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**myplace**  
support team

Off Site

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# Introduction

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Outdoor adventure and education has long been one of the cornerstones of youth organisations' activity and the value of off site activities, visits and residentials in the development of young people is well recognised by those who work in the youth and community work world. This briefing provides some useful pointers on how to include these activities as part of your **myplace** offer to young people.

## How to deliver off site activities

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Young people are attracted to off site activities and visits by the challenge, fun and enjoyment they offer. The chance to take part in new experiences and opportunities while enjoying themselves makes this a popular and enduring form of youth work, as well as being a purposeful use of their leisure time.

Off site, and particularly outdoor environments, can provide a variety of challenges that can contribute towards young people's educational, social and emotional development. A positive off site experience will be invaluable in improving the self-esteem, self-confidence and self-worth of young people, particularly for those for whom the experience is a new one.

Outdoor education and training promote learning through direct personal experience, offering excitement, and adventure within a safe and tested environment. Experiencing this new environment and the chance it provides to step outside their day-to-day routine can open young people's eyes to other possibilities in their lives, prompting them to raise their aspirations about what they can go on to do and achieve. This can be life-changing.

Outdoor activity involves young people in a range of experiences on land and water and challenges them to develop leadership skills, solve problems and work well within a team. But it's also about building self-confidence and self-esteem, fundamental to any young person's development. The experience can be particularly productive for young people who aren't academic, encouraging as it does reflection and feedback. It can help nurture and develop skills for life and the world of work, enabling them to focus on achieving something positive. Successfully stepping outside their comfort zone can mean that, next time they're faced with a challenge, they will be more prepared to face it head on and relish the situation rather than shunning it.

Outdoor activities provide valuable alternative, often non-competitive, avenues for achievement, as well as opportunities to develop independence and self-reliance. Through successfully facing up to the challenges which they provide, overcoming fears and apprehensions along the way, young people make major strides in confidence, with implications for all aspects of their development. Awareness of the needs and contributions of others and the ability to sustain effective relationships, at work and in the family, are vital in today's society and a well planned and delivered activity can help to realise this through promoting the development of communication, problem solving and decision making skills.

Remember your centre's location and building can make a big difference to activities off site – is it an easy place for people to meet to go off site? Do you have the storage facilities that could make some off site activities easier to deliver than others?

What you choose to do and where you choose to do it is of course central to the value of all this. There is no shortage of places either in urban or rural settings where you can take part in activities, and an A to Z of activities to consider – from abseiling to ziplines. The role of well-run, licensed centres run by qualified staff in all this is of course vital, and you should ensure you are visiting an accredited centre on any expedition you plan.

The Adventure Activities Licensing Authority ensures that activity providers follow good safety management practices that allow young people to experience exciting and stimulating activities outdoors without being exposed to avoidable risks of death or disabling injury. The scheme ensures that those who provide certain adventure activities to young people under the age of 18 will have their safety management systems inspected. Where appropriate, a licence is then issued. Find out more at [www.hse.gov.uk/aala](http://www.hse.gov.uk/aala), but note that it is planned to replace the existing statutory licensing regime with a code of practice from April 2012. The Health and Safety Executive will prepare a draft of the code and will conduct a public consultation in due course

The Institute for Outdoor Learning (see below) has a professional accreditation scheme to help practitioners gain an edge in a competitive market, and a growing number of youth organisations are using adventurous activity as part of wider personal development programmes. The UK is also home to some familiar and long established names in outdoor learning and adventure for the personal development of young people, for example, through the Scout and Guide movements, Outward Bound and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

Finally, a word about alternative off site activities. Although outdoor adventure is likely to be the main off site activity, and a favourite with young people, it is far from being the only activity that can be developed around a group in the *myplace* centre. Other off site activities young people may like to consider include, for example cultural visits to museums, galleries and theatres; exchange visits with other centres or to other countries to develop cultural awareness and understanding and introduce global issues to the youth work curriculum; visiting different faith groups or elderly people's groups in the community to build stronger community cohesion; representing the centre in sporting tournaments; or visiting local council offices or even the House of Commons as part of a wider programme on democracy, citizenship and participation. The key aspect of all of these is that the impetus should come from young people themselves and they should be fully involved in the planning of every stage.

“Every young person should experience the world beyond the classroom as an essential part of learning and development, whatever their age, ability and circumstance.”

[Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto](#)

“Adventure based learning activities are one of the most powerful and effective tools for engaging young people here at Salmon. We offer a wide range of adventure activities including climbing, abseiling, high ropes course, bungee trampoline, flying trapeze, mountain biking, kayaking, sailing, skiing and other seasonal events.”

“We offer adventure activities weekly in our club sessions for all age groups, school holiday special events and specifically tailored activities for your group of young people. We also offer a variety of team building adventure activities to people and groups of all ages.”

From the Salmon Youth Centre website

“Our young people guide the choices of activities and their enthusiasm for adventure is inspiring. The depth of bonding with mates and friends, the exhilarating feeling of accomplishment and the rewards of participating 100% build strong character for individuals and groups alike.”

“Our coaching team of instructors love this work and we do our very best to make young people feel welcomed and valued. We work in partnership with a variety of London schools, youth programmes and organisations capitalising on the value of adventure based learning and how it contributes to the quality of living for young people.”

## Action planning

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### Young People

A high degree of personal involvement by young people in all aspects of the total experience is a key factor in the successful provision of most offsite activities. Young people should be actively involved in the planning of activities and visits as part of their life skills development, and should be challenged to reflect on the process and the learning it brings.

### Making a Difference

Much outdoor activity and adventure is accredited and certificated. In some cases this can be a new experience in itself for young people who may feel they haven't achieved anything in their lives. As well as being enjoyable in its own right a successful residential or adventure activity can have a transformational effect on young people and re-engage them with learning..

### Vision and Values

Visits and outings will play an important part in the life of many organisations, giving young people the opportunity to undertake activities away from their normal surroundings. Visits and outings are no different to other activities you undertake though and a risk assessment is a vital starting point to ensure that potential risks are identified, and the appropriate control measures put in place.

### Practicality

Adventure activity centres providing caving, climbing, trekking and water sports activities have to be inspected and, where appropriate, licensed. Before organising any trip to an Adventure Activity Centre you must ensure that it has been properly investigated and licensed and that it also holds its own Public Liability insurance.

## Links and Further Guidance

The Institute for Outdoor Learning encourages outdoor learning by supporting and enhancing the good practice of those who work in the outdoors. By representing and lobbying on behalf of its members, both organisational and individuals, and the outdoor education and recreation sector, it helps to ensure the development and progression of outdoor learning. The Institute has also developed a range of professional accreditation for practitioners, including youth workers. Find out more at [www.outdoor-learning.org](http://www.outdoor-learning.org)

Since it began in 1956, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award has been dedicated to the personal development of young people from all backgrounds. With the widest reach of any UK youth charity, 275,000 young people (30,000 from disadvantaged backgrounds) undertake DofE programmes to achieve Bronze, Silver or Gold Duke of Edinburgh's Awards every year. To date it has helped four million people in the UK and, thanks to over 120 sister organisations, two million internationally. To contact your local organiser visit [www.dofe.org](http://www.dofe.org)

A good site to explore is the Adventure Activities Portals – an A to Z index to outdoor adventure activity sites. The site also sells books and resources on outdoor training and development and active learning. Take a look at [reviewing.co.uk/outdoors/links.htm](http://reviewing.co.uk/outdoors/links.htm)

Those of a nautical disposition might like to explore the opportunities offered by the Tall Ships Youth Trust, a registered charity dedicated to the personal development of young people through the crewing of ocean-going vessels. In a world that can be excluding and challenging, sailing as part of a Tall Ships crew can make for a participative and empowering experience. Young people learn to:

- › acquire new skills, knowledge and understanding;
- › make use of information and resources;
- › learn to problem solve, communicate ideas and information, evaluate achievements;
- › increase self awareness, self confidence and gain a sense of empowerment;
- › be able to make choices, influence others and be able to discuss and debate; and
- › take responsibility for self and others, forming positive relationships with supportive adults and peers.

See [www.tallships.org](http://www.tallships.org) for more information.

Fairbridge uses outdoor activities as a vehicle for developing personal and social skills with young people aged 13 to 25 that other organisations find difficult to engage – giving them the motivation, self-confidence and skills they need to change their lives. Challenging activities such as climbing, canoeing and caving – all designed to build confidence, develop team work and challenge negative behaviour – have proved a first step back into education, training or work for many. Find out more at [www.fairbridge.org.uk](http://www.fairbridge.org.uk)

Other useful sites include that of the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority. Adventure activities licensing ensures that activity providers follow good safety management practices. Being granted a licence should reassure the public about the safety of the activity provider. See [www.hse.gov.uk/aala](http://www.hse.gov.uk/aala) for more on this.

The English Outdoor Council is an umbrella body for organisations involved in the provision of outdoor education, recreation and development training. Its work includes promoting the benefits of outdoor experiences and encouraging high quality, sustainable provision. Find out more at [www.englishoutdoorcouncil.org](http://www.englishoutdoorcouncil.org) Recent publications include Time for Change – a summary of evidence in support of outdoor learning and a challenge to the new government; Nothing Ventured ... balancing risks and benefits in the outdoors – a new publication that explodes the myths about safety on school visits and gives real reassurance to teachers and others; and High Quality Outdoor Education – a publication that lists ten outcomes of quality provision and gives advice on how to achieve these.