

Wilderness School

Expedition Programs



Wilderness School students on an Appalachian Trail mountaintop

Since 1974, the Wilderness School has offered Expedition courses for adolescents from Connecticut.

The purpose of the Wilderness School's Expedition is to:

1. Provide the student with an experience that promotes self-improvement, specifically in such areas as self-esteem, responsibility and interpersonal skills
2. Help the student achieve goals that are attainable within the framework of a 20-Day or 5-Day Expedition
3. Relate the achievement of course goals to the student's transition home, including pursuit of Follow-Up goals

The 20-Day and 5-Day Expeditions are designed to confront the participant with a new and challenging environment in addition to a new group of individuals with which to co-exist. Success or failure is found to be dependent upon the extent of one's willingness to try. Our programs are based in action where experience is the medium for learning cooperation, self-reliance, decision-making, and the rewards of achieving goals.

Wilderness School 20-Day Expeditions are enrolled in single gender groupings according to the open enrollment of the course. When courses are over-enrolled with either male or female students, mixed gender groupings may be considered upon the discretion of the Wilderness School Director. Wilderness School 5-Day Expeditions may be either single or mixed gender courses.

Philosophy and Methodology:



Small Group Process: Wilderness School groups are largely responsible for the outcome of the course. Through discussion and experience, the group learns teamwork, problem solving, and decision-making. The group is expected to advocate positive values such as respect and compassion, and to develop an ability to perform with increasing self-direction.

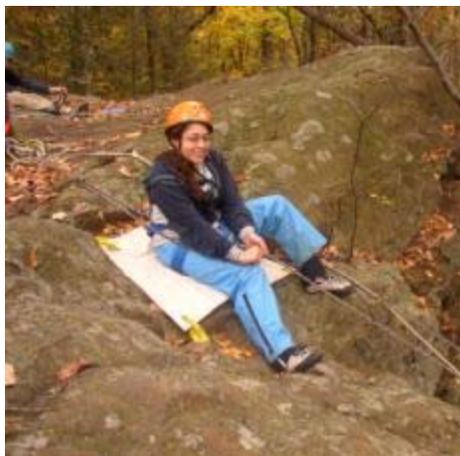
Processing of Experience: Course experiences are discussed and processed by the individual and the group for the course's impact to be made relevant. On wilderness courses, a major emphasis is placed on briefing and debriefing each day and activity, and on relating these subjects to meaningful examples from the student's life.



Graduated Challenges: The course consists of a series of graduated, achievable challenges intended to establish a pattern of success. These require continually increasing effort and produce related feelings of accomplishment.

Use of Natural Consequences: The natural consequences of one's actions or inactions are used to a safe and reasonable degree. The simplified environment of the course dispenses immediate, impartial consequences that may be utilized as learning experiences for students.

Experiential Learning: Learning by doing is emphasized in skills instruction. Group members are active participants in lessons and are given the responsibility to learn the skills necessary for the successful completion of the course.



Twenty-Four Hour Programming: Programming twenty-four hours per day provides an intensive experience resulting in an eventual confrontation with one's limits. This experience produces opportunities for students and the group to expand limits and gain positive self-awareness.

20-Day Expedition participants engage in group initiative activities, backpacking, canoeing, rock climbing and rappelling, ropes course activities, a community service project or trail maintenance, a solo experience, running, and group discussions.

5-Day Expeditions offer a canoe or backpacking expedition and the opportunity for a high impact activity such as the ropes course, rock climbing, white water canoeing or caving.

Wilderness School activities are not viewed as an end in themselves but as a means of attaining positive self-awareness, respect for others, and self-reliance.

On the course, students spend all or part of the first day at the program base camp, then depart for course activities on the rivers and mountains of Northwestern Connecticut, in addition to neighboring areas of Massachusetts and New York State.



Students are able to receive family and agency support through letters and (as necessary) through contact with the Wilderness School in the event an individual needs greater encouragement or should a crisis situation take place.

On 20-Day Expeditions, students return from the field shortly before the nineteenth day in preparation for Graduation.

Families and agency staff are expected to attend the Graduation, which is a special recognition of the student's experience on the course.

It is also an opportunity to meet course Instructors and receive a brief report on the student's course experience in person.

5-Day Expeditions return to the Wilderness School base camp upon completion of the high impact activity scheduled for the fifth day, and students attend a less formal Course Ending Ceremony.

Field Related Behavioral Policies

Students will be removed from proximity to Wilderness School 20-Day and 5-Day Expeditions when violations of behavioral policies or program expectations make continued participation physically or emotionally unsafe for any student or staff.

If field interventions by program staff result in a student being removed and sent home from the course, students will be returned to the Wilderness School base camp and will require transportation home by the agency or family at the first opportunity.

Violations of Wilderness School Behavioral Policies require intervention from program staff and removal from proximity to other students while a determination is made whether the student shall be allowed to continue participating in the program.

Wilderness School Behavioral Policies

1. **Non-Compliance:** Failure to comply with program policies, procedures, expectations, or staff directions or requests in a deliberate, repetitive manner will result in removal from the course activity and group participation, with contact made with the Referring Agency and/or family.
2. **Violence and Threatening:** Violent or threatening behavior will result in the student's removal from the course activity and group participation, with contact made with the Referring Agency and/or family.
3. **Severe Emotional Disturbance:** When a student's actions present a reasonably assured risk of harm to self or others, the student will be removed from the course and care of the student will be relinquished to an emergency medical service, an M.D., parent or family, or Referring Agent.
4. **Emotional Safety:** Intentional, repetitive actions (verbal or physical) that result in emotional distress or intimidation of a persistent nature will result in removal from the course activity and group participation, with contact made with the Referring Agency and/or family.
5. **Sexual Activity:** Engaging in or being suspected of sexual activity will result in removal from the course activity and group participation, with contact made with the Referring Agency and/or family.
6. **Drugs and Alcohol:** Using or being suspected of using drugs or alcohol will result in removal from the course activity and group participation, with contact made with the Referring Agency and/or family. Please note: There is no use of tobacco products at the Wilderness School.

[HOME](#)