

Eve on the Trail –

What's important about working with young women on the trail

Scouting rules for Venturing

The 3 P's: Peeing, Pooping and Periods

The 3 E's: Equipment, Experience, Expectations,

The 3 F's: Fitness, Food and First Aid

The group dynamic – a plus for all involved

Scouting rules for Venturing

Guide to Safe Scouting and Youth Protection training applies to all Venturing activities. This is a summary only.

- In coed activities, two deep leadership applies.
- Coed overnight activities require male and female adult leaders, both of whom must be 21 years of age or older, and one of whom must be a registered member of the BSA.
- One on one contact is not allowed
- No fewer than 4 individuals (always with a minimum of 2 adults) go on any backcountry expedition or campout.
- Male and female youth participants will not share the same sleeping facility.
- Shared showers & latrines require use of the buddy system as well as designated separate times for male and female use.
- Privacy must be respected
- Guide to Safe Scouting is the minimum expectation– a higher expectation makes everyone more comfortable.

- Recommend female leadership on every activity, overnight or day trip.
- A female leader may be better attuned to the needs of female participants – physically and emotionally.
- Young women often seek the company and advice of an adult woman when they are unsure of the safety of a situation.
- Young women may encounter physical injury or illness during any activity and may require assistance that would make them uncomfortable were a man to give it.
- Parents of young women are reassured by the presence of a female leader.
- There is sometimes an unspoken competition between the males and females that could cause a young woman to adopt an attitude or challenge with which she is not really comfortable. A woman can diffuse the situation by supporting a realistic assessment of the situation and propose alternatives. (Sometimes the alternatives are better for the entire group, not just the females). Read: eliminating the macho factor.

How to observe the separate facilities rule when high adventure activities don't allow for traditional separation of males and females:

Sometimes the campsite, or cabin is not ideal for separating genders. Acknowledgement of the situation and the solution should be discussed with the entire group, so everyone knows the rules:

- No mixing of genders for sleeping in tents. Try to have a central tarp for group activities, or include leaders in "big tent" games at night.
- Adult tents strategically placed throughout the campsite. (In view and earshot of comings and goings from youth tents)
- Outhouse or wet willie rules. –
 - Announce comings and goings (with buddy)
 - Mask a wet willie with a tarp to provide some privacy
 - Agree on an "occupied" signal at the start of the path – a bandana or other item can be used to "flag" occupied
 - An adult leader can accompany a group. (Girls like this sometimes)

If a cabin or shelter needs to be shared, set up rules for changing and segregate as much as possible. One situation we were in, we used tables to set boundaries to separate sleeping areas. Again, with adults strategically placed. Tarps or blankets can make a private dressing area

The 3 P's

Female anatomy is different than male anatomy. So, personal hygiene in the woods is a little, but not very, different. It's no big deal!

Peeing

Girls tend to make more of an effort to secure privacy. They need to learn to be comfortable with statements like: "I'm going to pee, no one look over this way" then go the required distance off trail. Finding the perfect bush may be impossible.

It is harder to follow the leave no trace "scatter" philosophy. I just tell the girls not to pee repeatedly in the same place. Peeing on a rock or log can help with scattering, but also can increase splattering.

Comfort: Sitting on the edge of a log (check for poison ivy and spiders first) or rock can be much more comfortable than squatting and it makes it easier to manage clothing. Even leaning back against a tree trunk can be comfortable.

Girls seem to prefer to travel in groups when toileting at night. An adult female being willing to walk into the woods and "guard" makes the girls more comfortable and more willing to travel farther off the trail.

In a pinch, it is possible to pee into a baggie in, or just outside a tent and dump it later. Not recommended, but in very cold, wet weather it can work.

Devices exist to allow peeing without removing clothing. So far, I haven't tried them, but I am told they work, if somewhat awkwardly. The female urinal with a long hose is one option. I also see more clothing offered with crotch zippers. I have not had experience with this – has anyone?

Periods:

Girls have periods and on any given trip it is likely that someone will have her period.

The good news is that by high school, girls have been having their periods for years and can generally handle it without anyone needing to know or get involved.

But there are a few issues:

The young women should pack in all the supplies they are likely to need. Our crew policy is not to carry extra sanitary supplies “just in case.” Women are responsible for themselves. If their periods are irregular, they need to be prepared. You may want to have extras on hand – depends on the age and competence of your girls.

Individual Preparations should include:

Sanitary supplies

Baggies – or long newspaper bags that can be tied off after each deposit. Double bagging is recommended.

Wet wipes

Extra undies.

Permission to use medication for cramps on medical form.

Aspirin tablets to crush and use in bag as deodorant

A belt pack is ideal for carrying sanitary supplies.

Crew Preparation should include:

Young women should be advised in advance to be prepared and of how to pack out used sanitary supplies. (A good time to do this is during a pack check prior to the trip – separate genders for pack checks)

Extra supplies for emergencies

Young women should be told to observe toxic shock precautions – don't leave a tampon in too long, just because it's a pain to deal with it in the woods.

Trash receptacle needs to be easily available.

Animal safe trash management – Same precautions as for food waste.

The Diva Cup – an alternative to pads or tampons, the Diva Cup is a small silicone cup worn internally to collect menstrual blood. It needs to be emptied a few times a day and there is no waste to pack out. The contents of the cup should be buried in a cat hole.

THE BEAR QUESTION?

Someone always brings up the question of periods and the potential of blood scent to attract bears. Basic common sense applies. Bears are attracted to food, but no one suggests starving during camping trips. Bears may be attracted to the scent of used sanitary supplies, but if they are packed properly, they don't pose a problem. A group using basic bear precautions should not experience any problems.

Young women should be advised, in advance, of the proper disposal of sanitary supplies, and should be told not to carry them in their packs unless they are properly packed. At night the bags containing sanitary supplies should be hung in bear bags, like food, NOT kept in the pack or tent.

POOPING

Everybody POOPS! The basic rules are the same for males and females. Teach proper cat hole use. Be sure trowels are available. If you are camping or traveling where human waste has to be packed out, be sure to discuss the procedure in advance. It might be wise to have a "women's poop tube" and a "men's poop tube" as there could well be resistance to sharing. Remember, most teenaged girls have been changing diapers while babysitting, since they were 12 years old, so poop is not that scary. Many girls are perfectly willing to use a poop tube. They are often very concerned about the environment and will do whatever is necessary to protect it.

Constipation: Everybody POOPS – but sometimes not often enough. Male or female, it can be difficult to poop in a less than private setting. Constipation can cause anyone to feel poorly and should be addressed early on.

Girls who are prone to constipation, or who have "shy" bathroom habits, need to be especially careful to eat fiber, drink enough water and may even want to bring stool softener along. Girls who need some private time far from the group can be accommodated if they let an advisor know about the problem. Talk about these topics in advance!

Equipment, Experience, Expectations

Experience

Girls and Boys will arrive in your crew with different levels of experience.

Do an interest survey early on, and include some questions about experience in the woods, or talk about experience levels at a crew meeting.

If there are wide differences in experience, be sure to plan activities to bring everyone up to speed, and to plan the activities appropriate to the level of outdoor skills the group has. Keep more difficult activities for later, or divide the group according to skill. (Our group was pretty evenly split- just as many inexperienced guys as girls)

Skill training is well received by motivated girls. If they have not camped, do some training sessions setting up equipment, lighting stoves, cooking and doing basic camping skills before going on a trip.

Some of the best times our crew had early on involved fire starting competitions in the back yard, accompanied by campfire and backpack stove cooking.

Expectations

When youth join a crew it is wise to check on their expectations.

Be clear about the crew mission statement, by-laws and the expectations leaders and advisors have for the members. The crew leaders needed to reinforce the bylaws about dating and make clear the expectation that crew members were at meetings to learn and plan, not to flirt. This problem may resolve itself when it becomes apparent that everyone is expected to work to the goals and there really isn't a place for people who just show up to socialize, but don't pull their weight.

Equipment

A problem for many young women

The biggest problem young women in our crew faced was acquiring suitable clothing and camping equipment.

Clothing:

They may know that "Cotton kills" – but do they know how to identify cotton? Do they know that their jeans are cotton? PJ's? Underwear? If the label is in Spanish can they read it? Few of the girls in our crew had any understanding of how to dress in the outdoors. Skills training about fabric, layering, and staying dry were essential.

Recommend:

- Show and Tell, wet/dry tests of socks and underwear in cold weather.
- Lists of clothing (very specific) for trips
- And MOST IMPORTANT- Pack checks before every trip.

Before any trip, have the participants pack, then a few days before departure, have a knowledgeable adult female go through the pack item by item and pull out inappropriate items. I guarantee you will find jeans and cotton underwear. If possible have some "loaner" items available for emergencies, but make it clear that proper outfitting is a safety issue and will not be compromised. Each girl is responsible for acquiring basic non-cotton clothing for activities. Parents can be given lists of requirements as well. **As I've mentioned before, the pack checks also provide a great opportunity for discussing personal hygiene issues.**

Packs

"My dad says to use his pack for now, and I can get one if I decide to keep doing this"

For many girls, this is the first time they have needed camping gear of their own. Most come with their father or brother's gear and this poses real problems.

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The problem with the use of poorly fitting equipment is that it hurts to use it and makes the experience a lot less fun. A properly fitted backpack can make the difference between a love of the outdoors and the life long hatred of camping.

Anyone purchasing a pack should use an outfitter who will make recommendations. Packs specially designed for women are worth their weight in gold!

Ultra Light or Lightweight:

It is worth considering light, or ultra light equipment right from the start. Ultra light may not provide the pack stability that some users want. Again, a good outfitter can help with the pros and cons.

Headlamps, lexan bowls and utensils, nalgene bottles, pocketknives, wool socks... Camping necessities also seem to be lacking among girls.

Guys show up with all the "best" stuff and have endless conversations about the relative merits of their gear. Girls show up with the bare minimum, usually cast offs or very low tech. Again, lists, show and tell and loans are necessary.

I've also found that if they do ask for gear, it is important to be specific (Do the research ahead of time and ask by brand and model) or once again, the less technical might be offered

A gear show and tell meeting can be a great resource. People bring in their good gear and tell about it. Lots of discussion of what gears works in what situation results.

The 3 F's: Fitness, Food and First Aid

Fitness

As with boys, fitness levels vary. Some girls may be athletes, some couch potatoes. Addressing fitness is an issue that needs to be handled with care. Body image tends to be fragile in adolescent girls, so talk about fitness should be very concrete. Statements of fact like: "You need to be able to walk 5 miles carrying a 30 lb. pack". Or "you need to pass the swim test to participate" are more useful than statements of opinion like "I don't think you're in good enough shape for this trip" or "You'd better start working out if you want to go".

Most girls have a fairly decent idea of their fitness level. They may be embarrassed to talk about it, though, so it is important to set some guidelines. It is also important to monitor what kinds of trips the crew leaders are planning to be sure they are going to be safe for those participating. I've observed that the girls don't want to let on that they might not feel ready for an activity, but will make a good decision with the right support.

They may also hesitate to ask for less demanding activities, but will sign up when one is offered.

Food

Food is one of the places where young women bring welcome changes to a camping group. Many girls are vegetarians and many health conscious eaters. Meals may become more varied and nutritious as the young women become assertive about their needs. Try to be sure the job of meal planning and shopping is shared between the genders.

Some of the challenges are:

Lactose intolerance

Food allergies

Special diets

Eating disorders – An anorexic Venturer may hide that she is not eating or lie about her intake. Be observant and set some guidelines. If a Venturer is not able to eat, high adventure activity is inappropriate.

Perceptions of calorie needs (male vs. female)

- Some of the girls try to eat very, very little, even when they have been active and need calories. Watch what they eat – be aware that they might need a logical rationale to eat enough. I've noticed a tendency to avoid protein and any fat at all.
- Some girls don't want to eat in front of guys (really). They may eat very small meals, and then be tired and hungry later.
- Many girls will eat chocolate anytime!

Again, communication and skills training are essential. The NOLS cookbook gives some guidelines for planning the appropriate amount of food for group trips. Researching needs, likes and dislikes with a survey can solve food problems.

FIRST AID & Health issues

There are some issues that come up when camping with young women.

1. Menstrual cramps: Hot water bottles (a Nalgene bottle with hot water wrapped in a t-shirt) exercise or pain meds may be appropriate.
2. Medication: Some young women may take hormones for cycle management or birth control. They may not be inclined to include this on their health forms. Assure them that the forms are confidential and ask them to include all medications they are taking. Their parents may not be aware of their use of certain prescribed medications and it is not our business to tell them.
3. Unknown medical conditions: Venturing leaders should be prepared to deal with depression, cutting and eating disorders. This type of information is rarely included on a health form or permission slip. Parents may try to protect their child by withholding information they consider "unnecessary" or they just may not recognize the problem, but on a high adventure trip, any of these conditions can affect the safety of the individual and the group. I don't have a solution – but I try to be aware of the personalities, problems and situations the girls might be facing. I encourage honesty and offer resources for treatment. You will need to contact a parent or health professional.