Young people today seek increasingly challenging activities, many of which involve trekking in backcountry or wilderness areas.

Treks can include such high-adventure activities as backpacking, canoeing, caving, horse packing, kayaking, mountain biking, mountaineering, rafting, sailing, and skiing. While some treks are as short as overnight, others last a week or two. Trek Safely, the Boy Scouts of America’s recommended procedure for organizing BSA outdoor treks, applies to overnight treks of any duration.

By being aware of the seven points of Trek Safely, youth and adult leaders will be better prepared for a safe trekking experience.
Each of the following elements plays an important role in the overall Trek Safety procedure. Fun and safety overnight trekking activities require compliance with Trek Safety by both adult and youth leaders.

1. Qualified Supervision

All backcountry treks must be supervised by a responsible, conscientious adult at least 21 years of age who understands the potential risks associated with the trek. This person knowingly accepts responsibility for the well-being and safety of the youth in his or her care. Each supervisor must be trained and committed to comply with the seven points of the BSA Trek Safety Procedure. Additional aids and information for adult leaders who address possible scenarios in advance are less likely to be surprised if some conflict occurs on a trek. Understanding that this is a normal occurrence enables the group to maintain unity and work through disputes.

2. Keep Fit

Require evidence of fitness with a current BSA Annual Health and Medical Record. The current fitness regimen is recommended for trek participants. They are urged to start slowly, gradually increasing the duration and intensity of their exercise. The adult leader should adopt supervision, protection, and anticipate potential risks associated with individual health conditions. Neither youth nor adult participants should participate in any activity that makes them physically unhealthy. See the Fastbook, No. 33750.

3. Plan Ahead

Planning a trek includes familiarizing the group and their local council service center at least 12 days before the departure date. Log into www.recoscouting.org to find the tour and activity plan online. The trek should match the maturity, skill level, and fitness level of youth participants. A youth or adult leader must ensure land-use permits are in public fest or written permission from the owner to cross or use private land. It is also crucial to ensure you are informed about any requirements from the local land manager. Find out about the terrain, elevation changes, topography, weather, climate, typical weather conditions, and environmental issues for the period of the trek.

4. Gear Up

Proper trekking maps, as well as current trek maps, for the area of the trek. Take equipment and provisions that are appropriate for the weather and until level is in good condition, and is properly sized for each participant. Adult and youth outdoor leaders should ensure that participants are trained in the use of appropriate gear, especially items with which they are not familiar, such as ropes, harnesses, belays, ice axes, snowshoes, craft, birdies, saddles, and cross-country skis and poles. The adult leader must confirm that each person has the right equipment without taking too long.

5. Communicate Clearly and Completely

Communication is one of the keys to success in an outdoor adventure, and staying in touch with home bases. A youth or adult leader should complete a trip plan and share these details with the Council office. Clear communication is key in any emergency. At any time the itinerary changes, one of the leaders relays the changes to the trek participants. This may be done through the “Scout” plan. A plan for communicating with each other should be established beforehand. A means of electronic communication—with back-up power—may be helpful should an emergency occur. Include contact information, such as the number to call for emergency assistance, the exact location of the trek or area of the trek. The leaders are responsible for making good decisions and recommendations from the local land manager. Find out about the terrain, elevation changes, topography, typical weather conditions, and environmental issues for the period of the trek. Training in Leave No Trace using the Principles of Leave No Trace or the Leave No Trace Training Program. Wearing the right gear is crucial to include the proper dressing for the weather conditions and temperature and develop an alternate itinerary in the event that adverse conditions develop.

6. Monitor Conditions

The leaders are responsible for making good decisions during the trek, and communicating the successes and difficulties of the group. It is the responsibility of the group to keep the route planned. The route may be changed or adjusted as necessary.

7. Discipline

Each participant knows, understands, and respects the rules and procedures for safe trekking. Each participant knows, understands, and respects the rules and procedures for safe trekking.