

Toolkit for pre and post trip TEAM interactions

The focus of the Big City Mountaineers experience is our 8 day adventures into the mountains and waterways of this country. During the trip, teens typically discover abilities that they were unaware of prior to the trip. These discoveries are the backbone of the BCM program and our hope is that our participants will go home with increased confidence and a higher sense of self esteem. For teens coming home from these journeys, it is often difficult to apply what they learned in the wilderness to their urban lives. In addition, the positive role-modeling and constant encouragement that took place on the trail is often lost in school or at home. As a result, the confidence and personal growth that took place in the backcountry can be lost or buried under the constraints of daily life. We do not want this to happen.

This Toolkit is designed to facilitate a longer term presence of caring adults in the lives of these youth. It includes plans for pre-trip get-to-know-you sessions, as well as post-trip gatherings for TEAM members to catch up, tell stories, and reconnect to each other and their experience. For each meeting there is a description of what each member of the team will contribute.

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Teen Introduction to BCM Meeting

Purpose: This is the first meeting about the upcoming BCM trip season. The purpose is to get the teens at the youth organization excited about the prospect of going out on a BCM trip.

If this is your or the youth organization's first year of involvement with BCM, this meeting and our process will take some time to get used to. We encourage you to be patient, ask questions and have confidence that you are offering your youth a safe, unique and potentially life changing opportunity.

If BCM trips are an established part of your program, this meeting will serve the dual purpose of reuniting past participants and introducing new ones to the experience. The teens from past seasons can present their accomplishments and stories to their peers. Leaders from the trip will talk about the details and the overall picture, but the teens should be the center of this meeting. A BCM representative can offer logistical details and answer specific questions about the program. When possible, the leaders who will join BCM in the up-coming summer can introduce themselves and begin to make a connection with the teens who want to go out.

Who: Team Leader (past and next season), Team Members (past and next), Youth Leader (past and next), Teens, Potential volunteers, guardians, BCM representative

Where: Youth Center

Needed Items: Slides/pictures, food/drink, computer/slide projector & speakers

Special Considerations: As this is the first meeting, in the absence of leaders from this trip those from other recent trips should be invited to come and work with the teens and their local youth organization. Because each trip is a bit different, these other adult leaders need to speak with whoever is coordinating the meeting.

Before: A few weeks before the meeting, post signs and pictures around the youth organization advertising the BCM trip and this meeting to learn more about it. Encourage teens to bring friends.

The Meeting: At the meeting the BCM representative, if present, will speak for a few minutes about the program. This need not be too long because s/he is mainly there to answer questions and be a face for the organization. The Youth Leader or Team Leader (possibly from a past BCM trip) will then welcome everyone and ask each person present to introduce themselves. The Leader will then show the BCM Introduction PowerPoint. After the slideshow, break into groups for an ice-breaker (see the list of ice-breaker activities on the next page). For all group activities, intersperse teens with prospects, adult team members and guardians. After everyone has moved about a little, introduce any teens from previous years who are willing to talk about their experience and what it has meant to them. Leaders should help the teens prepare this to make sure that a number of different aspects are covered. Use photos, if possible, to show each teen someplace spectacular so they can brag a bit about what they accomplished. After these pieces have presented, leaders will present their personal experiences and what they learned. Have the volunteers talk about the power of the backcountry, how it affects them and why they volunteer for BCM. Follow the presentations with a question and answer session. End the meeting with some kind of activity. For example, have teens teach others how to quickly set up a tent. If there are poles or trees, make a game out of setting up bear bags. Use your imagination and make it a fun note to end on!

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Ice Breakers

Look Up

Objective: To avoid looking other participants in the eye

Number of participants: 6 or more

Best for ages: 10 and up

Time to complete: 10 minutes or more

Tools needed: Any small object to place in the middle of the circle

How to play: While standing in a tight circle, everybody stares at an object placed in the center. When the leader says “look,” everybody immediately looks up to stare one person in the face. If the person you look at is also looking at you, each of you is out. The leader then says “down” and everybody looks at the object again and waits for the next command of “look.” For especially outgoing groups, you can add the rule of a scream and dramatic “death” when two people look at each other.

1 to 10

Objective: To count to 10 as a group

Number of participants: 5 or more

Best for ages: 10 and up

Time to complete: 10 minutes

Tools needed: None

How to play: The group as a whole must count from one to ten, but with participants speaking in no particular order. In other words, participants must spontaneously decide when they will speak out a number. The catch: if any two participants speak at the same time, the group must start over.

A Great Pair

Objective: To find the other person in the group with the same “name”

Number of participants: 6 or more

Best for ages: 10 and up

Time to complete: 10 minutes

Tools needed: None

How to play: This game is where a slip of paper with the name of a “famous” person is delivered to each person in the group. After all the slips of paper have been distributed, the task of the participants is to find their “partner.”

Shoe Game

Objective: To find the person in the group with the “other” shoe

Number of participants: 6 or more

Best for ages: 10 and up

Time to complete: 10 minutes

Tools needed: None

How to play: Everyone takes off their left shoe and throws it into a pile in the middle of the circle. Mix the shoe pile for a few moments. Everyone must then select a shoe, other than their own, and find the owner. They then exchange information about themselves, such as, name, what they hope to get out of the BCM trip, etc.

Season Kick-Off Meeting

Purpose: At this time the up-coming summer's participants should be settled and alternates selected. This summer's teens and leaders need to build a strong connection and get each other excited about the up-coming trip.

Who: Team Leader, Team Members, Youth Leader, Teens (new and alumni), guardians, BCM representative

Where: Youth Center/Local Park

Items Needed: Informational handouts for guardians, Youth Applications, packing lists for teens, one set of teen gear (including clothing)

Special Considerations: As much as possible, local volunteers will be placed on trips with the youth organization. This makes the connections made during this time period stronger and keeps teens and volunteers invested in the trip. In the case that someone who has helped with BCM activities is unable to join the teens on their trip, please make sure that this is understood beforehand. For both parents and teens, the volunteers that they get to know *are* Big City Mountaineers and a last minute drop might make some ambivalent about the trip. An additional possibility is to work with a climbing gym and take the teens there. This is a great exercise in trust and overcoming preconceived weaknesses.

The Meeting: Begin this meeting with a general ice-breaker. After this, introduce the members of the TEAM and talk briefly about the BCM trip. If possible this will include looking at a map of the trail and a rough itinerary. With basic questions covered, have each person express one hope and one concern about the up-coming trip.

After this, do a Team Building activity and then bring the group together again for a discussion of the importance of a backcountry experience. Start off by asking the new team to brainstorm about what they could learn from being on the trail. Allow anyone to respond to their thoughts, but keep the discussion positive. Have the Alumni teens say a few words about what affected them most. How is this different from what they have learned in the city? How can they apply it to living in the city? Has this experience changed the way that they view themselves?

After this discussion, have a group activity teaching the new teens about pitching tents and packing a backpack. Allow Alumni teens to lead this activity with the help of volunteer leaders. If guardians are present, the BCM representative will take them aside and talk to them. A discussion of safety should begin this talk followed by a reiteration of the power of this experience for the teens. Allow everyone time to voice concerns and ask questions. If all paperwork has not been completed or signed, now is a good time to take care of that.

To close the evening, allow this summer's team to express a few concerns and let the Alumni and leaders address these. Finally, have each member of last year's team offer one piece of advice to the members of this year's team.

Team Building Activities

Helium Stick

Objective: To lower a tent pole or stick to the ground as a group

Number of participants: 6 or more

Best for ages: 6 to adult

Time to complete: usually 15 minutes of trying until success

Tools needed: Tent pole or other rod/stick of approx. same length

How to play: Create two lines facing each other. Introduce the Helium Stick—a long, thin, light rod. Ask students to point out each index finger and then lay the Helium Stick down on people's fingers. The challenge is to lower the Helium Stick to the ground. The catch: everyone's fingers must constantly be in contact with the Helium Stick at all times. Warning: the Helium Stick may start floating up! Jump up and pull it down! Reiterate that if anyone's finger is caught not touching the Helium Stick, the task is restarted at shoulder height. The Helium Stick will mysteriously have a habit of floating upwards rather than coming down. Often the more a group tries, the more it floats. The group needs to eventually calm down and slowly, patiently, lower the Helium Stick (which is easier said than done).

Revealing Toilet Paper

Objective: A game where toilet paper is used to get to know other people!

Number of participants: 3-10

Best for ages: 6 to adult

Time to complete: usually 15 minutes of trying until success

Tools needed: Toilet paper roll

How to play: A roll of toilet paper is passed around the room, and players are told to take a quantity of toilet paper off of the roll. They may take as much, or as little as they like (in full sheets only, please). When everyone has their share, they are then told that they have to make one statement about themselves for every sheet they took from the roll. Great for young teens, because the "clown" in the group usually takes massive quantities, and then discover they must share information about themselves. One roll of toilet paper (or a box of tissues can be used) but toilet paper is more fun.

Orientation Meeting

Purpose: Prepare the teens for their backcountry experience as much as possible and allow the teens and adult team members more time to connect.

Who: Team Leader, Team Members, Youth Leader and Teens

Where: This meeting should be held outside if it is at all possible; a park or nature preserve is best. If not, it needs to be an open space where it is possible to emphasize hard skills by setting up tents and learning about backpacks.

Requirements: Open space (park or preserve with trails preferred), transportation, trail food, packs, weight for packs, sleeping pads, stove, pots and utensils

Before: At the youth organization, have each of the teens fill out a BCM Pre-Trip survey and return it to the Team Leader or Team Member in charge of the outing. Have the Team Leader verify that ALL applications for each teen and adult have been submitted to the BCM office.

The Meeting: Begin the meeting with a BCM ice-breaker to warm the teens and leaders up. Then have one of the leaders talk about backpacks and how they fit. Give each teen the opportunity to try on a pack and walk around with 10-15lbs. on. Find a hill for the teens to walk on to get a better feel for the pack when climbing. If this is done inside, have them walk up and down a flight of stairs a few times to get a feel for pack and how it transfers weight to the hips and legs.

If it is possible, the entire team should take a hike together. Along the way, point out plants, animals, and natural features. Encourage the teens to think about the interconnected ecosystem that they are walking through. When the hike is not a possibility, teach some basic ecology using emphasizing where the teens fit into it. For example, draw a food chain and have the teens brain-storm about the plants and animals they might encounter. Who eats whom? Where do people fit into this scheme? Talk about what might happen if one of the members of the web were to be removed.

To finish the meeting, one team member will talk about trail food and everyone can sample some. This is especially good to do after the hike because everyone will have a bit more of an appetite and will be more willing to try freeze-dried food. Offer trail mix, ramen (dry or cooked), backpackers' meals, etc. If there is time, have one leader fire up the stove to boil water and cook a sample meal. If there is time and interest, include a brief discussion of drinking water and filtration.

Team Reunion

Purpose: This event is intended to reinforce in the teens, now BCM Alumni, of their accomplishments from their BCM experience. It gives everyone time to catch up as well. It is important that the teens be recognized for their accomplishments in front of their guardians, peers, teachers, etc. We believe that the youth organization leader and adult volunteers from their trip are the best ones to do this.

Who: Summit Team including: Team Leader, Team Members, Youth Leader and Teens from past summer; guardians, peers and BCM sponsors.

Where: Youth Agency or gathering space

Needed Items: Photos/slides to present in front of parents with stories, food/drink, and slide projector

Special Considerations: Depending on the situation with each individual youth organization, there are different issues that need to be addressed. If parents/guardians are not available, peers need to join in the sharing of experiences. Mentors and teachers would be a good addition, too. It is important that this get-together not become too large, so these groups of individuals need to be evaluated as to who needs to hear about the teens' accomplishments most. In the event that Team Members from the trip are not local, but other BCM leaders are, they should also be invited to the party. This allows local leaders to become involved in local youth organizations and introduces the teens to more caring adults.

Before: Two weeks before the planned meeting, have the teens send out invitations to guardians, mentors, and peers. Keep the number of invitations reasonable to make the evening intimate, but encourage each teen to bring guests.

The Meeting: As an introduction to the attendees, the Youth Leader should welcome everyone to the youth agency. Talk about the mission and activities of the organization and how the youth organization became involved with BCM.

Next have either the Team Leader or a Team Member introduce the whole team and give a brief summary of the trip. Where was it? How long? How hard was the hike? Other team members, especially the teen alumni, may then follow this with a more detailed account of the hike. Whenever a difficulty is discussed, follow it with a description of how the teens persevered. If possible, use a slide projector to show different parts of the trail and photos of the teens working together. If not, at least have a dozen pictures to pass around or have displayed prominently.

End the meeting on an upbeat note by talking about next year and the additional opportunities available to BCM alumni teens such as Outward Bound Scholarships.

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