



School Group Leader **Field Trip Prep Guide**





Table of Contents



Welcome!

03

Field Trip Quick Guide

04

Pre-Program Coordination

05

Before Your Program

06-07

Preparing Students

08-09

Preparing Your Group: Safety

10-11

During & After Your Program

12

Program Policies

13

Thank you!

14





Welcome!

Thank you for joining us for an outdoor learning experience! Our programs are designed to create meaningful, engaging and accessible opportunities for students to explore, investigate and connect with the natural world through hands-on learning and shared discovery.

We believe students learn best through curiosity, observation, inquiry and active participation. Rather than focusing solely on memorization, our programs encourage students to ask questions, notice patterns, collaborate with one another and build on personal connections with nature and place.

Our goal is to create positive and memorable outdoor experiences that support classroom learning while helping students feel confident, curious and welcome in outdoor spaces.

We hope these experiences inspire continued exploration, environmental awareness and meaningful engagement with the natural world long after the field trip ends.

See you on the trails,
Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority Education Team

Field Trip Quick Guide



For your convenience, here is a quick printable reference document for you to review before your program. There is more detailed information throughout this guide.

Pre-Coordination

- Ensure student guardians complete an "Individual Program Waiver" for each student & send completed forms to OSA education staff at least 1 week before the program
- Coordinate transportation
- Coordinate chaperones: ratio is 1:8; send them "Chaperone Expectations" (translations available)
- Inform OSA staff of any group accommodations
- Prepare for possibly not having cell service. Save important numbers and maps before you arrive
- Review program policies included in the preparation guide

Group Preparation

- Ensure students have visible name tags, marked if they did not sign the photo waiver
- Break your class into groups (we will tell you how many depending on the program)
- Check the program location
- Ensure you are prepared to carry and/or administer any medications
- Encourage students to use the restroom at school
- Be prepared to pack out trash

Group Expectations

- Stay on trail
- Respect wildlife
- Leave nature and wildlife as they are – no taking, picking or throwing things
- Work collaboratively
- Practice observation and inquiry program site

What to Bring

- Excitement!
- Water bottle filled with water
- Closed-toed shoes and clothes they do not mind getting dirty or wet
- Layers, including long pants
- Sun protection (Hat, sunscreen)
- Lunch, if eating on-site – please inform Open Space Authority if you plan to eat at the program site



During the Program

- Stay on designated trails and program areas
- Follow facilitator instructions and group expectations
- Minimize distractions during activities and discussions
- Help maintain a safe, respectful and inclusive learning environment
- Encourage all students to participate

After the Program

- Please complete the "Program Feedback Form"
- If you received a transportation reimbursement, send invoices within 30 days after the program takes place
- Send us feedback, photos and testimonials!

Pre-program Coordination



Program Waivers

Ensure guardians complete the “Individual Program Waiver” for each student. Students without a waiver will not be able to participate. These can be mailed or brought the day of the program. Mailed waivers must be received before the program date.

Transportation

Teachers/schools are responsible for coordinating all transportation accommodations, including if the group will receive a reimbursement. Please be sure all vendors are informed of bus loading and parking areas.

Chaperones

Coordinate chaperones:

- We require a 1:8 ratio for chaperones to students
- Please be sure to send “Chaperone Expectations” to all chaperones in advance – these are available in English, Spanish, Vietnamese and Traditional Chinese

Lunch

Please inform Open Space Authority education staff if your group intends to eat lunch on-site.

Trash & Restrooms

There are no trash receptacles in the preserves, and only one restroom or porta potty on-site (with one toilet), please plan accordingly.

Before Your Program

Please review the following information to help you with planning in advance of your program experience.



Name Tags

Please be sure students arrive with visible name tags. If any students are not permitted to be photographed, please mark their name tag in advance with an identifiable marker and inform field trip leads.



Program Groups

Please break students into small groups before arrival so they can easily split during the program. Some teachers use colors, or pre-mark name tags with group numbers. You will be informed before your program how many groups are needed, depending on the program selected



Programming Location

Please review the program map, including drop-off and bus parking locations, and chaperone parking areas. There is no fee to park at any of our preserves.



Cell Service

Cell phone service may be limited or unavailable at some preserve locations. We recommend downloading maps and saving important information ahead of your visit. Open Space Authority staff will have communication devices available for emergency use, if needed.

Before Your Program

Please review the following information to help you with planning in advance of your program experience.



Timing/Restrooms

Please encourage students to use restrooms at school, and before the program begins. Most preserves have one restroom or porta potty with one stall.



Accommodations

We recognize students may have varying comfort levels, learning styles and experiences outdoors. Teachers and chaperones are asked to communicate student needs, accommodations or concerns with Open Space Authority education staff in advance, so we can support a positive experience for all learners.



Medication

Teachers and chaperones are responsible for carrying and administering any required medications, including EpiPens or inhalers.



Technology

Unless otherwise discussed, we ask for students to limit personal device use during programming to support engagement and participation.

Preparing Students

Help prepare your students before the program to ensure they have a great experience during their time with us.

What Students Should Bring

- Excitement and enthusiasm!
- Water bottle filled with water
- Closed-toed shoes
- Layers and long pants, and clothes they do not mind getting dirty
- Sun protection (hat/sunscreen)
- Lunch, if eating on-site after the program

We understand some students may need snacks for medical or accommodation purposes, and those are always welcome. To create a smooth and engaging experience for all participants, we ask that students arrive prepared to comfortably participate in the duration of the program.

Please Encourage

- Chaperones and guardians to review and prepare for weather, poison oak and ticks
- Curiosity
- Observation
- Participation
- Respectful outdoor behavior



Before your school program, we encourage students to begin thinking about the outdoors with curiosity, observation and respect. These questions can help prepare your group for the experience ahead.

Preparing for the Preserve

- What do you think a nature preserve is? Is it the same as a park?
- What does respectful behavior outdoors look like?
- Why is it important to stay with your group on trails?
- What should you do if you see wildlife?
- What do you think wildlife will do if it sees you?
- Why might Open Space Authority asks visitors not to take, collect or throw natural objects?
- How can we keep outdoor spaces healthy for plants, animals and other visitors?
- What should you bring to stay comfortable and prepared outdoors?
- The preserve we are going to visit might have rare, threatened or endangered species living there. What does that mean?

Classroom Connections

- What have we talked about in class that we might see while we are at the preserve?
- What do you think scientists or naturalists might pay attention to while outdoors? Why?
- What different living things depend on one another that we might see?
- How do people affect natural environments?

Curiosity and Observation

- What do you think you might notice outdoors that you normally miss?
- What sounds, smells or textures do you expect to experience in nature?
- What animals or plants do you think live in the the preserve?
- What questions do you already have about the outdoors?
- How do you think people and nature are connected?
- What are you most excited or curious about?

Preparing Your Group

Feel free to share this resource with guardians and chaperones so they can ensure students are prepared for possibly encountering these things in our preserves.

This resource is intended to give information so everyone can keep themselves safe while they enjoy the program with us.



Poison Oak

In some areas of the preserve, you may encounter poison oak.

The oil found in poison oak, urushiol, produces an allergic reaction to the majority of people who encounter it. This results in an extremely uncomfortable rash with blistering and redness. You can avoid the rash by not touching the plant—it's leaves, berries and stems all contain the oils. You may even get a rash later if any of your personal items touch poison oak and you then also touch that personal item.

When we are out in the field we will point out poison oak because it can look different throughout the seasons. you can remember how it looks with the mantra "leaves of three, let it be."



Rattlesnakes

During the summer reptiles, like snakes, are most active. Rattlesnakes can be found in tall grass, holes, burrows, around rocks, and on trails basking. Most California species of snake are harmless, however there is one venomous species that we need to be aware of: the Northern Pacific rattlesnake.

Pay attention to your surroundings. If you encounter a snake on the trail, stay calm, give it space, and find a safe place to pass at a wide distance. In the unlikely event you are bit by a rattlesnake, call 911 immediatley.

Preparing Your Group

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Ticks

Ticks are found throughout California and pose a risk for tick-borne diseases like Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. Tick activity varies by species and region, but encounters are possible year-round, with activity peaking in the spring and early summer.

You can reduce the risk of tick-bites by doing the following:

- Wear protective clothing (tuck pant legs into socks; shirts into waistbands)
- Use insect repellent.
- Check for ticks during and after your time in nature. Often, you can find them before they bite you.
- If you find a tick that's bitten you—DON'T PANIC! You can remove the tick with a pair of tweezers or pliers. Gently pull and twist to remove all parts of the tick. Do not yank.
- If a tick is removed within 24 hours of biting you, the chances of contracting any tick-borne illnesses is reduced. Save the specimen and have it tested by your health care provider to be sure.

During Your Program



We encourage adults to...

- Support student participation.
- Help students stay with their assigned groups.
- Encourage respectful behavior toward nature, wildlife and other participants
- Model curiosity, observation and positive engagement.
- Allow students opportunities to investigate, problem solve and discover answers independently when appropriate.
- Be flexible - as outdoor programs may shift slightly depending on weather, wildlife activity, group pacing or other environmental factors.

To help the program run smoothly, we ask that groups...

- Stay on designated trails and program areas.
- Follow facilitator instructions and group expectations.
- Minimize distractions during activities and discussions.
- Help maintain a safe, respectful and inclusive learning environment.
- Encourage all students to participate.

Group expectations during the program:

- Stay on trail.
- Respect wildlife.
- Leave nature and wildlife as they are – no taking, picking or throwing things.
- Work collaboratively.
- Practice observation and inquiry.

After Your Program

- After the program, you will be asked to complete a "Program Feedback Form" on-site. These forms help us with programmatic development and evaluation. Please complete the form during and after the program, and give it to field trip leaders before you leave.
- If you were approved for a transportation stipend, invoices must be submitted 30 days after the field trip date to Open Space Authority staff in order to be reimbursed.
- Feedback, photos and testimonials via email are welcome and appreciated!

Program Policies

Please review our policies in detail so you are prepared for your program.

Heat, Air Quality & Smoke

The safety and comfort of students, teachers, volunteers and staff are important considerations during all outdoor programs.

Programs may be modified, shortened, rescheduled or canceled due to extreme heat, poor air quality, wildfire smoke or other environmental conditions that may create unsafe or unhealthy outdoor conditions.

Open Space Authority staff monitor weather and air quality forecasts leading up to each program and will communicate with teachers as early as possible if changes are necessary. Decisions are made using current environmental conditions, preserve-specific exposure levels, activity intensity, participant age and public health guidance.

We encourage schools to prepare students for changing outdoor conditions by bringing appropriate layers, sun protection and water.

Late Arrival

Please plan to arrive on time for your scheduled program. Field trips operate on a set schedule and late arrivals may result in shortened activities or modified programming. If your group is running late, please contact Open Space Authority staff as soon as possible using the provided contact number.

Groups arriving more than 15 - 30 minutes late may need to transition directly into the remaining portion of the program based on staffing and schedule limitations.

Cancellation Policy

If you need to cancel your field trip, please notify Open Space Authority education staff as soon as possible. Advance notice helps us coordinate staffing, volunteers and scheduling opportunities for other schools.

Programs may need to be cancelled or rescheduled by Open Space Authority staff due to severe weather, unsafe trail conditions, poor air quality, emergencies or other unforeseen circumstances. In these cases, staff will communicate with group organizers as soon as possible regarding next steps.

No-Show Policy

If a group does not attend their scheduled program and no prior communication is provided, the visit may be considered a "no-show". Repeated no-shows or last-minute cancellations may affect eligibility for future transportation reimbursements or program scheduling opportunities.

We understand unexpected situations can arise and encourage teachers to communicate with staff as early as possible if plans change.



THANK YOU!

Thank you for helping create meaningful outdoor learning experiences for your students.

By bringing students into open spaces, you are supporting their connection with the natural world. These experiences help students build confidence outdoors while encouraging stewardship and care for the environments around them.

We appreciate the time, coordination and energy that teachers and chaperones dedicate to making field trips possible, and we lookforward to learning and exploring alongside your group.

See you at the preserve!



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Meet Our Team!



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