

*Wondering if That
Field Trip Will be Safe?*
Youth**Safe** Outdoors
is Your Source



by

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“Not guilty.”

Those two words, uttered in an Ontario Court in 2021, led to teachers, Principals, and Vice-Principals across Canada emitting a collective sigh of relief. For the first time in Canadian history, a teacher who had organized a field trip during which a student had tragically died had not only faced civil litigation, but a charge of criminal negligence causing death. Had the teacher been found guilty, a serious pall would have fallen on Canadian schools offering outings that involve risk. No one is prepared to go to jail for doing their job.

In the case when a 15-year-old Toronto student, Jeremiah Perry, drowned in a lake swimming incident during a canoe trip, prosecutors claimed that the lead teacher, Nicholas Mills, had failed to follow district policy requiring that students pass a pre-trip swim test without a personal flotation device (PFD). The teacher admitted to ignoring the policy, saying it was impractical and would have led to the exclusion of almost half of the under-served students for whom the trip was designed.

The school board had unintentionally installed a policy that did not take into consideration the use of PFDs, the financial limitations of many families, and the needless loss of educational opportunities the policy caused. There was no reason – based on actual data related to canoeing and lake swimming – to preclude students from wearing a PFD for their swim test. The incident would have been very unlikely had there been a simple requirement for all non-swimmers and weak swimmers to wear a PFD when on or near the water.

Educators in BC are fortunate that appropriate guidelines related to PFD use are found in YouthSafe Outdoors (YSO), the comprehensive research and consensus-based field trip risk management and safety education resource that is used in most BC schools. Schools using this resource are far less likely to suffer a tragic incident such as the one described.

YouthSafe Outdoors (YSO) was first introduced in BC school districts in 2005, following an extensive



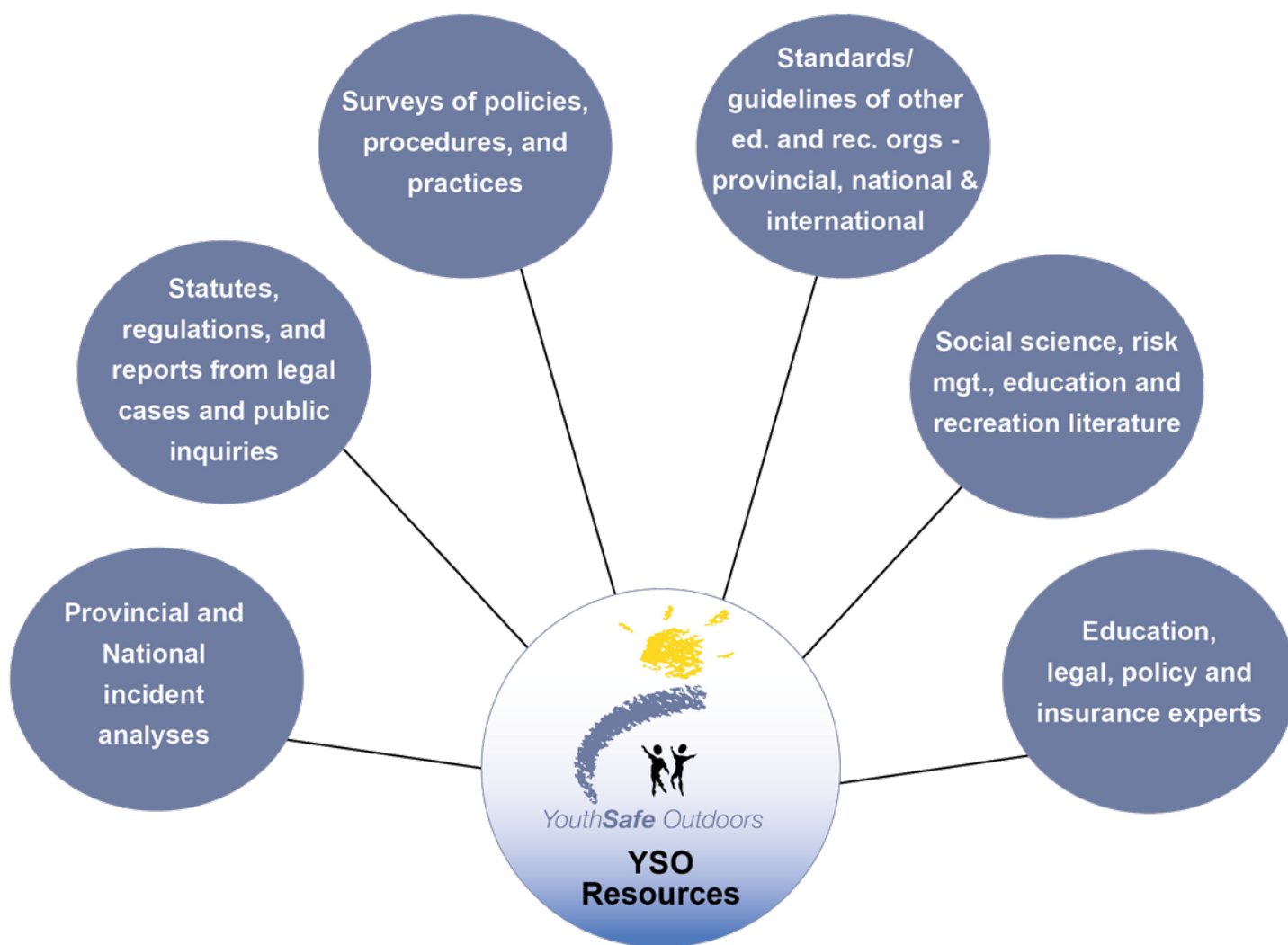
“This is a great resource providing everything teachers and administrative staff need to ensure they have planned appropriately to take student learning outside.”

Terri Hayes, Principal
J.A Laird Elementary, SD 06

“A very comprehensive, detailed, user-friendly resource covering all factors that need to be considered in the planning of field trips for students.”

Paul Skarsgard, Teacher
Point Grey Secondary, SD 39

research and consensus-building process that was federally funded, but made in BC. YouthSafe Outdoors did the legwork, studying and integrating multiple, cross-referenced research sources (see Figure 1).



43 years of ongoing research & practice

Figure 1. YSO's comprehensive, integrated research bases

In addition, the initiative – internationally, the first of its kind – involved a BC Advisory Committee who reviewed drafts and met several times to come to consensus on the final draft. There was broad member representation: from the associations representing BC school trustees, superintendents, principals and vice-principals, teachers, and parents/guardians; as well as from the School Protection Program (the insurer), the School Safety Association, service providers (e.g. the BC Camping Association), BC Provincial Emergency Program, and AdventureSmart. Several other offices, organizations, and individual experts including lawyers, policy analysts, researchers, and curriculum advisors provided valuable input.

This research and consensus-building approach led to the creation of an exceptional resource, unique in the world. All school districts in BC have the right to use the 2005 version in perpetuity. However, in 2016-18, YSO fully updated the resource and placed it online to ensure 24/7 access for licensed districts. Several of the 2005 edition's Advisory Committee members worked to ensure the updates were appropriate, and the platform user-friendly.

Summary data from the more than 2,000 evaluation forms completed by teachers, principals, and vice-principals demonstrates more than 97.8% satisfaction with the resource has been logged. School staff frequently expound on the benefits of YSO, including:

- Healthy, active, self-reliant students
- High capacity to provide safe outings and activities
- Support and clarity of expectations across all levels: trustees, superintendents, principals and vice-principals, and teachers
- Substantial time savings through a “one-stop shop”, and Word/PDF format options
- Confidence that the community and industry standard of care (custom) is being met
- Minimized exposure to legal liability or negative press from preventable incidents

“Excellent, comprehensive resources. Love that the docs come in PDF and Word, so they are editable. Brilliant!”

Lisa Fryer, Vice-Principal,
John Howitt Elementary, SD 70

YouthSafe Outdoors does not replace a district's field trip policy or procedures, but serves as the key resource school staff use to meet district requirements. It supports those planning all types of off-site activities and events: a trip to a local museum, farm, or industry site; sport or arts performance travel; more than 45 different outdoor pursuits/adventure travel outings (from class instruction through extended wilderness tours); and, interprovincial and international travel excursions.

In the Safety First! Guidelines, the mission-critical resource in the package, the user is provided with

the Known Potential Risks of the activity and the Common Risk Mitigation Strategies teachers use to manage these risks. Each guideline meets five key criteria:

Safe	minimizing potential for catastrophic loss while managing other risks
Reasonable	proportional to the risks present; balancing benefits with risks
Attainable	with the human, financial, and equipment resources available
Ethical	supporting informed decision making and appropriate contracting
Sustainable	24/7 access for all school staff to a current user-friendly resource

These guidelines not only help teachers plan field trips effectively and efficiently, but they ensure that principals and vice-principals have access to the information and tools they need to execute their due diligence before allowing the field trip, and so they can help the teacher identify and fill any gaps in their plan as part of a ‘Getting to Yes’ philosophy.

Several supplementary, use-at-will, resources are included in the YSO resource, including:

Legal Liability and Risk Management Primer
basic definitions and concepts

Forms File

form templates for virtually all forms relevant to field trips (district offices may use to update their own forms)

Adventure Leadership Resource

Outdoor Ed. 101, e.g. supervision calculation, first aid capacity, hazards in the environment/terrain, communications technology, and gear lists

Parent/Guardian Resource

to help them in their role supporting their child/ward's safe participation in field trips, whether from home or while serving as a volunteer

Student Instruction Resource

Research-based lesson plans, games, and activities to help students learn to identify, assess, and manage risks for themselves, an important educational objective in BC where outdoor recreation is a much-valued part of life

Given the research and consensus base, and the high number of BC school districts already using YSO, the safety guidelines likely articulate the de facto standard of care that will be expected by the courts if something unfortunate happens. The guidelines have already been reaffirmed by the courts. There are simply no good reasons not to share YSO with school staff to help them do their jobs related to field trips effectively, efficiently, and with peace of mind. While it is hoped that no teacher will again be charged with criminal negligence, injury prevention must remain a high priority. Principals and vice-principals in schools using YouthSafe

Outdoors can operate with confidence, knowing that they have access to the most appropriate guidelines, information, and tools to accomplish this objective.

Action 1: If you are in a YSO licensed district, ensure you have the login information for www.youthsafeoutdoorsschools.ca and share this with your school staff so they have access to the YSO resource. Discuss YSO at a staff meeting and support teachers in using the resource.

Action 2: If you do not know if your district is licensed, check with district staff. If not yet licensed, the district office may secure its license by contacting YSO at info@youthsafeoutdoors.ca.

You may not use or distribute a login from someone in another district and, once licensed, the only requirement is that no one can post YSO content on a publicly accessible website.

“This is a great resource for both experienced and new outdoor educators.”

Grayson Pettigrew, Teacher
G.P. Vanier Secondary
SD 71

