Track 1: Outdoor Skills and Survival

SESSION 3: SHELTER AND FIRE BUILDING

Overview: Shelter and Fire Building introduces youth to two of the most critical survival skills in the outdoors: creating protection from the elements and safely building a fire. In this session, participants learn how to identify suitable shelter locations, use natural and available materials to construct simple shelters, and understand the principles of fire safety and ignition. Through hands-on practice and teamwork, youth gain confidence in their ability to respond to changing outdoor conditions and begin developing the resourcefulness and caution needed for real-world survival situations.

Objectives

- Learn how to construct a basic outdoor shelter using tarps and natural materials.
- Understand fire safety principles and practice building a small campfire.
- Develop teamwork and problem-solving skills in outdoor settings.

Supplies for Shelter Building

- Tarps (6 by 8 feet or larger)
- Paracord or rope
- Tent stakes or sticks
- Ground cloths or sleeping pads

Supplies for Fire Building

- Matches or flint and steel
- Firewood (small sticks, kindling, tinder)
- Fire ring or designated fire-safe area
- Buckets of water or fire extinguisher
- Metal tray or fire pan (if needed)

Advisor Notes

- Review fire safety rules before starting any fire-related activity.
- Ensure shelter-building area is safe and free of hazards.
- Demonstrate both shelter and fire-building techniques before youth begin.
- Encourage creativity and teamwork during shelter construction.
- Monitor fire building closely and ensure all fires are extinguished properly.

SESSION OUTLINE

Welcome and Icebreaker Activity: Survival Scenario Scramble (10-15 min)

- Get youth thinking creatively about survival situations while encouraging teamwork and fun.
- Divide youth into small teams of 3-6 people.
- Give each team a fun, fictional survival scenario (for example, "Stranded on a mountain during a snowstorm," "Lost in the woods with only a backpack," "Camping trip interrupted by unexpected rain").
- Teams have three minutes to brainstorm and share:
  —What shelter they would build
  —How they would start a fire
  —What gear they would want to have
- Each team presents their plan in 1-2 minutes.
- Advisors can highlight creative ideas and connect them to real outdoor skills.

Safety Moment: Fire Smart, Shelter Safe (2-3 min)

- Always build fires in designated areas and keep water nearby.
- Never leave a fire unattended.
- Choose shelter locations away from hazards like falling branches or flooding.

Shelter Building Challenge (20-30 min)

- Divide youth into small teams.
- Provide each team with a tarp, rope, and stakes.
- Challenge them to build a shelter that could withstand wind and rain.
- Test shelters with simulated rain (for example, water bottles or a hose).

Fire-Building Basics (20-30 min)

- Demonstrate how to build a fire using the teepee or log cabin method.
- Discuss the fire triangle: heat, fuel, and oxygen.
- Youth practice building a fire structure (lighting optional based on safety).
- Review how to safely extinguish a fire.

Resources and Notes

- Handout: Fire Safety Basics for Outdoor Activities
- Optional: Link to local fire department safety resources
- Scan or click for information on tarps and dining flies.
- Scan or click for information on fire building.

REFLECTION SECTION

Advisor note: These are sample questions. They are designed to help the participants apply what they have learned to their own interests. You are welcome to use these questions or develop your own questions.

Focusing Questions

- What did you enjoy most about building your shelter or fire?
- What was the most challenging part?

Analysis Questions

- How did your team decide on the shelter design?
- What materials worked best for starting a fire?

Generalization Questions

- How can teamwork help in outdoor survival situations?
- Why is fire safety important in everyday life?

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PRINTABLE HANDOUT: FIRE SAFETY BASICS FOR OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Campfire Setup

- Use established fire rings or pits whenever possible.
- Clear a 10-foot diameter around the fire site of leaves, grass, and other flammable materials.
- Keep fires small and manageable.

Safe Extinguishing Methods

- Allow wood to burn completely to ash.
- Pour water on the fire until hissing stops.
- Stir ashes and embers with a stick and douse again.
- Ensure everything is cold before leaving.

Fire Ring Use

- Use only designated fire rings in campgrounds.
- Do not build new rings without permission.
- Keep flammable items away from the ring.

Wind Awareness

- Avoid building fires on windy days.
- Position fire downwind from tents and gear.
- Monitor wind direction and strength regularly.

Emergency Preparedness

- Keep a bucket of water and a shovel nearby.
- Know the location of the nearest emergency services.
- Have a fire extinguisher or fire blanket if possible.