

# DAVID ELTON OUTDOOR FUND SAFETY DISCUSSIONS

**R**ecently, the *David Elton Outdoor Fund* of Calgary sponsored a risk management/safety awareness session at Camp Gardner, near Calgary, AB. The Fund was established by David's parents after this young Venturer died while trying to save an adult chaperone on a school backpacking trip in California. David was posthumously awarded Scouting's Gold Cross for Gallantry for his heroic actions.

Providing educational opportunities for Scouters and youths is very high on the list of priorities for the David Elton Outdoor Fund. Because of this focus, the Fund sponsors projects which encourage young people and youth leaders to develop safety awareness as a primary leadership skill.

## Safety Panel Discussion

During the session at Camp Gardner, a number of people sat on a panel discussing how they viewed their role in Scouting, as it related to risk management and safety. As well, these people shared their concerns and offered suggestions. Panel members felt that most leaders understand the importance of following Scouting's policies and practices, even when it comes to filling out the forms.

Following are some highlights that discussion leaders felt bore repeating.

- Leaders need to plan and prepare fully for all activities before setting out on a trip. For example, leaders should visit the area prior to the trip to assess potential risks/hazards, and measure these against the knowledge, skills and abilities of group members. The activity must always be appropriate for youths.
- Parents and youth members should be involved in all phases of a trip. This ensures that everyone has a clear understanding of what will happen. Involving and informing parents ensures that they can give "informed consent" when they complete the Parent Consent Form. If they do this, parents won't be able to come back and say, "Nobody told me you would be doing that," or "Had I known, I could have told you that my child has a fear of the activity, and provided some tips on how to deal with the situation." Communicating with parents is one of the most important things leaders can do. Often parents get excited about what Scouting is doing, and want to get involved themselves.
- Teamwork is vital. One person can't do it all. Delegate different tasks to different leaders or parents to spread the workload around.

- Develop an emergency response plan. Prior to the activity, ask the leaders/youths to think up different things that could go wrong, and develop a plan to deal with each scenario.
- File a route plan with someone at home; this plan should come complete with instructions of what to do if, or when, an emergency happens.
- Keep written notes and records of your plans for future reference. This will make repeating the activity again much easier. Imagine how helpful it will be to present this package to the leader who eventually replaces you. What a great resource this would be.
- Spend time reflecting on your experience – both positive and negative – after the event.

## Boost the Thrill, But Safely

One speaker at the session, Jeff Reading, a Cub leader and Duty of Care expert with the Calgary Board of Education, summed his thoughts up nicely with these words: "We need to develop programs and activities that maximize perceived risks, while minimizing actual risks."

It's great for kids to think that the risk is high during some activities, as long as they feel protected and looked after by adult leaders. This sense of risk "pumps" them up and gives the illusion that they are on a great, challenging adventure with some danger. This is good, but only as long as leaders

have implemented the appropriate safety measures to minimize actual risk. How can leaders achieve this balance? They could do it through training, practising, planning, getting proper safety equipment, etc., while maintaining the exciting illusion for the kids.

To help ensure that Scouting continues to provide programs/outings in the safest possible manner, Scouts Canada has developed and provided a *Duty of Care Document*, a *Camping/Outdoor Activity Guide*, and our *By-Law, Policies and Procedures (B.P. & P.)*. The *Duty of Care* and the *Camping Guide* are available on our web site ([www.scouts.ca](http://www.scouts.ca)), while *B.P. & P.* is available at local Scout Shops. These documents talk about leader conduct, accepted practices, policies and forms, and applications necessary for camping and outdoor activities. They are essential resources for every leader.

## Thinking About Safety

The risk management/safety awareness session proved very helpful for leaders wanting to find new ways to introduce fun into our programs, yet maintain a high margin for safety. Thanks to Grace Belzner and Ann Gray-Elton from Calgary for sending the video and notes from the workshop.

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