WHY DO A FIELD EXPERIENCE?

Learning science is doing science! The best way to learn science is by doing hands-on, process and inquiry based learning activities. Working in the field as opposed to the formal academic classroom is a means to that end. Students should have as many field experiences as possible in concert with their classroom studies. The extent of field experiences depends on the age of students/grade level, school policies and available resources. That can range from working on school grounds to taking hikes in a pasture, woodland or other types of more challenging terrain. However, no matter where the experience is, a successful field experience is a safe field experience. So what types of considerations should the teacher of science address to secure a safer learning experience in the field?

SAFER SCIENCE IN THE FIELD

The following items provide teachers of science an introduction to planning for a safer field experience. It is a place to begin and certainly should have additional considerations depending on age of students and location of the field experience, to mention a few. LET THE LIST BEGIN!

- **Walk-The-Walk:** Always walk-the-walk before taking a field trip with students. Know the terrain, hazards, etc. and be prepared for them. Hazards such as broken glass, trash, branches, insects (bees, mosquitoes, ticks), wild animals, poisonous plants (poison ivy), unlevel ground, etc. should be considered.

- **Permission Slips:** Make sure student permission slips or acknowledgement forms are provided for parents/guardians to sign, acknowledging the specifics of the trip and academic purpose. Also note what is being done to make it a safer trip.

- **Safety Training:** Provide basic safety training for all participants BEFORE the field trip starts. Include such things as overview of the trip, what happens if a participant is lost, injured, medical issues, avoiding unsafe terrain, communications, etc.

- **Appropriate clothing:** Appropriate clothing depends on trail conditions and the season. All participants should make sure their bodies are completely covered below their neck – long sleeve shirts, pants, close toed shoes or boots, etc. – jackets and gloves if necessary.

- **Sun-Wise:** All participants should have on hats, sun glasses, and sunscreen when in the field to prevent overexposure to UV rays.

- **Weather-smart:** Make sure you have checked the weather forecast before moving into the field. Never take the trip in inclement weather – rain, snow, etc. Also be aware of unpredictable weather such as thunderstorms, wind storms, etc.

- **First-Aid:** Make sure someone is trained in first-aid procedures in case there is an incident requiring medical attention. Also have a list of medical needs for all participants, including necessary medications, etc.

- **Itinerary:** Make sure the school knows where you are going and when you plan on returning in case there are issues or problems.

- **Togetherness:** Always travel in a group or groups – never alone! Develop a formal buddy system for all participants.

- **Rest & Water:** Participants should have rest time when walking long distances. Also make sure water and snack food for energy is available.

- **Communications:** Whistles for each participant, cell phones or walkie-talkies for group leaders, etc. are helpful for communications, especially in emergencies.

- **Personal Hygiene:** Make sure appropriate toilet facilities are available on long hikes at appropriate intervals. Also, have either soap and water or antibacterial wipes available for use.

- **Storm Plan:** Have a plan in case an unexpected thunderstorm, windstorm, etc. should appear. Review basic behavioral procedures with all participants fostering best safety practices.
**Trip Kit Items:** In addition to a general first-aid kit, consider bring a trip kit with the following items: extra clothing for warmth, compass, extra food, flashlight, insect repellent, map, pocket knife, pocket mirror, trash bags, water, extra whistles.

**IN THE END**

Remember – the field experience for student learning is priceless. So is the safety. It doesn’t matter if the trip is for five minutes or five hours. Try not to have any surprises which you did not anticipate. Planning will not eliminate all possible surprises but certainly will make it safer for all participants!

**LIVE LONG AND PROSPER SAFELY!**

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**References**


**USDS Forest Service:** [http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/safety/safety.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/safety/safety.shtml)