



Program Policies & Procedures

- A Manual for Field Staff
- A Resource for Parents and Participants

PURPOSE OF THIS MANUAL

- To describe the policies that apply in all the programs we offer. These are the commitments that the Vermont Wilderness School (VWS) has made as an organization.
- To explain our procedures. These are the ways that we implement our policies.
- To train/guide members of our field staff in our program policies and procedures.
- To inform participants— and the parents of youth participants— about our policies and procedures, so they know what to expect from a VWS program

A NOTE TO STAFF MEMBERS

In becoming part of the VWS staff, you have joined a community of dedicated, passionate, creative, and talented mentors who understand that helping children, teens, and adults develop a meaningful relationship with the Earth, as well as with one another, means a lot more than just taking them outside or going for a “nature hike.” This job requires a constant honing of skills, a commitment to the participants, a dedication to community, and an awareness of, and tending to, the unique and sacred fire that burns within each one of us. You are entering into a rich tradition of a learning community that has been evolving since 1999 and will hopefully continue evolving and growing for many more years. Welcome!

A NOTE TO PARTICIPANTS & PARENTS

This manual is written as a staff training manual, but it can also serve to inform you about the policies, procedures, and mentoring philosophy used in VWS programs. Feel free to contact the VWS office for any further information.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- **VWS Employee / Contractor / Volunteer Handbook.** A document that describes in detail the rights and responsibilities of every person VWS hires or engages as an employee, contractor or volunteer.
- **Participant Letters.** For each adult program there is a unique letter describing participant responsibilities, program calendar, logistics, contact info, etc.

DISCLAIMERS

We will update this manual periodically. VWS reserves the right to alter, interpret, supplement, or rescind these policies and procedures as we see fit. This manual is not a contract of employment. It is a record of policies and procedures. This version supersedes all previous employer statements, including any previous manuals, handbooks, memos, employee agreements, and oral and written statements pertaining to VWS. The Executive Director has the final word in interpreting this manual. Because it is impossible to anticipate every situation that may arise, VWS reserves the right to address any given situation in a manner different from the procedures described in the manual.

This document can be downloaded from our website at: [insert url]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

“Participant” = A person of any age who is participating in a VWS program and is not in a staff role. Unenrolled guests/visitors are also considered participants.

- “Youth,” “child,” “participant,” and “teen” = are all used to refer to a participant who is under 18 yrs old.
- “Adult” refers to a participant (or a guest) 18 or more years old.

“Staff member” = A person of any age who has an agreement with VWS to help create/lead/facilitate a VWS program. This term refers to **both** paid people (such as employees and contractors) and unpaid people (volunteers).

- “Adult staff member” = a staff member over 18
- “Youth staff member” = a staff member under 18

I. WHO WE ARE

MISSION

The Vermont Wilderness School is dedicated to cultivating long-term mentoring relationships rooted in community, nature connection, and earth living skills. Nature-connected children lead to nature-connected families and communities. Our vision is a healthy and equitable nature-connected culture.

Through our annual Art of Mentoring workshop and our many local programs, our work has touched the lives of thousands of children and adults since 1999.

VALUES

Inclusion & Accessibility

We believe that each person has a gift to bring the world, and we foster the calling forth and receiving of that gift. VWS strives to create an atmosphere in which people are able to participate irrespective of gender or gender identification, sex, sexual orientation, race, color, ethnicity, religion, creed, age, size, marital status, national origin, mental or physical disability, political belief or affiliation, or veteran status.

We also acknowledge the limitations of our program in accommodating certain individuals. If a staff member does not believe they can incorporate an individual without detracting from the health of the whole group and program, a participant may be referred to another program or asked to leave.

Instructors' Guild Code of Ethics

VWS is committed to providing quality learning environments so that participants will deepen their connection to nature, themselves, and other people. This requires a commitment to tracking ourselves, our relationships with others, and our relationship to nature.

We hold high expectations for each other to ensure a quality learning and working environment. We invite VWS staff members to make the following agreements:

1. We agree to use good words from a place of peace.
2. We agree to assume the best intent.
3. We own our own experience.
4. We agree to resolve issues in a timely manner.
5. We agree to hold each other accountable.
6. We acknowledge that we may falter and agree to get back up and forgive ourselves when we falter.

2. STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES & EXPECTATIONS

VWS CHAIN OF RESPONSIBILITY

Use this chain of responsibility to help direct you in times of emergency to be sure you are reaching the correct people to aid you. If you can't reach the first person above you, continue up the chain.

1. Board Chair / Board Vice Chair
2. Executive Director
3. Program Director (for the relevant program)
4. Field Director (if there is one for the relevant program)
5. Lead Instructor
6. Assistant Instructor / Adult Volunteer / Youth Volunteer

The names and contact information of these people can be found in Appendix 3.

ADMINISTRATION, HIRING, & TRAINING

The VWS Office

The Vermont Wilderness School office handles the administration of all programs. Staff members, participants, and parents should feel free to contact the office team (Administrator, Bookkeeper, ED, or the relevant Program Director) with any questions or concerns about registration, payment, and all paperwork such as medical forms and waivers.

Background Checks & Reference Checks

Every Vermont Wilderness School staff member must undergo background checks before interacting with any children in our programs. This includes a search for criminal offenses nationally, and an additional, more detailed, check in your most recent state of residence. Your name will also be searched in the national sexual offender database. VWS pays the fees associated with the background checks.

VWS will also check two of the personal references that you provide with your application.

Staff members must also complete the standard VWS Medical Form & Waiver before attending your first program.

Hiring Practices

For a full description of VWS's hiring practices (job posting policy, application review & interview, reference checks, background check, and enrolling in our payroll system), please see the VWS Employee Handbook.

Qualifications

Paid instructors are required to have experience and training in outdoor leadership, program curriculum, and first aid training (preferred current certification) Past participation in the Art of Mentoring training is also preferred.

Staff Training

Before your pre-program staff training, and annually thereafter, you are required to read this manual (and the appropriate site-specific Appendix for your program) and sign the statement (Appendix 6) stating that you will abide by these policies and procedures.

You must attend the staff training session for your program, during which **some, but not all**, of the policies & procedures in this manual will be reviewed.

Role Modeling

One of the most critical parts about being a staff member is that you are role modeling knowledge and experience for participants and parents. Therefore, the way we conduct ourselves in their presence may influence their future steps more than we could possibly be aware of. It is important to ask yourself at all times, "What is my behavior teaching these participants?"

Are you role modeling appropriate clothing for the weather conditions? Good eating and food intake? Care of equipment? Staying hydrated? Arriving prepared and rested? Willing to admit when you aren't prepared and being able to improvise or ask for help? Communicate and value others in a good way? Work through conflicts and agitation in a growing way? Are you taking time off or a break when you need to (and at an appropriate time)? It's easy to get caught up in the day and forget about whether we are role modeling good caretaking of ourselves for the participants.

At the same time, keep in mind that when the participants are there, you are "on" and you are expected to be profiling and assessing participant's instructional, physical, and emotional needs to the best of your ability. If you are not leading an activity, you are expected to be assisting.

3. SAFETY & RISK MANAGEMENT POLICIES

Wilderness and outdoor activities are not without risk. With this in mind, safety is at the forefront of our practice. Participants will be trained to be aware of risks and how to avoid them.

THREE GENERAL GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR RUNNING SAFE AND EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS:

- i. **Respect**
- ii. **Safety**
- iii. **Have Fun!**

The following rules apply to both staff and participants in all VWS programs:

- No Drugs or Alcohol are to be present or consumed.
- Tobacco, Firearms and Fireworks are generally not to be present at programs. Special permission may be granted by the Executive Director if there is compelling curriculum reasons (ex. Use of tobacco as offering, firearms used for hunter education, or poppers for awareness tests).
- Making out and/or having sex is inappropriate conduct at programs.
- Physical fight/conflict or sincere intent to physically harm or threaten someone else is inappropriate conduct at programs.
- Leaving the program site during program time without explicit permission from Program Director or Executive Director, and, in the case of minors, parent or guardian.
- Sexual harassment or misconduct is not tolerated and can lead to criminal prosecution.

Child Safe Policy

VWS is committed to operating our programs in a manner that is safe for the children we serve. All children have the right to live free from fear or impact from any form of abuse or exploitation. We are obliged to create environments that aim to prevent harmful or dangerous circumstances. While the vast majority of individuals have good intentions, we must safeguard against those who do not. In addition to protecting children, some of the following protocols can also serve to protect staff members from the possibility of erroneous or false allegations of abuse.

Behavioral Protocols for VWS staff Engaging with Children

1. Where possible, and practical, the *two-adult* rule, wherein two or more adults supervise (within 200 feet) all activities where children are involved and are present, should be followed. Typically this is a lead or assistant instructor plus a volunteer/intern/CIT (or second instructor).
2. VWS staff members should not take a child or children into a private place out of sight AND sound of other adults. Being alone with a child is prohibited, except in emergency situations. A staff member should always have at least two participants or another staff person with them. Have at least one witness (preferably more) at all times.
3. Boundaries need to be respected when touching children. Children who do not want to be touched should not be touched. Intentional touching a child's lips, genital area, or

breasts is not permitted under any circumstance, with the exception of giving emergency first aid.

4. Corporal punishment (touching a child as a disciplinary measure) of any kind is not permitted under any circumstance. A child may only be physically restrained if they are a danger to themselves or to others.

See the "PARTICIPANT & STAFF SAFETY" section below for more detailed policies and procedures related to our Child Safe Policy.

WELFARE AND SAFETY

The "Three Lemons Rule": Hazard Awareness And Prevention:

Just like any gambler at the slot machine, we too want to avoid the lemons! Get three in a row and you lose. It seems that the same goes for group experiences and individuals. In order to prevent injury, harm, or simply a bad experience while at a program, it's important that staff be on the lookout for potential lemons so that they can be avoided, and, even better, understood by our participants.

The following is a set of things to have in your awareness so that you may assess situations using the "Three Lemons Rule:"

Dehydration

A very common "lemon" that can easily be overlooked. In the past staff have done a great job of reminding kids to "drink water!" Keep it up. Remember, our bodies use approximately 2.5-3.5 quarts of water per day, depending upon our daily activities and weather conditions. It's important that we replace this amount of water!

Hypothermia & Frostbite

The majority of hypothermia cases happen in temperatures above 50F. Water and wind can be more than enough to drop a person's core temperature faster than their body can produce heat in order to maintain it. Again, proper dress (especially dry clothing), awareness of the wind and temperature, and good planning will help to ensure that hypothermia will not be an issue. Signs of hypothermia are the "umbles": mumbling, bumbling, grumbling, stumbling... See the signs and address immediately.

Frostbite, as well as hypothermia, occur when it's "really" cold with the major risk zone being when it is 30F- 35F and it's raining or sleeting. Staying dry, well fed and hydrated is critical—especially paying attention to hands and feet. Frostbite becomes riskier as the temperature drops. Warning signs are the skin is pale, numb and cold to touch but still soft and pliable.

Time to get warm by a fire and remove damp clothing and switch into dry. Don't mess around with any of this.

Sunburn, Sun Poisoning, Heat Exhaustion, And Heat Stroke

If you are in direct sunlight a lot, encourage use of sunscreens and lotions or avoid prolonged exposure to direct sunlight. Be aware of the different fitness levels of you participants and don't assume that they know how to dress appropriately. Children, and adults for that matter, will over dress (or under dress) for a variety of reasons and unknowingly put themselves at risk for sun and heat related problems. Be observant for the signs of these medical issues and follow appropriate procedures should they appear.

Physical Exhaustion

Again, a simple walk up from the river may be nothing for those who are physically fit but it may be nothing short of Everest for others. Consider the effect that certain activities may have on your participants and plan strategically so that the required amount of rest and refueling may be had by each participant.

Bare Feet

Footwear must be worn by participants except for during specifically facilitated activities (such as wading in water, swimming or engaging in an activity that benefits from being barefoot). Youth participants can go barefoot most of the time if parents and participants have discussed it with lead staff and the person going barefoot has a clear understanding of the hazards. If at any time a staff member assesses that environmental conditions (such as sharp scree rocks) are not safe for bare feet, they can require participants to wear appropriate shoes. Shoes must always be worn in 50 degree or colder weather to prevent foot damage.

Before shoes come off, share guidelines for being barefoot (primarily fox walking and how to avoid stepping on sharp objects). If you as a staff member are going barefoot and others are inspired, role model awareness and talk with participants about the joys and the risks of going barefoot.

Ticks and Tick Checks

Tick checks are to be conducted periodically and especially after spending time in a high tick incident zone (fields and evergreen saplings, river corridors). At the start of the program, participants should receive a demonstration of how to conduct a proper tick check. If a tick is found, they are to report it to a staff member who will then assist in safe removal of the tick. If a tick is discovered in a "private" part of the body, the participant will be coached through the proper removal of the tick. Use a tick scoop, tick twister, or pincer tipped tweezers supplied in the med kits. Absolutely be sure to remove the head. If the tick is not removed easily, the participant's parents are to be called and informed of the problem. The easiest is to catch the ticks before they dig in—so check often and encourage participants to tuck pant legs into socks etc. Be sure to keep an eye out for the nymphs which are tiny. Inform parents if a tick was

found embedded so they can watch for signs of Lyme Disease. The nymph and adult deer tick stages are the highest risk of being carriers of Lyme disease.

Bee And Wasp Stings

Bee and Wasp stings can be anywhere from mildly annoying to deadly. Prevention is the best piece but if a participant is stung, first of all get everyone to safety away from the wasp/bee. Secondly, inspect the sting, apply a sting stopper and if needed a cold compress. If swelling occurs, immediately administer Benadryl or equivalent antihistamine in the med kits. If swelling continues, it's time to call the parents and/or EMT. Allergic reactions can occur any time within 24 hours of being stung so just because there isn't an initial reaction, that doesn't mean that one won't occur or that a reaction won't get worse. Don't mess around with these. Know ahead of time who in your group has been stung previously and what kind of reaction the participant had and whether there is a family history of allergic reactions to stings. Also find out, if the participant has an epi-pen or equivalent prescription. Know who in your staff group knows how to handle epi-pens and is certified to do so.

Animals

Developing an understanding and relationship with animals is something we value highly. Certain animals are not meant to be taken lightly, however. Staff will discuss proper procedures for handling wildlife sightings during staff orientation. This is to include but is not limited to: bear, moose, snakes, insects and any creature, dead or alive, that may show signs of illness or disease such as rabies.

Rabies And Distemper

Rabies is a deadly virus that attacks the central nervous system and can be transmitted via exposure to infected saliva and nervous system tissues. Rabies is most often seen in wild animals such as raccoons, bats, skunks, bobcats, and foxes. Domestic animals such as cats and dogs that have not been vaccinated can also be carriers of the disease. Infected animals may present as irritable, demonstrate no fear of humans, stagger, convulse, spit, and or froth at the mouth. They may however, also appear to be completely healthy. It is for this reason that encounters with wild mammals be limited to observations only. If for any reason a staff member comes across an animal that you suspect to be ill, first secure the safety of the participants by removing them from the scene. Then report it immediately.

If exposed to rabies either directly (i.e. a bite or scratch) or via an indirect mechanism (i.e. a participant touches a dead animal), the wound and/or exposed area on the participant is to be washed with soap and water immediately. The incident must then be reported to the site director, and the local hospital will be contacted. This protocol is to be followed for domestic animals as well. Indirect exposures can easily be avoided by making sure participants are aware of the dangers and strongly enforcing a "no touching" rule.

Water and Wading Activities

Streams, rivers, ponds are practically lemons all by themselves. Participants and staff may not go into an area where the water is deeper than their knees. The reason for the knee-height rule is that if you get your foot caught and you are in fast water, at this water height you will be able to hold your head above the water with your arms. In waters deeper than knee-height, there must be a certified water instructor or lifeguard monitoring activities.

A staff member must be vigilantly supervising all water activities. This responsibility should be shared and rotated between leads of each mentoring team. For groups of 12 participants, there must be a minimum of 2 supervising staff members at the water at all times.

Wading and other water activities is a time to be hyper-vigilant and aware of potential hazards such as lightning, swift waters, glass & metal, as well as inappropriate play and risk-taking behaviors. Basic first aid kits must be carried by all staff members involved as well as having rescue ropes or poles available in case of need. Be aware that rivers may be off limits if rain, high waters, or ice pose a danger. This will be communicated daily. When in doubt, ask before planning trips to bodies of water.

Participants are not to go wading or swimming without permission. Participants will be sent home if violating this rule.

Winter Water Conditions

Exploring ice is a child's universal passion AND a hazard. Avoid going out on rivers or large ponds unless you really know that the ice is thick enough. Teach the participants how to assess ice safety. Ice needs to be 4" thick to hold up humans walking across, skating, or ice fishing. This is also a good opportunity to teach Cougar Stalk. It is a Foxwalk gait, but you pause every 10 steps and look up, down, around, behind...and listen! When you establish that the ice is thick enough and there aren't thin ice areas, you might consider sliding, "skating" etc.

If you venture out on an icy stream, do so prepared for if someone gets their clothes wet. Or someone getting cut on ice. Or dealing with major bruising from a fall.

When we reach the season of ice melt, one needs to be extra wary again. Ice melt frequently includes a rise in water, potential flooding, and ice dams. On rivers, it can mean miniature icebergs that can be quite hazardous.

If you have youth who are impulsive, avoid the winter water. If you have youth who are really good at waiting and being cautious with you, you might consider the exploration.

Tree Climbing

Tree climbing is also practically a lemon all by itself. A staff member must be present and give permission for a participant to climb a tree. The general rule is a participant can climb as high as twice their height. A participant should choose a branch as thick as their wrist to put their

weight on and should also stay close to the trunk of the tree. A staff member, at their discretion, may give permission to climb higher and/or move further out on a branch. However, the staff member needs to take full responsibility for the participant's safety. Checking the tree to be sure it is alive and sturdy before climbing is also an important skill to develop.

Lightning

If it is clear that we are going to experience thunder and lightning, it is standard procedure to avoid rivers and other bodies of water, especially the shores, as well as open fields. Stay away from ravines and low areas where water is likely to collect as well as shallow caves or overhangs. If caught away from shelter, have your group spread out in an area of thick growths of small trees of uniform height. Have everyone sit on a dry non-conductive object like a day pack, jacket or sleeping pad. Huddle in a ball keeping feet close together. Depending upon the severity of the storm and accessibility, we will have participants go to the shelters and insulate themselves from the ground. When wandering out for distances, pay attention to the weather and act appropriately.

Icy Conditions and "Hillside sliding"

For programs occurring in winter, we have the hazard awareness of sudden sliding or intentional sliding. This is a major children's universal passion AND can be very hazardous – think about concussions, spinal injuries, broken arms and legs, severely bruised tail bones! Even possibility of being paralyzed or death.

So think it through and encourage the participants to think it through – how to have fun and be safe. Avoid sliding on hillsides with lots of trees, saplings, rocks, or potentially hidden stumps. Consider the condition of the snow/ice and likely speed of sliding. Consider the skills of the participants – there's a big difference between a 10-year old who has been snowboarding or skiing for years and a 10-year old who has never gone skiing/snowboarding and only sledding on cleared hillsides.

When conditions are particularly icy, avoid steep narrow hillside paths with long drop-offs.

Lost-Proofing

From the start, we want participants to know what to do in the event that they find themselves separated from the group and are in unfamiliar territory. A crow call or other form of alarm call agreed upon by the group should be established early on so that participants know how to locate one another when lost. In the event that such a call does not work, the participant should know to remain where they are until they can be found. In the event that a participant is missing, staff members should follow the Emergency Plan (Appendix 1).

Children should not be out of visual/auditory check-in range (i.e. making a trip to the bathroom) for more than 10 minutes without a staff member checking in. Children should ask permission to go out of visual/auditory range so that a staff member knows where the participant is. Visual

and/or auditory contact is critical in keeping track of participants, monitoring safety/health. We do allow, at staff discretion, freedom to range out further, but there needs to be a well-established trust, guidelines, and agreed point of reconnection/check-in. Students are not to wander without first asking permission of a staff member or being instructed to do something requiring wandering.

Sticks, Rocks, Snowballs (And Other Throwing Things) & Wrestling (Rough-Housing)

In the main arrival/pick-up area, gathering areas, and firepits, objects may not be thrown and there is no wrestling/rough-housing. During certain play times, it is recommended that there is a designated area past gathering areas or major trails where games involving throwing objects or wrestling can occur under staff supervision. Anyone in the area of the activity is indicating a willingness to participate. Those who do not want to participate need to be in the Safe Zones or other areas away from the activity. No head or groin shots allowed. If someone is accidentally hit in those areas, game play halts and everyone goes down on one knee until confirmation is made that the hit person is okay. If an activity has a high incident rate of head or groin shots, the activity is halted.

Hitting and kicking is prohibited. (One exception is if it is part of a controlled skill development for martial arts in which case, actually landing the hit or kick is not part of the drill).

Guidelines for Rough Play

1. Ask permission of staff and get staff supervision,
2. Activity happens in a designated area separate from common areas,
3. Each child participating has to consent clearly, indicating desire to participate,
4. Before beginning, thank each other,
5. No punching, no kicking,
6. If someone gets hit in the head or groin, play stops to check in on wellness as well as let everyone breath and reset a bit. If it happens three times in short period of time, then the activity stops.
 - a. If someone in the group appears to no longer be having fun (is angry, frustrated, sad, etc.) the activity stops. Staff member checks in with the child and helps restore friendships.
 - b. Thank each other again and acknowledge friendship at the end of the rough housing activity.

Fire

Fire is a major focal point for many programs offered at Vermont Wilderness School. We teach it, gather around it, cook with it, protect it, and use it as a metaphor for our spiritual well-being. Fires can also be deadly and cause extensive damage to local/regional ecosystems. (There are forest fires in the Northeast!) Therefore, as with the animals, we must demonstrate extreme care and respect for it. Any fire pits and its surrounding area must be kept clean at all times.

Students must be made aware of behavioral expectations in this area and demonstrate safety at all times. (I.e. running, wrestling, and throwing of anything is not allowed around fires). Firewood should be stored at a safe distance. If the fire hazard index becomes such that risk of a forest fire is "high," fires should not be lit. Current conditions should also be taken into account in regards to the size of the fire. At no time should a fire be burning while unattended. Establishing that coals are out before leaving a firepit is also an important protocol. In the event that an uncontrolled fire is burning, staff and participants should follow procedures as outlined in the emergency/crisis management plan.

Check in with local fire marshals about fire regulations in the area and determine whether permission needs to be obtained for each fire.

Knives and Knife Safety

Knives are often an essential part of daily program activities. We encourage parents to supply their children with sheath knives, as opposed to folding blades. Folding blade knives may only be used if there is a locking mechanism, in order to avoid the blade collapsing and cutting fingers.

If a parent is sending a child with blade of any sort, they need to inform the staff. Carving knives, hatchets, and saws may be allowed with staff permission. All blades need to have a sheath/blade cover.

Specialized throwing knives, "Chinese stars", short swords, etc, are not allowed and will be confiscated by staff if found on a child.

Knife safety should be addressed at the start of the program and maintained at all times. Safety talks should include but are not limited to

- instruction in proper use (always cutting away from self) and maintenance,
- handling and passing knives to others, proper storage when not in use, and
- the understanding and consistent awareness of a "blood bubble" safety zone when using a knife – i.e. (except in the kitchen), no one should be in range of the knife blade when the carver extends their arm.
- 3 points of contact when carving (sitting, leaning against a sturdy tree)

Minors must ask for permission first to use a knife. Adults are requested to also ask the group they are with permission so that others are aware of what is going on and to let the person know if it is a good time for the group for them to carve.

Additionally, participants are asked to be seated or standing still in an appropriate area when a knife blade is exposed and for participants to be paying attention to other participants using knives or other sharp tools.

It is important too, for staff members to demonstrate the highest level of safety and etiquette themselves as participants are learning more from what we do than from what we say. Lead

and Assistant Instructors may revoke knife privileges, including taking knives away, at any time that they feel safety is being disregarded by participants.

Safety precautions, especially blood bubble awareness, also apply to use of saws, axes, hatchets, drawknives, etc.

VWS Knife Safety Guidelines

1. **Ask permission** before getting out a knife.
2. **Sit down to carve.** Do not carve while standing up; it's more dangerous.
3. **Draw your "Blood Bubble."** With the knife in hand, and in its sheath, stretch out your arm and circle your straight arm up, down, left, and right. This establishes the edges of your Blood Bubble, or personal area of safety. No person should enter your Blood Bubble.
4. **Carve AWAY from yourself.** Never allow the blade or knife point to be "pushed" toward any part of your body. *(There are some safe ways carve toward yourself, but they are not for beginning or young carvers.)*
5. **Pay close attention..** Do not talk or get distracted by other things while carving.
6. **Sheath the knife and set it in a safe place when finished carving or when taking even a short break.** Never leave an open knife laying on the ground even briefly. It can too easily be forgotten and simply be a danger to someone who is not aware that it is there.
7. **Sheath the knife when handing it to someone else.**

Debris Huts

Sleeping in a debris hut for the first time is a true rite of passage for anyone. For children as young as nine or ten years old, it can be a life changing event. The idea of knowing you can create a shelter that will keep you warm and dry, even on the coldest of nights is a powerful realization. However, we mustn't overestimate children's' capabilities. Therefore, debris huts should be made within clan site or Village boundaries. If a shelter has been made well beyond where the main site shelter, then it is required that a staff member sleep outside of the debris hut anytime a participant spends the night in the shelter. However, if the debris hut is built within the main shelter site, within 15ft of a staff member, then no additional staffing is required.

Solos

For the time being all solo experiences are to be lead and supervised by the directors only. This includes solos of any kind including what has become known as "group solos" in which two or more participants sleep away from the group. Typically, these types of experiences are reserved for experienced adults and older teen participants only.

Infectious and Communicable Diseases

As staff, we need to be aware of a variety of conditions, illnesses, and infections that are highly communicable between youth and ourselves. For instance, if we are using blindfolds, it is good for us to assign blindfolds to individuals and afterwards clean those blindfolds with hot water. Pink-eye and head lice can be transmitted via blindfolds!

It's also good to greatly discourage hat stealing and swapping of hats. Sometimes we have youth who are being treated for headlice (they aren't immediately "contagious," but are playing it safe keeping a hat on). Others could unknowingly get headlice from them. Or someone could be in early stages of headlice and not know it.

Washing hands before eating can prevent a variety of other communicable diseases and conditions, including pin worms, etc. There are some diseases communicable that can be gotten from touching animal scat, dead animals, dead birds, etc, before eating or putting hands to mouth. These include: Leptospirosis, Roundworm (from Raccoon scat), Hanta virus (from mouse scat), Tularemia (from rabbits). In our experience, these are unlikely, BUT it can and does happen.

We want to be aware of these hazards without stigmatizing them. Head lice and pinworm are fairly common and simply means a person got exposed...possibly through simply shaking hands. That doesn't mean we should stigmatize shaking hands!

If a child appears ill with an infectious disease (like chicken pox, whooping cough, swine flu, etc), contact the child's guardians/parents and ask that the child be picked up. It is harder for a lot of these diseases to be passed on in an outdoor setting, but it can happen. Not to mention the child is probably a tad miserable and can better be cared for at home.

If your family has been exposed to highly infectious diseases or parasites, we ask that you stay home from the program until you have cleared the incubation/contagious period of the disease or infestation.

Keep in mind that many of the families participating in VWS programs have chosen not to vaccinate for many of these common childhood illnesses. (And some of the adults in our community have not had chicken pox which can have very serious consequences when acquired as an adult).

Dead Animals, Roadkill, and "Nature Museum" Animal Parts

Checking out dead animals (including roadkill) is an amazing learning experience. Get to know different species up close and personal!

It is also important to know the various state and federal laws surrounding picking up roadkill and possession of animal parts.

Vermont Roadkill falls under the jurisdiction of the Vermont Fish & Wildlife (www.vtfishandwildlife.com).

- http://www.vtfishandwildlife.com/learn_more/living_with_wildlife/roadkill_procedure
- [Roadkill Procedure - Vermont Fish and Wildlife](#)
- [The Vermont Agency of Transportation \(VTrans\)](#)

If you are wanting to pick up roadkill, it is important to contact your local Game Warden, let them know of your interest, and ask permission. In all likelihood, you will get permission.

If you are considering bringing roadkill to a program, we ask that you first get permission to possess from the game warden and then get permission from the Program Director.

Possession of a variety of furbearers is generally legal— grey squirrel, red squirrel, beaver, mink, muskrat, coyote, red & grey fox, bobcat, white-tail deer, etc. See the VT Fish & Wildlife website to learn what animals are allowed to be hunted and trapped and in what seasons. That will give you a good idea what animals we are legally allowed to possess and likely to get permission from the game warden to pick up. (Some that are not legal include lynx, mountain lion, and wolf).

Possession of song birds and raptors (or parts) is strictly illegal (including disturbance of their nests). Educational licenses are available to possess parts, but they have particular restrictions and requirements. Injured birds are to be taken to licensed bird rehabilitators. For more information on laws regarding "Migratory" Birds & Raptors, check out this excellent summary: <http://www.sialis.org/mbta.htm>

When finding a dead raptor or migratory bird, you might consider calling the local game warden. The game warden will likely want to take possession of the bird, but usually there is a time delay in which you and others can check out and learn from examining the bird. Or, alternately, check out the bird, learn from it, and allow it to return to the wilds naturally.

We also ask that you refrain from posting photos and videos of roadkill and identifying it as happening at a VWS program. Be aware that posting such videos may draw questions to you about whether you are in legal possession of the roadkill. By naming VWS, you potentially also bring that attention to our organization. We are seeking to be in good relation with local, state, and federal authorities, and we ask for your help in supporting those good relations.

MEDICAL EMERGENCIES & FIRST AID

Medical and Registration Forms

Before the start of a program, the staff members of each group should carefully read through participants' medical and registrations forms so that they can flag any potential lemons. Anything from simple medical issues, to mild fears of being alone in the woods, when combined with any of the other lemons listed below, can spell trouble if you are not aware of them. Work

as a team and communicate your observations with one another as the program progresses. Be sure to read participant “essay” questions as they will often tell you why the participant wants to be (or doesn’t want to be) at the program. Knowledge of a participant’s strengths can be used to cancel out potential problems as well as to build their sense of belonging and purpose.

First Aid Kits

First aid kits must be carried by staff.

For day programs, minimally each sub-group should have a first aid kit that can respond to cuts, burns, sprains, allergic reaction, ticks and bites and a secondary kit that can handle allergic reactions, cuts, burns and ticks. Additionally, a larger kit should be available at the program base camps that can handle triage of more serious and/or less commonly encountered medical emergencies such as dislocations, breaks, hyperthermia, hypothermia, frost bite, dehydration, headaches, nausea, menstrual bleeding, CPR/BLS equipment.

For overnight programs: the base camp first aid kit is much more extensive to respond to in-the-field emergencies that aren’t as prevalent when the participants and staff are only there for the day.

For AoM: First aid kits must be carried by staff whenever away from base camp. Field first aid kits need to be able to respond to cuts, burns, splinters and allergic reactions. You can use your own kit and restock materials used from the VWS/Oyase supplies. Oyase/VWS kits are stored and restocked in the Main Building. When using a first aid kit, you need to check it out and check it back in when you return it. There are Lead and Assistant Staff first aid kits which are slightly different and a major med kit is available in the storage including a SAM splint and an emergency sleeping bag.

Medications

Parents will be informed that ALL medications should be presented to the field director upon the participants arrival in the original container. At No time should a participant be in possession of medication with the exception of inhalers and epi-pens (even these will be reviewed on a case by case basis and will require written consent from the child's parent and physician). All medications will be reviewed with Lead Instructors on a need to know basis. If any child requires medication during the program day, the medication will be dispensed by the Lead Instructors only. All medications will be stored in its original container in a secure location monitored by the lead staff member involved. A medication log to record each administration must be filled out by the person in charge of dispensing each dose.

Treating and Reporting Medical Emergencies

Stabilize the injured participant or staff member, call 911 or closest hospital/emergency room as appropriate to nature of emergency. Also contact participant’s parent or emergency contact if other than parent.

Treating And Reporting Medical Issues (Non-Emergencies)

Non-emergencies can be defined as an event in which a child requires medical attention within the parameters of basic first aid and requires treatment from staff. All basic medical incidents should be treated by trained and first-aid-certified instructors. At no time should medical treatment be given by a CIT, Volunteer, or Instructor in Training unless they have first aid certification. It is imperative that both during and after treatment is given, staff remains calm and do not draw unnecessary attention to the issue to insure the emotional wellbeing of the child. Afterward, the staff who administered treatment is required to document the nature of injury, treatment given, and follow up attention provided. Forms for this will be available at the Site basecamp and reports reviewed by the head of the program and VWS office informed.

End of program day: Staff report any incidents or injuries to program supervisor and notify parent guardian of what happened and action taken. An incident report is also filled out and filed.

Potential worker's comp insurance incidents need to have an incident report and be called into the worker's comp insurance company covering the program site at which you are working.

Incident/Accident Forms

See Appendix 4 for a copy of this form.

CHILD & STAFF SAFETY

Supervision Policy

There is to be a minimum of 2 staff to any group of participants. No staff person is allowed to be alone with a participant at any time. This policy both protects children from abuse and protects staff members from false or erroneous allegations of abuse. If you are with one participant you need to have at least another staff person or participant with you.

Child Abuse

Allegations or suspicion of any form of child abuse, including sexual, physical or emotional abuse or neglect must be reported to the program director. In a safe program environment, participants may sometimes reveal things about their home environments that are unsafe, and this needs to be addressed by professionals if this occurs. Staff is not to go searching or hinting for information among participants. They will report their observations to the Program Director who will then take the appropriate actions. We must also report and investigate any instance of alleged abuse by staff, no matter whom it is or how ludicrous the allegations. Student and staff confidentiality and privacy is to be maintained at all times in order to ensure that their safety and well-being remain intact.

Physical & Sexual Harassment / Abuse

According to the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, "Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964." The commission defines sexual harassment as, "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitutes sexual harassment when submission to or rejection of this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment."

If at anytime, an employee is feeling uncomfortable in regard to language or advances made by a coworker or any member of the VWS community, whether it be toward them, employees, volunteers or between an employee and a participant, it is recommended that they first employ the Peacemaker Principles in order to make known their discomfort with the situation. If they continue to feel uncomfortable and if the problem persists, we ask that they contact the Program Director or to the VWS Executive Director or the VWS Board Chair. (see Appendix 3 for current listings and contact information). The contacted person will then follow the following protocol:

- First: they will council with the caller in order to establish an understanding of the alleged situation and appropriate measures to be taken to insure prevention of further incidences.
- Second: Provided that the organizational representative sees fit, they will contact the VWS board members who will then begin an immediate investigation. Therefore, we must help them by setting clear expectations and boundaries, as well as by avoiding situations where such behaviors are more likely to occur or be misinterpreted (supervision policy).
- Third: Perpetrator will be contacted and counseled. Clear expectations and boundaries will be communicated and supervision policy reminded.
- Fourth: If this does not resolve the incident, further action may be taken such as being fired or banned from the program site.
- Fifth: Possible reporting to legal authorities.

Visitors, Guests, And Strangers

It is quite possible that visitors will appear at programs whether intentionally or unintentionally. Former apprentices, staff, and participants, as well as parents and friends of the community often stop by to participate in activities, teach a lesson, or even to tell a story or two. The person could also be a neighbor accustomed to walking on the property.

But how can you tell these folks from someone who has just wandered onto the property? Don't be insulted by this simple answer but it is something that many of us tend to forget- the best thing to do is to introduce yourself and to ask what brings them to the land. Make sure others become aware of their arrival and then of course, make them feel welcomed. If you know of, or have invited a guest for any reason, be sure to communicate this to staff before

their arrival. If a person clearly does not belong, make them aware of why we are there and ask them to leave. It is likely that at this point they will leave. However, if they do not recognize the request and boundary, immediately notify lead staff and/or appropriate authorities.

Assess each situation and use your best judgment. When in doubt, consult another staff member. You should be aware of where your participants are at all times and should never allow them to leave with anyone (even parents) before the end of the program unless you have permission from director/point person for the program or permission from parent/guardian ahead of time. Not that this has ever been a problem for VWS due in part to our community-based approach, but it is interesting to know that the majority of kidnappings in this country are committed by an estranged parent.

GUIDELINES FOR KEEPING PARTICIPANTS ACCOUNTABLE / RESPONDING TO RULES BROKEN

Behavioral Issues

Non-reportable Behavioral Incidents – is there text to add here?

Reportable Behavioral Incidents: may be defined as any behavior, action, or evidence of intent to cause physical or emotional harm to self or others. Such incidents may be exhibited through a participant's physical behavior or actions, spoken verbally to others or self, or represented in writing, drawings, or other forms of expression. This may also include a participant's refusal to cooperate with staff to such a degree that it places them and/or others in potentially hazardous situations.

Examples of reportable behavioral incidents: Physical confrontations, threatening to harm others or self, stealing, sexually inappropriate behavior (touching themselves in a sexual manner, exposing genitals, etc), talk of suicide, evidence of drug or alcohol use, etc.

If it is unclear whether an incident is reportable or not, speak with the next person in the chain of responsibility.

Definition and examples
Chain of Responsibility
Incident/Accident Forms
Informing parents

Response After First Incident:

Peacemaking Circle of involved parties facilitated by a Peacemaker in which each person shares what happened, what was the harm caused, how can the harm be reconciled.

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Violator sent home for that day and potentially for another additional program day with guidance on reflecting on the incident and actions to address the harm caused

Meeting with parent guardian explaining what has happened and consequences.

If the violator is a paid staff member, the person will likely be removed from employment. Incident will be assessed in consultation with Executive Director for determination of action (dismissal for a day, dismissal from program employment). May apply for future employment with demonstrated reflection on the action.

If an adult volunteer/intern, the person is removed from positions of responsibility, which depending on the program, may include dismissal from the program. May apply for future positions.

If the violator is a CIT (teen volunteer who is both mentoring and actively being mentored by staff), the CIT will be removed from position of responsibility for 4 or more program sessions as assessed appropriate by the Peacekeeping Circle.

If it is determined by the Peacekeeping Circle that the nature of the incident is a major endangerment to the well-being and safety of other participants, a participant may be dismissed from the program (such as in the case sexual abuse, threatened with a firearm or deliberate injury with a firearm, etc).

Special circle of affected community members will be held to reintegrate violator into program circle when that time comes to restore relationship and wholeness to the group and address lingering unsettled feelings.

Second Incident:

Violator removed from program with recommendation to seek help in addressing the behavior.

May apply to participate in following program year with possibility of being accepted, accepted conditionally, or turned down after staff reassess how the person has healed the incident, relationships, and changed behavior.

Meeting with parent guardian.

Peacemaking & Mediation

- If a conflict or disagreement should occur amongst participants, staff or parents, the Peacemaker Principles serve VWS as a model for conflict resolution. In short summary, the Peacemaker Principles are 1) the Upright Mind—this generally means that you are at peace both internally and externally and when you are sick or upset you are committed to finding or seeking help to restore peace; 2) the Good Message – using your best words to communicate honestly difficult matters as well as words of welcome, inclusion and

acknowledgement; 3) Unity – finding agreement regarding vision and ways of being together that all parties involved are working towards manifesting; and 4) Condolence – we all stumble and need to pick ourselves back up, sometimes with the help of others. The Peacemaker Principles also ask that people talk directly with each other about issues that come up. If you are not able to be in a place of peace in talking about the conflict with the person, you can ask for a mediator and/or elder who can impartially help you and the other person through the conflict. You can ask for the support of your supervisor, the VWS Executive Director and/or the VWS Board.

- In the case of a breach of policy or conduct, a Peacemaking Circle can be requested. A Peacemaking Circle brings together affected parties (the violated, the violators, affected individuals, possibly a VWS representative and a Peacekeeper). Each person is given opportunity to share what happened, the harm caused, the potential on-going harm, and how the harm might be repaired/healed. This particular method is used in a restorative justice model in Canada deriving from the First Peoples of Canada and operates alongside the criminal justice system.

4. PROGRAM SITE POLICIES

PROGRAM SITES

Tools & Toolshed

All tools, crafts, and supplies must be stored in appropriate place when not in use. In the past they have stayed out overnight, been left in the rain, lost and broken. Please help us to avoid potential harm that may come to tools, or more importantly people, as a result of neglect. Tool use by participants is to be at the discretion of Instructors. Children not demonstrating proper use of tools need to be guided towards doing so and/or not allowed to use the tools.

All tools, crafts, and supplies must be kept in the designated storage area when not in use. In the past they have stayed out overnight, been left in the rain, lost and broken. Please help us to avoid potential harm that may come to tools, or more importantly people, as a result of neglect. Tool use by participants is to be at the discretion of lead Instructors.

Children (or adults) not demonstrating proper use of tools need to be guided towards doing so for the health and wellbeing of all. We have a variety of folks attending VWS programs with different understanding of safety – especially including folks who have never used outdoor tools like knives, saws, hatchets, axes...

Nature Museum

For those of us who keep them at home, the power of a nature museum as an instructional tool is undeniable. They are intended to be a sanctuary of learning and a constant source of inspiration. It is a place where one can go to display and solve recently found natural mysteries.

In years past, there have been nature museum that included beautifully handcrafted tools, baskets, instruments, clothing, bows, arrows, and more, giving participants a glimpse into the possibilities of wilderness living and inspiring them to create their own works of art and to be aware of the endless natural mysteries that surround us. Your program may have a modest nature reference book library for use of participants and staff. In the past, staff members have also generously allowed their personal field guides and books to be used as reference materials. In order to develop the potential of the nature museum, we, as a staff, must treat it with the highest regard and exemplify proper respect and etiquette for those things contained within.

All of these resources are generously shared by staff and volunteers. Entrusted with these resources, we must treat all the nature museum display items and field guides with the highest regard and exemplify proper respect and etiquette for those things contained within.

The nature museum area is not to be used as a storage area for tools, gear, or current works in progress (this is what the tool storage area is for). All groups are encouraged to use, add to, and even plan several lessons or schedule times around its use. All participants should be encouraged to freely use field guides and other reference materials inside but they should be made aware of our expectations in keeping the resources in excellent shape. As a general rule, if an item does not belong to you, it should not be taken out of the storage area or away from the nature Museum display area without first acquiring the owner's permission or unless otherwise told.

Vehicles

Staff. At no time should staff be transporting participants unless approved by the program director, ED or VWS Board and permission is obtained from parents (insurance issues). VWS does not currently carry insurance covering transportation of participants. Furthermore, staff are asked not to drive vehicles owned by participants during the program. In the event that staff is asked to use their vehicle on behalf of the program, reimbursement for gas will require that employees keep accurate records of mileage. It is expected that all vehicles are properly registered and insured. Proof of insurance will be required.

Students. In the past we have had older participants who have driven themselves to and from programs. It is now required that they turn in their keys upon arrival and will have them returned upon leaving. In the event that the use of their vehicle be necessary at anytime during their time at program, written permission from their parents is required. It is further expressed that staff members are not allowed to drive vehicles owned by participants unless they obtain permission from the program directors and the owner of the vehicle.

5. GUIDELINES FOR RUNNING GREAT PROGRAMS

THE 8 SHIELDS HANDSHAKES – Draft V.1.11.2012

These agreements/handshakes represent the guiding commitments of Vermont Wilderness School and a wider network of schools and communities on a regional, national and

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international level. The crafting of these “handshake” agreements has been articulated by the 8 Shields Institute which is the home base/clearing house for best practices and processes for nature connection and regenerative community based on 30-years of hands-on practice, teaching and research with both modern communities and intact nature connected cultures. Vermont Wilderness School is in a direct lineage with these practices and emerging handshake agreements and has contributed to these best practices and agreements.

	Handshake Agreement	Practices of Embodiment
East	Deep Nature Connection , and the awareness, curiosity, creativity, and vitality that comes from it, is the root of lasting well-being and life-sustaining relationships.	Go to your Sit Spot....journal...share your story...ask questions...seek answers...deepen your relationships with nature...befriend a bird
Southeast	Mentoring and facilitation are necessary for deep nature connection to occur to a deep and meaningful degree and key to fostering connective relationships with self, each other, nature, and Spirit. ‘Deep and meaningful’ is measured in relationship to the 8 Attributes of deep nature connection and the 8 indicators of awareness (see attached).	Seek out anchors (coaches, aunties, uncles, elders) and connect with them on a regular basis. Share story of your day and ask questions. Be an anchor/guide for someone else – peer, brother, sister, niece, nephew, grandchild (Blood-relative or Adopted)
South	Local Resilience and Interconnectivity through Gardening and Backyard Subsistence activities (such as permaculture, gardening, canning, “green” building, traditional earth living skills, dirt piles and forts) greatly enhances peoples’ (especially families with children) likelihood to engage in and succeed in deep nature connection and mentoring and, by definition, increases local resilience. This is learning and applying the technical skills of sustainable (or resilient) living--not enough to “know”, but to do.	Support and/or facilitate subsistence and resilience activities wherever possible and collaborate with permaculture-related activities.
Southwest	Tending the Commons & the Wilds (the forests, fields, air, waters that support all life) is necessary to improve the health and vitality of our local ecosystems and further enhances deep nature connection, mentoring relationships, subsistence activities and local resiliency.	Work on tending the wild as a routine at least monthly, if not more, and collaborate with land-owners and innovative trusts.

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West	Peacemaking is core to developing the healthy processes that support trust in families and neighborhoods and build the resilient relationships and bonds that promote resilient communities. These processes enable us to live and work together, make decisions, work through conflicts so we can perform subsistence activities, tend the wilds, etc.	Teach peacemaking by sharing teachings in groups that are committed to some degree and learn by doing. There are a variety of peacemaking practices in existence. Experiment, test and find the ones that work for your group/community.
Northwest	Transparent and humble Inner Tracking , examining, and exploring shadows in an open process based on Peacemaking is essential for Peacemaking to work—as is forgiveness of self, others, ancestors, and the impact of cultural legacies allowing for healing and restoration of healthy connection and relationship.	Hold regular, routine focus-group meetings for folks to process in this way. Again, there are a variety of practices in existence. Experiment, test and find the ones that work for your group.
North	Regenerative Community Design is a commitment to designing and revising relationships, family life, neighborhoods, programs, organizations, villages, towns, cities, and governments with an “eye” to what not only sustains us and the Earth but also creates abundance well into the future.	Host quarterly Renewal of Creative Path* sessions with one long one per year with all collaborators (stakeholders). Host monthly festivals and tending the wild events with check-ins alongside.
Northeast	Creativity is that light and vitality within us that connects us with our power, passion and purpose and brings us into co-creation with the world around us. Creativity is vision – perceiving what needs to be born into the world and bringing it forth. Creativity is the life force that moves through all the other agreements and is in turn enhanced by living the agreements – a positive, regenerative feedback loop.	Combing for creativity is done through the process we use called “Renewal of Creative Path” or ROCP*. Teach this practice, and practice this teaching, with individuals in families and organizations related to this work and share outcomes together.

*Renewal of Creative Path is a process where we look at the patterns that have brought us to the present moment –the bright “high” moments and the shadows; look at what is blocking us from achieving our goals and/or potential; and what can we change to bring us closer to living our fullest potential. We do this process for ourselves individually and then share with others bringing us collectively together in supporting our communities to their fullest potential.

THE 8 INDICATORS OF AWARENESS AND THE 8 ATTRIBUTES OF DEEP NATURE CONNECTION – V.2.20.2012

The 8 Indicators of Awareness are detailed and described in the “Coyote’s Guide to Connecting with Nature” by Jon Young, Ellen Haas, & Evan McGown. This book details the approach and basic curriculum on which Vermont Wilderness School and many other programs/schools have been founded on. The 8 Indicators of Awareness are qualities that typically emerge in regular program participants (or youth and adults in mentoring communities) within the first year.

The 8 Attributes of Deep Nature Connection emerge over a longer period of time with the individual rooted in nature connection experience and active mentoring culture. After observing teenagers at Wilderness Awareness School, Gilbert Walking Bull shared seven of these attributes with Jon Young and school staff saying he saw these in the youth. Gilbert’s grandfather told him to watch for these Seven Sacred Attributes in children and adults identifying them as leaders. This was significant especially as most of these youth had shown up in the program as a last resort after being kicked out of numerous high schools and programs. Additionally, Jon recognized that in 10 years of nature connection programming at that time, these attributes frequently emerged. The emergence of the attributes was not by happenstance but as a result of a type of nature connection experience and quality of long-term mentoring relationships.

Jon Young and the 8 Shields Institute have added an 8th attribute which they feel was so embedded in Gilbert Walking Bull’s being and heritage that it wasn’t specifically named: that of a commitment to mentoring and passing on the learning. The orientation and wording below is derived from 8 Shields Institute “8 Gifts from Nature” and Coyote’s Guide 2nd Edition.

	Indicator of Awareness	Attribute of Deep Nature Connection
East	<i>Common Sense</i> Having good judgment about how to respond to situations.	<i>Inner Happiness</i> The Happiness of a child, unreserved, bubbling up
Southeast	<i>Aliveness & Agility</i> Glint of mischief, a spark of daring, a flare of excitement, a flame of	<i>Vitality</i> Feeling of vitality and ‘an abundance of electricity’ in the body often described

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	fascination—seizing opportunities with boundless enthusiasm.	by Gilbert Walking Bull as the “quickness of the coyote”.
South	<p><i>Inquisitive Focus</i></p> <p>Brightening of curiosity and the natural drive to follow mysteries and search for answers with hunger and determination.</p>	<p><i>A Commitment to Mentoring & “Paying it Forward”</i></p> <p>A desire to mentor and help others on their own journey begins to form as a person recognizes those who have mentored and helped them.</p>
Southwest	<p><i>Caring & Tending</i></p> <p>Acting on the instinct to wisely care for ourselves, others and the natural world – taking time for rest and relaxation, tending and integrating from hard work and focus. “Lay low & tend your fire”</p>	<p><i>Empathy & Respect for Nature</i></p> <p>Through connecting with nature, a sensitivity and respect of life emerges that creates a strong sense of empathy.</p>
West	<p><i>Service to the Community</i></p> <p>When we experience ecology, we quickly realize that our ecosystem is a functioning community. People of all ages always feel eager to figure out where they fit in and how their gifts can contribute.</p>	<p><i>Being Truly Helpful, Gifts & Vision Activated.</i></p> <p>Awareness of connectivity and interdependence naturally lead to a desire to help others. The art of being truly helpful includes a logistical ability to see and act on tasks that need to be done, and also a deeper level of expressing one’s gifts in the world with vision and joy.</p>
Northwest	<p><i>Awe & Reverence</i></p> <p>An experience of being ‘awestruck’ translates into being humbled by something bigger than yourself, or stunned into silence, or quieted down. An emergent sense that we are part of something much bigger.</p>	<p><i>Fully Alive</i></p> <p>Living fully in the moment. Put everything you have into what you are doing without “pulling any punches.” Gilbert said often, “If you’re going to sing, then REALLY sing. If you are dancing, then REALLY dance!”</p>
North	<p><i>Self Sufficiency</i></p>	<p><i>Love & Forgiveness</i></p>

	This is about calm, flexible wisdom that adapts to the flow of life, instead of futilely struggling against it. The more you experience, the more trials you endure, the less things seem scary, "I've been there, done that. I know I can take care of myself."	The ability to forgive and love others and oneself in a real and meaningful way.
Northeast	<i>Quiet Mind</i> An intensely alert ability to be still, peaceful, and present in the moment, and listen. An active, unobtrusive receptivity to what is happening everywhere at all times.	<i>Quiet Mind, Presence which deepens access to one's inner Creativity</i>

The Peacemaker Principles:

1. Peace
 - a. Internal Peace – Quiet Mind, being fully present and in the body, attuned to the web of relationships (NE)
 - b. External Peace – Caring the place where you are at, tending to the health of one's own body – cleanliness (SW)
2. Good Message
 - a. Words of Welcome and Inclusion (E)
 - b. Words of Honoring Gifts, Respect of Individual & Celebrating the Group
3. Unity/Power
 - a. Group Consensus and Vision (Guiding North Star) (N)
 - b. Accountability and Agreements that help the group manifest its vision (S)
4. Condolence/Healing
 - a. Working through personal blocks and embracing learning edges (SE)
 - i. Coaching and Motivation/Facilitation towards the focus work
 - b. Acknowledging Ancestral Trauma (like structural racism or family patterns) and willingness to work on healing these longer-term patterns (NW)
 - i. Honoring the Ancestors, Learning the Ancestry of Place & personal lineage

Appendix 1 : EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN

An emergency will be defined as any occurrence, event, or action that poses an eminent threat to life. Such threats may include but are not limited to injuries sustained as a result of an accident, force of nature, or those inflicted intentionally. A crisis or emergency may also include factors that have the potential to cause harm such that the resulting injuries pose a threat to life.

In the event of an emergency (injured participant or participants), the following plan of action should be strictly adhered to:

Lead instructors (or instructor with highest level of first aid certification) will follow the basic American Red Cross First Aid procedures:

CHECK: remain calm and survey the scene and ensure the safety of yourself and others while you assess what has happened. Identify the mechanism of injury and get an understanding of the number of people that have been immediately affected.

CALL: if the victim(s) are unconscious, contact next line of adults for additional help. Be ready to give them information regarding the nature of the emergency, the person's name and their current condition. You should also be aware of any allergies that they have and medications that they are on.

CARE: It is important that the most qualified member of the instructional team present begin to administer the care necessary to limits of their current certification.

Lead instructor will contact other instructors to alert to the situation. Assistant Instructors will assume responsibility for the remaining group members. It is important that they remain calm while moving participants from the scene to a safe location in order to ensure the emotional and physical well-being of all.

Instructors in Training:

are responsible for communicating the emergency to the outside connection. They should be prepared to answer the following questions:

WHO was injured?

WHAT has happened and has 911 been called.?

WHEN did the injury occur?

WHERE is the victim and remaining members of the group located?

Appendix 2 : REGIONAL EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE (Nuclear Accident, Act of War, Chemical Accident etc.)

We realize that there is a possibility that at any given time, the necessity of an area-wide unforeseen emergency evacuation might occur. This might happen on a program day, which presents us with a responsibility to have a clearly laid-out set of procedures for such an emergency, so that both staff and parents know in advance what is expected.

It would be unwise for every parent to rush down to the program site in search of their children. Additionally, families living far away should not find it necessary to possibly put themselves in greater danger, driving towards the emergency in order to find their children.

Procedures:

If staff or parents on the land are advised on a program day that there is an immediate need to evacuate the area due to a radiological, chemical or other life-threatening emergency, staff and parents who are already on the land will take all of the participants and any needed emergency kit (including medications, etc.) into every available vehicle,

...Site specific directions to the closest regional Evacuation Center.

Before leaving the program site, a note will be posted in [designated message area], advising of the evacuation of the entire group, and their planned route.

At Evacuation Site:

If lead staff determine that the situation warrants staying at the Evacuation Center until parents arrive, they will do so. But if the evolving nature of the emergency or the state of affairs at the Evacuation site are seen to be too unstable to remain, they may decide to inform the authorities at the center where they are going, and then move from there to the next designated site rendezvous.

The Reception Center is designed to be a registration checkpoint to monitor the situation and disseminate information, for parents to re-unite with their children, and for individuals and groups to leave information as to where they are heading if the situation demands further travel. It is expected that the Reception Center will have trained medical and psychological personnel, to attend to such needs. The Reception Center is not designed to be a shelter.

(Note Other Emergency Reception Centers where parents might be able to get information.)

Secondary emergency site further and route:

Third emergency site further yet and route:

In either case, the group is expected to stay at the location until parents or appropriate caregivers arrive to re-unite with their children.

Preparation and Communication:

We need to ensure that on every program day there are enough vehicles available for all participants and adults present on the land, ideally with full gas tanks. If necessary, this might include additional vehicles available from community members who live within a five-mile radius of the program site. We will attempt to procure several pre-paid debit cards to keep on hand for such emergency, to cover initial costs for extra fuel, food and other necessities. The program emergency kit should have the names of any participants needing life-safety medications listed prominently at the top, so that the responsible adults can quickly distribute those items to the cars in which those participants travel. We will try to get an adequate amount of potassium iodide (KI) pills on hand, so that in the event of a radiological emergency, the staff and parents may be able to give appropriate dosages of this to the children. KI is universally accepted as a safe and effective method to block the thyroid's ability to absorb dangerous radioactive iodine.

Communication capabilities in order to be informed of an event include the emergency radio, which is currently housed on the land. The radio must be tested once per month, and there needs to be a protocol that an individual is always within hearing distance of its alarm, and able to reach the rest of the clans by walkie-talkie in the event that the radio announces an emergency which demands evacuation.

Additionally, the program should be registered on the list of Day Care and other Special Needs Programs for the local Emergency Management personnel. Once on the list, the Emergency Management personnel (contact & phone number) will try to contact the program in the event of an emergency, and will send a school bus to help evacuate to nearest emergency reception center. However, due to the unpredictable nature of such an event and its Emergency Planning, we will NOT wait for the arrival of buses, and will instead move on our own when we are ready.

Once the group is ready to move, parents will be contacted regarding the group's progress, and to maintain contact as much as possible while moving.

In addition, a list of individual cell phone numbers of those staff and parents who are typically on the land will be made available to all program parents in advance, to have on hand for such emergencies. We must be aware, however, that cell and land telephone capacities might be limited in such an event.

Parents should also try to monitor the situation by tuning into their own emergency alert radios, or into VT radio stations WTSA (96.7 FM, 1450 AM), WKVT (92.7 FM, 1490 AM), WVPR (94.5 FM) to determine the nature of the event and which Reception Centers are likely to be used. A number of Keene NH and Greenfield MA stations will also carry the information.

Guiding Principles and Conclusion:

In any case, we are operating under two primary guiding principles:

- 1) We all recognize that under any and all circumstances, staff will have a responsibility and a commitment to stay with the children and to keep them safe, no matter where they are and no matter how long it takes, until they are in appropriate hands of family or friends. Staff has

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already been included in the drafting of these procedures, and we are grateful that they recognize and accept this responsibility in the event of such an emergency.

We hope that we never have to utilize these procedures, but we need to be prepared in the unlikely event that we do need them. This template of procedures is a step towards that preparedness.

Appendix 3 : VWS Chain of Responsibility

Use this chain of responsibility to help direct you in times of emergency to be sure you are reaching the correct people to aid you. If you can't reach the first person above you, continue up the chain.

1. **Board Chair / Board Vice Chair**
2. **Executive Director**
3. **Program Director (for the relevant program)**
4. **Field Director (if there is one for the relevant program)**
5. **Lead Instructor**
6. **Assistant Instructor / Adult Volunteer / Youth Volunteer**

Here are the people currently holding these positions.

Updated: **Summer 2018**

- **Board Chair**
- **Ingrid Burrows**, ingridburrows@gmail.com
- c: 802-451-6744 h: (802) 257-7184

- **Board Vice Chair**
- **Kalia Lydgate**, kamelian@gmail.com
- c: (831) 247-9127 h: 413-624-5191

- **Executive Director**
- **Sam Stegeman**, sam@vermontwildernessschool.org,
- c: 413-548-0876 h: 413-369-4020

- **Program Directors**
- **Amy Hyatt**, hyatt@vermontwildernessschool.org
- c: 802-275-2904 h: (802) 368-2958
- **Bob Etzweiler**, robertetzweiler@hotmail.com
- c: (802) 275-2852 h: (802) 387-2708

Directions to the VWS office:

Croker Hall, Winston Prouty Center, 209 Austine Drive, Brattleboro, VT 05301

To find our office: When you arrive at the Winston Prouty Center, take the 1st left into a parking lot. Go up the stairs by the basketball hoop, and then up a very long uphill sidewalk. There are VWS signs pointing the way.

Office land line: 802-257-8570

Appendix 4 : INCIDENT/ACCIDENT REPORT FORM

INJURED PARTICIPANT/STAFF NAME: _____

DATE: _____ TIME: _____ am / pm

HOME ADDRESS: _____

EMERGENCY CONTACT NAME & PHONE: _____

STAFF MEMBER(S) PRESENT: _____

PHONE CONTACT MADE BY: _____

SPOKE TO: _____

Nature of Incident: ___ Illness ___ Disease ___ Injury ___ Other ___

Non-Emergency ___ Emergency ___ Parent/Guardian Notified ___

Description of Incident, including where incident occurred and who was supervising:

Description of Action Taken, i.e., First Aid treatment, corrective actions, and/or special instructions:

Follow-up/Referral/Medical Services Required:

Strategies Employed to Prevent Future Incidents/Accidents:

SIGNATURES:

Person Completing Report _____ Date _____

(Print Name, Note Position) _____

(Name Printed)

(Position)

Appendix 5: Scholarship & Cancellation Policies

The following text is posted on the VWS website, and it is linked to from every program web page.

SCHOLARSHIP POLICY

We believe that the Vermont Wilderness School's programs should be available to everyone who wants to attend, regardless of individual circumstances. The Great Blue Heron Scholarship Fund provides tuition reductions for VWS programs. Most scholarships provided are discounts of 10-30% of the low end of the sliding scale, but we consider all requests. We ask you to provide a short, written description of your scholarship request. We do not ask you to provide evidence of income level or other personal financial information. Please ask for only what you need.

To request a scholarship:

- Complete a registration form for the program in which you'd like to participate. The registration form asks you to indicate the amount of scholarship money you are requesting.
- You must also provide a refundable deposit at the time of your registration. If you are unable to submit a deposit or complete an online registration form, please give us a call or email.
- The deadline for scholarship requests is 8 weeks before the program start date. We may be able to offer scholarships after that time, but your best bet is to make your request before this deadline.
- We will respond to your request within one week. You then have one week after that to decide whether or not you plan to attend. If you choose not to, we will refund your deposit.
- If the scholarship deadline (8 weeks before the program) has passed, you can still request a scholarship. Please contact by email or phone to make after-the-deadline requests. Your chances will not be as good, because scholarship fund may already be empty.

REFUND & CANCELLATION POLICY

If the Windham Southeast Supervisory Union cancels school due to snow or hazardous weather, or if the sheriff declares the roads are closed due to hazardous conditions, our programs will be cancelled. If Supervisory Union issues a delayed start, we will still plan to open on time. However, we ask for your understanding if our staff members are delayed by road conditions. They will start as close to on time as possible. In addition, we encourage parents to travel only when you feel it is safe.

You can check [here](#) for current school closings.

If a single-day program (such as a school-break day) is canceled due to inclement weather, we will credit your payment toward a future program or refund your payment minus a \$10

processing fee. If a single day of an ongoing program (such as a week-long camp, a long-term program like Foxwalk, or an after-school program) is canceled, no refunds will be made.

If you need to cancel your registration for a VWS program:

1. Cancellations 4 weeks (28 days) or more prior to the program start date will receive a full refund, minus the deposit.
2. Cancellations between 4 weeks (27 days) and 1 week (7 days) prior to the program start date, will be refunded at 50% of the program fee.
3. Cancellations less than a week (6 days) prior to the program start date will not be refunded.

We do not guarantee a refund or discount if you choose to participate in only a portion of the program. This includes if you are dissatisfied with the program and choose not to complete it. However, we welcome your feedback and a conversation about whether a full or partial refund is appropriate.

Some years the local school districts extend school into late June to make up for snow days. If your child is registered for our summer camp and you receive news (usually in April) that school will be extended and conflict with camp, we will refund your deposit if you choose to withdraw. The deadline for this exception is the last day of May. If you choose to stay registered, and your child will miss the first day or more of camp, we do not offer a pro-rated camp tuition. This is because we still need to cover the costs of staffing and rental of the camp site for the entire week.

The purpose of these policies is to keep VWS fiscally sound. The number of staff we hire, and the equipment and venues we rent, are based on the number of registered participants. If you cancel, especially in the week before a program, we have no way to recoup these costs. We understand that sickness and other unforeseen circumstances cause people change their plans. In these situations, please contact us as soon as possible, and we can discuss the available options. Sometimes there is a waitlist for a program, and someone can pay to fill your slot. Sometimes you can find a person willing to attend in the spot you paid for. We always try to work it out!

[Late Pick-Up Policy](#)

Our staff have families, too! If your child remains in our care beyond the appointed pick up time we reserve the right to charge you for the additional supervision costs incurred. The cost is \$10 for each fifteen minute-increment. By signing the registration form you agree to this policy and agree to be charged accordingly.

Appendix 6: Signature page

I hereby acknowledge receipt of the Vermont Wilderness School Program Policies & Procedures Manual. I understand that it is my continuing responsibility to read and know its contents.

I have read and understand the Manual. I understand the policies, and I agree to follow the procedures outlined in the Manual.

Signature _____

Print Name _____

Date _____