

Lost in the Woods

Being lost in the woods is a terrifying experience that sometimes ends tragically.

Here you will find rules for survival and a list of items for a simple and inexpensive survival kit. The information is based on the programme *Lost in the Woods: Child Survival* by Colleen Politano (Sidney, B.C.: Porthole Press). This programme is taught coast-to-coast by a variety of organizations to schools, clubs, churches or family groups.

If you would like to have **Foothills Search and Rescue** teach a programme to your group, contact FSAR at least four weeks in advance of your preferred date. FSAR will teach groups of 5 to 30 people ranging in age from 4 to adults. Group members should be of a similar age. Cost is free for not-for-profit groups, \$100 for others.

The Nine Rules for Survival

Survival is staying warm and dry while waiting to be found.

Rule 1: If you are with a pet or another person, STAY TOGETHER. People and pets (such as a large dog) are warm and they can help keep you warm if you cuddle together. If you are with a dog, don't let it run loose. Keep it close so you'll both be warmer. It's also a lot less scary if you have someone to hold onto.

Rule 2: Stay in one place. Don't wander around. This is the most important rule. If you run around you might be running away from the searchers. Search teams look in specific areas and if you move around you might move out of one area before the team finds you and into another area that has already been searched. Running around could also lead to getting hurt. Being lost is bad, but being lost and hurt is much worse.

Rule 3: Keep warm. NEVER take any clothes off. Cover up all the exposed skin you can. If you are wearing a sweater or jacket, do it up. Watch out for your shoe laces. Branches have a tricky way of undoing them. The most important part of your clothing is a hat or something that covers your head. Over 70% of all your body heat escapes through your head.

Rule 4: Find a cozy waiting place, not a hiding place. Find a warm place out of the wind and rain but where searchers can see you. Under a large tree is a good place.

Rule 5: Put out something bright or make something to tell the people searching for you where you are. Make a flag using what you have, but don't take off any clothes (remember Rule 3). You can use white paper, money, hair ribbons, a piece of an orange garbage bag, a handkerchief, Kleenex or anything else you have. Spell the word "HELP" or "SOS" on the ground using rocks and sticks or make a large arrow with them, pointing to where you are. Do anything to attract attention! Sing, whistle or shout.

Rule 6: Look bigger for searchers. If possible, your waiting place should be near an open space. When you hear someone coming, move to the middle of the clearing and call. Do not run toward the noise, let the searchers come to you (remember Rule 2). If you hear an aircraft, lie down so the pilot can see more of you, then wave with both your arms and legs, like making an angel in the snow. Stand up immediately after the aircraft has passed, as the ground can be very cold.

Rule 7: DO NOT lie on the bare ground. The only exception to this rule is the one above. Lying on the cold ground for a very short period of time, attracting attention, is okay. Sitting or lying on the ground for any length of time is dangerous because the ground can make you colder. Build a mattress using available materials such as branches, moss, leaves, etc. This mattress should be as thick as the mattress you sleep on at home. After the mattress is completed, gather the same amount or more of the same material and use it for the blankets. This is called a survival bed.

Rule 8: DO NOT eat anything you are not sure of. Do not eat any berries, mushrooms or anything else unless you are 100% sure what they are. Being hungry is not too bad compared with being violently sick. Remember, there won't be anyone there to look after you. You can go without food for many days, but you can't go without water.

Rule 9: Stay away from large rivers and lakes. Be careful where you get your drinking water. Don't go near any large bodies of water. Instead, drink from a water supply that is smaller than you are, so you can not fall in. You can also find water on leaves in the form of dew.

A Compact Survival Kit

This kit fits in a sandwich-sized Ziploc® bag. The freezer bags are better because they are thicker and will take more abuse. You can use the bag as a drinking cup.

- A high energy snack such as trail mix or a survival food bar. PowerBars are good and the wrapper can be used as a reflector. The food should be in its own Ziploc bag.
- A whistle to make a noise. The standard signal for help is three short blasts.
- A signal flag about 10 x 100 cm cut from an orange plastic garbage bag.
- A reflector for signalling ground searchers or aircraft. Make this from aluminum foil glued to cardboard so it can't cause injury.
- A large, brightly coloured garbage bag to use as a poncho. You'll be amazed at how much warmer it keeps you. Pre-tear a slit for the face opening — do not cut a hole because cleanly cut plastic tends to stick to itself, a torn hole will stay open.
- A few cloth self-adhesive bandages so you can treat minor cuts or scrapes.