

C. WINTER-BASED ACTIVITIES

General Considerations for Winter Activities

Prior to reviewing elements of this subsection for the purpose of planning an activity or outing, be able to confirm the following:

- I have at least a basic familiarity with the content in Sections 1 (Introduction) and 2 (Risk Management Primer) of this document.*
- I have a solid understanding of all the material in Section 3 (General Considerations for Off-site Activities), and any relevant subsections in Section 4 (Special Considerations).*

With this grounding, now review the following:

Known Potential Risks

- Injuries related to vehicle crashes 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;
- Injuries related to colliding with another person or with a fixed object;
- Injuries related to the physical demands of the activity and/or lack of activity skill;
- Acute or overuse injuries/conditions;
- Weather changes creating adverse conditions;
- Injury or delay related to ill-fitting equipment or clothing, equipment malfunction, failure to use the equipment properly or becoming tangled in apparatus;
- Hypothermia frostbite or other cold injuries due to insufficient clothing;
- Loss of manual dexterity in hands during cold and wet weather;
- Illness related to poor hygiene;
- Injuries related to interactions with animals in the environment;
- Psychological injury due to anxiety or embarrassment (e.g., re: body size or shape, lack of fitness or skill);
- Cold injuries (e.g., frost bite);
- Other risks normally associated with the activity and environment.

Teacher/Leader Readiness

- The Lead Teacher must be competent to organize the activity; to demonstrate, instruct and supervise it; and to effect rescue and emergency procedures as necessary. The longer the winter activity is to be, especially if it is to be away from a warm indoor facility, the more competent the leader must be.
- The teacher/leader must know how to prevent and recognize signs and symptoms of common cold related illnesses and injuries (e.g., hypothermia, frostbite). At this level, treatment primarily involves getting the affected student(s) indoors out of the cold and determining if any additional first aid or medical treatment is needed.
- Assistant teachers/leaders must be comfortable outdoors in winter and have had sufficient experience in the activity to help 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 **Section 3**).

Equipment/Facilities

- For any site, students should be made aware of the boundaries for the activity.
- When choosing a site, consider the environmental conditions (e.g., sun, wind, wind chill, snow conditions and suitability of terrain).
- Appropriate layered or at least warm clothing should be worn. Headgear and gloves/mitts should be required (at least brought along) for anything beyond participation in mild conditions and within 250m of an accessible indoor facility.
- Refer to board policy regarding any temperature/weather cut offs. Many schools preclude outdoor activity at about -25° Celsius, including wind chill. Consider student age, maturity, clothing and footwear as well as site exposure.
- If activity will involve playing or traveling over natural ice (e.g., ice skating, cross country skiing, snowshoeing), see **Natural Ice** in **General Considerations for Winter Activities** in this section.

Natural Ice

Before skating, skiing or doing any other activities on natural ice:

- Confirm sufficient depth of natural ice with local authorities or check it at several points over the surface – for a group, ice must be consistently 15 cm thick or more. If unsure of ice conditions – STAY OFF!
- Recommended thickness of ice by the Lifesaving Society Canada are: 10 cm (4") for one person, 12 cm (5") for a snow machine, 20-30 cm (8-12") for a small car and 30-38 cm (12-15") for medium trucks.
- Clear hard, new ice is the only ice recommended for education, recreation or travel.
- Avoid:
 - slushy ice
 - ice near inflowing or outflowing streams which may be thinner.
 - ice on or near any moving water i.e., rivers and currents.
 - ice that has thawed and refrozen.
 - layered or rotten ice caused by sudden temperature changes.
 - heavy early snows that can act as a blanket to prevent hardening of ice.
 - air pockets beneath the ice, that may form near pressure ridges or when reservoir water levels change.
- Group members should be instructed in what to do in case of falling through the ice. Students should be within sight of each other and be prepared to call for help immediately for any participant who falls through.
- If someone does fall through, an adult supervisor must lay down and extend a rope or reaching assist (e.g., branch, pole, ski) to assist the individual.

Instruction

- If/as appropriate, instruct children to avoid touching metal objects with bare skin during cold temperatures.
- Instruct children not to eat snow; even white snow can be polluted and it lowers the body temperature contributing to hypothermia.
- Implement rules re: throwing snowballs at other people (due to potential for eye injuries); selecting or making appropriate inanimate targets (e.g., a big tree trunk) for this purpose is fine as long as group members are kept out of the line of fire.
- If walking off-site in winter, students should not walk or play on snow piles along the road or go near snowplows or areas being plowed.
- If/as appropriate, instruct students not to bury anyone in the snow and warn them about the hazards of making snow tunnels or quinzees that may create a risk of suffocation should they collapse. Snow shelter construction is allowed, with appropriate instruction, supervision and safety systems in place (see [Winter Camping](#) in the [Level 2 Manual](#)).
- Remind students to be especially vigilant regarding sun protection (e.g., sunglasses, sunscreen and lip block). Solar rays reflecting off the snow increase the risk of burning and skin damage.
- In an age-appropriate manner, discuss hypothermia and frostbite with students and how to prevent, recognize and treat.
- Be conscious of the risks posed by long scarves and drawstrings on students' snow suits and ask parent/guardians to consider removing any that could pose a hazard.

Supervision

- Level of supervision depends on the activity, environment and group.
- Ratio as per calculation (See [Section 3](#)).
- A buddy system should be used whenever appropriate, with buddies checking each other for signs of hypothermia, frostnip, etc.

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- I have a solid understanding of all the material in Section 3 (General Considerations for Off-site Activities), and any relevant subsections in Section 4 (Special Considerations).*

With this grounding, now review the following:

Known Potential Risks (refer to General Considerations for Winter Activities) plus:

- Injuries related to falling off the sliding apparatus;
- Injuries related to collisions with movable (e.g., other sliders or sliding equipment) or immovable (e.g., tree, fence) objects; and
- Injury or delay related to equipment malfunction, failure to use the equipment properly or becoming tangled in apparatus (e.g., toboggan/sled pull rope);
- Other risks normally associated with the activity and environment.

Teacher/Leader Readiness

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

Equipment/Facilities

- Unless the school is providing the sliding apparatus, students bring their own equipment for this activity. The Lead Teacher should share any equipment considerations with parents/guardians, as appropriate.
- If brought from home, teachers/leaders can expect to see a variety of sliding apparatus, including:
 - foam sleds,
 - saucers,
 - G.T. Racers,
 - toboggans,
 - sleds,
 - crazy carpets, and
 - inner tubes.
- Whatever apparatus is used, it must be in safe condition. Check it over or have parents/guardians check their child/ward's over for any cracks, sharp edges and broken parts.
- Each sliding apparatus has safety-related advantages and disadvantages. Occasionally, a particular type of sliding apparatus may be inappropriate at a particular sliding site or part of a site. For example, foam sleds, saucers and crazy carpets are light and common,

but are sometimes difficult to go straight on. This can be part of the fun and is not a problem if the sliding area is appropriate and the sliding area organized well so people on different sliding runs don't run into each other because they don't see each other with their backs turned. GT Racers (two 'skis', raised sitting area, steering wheel and brake lever) offer steering and braking, which few other sliding apparatus have, so provide for good control on flat downhill runs. However if going off a kicker, the steering and brakes don't work in the air and the high sitting position may increase the risk to the rider of a more serious fall on landing compared to other apparatus.

- In deciding which, if any, apparatus to restrict or prohibit (at the schoolyard hill during the school day or on an off-site sledding day to another hill), consider the following in relationship to the particular hill(s) to be used for the activity:
 - the weight and shape of the apparatus,
 - height sliders ride at (and, therefore, fall from),
 - ease of hanging on,
 - presence of padding to absorb bumps and landings; integral (e.g., foam sled) or attached (e.g., toboggan sit pad);
 - control of speed and direction on descent,
 - relative speed the particular apparatus is likely to go, and
 - how accessible the apparatus is (e.g., common, inexpensive).
- Each apparatus should be used in the manner in which it was intended. Recognizing that sliders often get turned around en route to the bottom and that this is part of the fun, sliders should generally start out sitting, kneeling or otherwise positioned in a manner that offers them the opportunity to observe the track below and prepare for any changes in terrain. Standing is generally not appropriate.
- Teachers/leaders should encourage parents/guardians and students that students bring and wear a helmet (e.g., cycling, hockey, multi-sport, downhill skiing, etc.). It is not evident that use of helmets by school-aged children/youth is community standard for recreational or educational sliding, so providing a helmet does not need to be a requirement for participating in a school sliding activity. However, this does not mean that use of helmets should not be encouraged and modeled.
- Clothing should be appropriate, including a water resistant layer or snowsuit, headgear and mitts/gloves. Sitting in school all afternoon in wet jeans is not much fun.
- Avoid scarves, loose clothing and tie up long hair that may get caught.
- As students will tend to get wet, the site should have proximity to a warm indoor facility or plan the activity so the activity ends before they have a chance to get cold.
- The area should be designated a "tobogganing or sliding area", either by signage or long-standing use as such and should not have competing uses (e.g., downhill skiing).
- Delimit the boundaries of the activity, if not obvious.
- Packed snow (but not ice) is preferred, with a grade of incline no greater than 30° (anything steeper is hard to walk up). The steeper the slope angle, the shorter the slope length should be.
- The hill and run-out section at the bottom should be free of hazards (e.g., trees, fences, rocks, vehicle or pedestrian traffic) and the run-out adequately long for safe stopping.

- If sliding onto natural ice, see **Natural Ice** in the **General Considerations for Winter Activities**.
- A level take-off/launch area at the top of the slope is preferred.
- Kickers are jumps built by students and are very common at most sliding hills. Where present, prohibit the use of all but very small ones for students below grade 3 or inexperienced in sliding activities. Set and enforce clear rules for all others. Students should only go one at a time when running a kicker (one person/apparatus). Ensure the run-out below the kicker is clear before the next slider proceeds. Use challenge by choice; no one should feel they have to go off a kicker.

Instruction

- Sliding seated forward or kneeling only.
- Ensure descending sliders understand what constitutes a safe distance to follow and that they respect that distance.
- Instruct students to simply roll off the sliding apparatus if heading for danger.
- A safe procedure for students to clear bottom area and to return to top of hill should be established (e.g., slide down middle and walk up sides). No walking up the sliding runs.
- Remind students at the bottom of the hill or ascending to watch up the hill so they can take evasive action if a descending slider comes toward them.
- No pushing or jumping in front of or over descending sliders.
- No overloading of sliding equipment.
- Students and others who are observing should do so from a safe vantage point, clear of the slope and run-out zone.

Supervision

- On-site supervision. One supervisor at the top of the run to help ensure that students do not proceed down until it is safe to do so. On the school yard, at a well-organized hill, one teacher/leader can manage the equivalent of a regular class of students. If young students are involved, a second teacher/leader is beneficial.
- If off-site, ratio as per calculation (See **Section 3**).

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With this grounding, now review the following:

Known Potential Risks (refer to General Considerations for Winter Activities)

Teacher/Leader Readiness

- The teacher/leader must be competent to organize the skating activity; to demonstrate, instruct and supervise it, and to effect rescue and emergency procedures as necessary.
- Training may be secured through Skate Canada or other appropriate sources.

Equipment/Facilities

- Teachers/leaders should communicate to students and parents/guardians regarding:
 - requirement or strong recommendation for the student to wear a helmet (e.g., single-use or multiple-impact),
 - wearing properly fitted and snugly laced/buckled skates (preferably sharpened at least annually),
 - falling is part of learning to skate and the ice is hard. Beginners and novices should be encouraged to wear protective padding such as wrist, elbow and knee pads if they have access to these,
 - appropriate clothing for the activity, including head gear (a thin toque or ear band/muffs that fits under helmet if the helmet is not warm) and mitts/gloves, and
 - transporting skates safely (e.g., with skate guards or in a bag).
- If the activity involves use of natural ice, see **Natural Ice** in **General Considerations for Winter Activities**.

Instructional Considerations

- Students should be taught how to start and stop and fall and rise safely.
- Students should be instructed to skate in control at all times.
- Students should watch where they are going and avoid cracks, holes and other debris.
- Have students skate in the same direction during a free skate.
- Implement a process for identification of ice skating skill levels.
- Provide space for beginner skaters separate from capable skaters (e.g., in the middle of the skating area or split the area in half).

- Activities and games should be appropriate to the skill level of the students.
- In general, stress technique versus speed in games, challenges, and drills.

Supervision

- On-site supervision; in-the-area supervision with students over 12 years of age. A teacher/ leader experienced and competent in teaching/leading this activity can supervise it on a rink on or adjacent to the schoolyard alone with a regular full class of students.
- With K-3 students, additional adults (or older student volunteers) are often needed at the beginning to help lace up students' skates (and again at the end) so time can be devoted to instructing/participating in the activity.
- Ratio as per calculation if off-site (See [Section 3](#)).

Cross Country Skiing

Activity Instruction
Half-day Tripping (< 3 hours)

Grade 1+
Grade 4+

This section includes track-set or skied-in trail skiing or instruction on a teaching grid or other appropriate terrain (e.g., trails with smooth turns and long run-outs on hills) with adequate snow coverage. Track-set skiing is done on purpose-built trail systems that are machine-groomed for classic (in tracks) and/or skate style (flat packed snow) Nordic skiing. Users of this Level 1 Manual must not use trails that require wilderness navigation or negotiation of any major terrain hazards (e.g., avalanche terrain). See the [Level 2 Manual](#) for longer, more remote or higher difficulty trail use.

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With this grounding, now review the following:

Known Potential Risks

(refer to General Considerations for Winter Activities)

Activity Instruction

Teacher/Leader Readiness

- The teacher/leader must be competent to organize the cross country ski activity; to demonstrate, instruct and supervise it; and to effect rescue and emergency procedures as necessary.
- Training and certification may be secured through the Canadian Association of Nordic Ski Instructors (CANSI), Cross Country Canada, Cross Country BC, or other appropriate sources.

Equipment/Facilities

- Equipment may be provided by the family, the school or a service provider. Whoever owns the equipment is responsible for checking that the skis, bindings, boots and poles are in good repair and of appropriate size for the skier. Check that the bindings work with the boots; there are different systems available.
- Equipment should be of an appropriate type for technique instruction for the terrain and the ability level of the students (e.g., novices should generally be on recreational/light touring equipment).

- If bringing skis from home or school to an off-site area, be aware that some buses may not permit skis and poles in the bus. If ordering a bus, request one with under-bus storage or arrange an alternative method of getting gear to the site.
- Improperly waxed skis can create risks related to slipping and sliding or icing up (e.g., falls, groin pulls, exhaustion). If waxable skis are to be used for classic skiing, teach a simple method for selection and application of kick wax.
- Where students are to use non-releasable bindings (i.e., the skis/snowboard does not readily come off in the event of a fall), they should be apprised of this fact and encouraged to participate in control.
- Define specific routes/areas to the students so they are aware of the boundaries for the activity, whether at an established Nordic ski area or other site.
- Students may be divided by ability level (through ski-off assessment and/or parent/guardian’s written classification) and then allowed on trails commensurate with their skills and experience.
- When choosing a site for group lessons, consider sun, wind and snow conditions as well as suitability of terrain. The facility should ideally include:
 - proximity to warmth, water, food, waxing and other facilities,
 - a level field/meadow with machine-groomed snow, and for classic skiing, tracked (preferred) or skied-in practice tracks,
 - a small, gently sloped hill or long un-treed run-out at the bottom section of a larger hill for teaching hill skills. If the hill is too long and/or steep, set an upper limit (e.g., use a pylon, ski pole, etc. to identify where students can ski up to before coming down),
 - spaces for games that are reasonably level, and
 - an area situated a safe distance from other skiers/area users, roads and other hazards.
- Establish boundaries for games (e.g., ski around outer perimeter of area).

Instruction

- Review safe and effective use of ski equipment, including boots, bindings, skis and poles (e.g., poles have sharp tips; use caution, especially when working close to others; avoid skiing over others’ skis).
- When playing games on skis, poles should not be used and should be kept outside the playing area.
- Teach basic trail safety and etiquette, including:
 - ski in control – be able to stop or avoid obstacles encountered,
 - yield to descending skiers on trails,
 - observe all signage (e.g., directional markers, trail closed),
 - call “Track” to pass another skier and stay/move to the right to allow others to pass,
 - fill in sitzmarks (big divots in the snow) after falls,
 - get well off of the track for rest, lunch, re-waxing or other stops, and
 - avoid taking skis off on a difficult up or downhill unless necessary for personal safety (footprints mutilate the trail and increase the risk for other skiers).

- Teach students basic skills required for safe participation in the cross country ski activity in the selected environment. This may include:
 - how to fall and rise,
 - skiing and turning on the flat safely,
 - basic uphill maneuvers (e.g., uphill diagonal stride, herringbone, side-stepping),
 - basic downhill maneuvers (e.g., braking snowplow, snowplow turns), and
 - the use of poles on flat, uphill and downhill terrain.

Supervision

- In-the-area supervision. For on-site instruction in a confined area such as the schoolyard or an adjacent park, a teacher/leader experienced and competent in the activity can supervise a regular full class of students. Additional adults (or older student volunteers) may be needed at the beginning and end of the session to help K-3 students put on and take off boots.
- Ratio as per calculation if off-site or on wooded or hilly trail terrain (See Section 3).

Day Tripping: all relevant elements of Activity Instruction, plus:

Equipment/Facilities

- Select a conservative route (e.g., one with escape routes and/or near shelters/cabins), particularly with novice students. Consider time available till dusk, prevailing and forecasted weather and snow conditions.
- Bring a thermos of hot drink for emergency use.
- Students should be encouraged to dress in layers and bring a back-up pair of gloves/mitts.

Instruction

- Discuss appropriate spacing of skiers.
- Have students ski under control at all times to prevent collisions.

Supervision

- In-the-area supervision; constant visual if dealing with a specific hazard.
- Ratio as per calculation (See [Section 3](#)).
- Use a buddy system, as well as a lead/sweep system and/or other appropriate techniques to keep group together.
- Rendezvous at trail junctions, especially if unsigned, to ensure no one goes the wrong way. Do head counts before heading off again.
- Create a system for appropriately spaced regrouping stops if the students are prone to getting too spread out along the trail (e.g., due to varying fitness levels and/or objectives) and/or to provide time for clothing adjustments, and water/snack intakes.

Snowshoeing

Activity Instruction
Half-day Tripping (< 3 hours)

Grade 1+
Grade 4+

Snowshoeing is a traditional activity in Canada, is easy to learn and has minimal risks, except those related to winter weather and terrain.

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With this grounding, now review the following:

Known Potential Risks (refer to General Considerations for Winter Activities)

Activity Instruction

Teacher/Leader Readiness

- The teacher/leader must be competent to organize the snowshoeing activity; to demonstrate, instruct and supervise it; and to effect rescue and emergency procedures as necessary.
- There are no instruction or teaching/leadership training/certification courses available for snowshoeing in BC.
- Assistants must also be comfortable and competent on snowshoes and being outdoors in winter.

Equipment/Facilities

- Equipment may be provided by the school, a service provider, or, more rarely, the family of the student. The owner is responsible for ensuring that snowshoes (and poles if used) are in good repair.
- Snowshoes range from traditional tea-drop shaped models made of wood and webbing to modern metal, plastic and fiberglass styles. If going off-site, teachers/leaders should be prepared to do basic repairs on the equipment the students will be using.
- If bringing snowshoes from home or school to an off-site area, be aware that some buses (e.g., school buses) may not permit longer style snowshoes and/or ski poles in the bus; order a bus with under-bus storage or arrange an alternative method of getting gear to the site.
- Define specific boundaries for the activity.
- Activity area should be situated a safe distance from roads and other hazards.

Instruction

- Review safe and effective use of equipment, including boots, bindings, and poles (e.g., poles have sharp tips; caution students about their use, especially when working close to others; avoid stepping on other's snowshoes).
- When learning games on snowshoes, poles should not be used and should be kept outside the playing area.
- Teach basic uphill and downhill maneuvers on a gentle slope.

Supervision

- In- the-area supervision; constant visual for students negotiating any particular hazard. For on-site instruction in a confined area such as the schoolyard or an adjacent park, a teacher/leader experienced and competent in the activity can supervise a regular full class of students. Additional adults (or older student volunteers) may be needed at the beginning and end of the session to help K-3 students put on and take off snowshoes.
- Ratio as per calculation for off-site participation (See [Section 3](#)).

Day Tripping: all relevant elements of Activity Instruction, plus:

Equipment/Facilities

- Select a conservative route (e.g., one with escape routes and/or near shelters/cabins), particularly with novice students. Consider time available till dusk, prevailing and forecasted weather and snow conditions.
- Bring a thermos of hot drink for emergency use.
- Students should be encouraged to dress in layers and bring a back-up pair of gloves/mitts.

Instruction

- Discuss appropriate spacing of students.
- Have students snowshoe under control to prevent collisions.

Supervision

- In-the-area supervision; constant visual if dealing with a specific hazard.
- Ratio as per calculation (See [Section 3](#)).
- Use a buddy system, as well as a lead/sweep system and/or other appropriate techniques to keep group together.
- Rendezvous at trail junctions, especially if unsigned, to ensure no one goes the wrong way. Do head counts before heading off again.
- Create a system for appropriately spaced regrouping stops if the students are prone to getting too spread out along the trail (e.g., due to varying fitness levels and/or objectives) and/or to provide time for clothing adjustments, and water/snack intakes.