or jumps;
Areas prone to natural elements – avalanche, mudslides, volcanic activity, flash flood, disease outbreak, etc.;
Natural disaster areas – hurricane, ice/snowstorm, tornadoes, earthquake, etc.
Areas experiencing war (declared or undeclared), civil and/or political unrest (Contact Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs for Travel information and Advisories) Exposure to wild and/or exotic animals;
Inexperienced volunteers and/or teacher supervisors; Use of student drivers for transportation.

The presence of any one or more of these factors is indicative of a high-risk activity and may not be an acceptable risk for your school board.

Collateral Hazards

During a school excursion reaching its planned destination, other activities may be planned along the route. Organizers often focus primarily on the destination risks and overlook the risks of other activities that may take place incidental to the primary purpose of the school excursion. Caution should be exercised when

unscheduled or “ad hoc” activities are permitted.

Typical examples of collateral hazards can occur when stops are made along the route of travel to visit venues including, but not limited to, amusement parks, restaurants, paint ball parks, go kart tracks, wave pools, hotel swimming pools, etc.

The same consideration must be given to whether such incidental activities are appropriate for the group, and as a school activity. Many physical activities, such as swimming or other sports, are referenced in the [Ontario Physical Activity Safety Standards in Education \(OPASSE\)](#), managed by Ophea, and should be referenced when organizing such activities. The same categories of hazards listed in “Foreseeable Hazards – Planned Destination” section should be used to identify unacceptable activities.

Supervision Requirements

The OPASSE provide basic guidance for supervision and may set ratios for many common school activities.

However, based on court cases involving student injuries arising from school activities, caution should be exercised when relying solely on a numeric ratio to guarantee a safe level of supervision. In these court cases, meeting the standard of providing “adequate supervision” for an activity will be based on a combination of the following factors:

Nature of the activity - Foreseeable risk(s) of injury associated with participating in an activity (see Foreseeable Hazards)

Ability of the Participants – Degree of difficulty, physical strength, endurance, coordination, mobility, physical/mental limitations.

Experience of the Participants - First time experience versus various degrees of experience/skill in participating in the activity.

Age of the Participants - Factors such as physical size (height/weight), maturity level, risk perception, comprehension of rules/instructions, etc. are dependent on age.

Environmental Factors - Site lay-out (clear sight lines versus obstructions); dispersed groups (e.g. ski hills, amusement parks); tour groups versus self-guided, presence of dangerous features (e.g. cliffs, allurements, unusual weather or environmental phenomenon, etc.)

Number of Students - The ratio of supervisors to participants after considering all the preceding factors.

It is expected that an organizer of a school board excursion/activity will act as a reasonable and prudent person by taking all these variables into consideration when

determining what level of supervision is required for the activity. Organizers should

always consult with school board policies and procedures regarding supervision.

Supervision levels for excursions/activities should be reviewed each time a recurring event is being planned and should take into consideration changes in any of these variables that may have occurred since the last time it took place. It is recommended that for physical activities, the OPASSE be consulted for activity-specific supervision ratios.

When sufficient staff and volunteer resources are not available to provide adequate supervision, an excursion/activity should not take place – the school/board should always reserve the right to cancel an event at any time if supervision or safety requirements cannot be met.

Contingency plans should also be in place to provide supervision for students who may:

- be injured or become ill (i.e. provide for someone to accompany to hospital, or return home)
 - experience travel changes/delays (e.g. airline over-booking of flights, reassign flights, weather delays or connecting flights, etc.)
 - be detained by authorities (passport, immigration or other legal issues)
- Students should never be left unaccompanied in any of these situations.

Volunteer Recruitment and Supervision

Many school excursions rely on parent volunteers to assist the teachers in supervising. The emphasis is on assist, as parent volunteers should not be in charge of the excursion or be administering discipline to students.

While use of volunteers has many benefits, organizers of any school activities, including excursions, need to be aware that there are always risks of assault, sexual misconduct and negligent acts that must be mitigated and managed. The school board will be held legally liable for any actions of a volunteer that cause injury to a student or a third party.

Volunteer Tips:

1. Utilize a screening process for volunteers that includes interview screening and reference checks. For over-night excursions, or for activities that involve long- term interaction with students, criminal background checks (CPIC) are recommended.
2. Define which activities are appropriate for volunteers to be involved in.
3. Follow up or investigate any rumors of inappropriate behavior.
4. Ensure volunteers are properly supervised by school staff.
5. Ensure volunteer drivers have valid driver's license and automobile Liability insurance. Use [OSBIE Volunteer Driver Form](#) (login required).
6. Do not use volunteer drivers to operate passenger vans (9 + vans require special driver licenses).

Risk Management Strategies

Based on the identified risks and the assessment of their priority noted in the previous sections, the following risk management strategies can be applied. In most cases, it will be common to use combinations of strategies to address the different types of risks associated with the excursion.

Avoidance

- 100% effective in preventing an injury
- Use if risk assessment indicates activity is "High Risk" and/or the hazards cannot be mitigated or controlled

Reduce (Manage) the Risk

- Modify the activity; remove unnecessary hazards/risks
- Establish and enforce safety rules
- Refer to the OPASSE for activity-specific excursions
- Conduct a pre-trip visit to site; learn local conditions, qualified leaders
- Hold pre-trip meetings with parents/students
- Use Informed Consent forms

Risk Transfer

- Promote Student Accident Insurance for sports and excursions
- Request Proof of Insurance from event/venue operators
- Out-of-Province Medical insurance if excursion is outside Ontario
- DO NOT sign waivers for students
- DO NOT agree to name commercial operators under the school board's insurance

Loss Reduction

- First Aid providers are on trip/site
- Evacuation Plan
- Emergency notification system
- Emergency Response Procedure

Duplication of Resources

- Adequate number of supervisors
- Substitute leader (back-up in case of illness or unexpected events)
- Contingency plan to stay with any student who is delayed or detained

Field Trip Quick Tips

Out of Province Trips:

- Ensure proper supervision is available
- Assess transportation risks
- Define rules for student behavior and enforce them
- Host a planning meeting with parents and volunteers prior to trip
- Use school board approved Informed Consent Forms
- Have a defined itinerary – beware of collateral risks of other activities along the way
- Out-of Province Medical insurance
- Recommend Student Accident Insurance

Water Related Trips:

- Use school board approved Informed Consent Forms
- Refer to the OPASSE for specific small craft activities or swimming activities
- Know skill level for all students for any swimming activity or small craft
- Request evidence of insurance for tour boat operators
- Ensure that students are taught proper safety
- PFD's are in use for small craft and readily accessible for larger craft

Overnight Trips

- Ensure proper supervision is available with back-up plan
- Define rules for student behavior and enforce them
- Use school board approved Informed Consent Forms
- Have a defined itinerary – beware of collateral risks of other activities along the way
- Recommend Student Accident Insurance

Ski/Snowboard Trips

- Refer to [OSBIE/OSRA School Board Snow Resort Safety Guidelines](#)