

# Conducting an Outing

## Addressing Issues



### Problem Behaviors from Participants

It is important to immediately address the problem behavior with the participant. Addressing problem behaviors can de-escalate conflicts by focusing on behaviors that can realistically be modified. Be clear about these expectations. Pull the participant aside and speak to the person in private or ask someone on the outing who has befriended the person to talk to them. When speaking with the participant, do the following:

- Identify the participant's inappropriate behavior.
- Acknowledge and tend to the participant's concerns.
- Explain and discuss that the person's behavior has an impact on the group, that the behavior needs to change, and that there will be reasonable, specific consequences if the behavior is not changed.
- Bring the participant back into the group with a sense of purpose and belonging (e.g. give the participant a task).

### Removing a Participant from an Outing

If all attempts to deal with a participant's problem behavior fail, the leader has the authority to remove that participant from the outing. Leaders should only do this if the participant's behavior is truly disruptive to the progress or safety of the outing. Removing a participant from the outing should be treated like any other evacuation.

An outing leader faced with such a disruptive participant should observe the following guidelines:

Ideally, do not allow a participant to leave the outing alone. This is a matter of safety for the participant and the protection of Sierra Club.

If a participant refuses to listen and decides to leave on their own, try to have the participant sign out and make sure another participant or leader witnesses the situation so that it is clear to all that leaving was the participant's decision. Clearly determine whether the participant is willing or unwilling to leave the outing. If the person intends to leave by his or her own free choice (and not in response to having been asked to leave by the leader), and it is not practical or there are no volunteers to accompany the person to their vehicle or another acceptable point of safety, the leader must use judgment to assess the participant's ability to reach their vehicle or another safe destination and must later make efforts to verify that the participant returned safely. If the leader thinks the participant can make it back safely, based on an assessment of factors such as the participant's capabilities, difficulty, weather, etc., the leader can let the participant leave—after signing out. If the leader thinks the person's safety is in jeopardy, the leader should assertively try to dissuade the participant from leaving. If the person is determined to leave anyway, the leader should try to find a way to get the person back safely, either by finding the participant an escort(s) or by rerouting or ending the outing. If the person is not willing to leave and the leader cannot provide an escort, then the participant should remain on the outing, and the leader cannot insist that the person leave. While it is the leader's right to ask the disruptive participant to leave, the leader can only force that person to leave if the leader is willing to escort the person off the trip to their vehicle or appropriate destination.

### If a Leader Feels Threatened

Leader and participant safety are of the utmost importance. If a leader feels threatened at any time, the leader may consider doing the following:

- Attempt to address the participant's problem behavior in a way that diffuses the situation.
- Decide to continue or end the outing early.
- Make sure to document what occurred on the outing. Write down the names of the affected parties and their contact information.
- Have witnesses write their own account of what happened.
- Fill out an incident report.

### Problem Behaviors from Outings Leaders

If there is a leader behavior problem on an outing, you should follow the problem behavior guidelines listed above in addition to notifying your Outings Chair. Problems with a leader come to the attention of the Outings Chair through a complaint from participants or other leaders or from an incident report filed after an outing. Complaints sometimes arrive at Sierra Club headquarters and are then passed to the local entity with the process. Leader issues are generally handled by the Outings Chair and any relevant committee in the entity. If there is an indication of potential legal action, immediately contact the Director of Outdoor Activities for additional support and direction. Sexual harassment claims must be reported to the National Office via an Incident Report immediately.

### Dealing with Hostile Non-Participants

Occasionally you may encounter people who become confrontational. Regardless of the cause of the hostility, the best course of action is to avoid any conflict and quickly distance your group from the hostile non-participants. If your group felt overly threatened during the confrontation, or any laws or land use regulations were violated, contact the proper authorities as soon as possible. If authorities are contacted, be sure to submit an incident report and Program Safety will follow up with you to provide advice and assistance.

### Leaving an Outing Early

As a leader, it is your job to keep track of participants from the start of an outing to the end. If a participant wishes to depart from the group before the end of an outing, you must make sure the participant is "signed out." If your outing is using the Sign-In Sheet and participant agreement forms, then simply ask the participant to initial the "Early Sign-Out" column. If your outing does not use a sign-in sheet, ask your Outings Chair for the sign-out procedure for your program. Participants may not sign out and then sign back in later in the outing. If you do not think that the participant can safely return to where you started your trip, you should assertively try to convince the participant to remain on the outing or try to provide an escort back with them or re-route the outing.

### Lost Participant

If someone on an outing becomes lost, leaders should follow the Sierra Club protocol for finding lost participants. A search for lost participants will not begin after dark unless there is good cause for alarm and searching will not begin (or resume) until eight o'clock the next morning. This protocol should always be mentioned in the pre-trip talk. Such occurrences are rare and do not justify the danger to other outings participants caused by undertaking night searches. In any event, the lost person should understand that there are usually several hours of daylight before 8:00 A.M. in which to attempt rejoining the group before a search begins. With lost children, your emotions, as well as the emotions of parents and other outings participants, often force action. If conditions necessitate a night search, proceed methodically. A closely spaced line of searchers is best. Amateur rescuers, by covering tracks or frightening a lost child with loud yelling, can make it even more difficult for experts to locate that child the next day.