

Field Guide

Outdoor skills, service, and leadership for
Gainesville Youth — young men ages 11–18. High
adventure, hard work, and preparation for the trail.

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PART 1

Getting ready

Trip planning

Goals, permissions, schedules, and backup plans before you leave town.

Good trips start at the kitchen table, not on the trailhead. Planning keeps the group safe, on time, and ready for weather or surprises.

KNOW

- Every outing needs a written plan: where you are going, who is coming, how long you will be gone, and how adults will stay in contact.
- Match the trip to the weakest link in fitness and experience — the group moves at the pace everyone can sustain safely.
- Check land manager rules for the area (permits, group size, fire restrictions, cave closures). Leaders hold the official permits.
- Build in turnaround times: if you are not at a checkpoint by a set time, you change plans — do not push into darkness or storms.
- Share the plan with parents and the adult leader team before departure.

DO

1. List the trip purpose (training hike, service camp, river day) and three learning goals.
2. Draft a simple timeline: meet, travel, on-trail hours, meals, sleep, return.
3. Identify risks (heat, cold water, cliffs, traffic) and one mitigation for each.
4. Pack a contact card: leader phones, meeting point, and emergency meet-up location.
5. Run a five-minute gear check with your crew the night before.

LEAD

- Assign roles early: navigator, first-aid kit, water filter, camp setup lead.
- Use a whiteboard or shared doc so everyone sees the same plan.
- Ask quieter members what they are worried about — address it before the van leaves.
- Debrief within 48 hours: what worked, what to change next trip.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I can write a one-page trip plan with times and contacts.
- ☐ I know who the adult leaders in charge are for this outing.
- ☐ I can name two reasons we might turn back early.

| Gear basics

Core equipment for day hikes, overnights, and travel days.

Gear does not need to be expensive, but it must fit, work, and be appropriate for the activity. Test new gear at home or on a short practice outing first.

KNOW

- The ten essentials mindset: navigation, sun protection, insulation, illumination, first-aid supplies, fire starter, repair kit, nutrition, hydration, emergency shelter — adapted to the trip.
- Borrowed gear must be returned clean and dry; report damage immediately.
- Sharp tools (knives, axes) stay with adults or trained youth under direct supervision.
- Group gear (tents, stoves, ropes) is shared property — treat it better than your own.

DO

1. Lay out gear on a tarp at home; eliminate duplicates your team does not need.
2. Label your bag and water bottles with your name.
3. Practice setting up tent and stove before a big trip.
4. Pack rain cover for pack and a dry bag for sleep clothes.
5. Weigh your pack; ask a leader if you are unsure about weight for the route.

LEAD

- Run a gear swap table so newer members see good budget options.
- Teach the difference between cotton and synthetic for active layers.
- Keep a shared checklist photo in the group chat for each trip type.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I own or can borrow a working headlamp with spare batteries.
- ☐ I can pack my bag without forgetting rain layer and water.
- ☐ I know where group gear is stored and how to check it out.

| Clothing and layering

Dress for sweat, wind, rain, and cold — especially in North Georgia hills.

Weather in the mountains changes fast. Layering lets you cool off on climbs and warm up at camp without soaking your clothes in sweat.

KNOW

- Base layer moves moisture (synthetic or wool — avoid cotton for active wear).
- Mid layer traps warmth (fleece or light puffy).
- Shell blocks wind and rain (breathable rain jacket).
- One warm hat and light gloves weigh little and help a lot at night.
- Wet cotton steals body heat — change into dry clothes before evening chill.

DO

1. Wear your trail clothes on a practice walk; adjust before trip day.
2. Pack an extra dry shirt and socks in a zip bag.
3. Learn to strip a layer before you start sweating hard uphill.
4. Bring sun hat and sunscreen even on cloudy days.
5. Break in boots or trail shoes weeks ahead — not on a long hike.

LEAD

- Demonstrate layering at a meeting with real jackets, not just slides.
- Call a clothing check at the trailhead — polite but firm.
- Pair experienced hikers with newer members to review layers quietly.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I can explain base, mid, and shell layers with my own gear.
- ☐ My boots or shoes are broken in and laced for downhill control.
- ☐ I carry rain layer even when the forecast looks clear.

Packing lists

Day pack, overnight, river, cave, and travel lists you can reuse.

Use a list every time. Memory fails when you are rushing out the door at 5 a.m.

KNOW

- Day hike: water, snacks, rain layer, first-aid kit, map/phone, headlamp, sun protection.
- Overnight add: shelter, sleep system, stove fuel, bear-safe food storage where required, camp clothes.
- River or lake days need PFDs as leaders direct, dry bags, and closed-toe water shoes — no cotton shorts only.
- Cave trips are leader-planned only; never add gear on your own without approval.
- Travel days need modest, clean clothes for stops and a book or card game without phones driving the mood.

DO

1. Print or copy the list for your trip type from this guide or leader packet.
2. Check off items as they go into your pack — not after the zipper is closed.
3. Stage your pack the night before; put food in the fridge until morning.
4. Weigh optional items; cut luxury if your shoulders tell you to.
5. Do a buddy check — two sets of eyes catch forgotten water filters.

LEAD

- Publish trip-specific lists in the group chat one week out.
- Collect photos of packed bags from new members for coaching.
- Keep a bin of spare batteries, duct tape, and zip ties for last-minute fixes.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I use a written list for every outing.
- ☐ I completed a buddy gear check on my last trip.
- ☐ I know which items are never allowed (leaders will brief weapons, drones, etc.).

PART 2

Camping

Campsite selection

Pick durable surfaces, manage drainage, and respect neighbors.

A good site makes camp chores easy and protects the forest for the next crew.

KNOW

- Use existing campsites when available; avoid trampling new vegetation.
- Stay 200 feet from lakes and streams when rules require it — leaders know local rules.
- Look up for dead branches; avoid ravines that flash-flood in rain.
- Wind breaks are nice but not under leaning trees or cliff edges.
- Group size and land rules may limit where you may camp — follow the permit.

DO

1. Arrive with daylight to choose site calmly.
2. Place tents on level ground with head slightly uphill if possible.
3. Store food and scented items as leaders direct (bear bag, canister, vehicle).
4. Identify bathroom area and dishwashing spot away from tents and water.
5. Walk the site perimeter for glass, holes, or trash before settling in.

LEAD

- Send two scouts to compare two sites, then decide as a crew.
- Rotate who picks kitchen vs. tent zones so everyone learns.
- Leave a site cleaner than you found it — model picking up micro-trash.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I can name three things wrong with a bad campsite.
- ☐ I set up tent without damaging plants under the footprint.
- ☐ I know our food storage plan for this trip.

Tents and shelters

Setup, stakes, rainflies, and care for shared tents.

Tents are teamwork. Fast, calm setup beats a rushed job in the rain.

KNOW

- Read the pitch diagram before you pull poles out.
- Stake corners at a low angle; guylines matter in wind.
- Keep mud and boots outside the vestibule when possible.
- Never cook inside a tent — carbon monoxide and fire risk.
- Dry tents completely at home to prevent mold.

DO

1. Lay footprint or ground cloth without sticking out past the rainfly.
2. Assemble poles; clip body; stake downwind side first in breeze.
3. Tighten rainfly evenly; check ventilation.
4. Store sharp stakes in a bag so they do not tear the tent in the stuff sack.
5. Practice breakdown: shake dirt out, roll loosely, stuff sack.

LEAD

- Pair one experienced and one newer member per tent.
- Time a setup drill at a meeting — celebrate improvement, not speed alone.
- Inspect returned tents and log damage on a shared sheet.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I can pitch our common tent style with a partner.
- ☐ I stake and guyline for wind without being told.
- ☐ I dry and return group tents on schedule after a trip.

| Sleep systems

Pads, bags, quilts, and staying warm without overheating.

Sleep fuels the next day. Cold or poor sleep leads to mistakes on trail.

KNOW

- Insulation under you (pad) matters as much as insulation on top (bag or quilt).
- Match bag rating to expected low temp; wear dry base layers to bed.
- Vent the tent slightly to reduce condensation.
- Keep tomorrow's clothes in the bag if cold — not wet socks.
- Inflatable pads can puncture — carry a patch kit or foam backup on long trips.

DO

1. Inflate pad firm enough you do not touch ground when on your side.
2. Fluff sleeping bag before bed; zip fully in cold, vent in heat.
3. Use a liner or wear clean base layers — body oils reduce loft over time.
4. Store food-scented items out of the tent.
5. In morning, air bag before stuffing if time allows.

LEAD

- Teach the sit-kneel-lie test for pad thickness on loaner gear.
- Check that everyone has something under them — not just a blanket on tent floor.
- Remind crew about quiet hours and headlamp courtesy.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I slept warm on my last campout or fixed my setup.
- ☐ I know my bag's comfort rating and how to vent it.
- ☐ I keep sleep clothes dry in a zip bag.

Leave No Trace

Seven principles adapted for our trips and service mindset.

We leave places better because good stewardship shows in action — on trails, rivers, and neighbors' yards.

KNOW

- Plan ahead and prepare — reduces rescue impact and resource damage.
- Travel and camp on durable surfaces.
- Dispose of waste properly — pack it out, including food scraps in many forests.
- Leave what you find — rocks, plants, artifacts stay put.
- Minimize campfire impacts — use stoves when fire risk is high.
- Respect wildlife — store food, observe from distance.
- Be considerate of other visitors — quiet voices, yield on trail.

DO

1. Pick up trash you did not drop when it is safe to do so.
2. Use established fire rings only when fires are allowed.
3. Dig catholes correctly where toilet paper must be packed out — leaders brief local practice.
4. Stay on trail through mud; do not cut switchbacks.
5. Photograph nature instead of collecting souvenirs.

LEAD

- Assign a “trash sweep” line before leaving camp.
- Teach one LNT principle per meeting for a month.
- Call out good examples publicly; coach privately when someone forgets.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I can list all seven Leave No Trace principles.
- ☐ I packed out all my trash and micro-trash on my last trip.
- ☐ I stayed on trail even when muddy.

PART 3

Camp kitchen and food

Camp kitchen setup

Food prep zones, sanitation, and keeping critters out.

A tidy kitchen prevents illness and keeps animals away from your tent at night.

KNOW

- Separate raw meat handling from ready-to-eat food when possible on longer trips.
- Wash hands or use sanitizer before meals — especially after bathroom breaks.
- Store food and trash in approved containers or vehicles as leaders direct.
- Grey water (dish water) should be strained and scattered away from camp and water sources per leader briefing.
- Knives stay supervised; cut away from your body on a stable surface.

DO

1. Set kitchen downwind of tents if smoke is a factor.
2. Hang or store food before dark.
3. Use a collapsible sink or pot system for dish line: wash, rinse, sanitize if needed.
4. Assign cook, assistant, and cleanup roles before you start.
5. Pack out all food waste when required — do not bury scraps.

LEAD

- Draw a simple kitchen map on a napkin for new crews.
- Rotate jobs so everyone learns cook and cleanup.
- Inspect coolers and ice plan before leaving town.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I washed hands or sanitized before my last group meal.
- ☐ I know where food is stored at night on our trips.
- ☐ I can run dish cleanup with biodegradable soap properly.

Trail food and meal planning

Calories, hydration, simple menus, and allergies.

Eat and drink steadily on trail days. Bonking from low calories makes navigation and teamwork harder.

KNOW

- Active teens often need more snacks than they expect — plan extra.
- Balance carbs for energy, protein for recovery, and salt when sweating.
- Know every member's allergies and dietary needs before cooking for the group.
- Water treatment is required unless leaders say a source is pre-approved.
- Heavy glass and unnecessary packaging stay home.

DO

1. Pack lunch you can eat without stopping long in cold rain.
2. Pre-measure ingredients for group meals into zip bags at home.
3. Label allergen-free foods clearly.
4. Carry at least one spare meal bar in your pack.
5. Drink on a schedule — not only when you feel thirsty.

LEAD

- Build a shared menu with leaders and parent helpers.
- Post allergy list in the kitchen area every campout.
- Teach “eat early, eat often” on hard climb days.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I can pack a full day of snacks and lunch for a hard hike.
- ☐ I know my crew's allergy restrictions.
- ☐ I treat or use approved water on every backcountry trip.

PART 4

Fire and stoves

Campfires

When fire is allowed, how to build, tend, and extinguish safely.

Campfires are optional on many trips. When banned or too dry, we use stoves only — no exceptions without leader approval.

KNOW

- Check fire restrictions every trip — they change with drought.
- Use existing fire rings; keep fires small and manageable.
- Never leave fire unattended; have water and shovel ready.
- Extinguish until coals are cold to the touch — drown, stir, repeat.
- Collect firewood only where rules allow; do not strip live trees.

DO

1. Clear a zone of flammable material around the ring.
2. Build with tinder, kindling, then fuel wood — avoid gasoline or liquid fire starters unless leaders train you.
3. Keep hair and loose clothing away from flames.
4. Burn wood completely to ash when possible before leaving site.
5. Pack out foil and trash — do not burn plastic.

LEAD

- Assign a fire watch rotation with a clear handoff.
- Teach one-match fire only after basic stove skills are solid.
- Call full stop when wind picks up or group is tired.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I can explain when our group uses stoves only.
- ☐ I extinguished a practice fire until cold or observed a leader do so.
- ☐ I never cut live trees for firewood.

Stoves and fuel

Canister and liquid fuel basics under adult supervision.

Stoves cook dinner when fire bans are on and boil water fast. Treat fuel with respect — it is not a toy.

KNOW

- Fuel stays outside tents and away from heat sources.
- Use stoves on stable, non-flammable surfaces; wind screens help efficiency.
- Canister stoves screw on firmly; check for leaks with soap water at home if trained.
- Liquid fuel stoves need priming — youth use only after leader training.
- Carbon monoxide risk means stoves run only in open air.

DO

1. Set stove on a flat rock or pad; shield from wind.
2. Light with face and body clear of flare-up path.
3. Turn off fuel at the source when finished; let cool before packing.
4. Store fuel in marked containers away from food.
5. Report empty canisters to leaders for proper disposal.

LEAD

- Run a stove clinic at a parking lot before backcountry trips.
- Keep a spare lighter and repair kit in the group bin.
- Log which stoves are due for maintenance.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I can safely light and shut off our common stove model with supervision.
- ☐ I store fuel away from tents and food.
- ☐ I know never to use a stove inside a tent or enclosed shelter.

PART 5

Navigation

Map and compass

Read terrain, orient the map, and take a bearing.

Phones fail. Paper maps and a compass still work when batteries die or screens crack.

KNOW

- Map scale shows distance; contour lines show steepness — close lines mean steep terrain.
- Orienting a map means turning it so north on the map matches north in the field.
- A bearing is a direction in degrees from north.
- Declination adjusts compass for true north vs. magnetic north — leaders provide local value.
- Always combine map, compass, and what you see on the ground.

DO

1. Identify trail junctions and landmarks on the map before you walk.
2. Practice taking a bearing to a visible object, then walk toward it with terrain checks.
3. Thumb your map — keep your thumb on your current location as you move.
4. If lost, STOP: stay put, observe, think, plan — then call leaders.
5. Protect map in a zip bag or case.

LEAD

- Run a backyard or parking-lot compass course before forest practice.
- Pair members for map quizzes at trail junctions.
- Rotate navigator role every hour on trail.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I oriented a map to north with a compass.
- ☐ I took and followed a simple bearing to a landmark.
- ☐ I can explain what contour lines show.

| Phone and GPS apps

Useful tools with limits — battery, accuracy, and distraction.

GPS apps help, but they are not a substitute for map skills. Use them as backup, not autopilot.

KNOW

- Phone GPS uses battery fast — carry a power bank on long days.
- Download offline maps before you lose signal in the mountains.
- Location error can be large under cliffs or dense trees.
- Sharing live location with leaders may be required on some trips — follow the briefing.
- Walking while staring at a screen causes trips and falls.

DO

1. Download the route area offline the night before.
2. Put phone in airplane mode and use GPS only to save power when leaders allow.
3. Stop to check the screen; do not navigate mid-stride on rough trail.
4. Mark camp and car as waypoints when you arrive.
5. Keep phone dry in a zip bag or waterproof pouch.

LEAD

- Show which apps the program standardizes on.
- Set a rule: map out, phone in pocket unless stopped.
- Carry a group charger for multi-day trips.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I downloaded offline maps for my last trip area.
- ☐ I stopped walking before reading my phone on trail.
- ☐ I carried backup power or shared a group charging plan.

Trail blazes and signs

Follow painted blazes, signs, and junction discipline.

Blazes are the trail's language. Learn the local colors and shapes before you hike.

KNOW

- Blaze color and shape mean a specific trail — know yours for the day.
- Two blazes stacked can mean turn or caution depending on local custom — ask leaders.
- Signs at road crossings may use different symbols than forest trails.
- False trails and social paths exist — stay with the marked route unless scouting with leaders.
- The Appalachian Trail uses white blazes in many sections — still confirm with your map.

DO

1. Confirm blaze color at the trailhead sign.
2. At every junction, wait for the group before choosing a fork.
3. If blazes disappear, backtrack to last known good marker.
4. Log junction decisions on a notepad for debrief.
5. Report missing or confusing signs to land managers through leaders.

LEAD

- Quiz the crew at the first three junctions.
- Place a sweeper at the back so nobody misses a turn.
- Teach “halt at forks” as a crew habit.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I know today's blaze color and shape.
- ☐ I waited for the group at a junction on my last hike.
- ☐ I backtracked safely when unsure instead of guessing.

PART 6

Hiking and backpacking

| Day hiking

Pace, hydration, trail etiquette, and group spacing.

Day hikes build fitness and teamwork without the weight of full backpacking.

KNOW

- Start slower than you think — warm muscles prevent injury.
- Downhill hurts knees — shorten steps and use poles if leaders issue them.
- Yield to uphill hikers on narrow trail when safe.
- Stay in sight or sound of your assigned buddy pair.
- Turn back before exhaustion — leaders set turnaround times.

DO

1. Eat a real breakfast; sip water every 20–30 minutes.
2. Use trekking poles on steep or wet trails if available.
3. Announce when passing: “On your left” with space.
4. Take short breaks on durable ground, not on fragile plants.
5. Log miles and how you felt for training records.

LEAD

- Set pace by conversation test — able to talk without gasping.
- Assign front, middle, and sweep with radios or whistle signals if needed.
- Plan water stops before the group is thirsty.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I kept hydration steady on my last day hike.
- ☐ I used buddy system without drifting out of contact.
- ☐ I yielded properly on a narrow section.

Backpacking

Load, hip belt, camp miles, and caring for feet.

Carrying your house on your back changes how you walk. Train with weight before a big trip.

KNOW

- Most pack weight should sit on hips via hip belt, not shoulders.
- Adjust straps every morning as load settles.
- Blister care early beats hiking in pain — stop at hot spots.
- Camp chores eat time — start hiking early after breakfast.
- Bear bags, canisters, or lockers depend on area — leaders decide.

DO

1. Pack heaviest items close to spine and mid-back.
2. Loosen hip belt when resting; snug when moving.
3. Change socks at lunch on wet days.
4. Break camp in reverse order of setup checklist.
5. Practice putting on pack without help — then learn team assists on steep ground.

LEAD

- Weigh packs before departure; redistribute group gear fairly.
- Teach foot inspection at first camp night.
- Set realistic daily mileage for the slowest member.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I adjusted hip belt and shoulder straps correctly.
- ☐ I treated a hot spot before it became a blister.
- ☐ I helped break camp on time without rushing safety steps.

PART 7

Weather and hazards

Weather awareness

Forecasts, clouds, wind, and when to change plans.

Mountain weather differs from Gainesville. Check forecasts for the trail elevation, not just town.

KNOW

- Afternoon thunderstorms are common in North Georgia spring and summer — plan off summits early.
- Hypothermia can happen above 50°F when wet and windy.
- Heat illness hits on humid service days and exposed ridges — shade and water matter.
- Wind at ridge tops can knock you off balance — low center of gravity and optional turnaround.
- Leaders may cancel or shorten trips when lightning, flood, or ice risk is high.

DO

1. Read forecast night before and morning of; note storm timing.
2. Watch building cumulus and sudden wind shifts on trail.
3. Identify shelter options (dense lower forest, vehicle, building) before storms arrive.
4. Remove metal trekking poles from hands during lightning risk as leaders direct.
5. Add layers before you are shivering; remove before overheating.

LEAD

- Assign a weather watcher to call five-minute checks on risky days.
- Practice turning the group around without drama — safety beats summit photos.
- Keep a written go/no-go checklist for river and cave days.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I checked elevation-specific weather before my last trip.
- ☐ I can name signs a thunderstorm is building.
- ☐ I turned back or sheltered when leaders called it — or would have.

Terrain and environmental hazards

Slips, snakes, ticks, plants, and water crossings.

Awareness prevents most injuries. Look up, down, and ahead — not at your phone on rough ground.

KNOW

- Wet rock and leaves are slick — test footholds; use hands when needed.
- Stay on trail in snake country; do not reach where you cannot see.
- Check for ticks after brushy hikes; shower and parent check as appropriate.
- Poison ivy has three leaflets — learn it before yard work and trail maintenance.
- Unroped water crossings are leader-only decisions — swift water is dangerous.

DO

1. Wear ankle-support footwear on rocky trails.
2. Use trekking poles for balance on streams when leaders approve crossing.
3. Brush pants legs and use repellent when ticks are active.
4. Report unstable trees or trail damage to leaders.
5. Carry whistle for separation — three blasts means emergency in our practice.

LEAD

- Brief local hazards at trailhead each trip.
- Stop the line when someone struggles — regroup before continuing.
- Keep a tick kit and know disposal method in group first-aid supplies.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I identified poison ivy or reviewed a photo before service season.
- ☐ I did a tick check after my last brushy hike.
- ☐ I crossed water only under leader direction.

PART 8

First aid and emergencies

First aid kit and common injuries

Blisters, sprains, cuts, and when to stop and treat.

You are not a medic — you stabilize, comfort, and get adult help. Leaders hold training and authority.

KNOW

- Group kits stay stocked — report used items after every trip.
- Clean small cuts with safe water; cover with bandage.
- RICE for sprains: rest, ice, compression, elevation when appropriate.
- Do not move someone with neck or back pain unless immediate danger — call for help.
- Know where epinephrine and inhalers are for members who need them — do not share meds.

DO

1. Locate the group first-aid kit before each outing.
2. Practice blister tape on a practice foot at a meeting.
3. Carry personal meds in original labeled containers.
4. Write incident notes for leaders after any treatment.
5. Replace gloves and gauze you use.

LEAD

- Assign a first-aid kit carrier each trip.
- Run a scenario: ankle twist at mile two — who does what?
- Check kit expiration dates quarterly.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I know where the group first-aid kit is on trips.
- ☐ I can clean and bandage a small cut.
- ☐ I know to call 911 for serious injury and then notify leaders.

Emergencies and communication

911, location, signals, and staying calm.

Emergencies are rare when we plan well. Rehearse so panic does not waste minutes.

KNOW

- Call 911 for life-threatening injury, chest pain, severe allergic reaction, or missing person after search plan fails.
- Give dispatch your best location: trail name, GPS coords, landmarks, and callback number.
- Satellite messengers or radios may be on trip — leaders assign who carries them.
- One person stays with the injured; others note time and conditions.
- Parent and leader contact list is in the trip plan — leaders fill exact numbers.

DO

1. Practice saying your location out loud using map and phone coords.
2. Learn whistle and hand signals used by your crew.
3. If separated, STOP and wait unless leaders taught otherwise for that terrain.
4. Send one runner with written message rather than many people scattering.
5. After incident, participate in debrief without blame focus.

LEAD

- Review emergency card at trailhead.
- Designate communicator role before hike starts.
- Run a table-top drill: lightning on an open ridge.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I can read coordinates or describe location for rescue.
- ☐ I know our whistle signal for emergency.
- ☐ I stayed calm in a practice scenario or real minor incident.

PART 9

Water skills

| Swimming safety

Open water, buddies, PFDs, and cold water respect.

Lake Lanier and river swims are only with adult supervision and clear rules. Never swim alone.

KNOW

- Cold water can shock your breathing — enter slowly; wear PFD when leaders require.
- Swim with a buddy and stay in designated areas.
- No diving into unknown depth — rocks and stumps hide below.
- Alcohol and swimming do not mix — our trips are dry.
- Lightning ends water time immediately.

DO

1. Fit your PFD snugly; test float before leaving shore.
2. Establish a shore spotter when swimming from boats or docks.
3. Signal distress with one arm up — buddies alert adults.
4. Dry off and warm up before evening chill.
5. Hydrate even when you feel cool in water.

LEAD

- Count heads before and after every water session.
- Set clear boundaries with floats or landmarks.
- Pair strong swimmers with newer swimmers for buddy checks.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I wore a PFD when required on my last water day.
- ☐ I never entered water without adult supervision on program trips.
- ☐ I know our distress signal on water.

Paddling basics

Canoe and kayak posture, strokes, and capsize mindset.

Paddling builds teamwork on flat water before any moving water trips.

KNOW

- Wear PFD at all times on the water — buckled.
- Grip paddle with relaxed hands; torso rotation adds power.
- Bow sets rhythm in tandem boats; stern steers — communicate.
- Capsize plans are practiced in calm water with adults.
- Weather and motorboat traffic matter on Lake Lanier — stay visible.

DO

1. Adjust foot braces and seat before launching.
2. Practice forward, reverse, and sweep strokes near shore.
3. Tuck spare paddle and whistle on boat.
4. Land into wind when possible.
5. Help unload boats without dragging plastic hulls on pavement.

LEAD

- Assign bow/stern pairs by skill and weight balance.
- Run a wet exit drill only with certified instructors or leader-trained sessions.
- Brief right-of-way rules for powered boats in plain language.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I paddled with PFD buckled for a full session.
- ☐ I can name bow and stern roles in a tandem boat.
- ☐ I helped load and unload boats without damage.

| Whitewater basics and rafting safety

Outfitter trips, helmets, commands, and swim position.

Ocoee River and similar trips use licensed outfitters and guides. Your job is listen, paddle, and stay in the boat unless told otherwise.

KNOW

- Commercial rafting follows guide commands — high side, lean in, paddle forward.
- Helmets and PFDs are required — outfitter fits them.
- If you swim, feet up, face up, toes not touching bottom in moving water — guides train this.
- Hold paddle properly — never swing at others.
- Trip timing is seasonal — leaders book windows when water and staffing are safe.

DO

1. Listen to guide safety talk without talking over it.
2. Practice sitting brace in calm eddy if guide offers.
3. Secure glasses with strap; leave non-essential electronics ashore.
4. Paddle in sync with crew on commands.
5. Thank outfitter staff — they manage real risk.

LEAD

- Confirm headcount on bus and at put-in twice.
- Pair nervous members with calm partners in same raft if guides allow seating input.
- Debrief feelings after rapids — normalize fear, praise listening.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I attended a guide safety briefing on a rafting trip.
- ☐ I can describe passive swim position in whitewater.
- ☐ I wore helmet and PFD as directed without adjustment mid-rapid.

PART 10

Caving basics

Caving basics

Only with experienced leaders — helmets, lights, teams, and conservation.

Caves are fragile and disorienting. Our youth group enters caves only on leader-planned trips with qualified cave leaders. Never explore on your own.

KNOW

- Three independent light sources per person — helmet-mounted primary plus two backups.
- Helmet always; knee pads often; no loose scarves or dangling strings.
- Never go alone; minimum team size and turnaround times are set by leaders.
- Cave conservation: do not touch formations, stay on marked routes, pack out all trash.
- White-nose syndrome kills bats — follow decontamination steps leaders provide between sites and gear.

DO

1. Complete leader-led cave orientation before any trip.
2. Test all lights before entry; spare batteries in dry bag.
3. Move slowly; three points of contact on slippery rock.
4. If light fails, stop and fix — do not proceed in darkness.
5. Decontaminate boots and gear per leader checklist after exit.

LEAD

- Verify every member's lights and helmets at cave mouth.
- Assign experienced adult at front and rear; youth in middle.
- Stop for hypothermia signs — caves stay cool year-round.
- Log training dates for members allowed on vertical or tight passages.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I have three working lights for caving trips.
- ☐ I will not enter a cave without leader approval and qualified guides.
- ☐ I followed white-nose decontamination steps on my last cave trip.

PART 11

Scuba introduction

Scuba introduction and certification path

What training involves and why only certified instructors teach it.

Scuba opens a new world underwater. All in-water scuba training happens through certified dive instructors — not peer teaching.

KNOW

- Open water certification includes classroom, pool, and open-water dives with skills checks.
- Medical form may require doctor sign-off — be honest about asthma, ears, and anxiety.
- Never hold breath on scuba; ascend slowly while breathing normally — instructors teach details.
- Rent or buy gear only with instructor fitting; buoyancy control takes practice.
- Our youth group participates only on leader-arranged courses and supervised fun dives.

DO

1. Complete swim review if instructor requires before pool sessions.
2. Study hand signals and pressure concepts before first pool day.
3. Inspect mask and snorkel fit in shallow water.
4. Log practice hours and skills in your training record.
5. Ask instructors questions — there are no dumb safety questions.

LEAD

- Coordinate course dates and transportation with parents early.
- Track who completed medical forms and academic modules.
- Never take a non-certified member on a dive — observe surface support instead.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I understand scuba training requires certified instructors.
- ☐ I completed or scheduled entry swim requirements.
- ☐ I can name three skills taught in pool session one (mask clear, regulator recovery, buoyancy).

PART 12

Knots and ropes

Essential knots

Square knot, bowline, taut-line, and when to use each.

Knots hold loads and lives. Practice with paracord until you can tie them with cold hands.

KNOW

- Square knot joins same-size ropes for non-critical bundles — not for climbing.
- Bowline makes a fixed loop that will not slip when loaded correctly.
- Taut-line hitch adjusts tension on guylines and tarp ridges.
- Two half hitches secure a rope to a post or ring.
- Climbing and rappelling knots require certified instruction — beyond this guide.

DO

1. Practice each knot ten times in a row without looking at a diagram.
2. Dress knots — remove twists so strands lie parallel.
3. Store rope coiled without kinks; keep ends whipped or melted as appropriate.
4. Untie jammed knots patiently; do not yank random strands.
5. Teach a partner using slow, clear steps.

LEAD

- Run a knot ladder at meetings — rotate stations.
- Test with light load on bowline in supervised setup only.
- Keep short practice ropes in the gear bin labeled by length.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I tied a bowline correctly five times in practice.
- ☐ I used taut-line hitch on a tarp or tent guyline.
- ☐ I can teach square knot to a new member.

Rope care and storage

Protect fibers, avoid chemicals, and inspect for damage.

Rope weakens with dirt, UV, and sharp edges. Care extends expensive group gear life.

KNOW

- Keep ropes off gritty ground when possible — use rope bags.
- Do not step on rope — grit cuts internal fibers.
- Chemicals (gas, solvents) weaken nylon — store away from garage fumes.
- Retire rope with flat spots, stiff sections, or core damage visible in a sheath bulge.
- Dynamic climbing ropes are not the same as utility line — leaders label gear.

DO

1. Flake rope before use to avoid twists.
2. Pad sharp edges when rigging tarps under leader direction.
3. Wash rope only if manufacturer allows — air dry out of sun.
4. Coil using butterfly or mountaineer coil; tie off with strap.
5. Log heavy use trips on rope tag card.

LEAD

- Inspect group ropes at start of each season.
- Teach proper coiling at end of every rope activity.
- Remove damaged rope from service immediately and label DO NOT USE.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I coiled rope without twists on my last trip.
- ☐ I reported or avoided stepping on shared rope.
- ☐ I can point out one sign a rope should be retired.

PART 13

Home and vehicle skills

Vehicle basics

Tire change, jump start, fluids check — with adult supervision.

Vehicles get crews to adventure. Learn maintenance skills on a practice car in a parking lot, not on a busy highway alone.

KNOW

- Park off road, hazards on, parking brake set before any roadside work.
- Jack points are specific — use owner manual or leader demonstration.
- Jump start: correct terminal order, never lean over battery, remove clamps in reverse order.
- Check oil, coolant, and washer fluid when engine is cool — adults supervise first times.
- Call roadside assistance or leaders when unsure — safety over pride.

DO

1. Locate spare, jack, and lug wrench in family or leader vehicle.
2. Practice loosening lug nuts before lifting vehicle on level ground.
3. Place wheel chocks or rocks as leaders teach when on grade.
4. Wear visible vest on roadside work.
5. Log when oil was last changed — leaders may track trip vans separately.

LEAD

- Schedule a skills day with parents who can donate driveway time.
- Keep gloves and reflective vests in trip van kit.
- Assign who calls for help if roadside fix fails.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I observed or helped a supervised tire change.
- ☐ I know jump-start terminal order our leaders teach.
- ☐ I checked fluids with an adult on a practice vehicle.

Basic home repair and yard tools

Safe use of common tools for service and home projects.

Aeration, flag routes, and camp fixes all use tools. Respect them like sharp trail gear.

KNOW

- Eye protection and gloves for power tools and string trimmers — adults run equipment unless trained.
- Extension ladders need three points of contact; do not overreach sideways.
- Know breaker panel location at home for emergencies — adults only reset breakers when safe.
- Shut off water before small plumbing fixes leaders approve.
- Return borrowed tools clean — rust starts overnight.

DO

1. Read tool manual or leader demo before first use.
2. Carry nails and screws in pouch, not mouth.
3. Mark underground lines before digging — call appropriate locate service with adults.
4. Sweep work area; remove tripping hazards.
5. Store tools dry in labeled totes.

LEAD

- Tool talk at start of service season — aerator, flags, rakes.
- Pair youth with adult on first customer yard until consistent quality.
- Maintain tool inventory list in leader hub.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I used eye protection on last power tool day.
- ☐ I returned tools clean after service or camp repair.
- ☐ I asked for help before using an unfamiliar tool.

PART 14

Money and work

Budgeting and saving

Trip costs, gear funds, and giving back to the group.

Adventures cost money. Learning to plan expenses now helps you afford trips without surprise.

KNOW

- Separate needs (food, required gear) from wants (extra snacks, premium gadgets).
- Track spending for a month — small purchases add up.
- Trip accounts may use shared fundraising — know how credits apply to your balance.
- Save early for big items like boots or certification fees.
- Charitable giving is personal — leaders do not pressure amounts.

DO

1. Write a simple budget: income (jobs, allowance, fundraiser credit) minus planned expenses.
2. Set a savings target for next major trip.
3. Compare prices before buying gear — borrow when sensible.
4. Keep receipts for reimbursements leaders approve.
5. Review budget with a parent or mentor quarterly.

LEAD

- Share a sample budget worksheet at a meeting.
- Celebrate members who hit savings goals without shaming others.
- Explain how trip scholarships work if your group offers them — leaders fill details.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I wrote a one-month spending log.
- ☐ I know my current trip account balance or how to ask leaders.
- ☐ I set a savings goal for gear or a course.

Earning money and fundraisers

How service routes fund adventure — aeration, flags, and work ethic.

Our fundraisers are real work for real pay that supports the whole program. Show up on time and finish the route.

KNOW

- Aeration and holiday flags are skilled labor — quality matters for repeat customers.
- Payments flow through the program's systems — leaders explain splits and trip credits.
- Door knocking for sign-ups follows etiquette in the Service section.
- Tips may be allowed — follow leader guidance on reporting.
- Tax and paperwork questions go to parents and leaders — not guesses in the field.

DO

1. Sign up for shifts you can finish; swap early if plans change.
2. Wear uniform or agreed shirt; bring water and sun protection.
3. Complete checklist per home before marking done in app or sheet.
4. Report problems (missed sprinkler, locked gate) to adult leader same day.
5. Thank customers politely — reputation brings next season's jobs.

LEAD

- Post season calendar and earning goals clearly.
- Train new members on aerator operation before first solo pass.
- Debrief revenue and trip funding at youth meetings — numbers transparent to members.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I completed a full service shift without skipping steps.
- ☐ I understand how my earnings connect to trip costs — asked leaders if not.
- ☐ I swapped a shift responsibly when I had a conflict.

PART 15

Service

Lawn aeration

Crew roles, clay soils, and customer respect.

Core aeration pulls plugs from compacted soil so water and roots breathe. North Georgia clay benefits when done in the right season — leaders set schedules.

KNOW

- Walk the yard first — mark sprinklers, wires, and dog waste hazards.
- Adults run the aerator. Youth never operate, load, or haul the machine, and never drive.
- Youth jobs: spotter (flag hazards, walk ahead, stay clear of tines), raker (clear plugs off hardscape, hang door hangers), and navigator (addresses, time on site).
- Close gates; return hoses and toys you moved.
- If soil is too dry or wet, leaders may postpone — do not force poor results.

DO

1. Verify the address and work order with your leader before the machine starts.
2. Wear closed-toe shoes, eye protection, and hearing protection as provided. Stay clear of the tines.
3. Flag or avoid tree roots and irrigation heads.
4. Leave plugs on lawn to break down unless customer asked otherwise.
5. Photo problem areas for leader follow-up if needed.

LEAD

- Two adults present whenever youth help. Only adults load, haul, and run the machine.
- Assign checker who walks behind for missed strips.
- Log machine hours and report maintenance issues same day.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I walked a yard for hazards before aerating.
- ☐ I completed overlapping passes on my last route.
- ☐ I shut down equipment safely and cleaned tines.

Holiday flag placement and retrieval

Respectful display, weather calls, and neat yards.

Families hire us to honor holidays with flags in their yards. Precision and respect matter more than speed.

KNOW

- Use only provided stakes and flags — do not mix customer sets.
- Placement spot is usually front yard near walk — follow route card.
- Retrieve on scheduled day even if weather is wet — dress for it.
- Damaged flags go to leaders — do not throw in customer trash without asking.
- Never enter a home or garage without explicit permission and adult present.

DO

1. Carry flags upright; do not drag on ground.
2. Step on sod carefully; avoid flower beds.
3. Straighten flag on stake; check from sidewalk for appearance.
4. Record completion in app or checklist per stop.
5. Driveways: watch for kids and pets when backing vans.

LEAD

- Sort flags by route the night before.
- Pair new member with experienced driver for first holiday.
- Weather cancel policy comes from leaders — communicate early to customers via office.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I placed flags per route card without damaging landscaping.
- ☐ I retrieved flags on the assigned day.
- ☐ I reported a damaged flag or unhappy customer to leaders promptly.

Talking to neighbors and door etiquette

Polite sign-ups, safety, and representing the youth group well.

You are the face of the program on door routes. Courtesy opens doors; pushiness closes them.

KNOW

- Travel in pairs with adult leader nearby on knocking days.
- Identify yourself by name and youth group; mention adult leader if asked.
- No entering homes; stay on porch or driveway.
- If someone says no, thank them and leave — no debating.
- Do not knock after posted quiet hours leaders set.

DO

1. Practice intro script with leader until natural.
2. Hold materials so address is visible for accuracy.
3. Step back from doors with dogs barking until owner controls pet.
4. Mark results honestly in tracker — do not knock again same day if marked do-not-knock.
5. Wear clean shirt and smile — nonverbal respect counts.

LEAD

- Brief boundaries map before each street.
- Debrief tough conversations without mocking residents.
- Rotate who speaks so everyone builds confidence.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I used the approved intro on a knocking shift.
- ☐ I accepted a 'no' politely and moved on.
- ☐ I logged each stop accurately in the tracker.

PART 16

Leadership

Leading a crew

Assignments, check-ins, and keeping morale up.

Crew lead is service, not bossing. You help adults move the group safely and kindly.

KNOW

- Leaders set authority; youth crew leads coordinate tasks within that frame.
- Clear, short instructions beat long speeches on trail.
- Watch energy levels — food, water, and breaks prevent grumpy crews.
- Include quiet members with specific roles.
- Admit when you do not know — ask an adult leader.

DO

1. Hold a two-minute huddle: goal, roles, turnaround time.
2. Count heads at junctions and after breaks.
3. Praise in public; correct gently one-on-one.
4. Carry extra snacks to share when someone forgot.
5. Hand off lead role when tired — rotation is strength.

LEAD

- Model calm when weather or plans change.
- Debrief what you did well and one improvement after each lead stint.
- Ask adults for feedback weekly during busy seasons.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I led a huddle before a service or trail block.
- ☐ I included every member in a task rotation.
- ☐ I asked an adult when a decision was above my training.

Planning an activity

From idea to calendar item with safety and fun balanced.

Youth can propose hikes, skills nights, and service projects. Adults approve, but your planning work makes it happen.

KNOW

- SMART-ish goals: specific activity, measurable outcome, agreed date, realistic for group, time-bound evening or day.
- Permits, transportation, and parent communication are adult tasks you assist.
- Backup indoor plan for weather-dependent ideas.
- Budget line items: food, fuel, rentals.
- Promotion: one clear message in group chat beats ten reminders.

DO

1. Write one-page proposal: what, why, who, when, cost, risks.
2. Present at a Wednesday planning meeting for feedback.
3. Build equipment list from Field Guide sections.
4. Confirm adult coverage before announcing date.
5. Send reminder 48 hours and morning of with meet location pin.

LEAD

- Coach younger members through their first proposal draft.
- Use a template slide leaders keep in shared drive.
- Celebrate executed plans even if weather shortened them.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I wrote an activity proposal and shared it with leaders.
- ☐ I listed risks and mitigations for my idea.
- ☐ I helped run an activity that happened on the calendar.

Teaching a skill

Demonstrate, practice, review — the teaching loop.

Teaching reinforces your own skills. Go slow, let others try, and fix one thing at a time.

KNOW

- Tell, show, do, review — four steps keep lessons short.
- One main skill per session (one knot, one map skill).
- Safety stops the lesson if gear or weather is wrong.
- Praise effort; correct technique without insults.
- Some skills (scuba, caves, whitewater) are instructor-only — know the line.

DO

1. Prepare materials the night before.
2. Demonstrate twice — once slow, once normal speed.
3. Let each person try while others watch one correction at a time.
4. End with checkoff items from this guide.
5. Ask adult leader to add anything you missed.

LEAD

- Assign teaching slots in monthly meetings.
- Video record demos only if parents consented for media policy.
- Pair teacher with assistant who watches time and safety.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I taught a skill using tell-show-do-review.
- ☐ I stopped practice when safety gear was missing.
- ☐ I used checkoff items to close the lesson.

PART 17

North Georgia places

Trails and forests

Day hikes and overnights within a few hours of Gainesville.

North Georgia offers ridges, waterfalls, and forest camps without flying west. Distances vary — leaders pick routes for the crew's experience.

KNOW

- Chattahoochee National Forest holds many maintained trails and dispersed camping only where rules allow.
- The Appalachian Trail crosses Georgia — popular day sections need parking planning and shuttles sometimes.
- Amicalola Falls State Park offers steep approaches and busy weekends — start early.
- Blood Mountain and nearby gaps can be rocky and exposed — weather moves fast.
- Trail registers and parking fees change — leaders confirm current info before trip.

DO

1. Research trailhead driving time and parking limits with leaders.
2. Pack extra water for Georgia humidity on exposed ridges.
3. Practice Leave No Trace especially on high-traffic paths.
4. Log trail conditions after trip for the next crew.
5. Thank land managers and volunteers when you meet them.

LEAD

- Maintain a shared doc of favorite loops with difficulty notes — no exact mile claims unless surveyed.
- Rotate trailheads so members see variety.
- Coordinate carpools to reduce parking pressure.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I hiked a North Georgia trail with the group or studied one for a upcoming trip.
- ☐ I followed forest rules for camping and fires on that trip.
- ☐ I contributed a trail condition note to leaders.

Rivers, lakes, and water trips

Lake Lanier, the Ocoee, and paddle days near home.

Water trips mix recreation and training. Current, traffic, and weather decide if a day is a go.

KNOW

- Lake Lanier is busy with boats — stay visible, use PFDs, and follow leader swim boundaries.
- The Ocoee River in Tennessee is a commercial rafting corridor — book through outfitters leaders trust.
- Smaller rivers and lakes near home work for paddle practice when wind is low.
- Cold rain upstream can raise levels quickly — leaders monitor gauges.
- Dam releases and schedules are not guesswork — adults read official sources.

DO

1. Check wind and thunder forecast before paddle days.
2. Wear bright colors on open water.
3. Practice self-rescue and T-rescue in calm water before advancing.
4. Rinse boats and PFDs after salt or mud.
5. Hydrate on shore — sun reflects off water.

LEAD

- Build relationships with outfitters and marinas through adult leaders.
- Keep a go/no-go chart for river levels posted in leader hub.
- Assign shore spotters on swim days.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I wore PFD on a lake or river program day.
- ☐ I know who calls off a water day for weather.
- ☐ I helped clean and store boats after use.

Caves and karst features

Why we only go with experts and how to protect bats.

Limestone regions near North Georgia and Tennessee hold caves. Many are gated or permit-only — our leaders handle access. This section is mindset, not a map.

KNOW

- Wild caves are not playgrounds — rockfall, drops, and flooding are real.
- Some caves are closed seasonally for bats — respect closures.
- Show caves exist for education — still follow guide rules.
- GPS does not work underground — navigation is route memory and markers leaders know.
- Decontamination for white-nose syndrome is mandatory between sites.

DO

1. Attend only leader-approved cave trips.
2. Carry three lights and helmet without exception.
3. Stay on marked paths; never collect rocks or formations.
4. Report bat sightings to leaders for conservation logs.
5. Clean gear after every cave exit per protocol.

LEAD

- Maintain roster of youth cleared for each cave tier.
- Partner with grotto or qualified cave leaders adults trust — names in leader packet.
- Never publish cave locations on public social media.

CHECKOFF

- ☐ I understand caves are leader-led only.
- ☐ I completed decontamination after my last cave trip or training demo.
- ☐ I will not share cave locations online.

Adult leaders approve all high-risk activities (water, caves, scuba, fire, power tools). Emergency: call 911, then notify trip leaders.
Leader contact list: see trip plan packet.