

FIELD TRIP TIPS: LEADERSHIP AND PLANNING

Field trips are common for religious organizations, especially those risks with an active youth ministry program. Typical trips include day or evening travel to local sights, sporting events, and ministry projects. Trips may also include overnight stays.

While these trips foster community outreach and involvement, there are risks to be considered when venturing off-site. Travel, off-site supervision, and unexpected hazards are some of the challenges youth ministries face while on a field trip. Implementing a procedure and establishing clear leadership roles during the trip could help improve field trip safety.

Planning

Designate a trip leader as the individual responsible for content and logistics before, during and after the trip. Set adequate approval timelines well in advance for pre-trip correspondence and activities. Create a trip ticket or fact sheet that documents administrative approval and identifies the destination, trip objectives, schedule, mode of transportation and other logistical information. Make sure that the travel times and the sequence of events are reasonable. To build anticipation and excitement, you can review the following as part of your plan:

- Advance research
- Specific questions to be resolved
- Anticipated weather
- Appropriate attire
- Lunch plans, etc
- Activity teasers

A field trip to a new destination may require a pre-trip visit to check the site, review the plan with the host venue staff and address needs such as:

- Will the parking lot accommodate bus loading and unloading?
- Is the facility ADA accessible?
- Are there adequate restrooms and drinking water?



Current knowledge of the site and clear communication with the host could help reduce the chance of scheduling problems and possibly identify hazards such as construction projects or other changes to the facility.

Transportation

Transportation safety is crucial. Transportation may be provided by owned vehicles, by church members in personal vehicles, or by a third party. As transportation arrangements are made, consider the first choice to be a school bus with a professional driver and the last choice to be church member volunteers. If volunteer drivers are used, establish procedures to pre-qualify an approved driver list. Confirm and address the following issues:

- Proper licensing.
- Proof of insurance.
- Recent driving history report (MVR) showing a good driving record.
- Vehicle capacity with seatbelts for every passenger.
- Protect confidential and personal information acquired during this process.
- Provide clear instructions, supervisory responsibilities and a list of students assigned to each driver.
- Emphasize loading and unloading safety practices that are specific to the destination.

Permission Slips

Establish a written permission process with parental consent and signed waivers. Use standardized permission slips that have been approved by legal counsel. Leave the original signed forms at the administrative office and send copies along with the field trip leader. Along with written permission, gather emergency contact information and note any special accommodations needed or existing medical conditions of which chaperones should be aware. It may be helpful to request authorization to provide first aid or procure necessary emergency medical treatment.

Supervision

Plan for an adequate ratio of adults to students. The number will vary depending on the age of the student, the activity and location. For example, if the activity is escorting high-school students from the bus stop to a

theater seat and back again, you may need less help than elementary students visiting a large museum. Obtain background checks for chaperones in accordance with the organization's policy. Assign specific students to staff and volunteers and use the buddy system where appropriate. It is essential that the trip leader maintain responsibility of the participant list and that students are accounted for on each group movement.

Student-to-chaperone ratios should be appropriate for the age of the participants and the nature of the activities. GMC recommends the following student staffing ratios for field trips.

- K-Grade 5: 1:12
- Grades 6-8: 1:15
- High School: 1:20

Increase the number of chaperones for trips to amusement parks, water parks, or beaches.

Emergency Preparedness

Prepare for the unexpected with an emergency plan that includes procedures for off-campus incidents. Provide an emergency contact communication checklist to trip leaders and volunteers. The permission slips can help maintain accurate guardian phone numbers. Discuss provisions for transporting students if needed as a result of behavior problems or illness.

Field trips can be rewarding but present unique risks. Good leadership and systematic trip planning can help you safely extend the boundaries of the youth ministry out into your community so that students have a safe and fun learning experience on each field trip you endeavor.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Protective Tips for Abuse Prevention | <https://www.glatfelterministrycare.com/risk-management/category/abuse-prevention>

Auto Safety Tips including Charter Coach Services and 15 Passenger Vans | www.glatfelterministrycare.com/risk-management/category/auto-safety