



**Activity: Wilderness Survival**

Here are twelve questions concerning personal survival in a wilderness situation. Your first task is to individually select the best of the three alternatives given under each item. Try to imagine yourself in the situation depicted. Assume that you are alone and have a minimum of equipment, except where specified. The season is Fall; the days are warm and dry, but the nights are cold.

After you have completed this task individually, you will again consider each question as a member of a small group. Your group will have the task of deciding, by consensus, the best alternative for each question. Do not change your individual answers, even if you change your mind in the group discussion. Both the individual and group solutions will later be compared with the correct answers provided by a group of naturalists who conduct classes in woodland survival.

	<b>Your Answer</b>	<b>Group Answer</b>
1. You have strayed from your party in trackless timber. You have no special signalling equipment. The best way to attempt to contact your friends is to:		
a) call "help" loudly but in a low register	_____	_____
b) yell or scream as loud as you can		
c) whistle loudly and shrilly		
2. You are in snake country. Your best action to avoid snakes is to:		
a) make a lot of noise with your feet	_____	_____
b) walk softly and quietly		
c) travel at night		
3. The day becomes dry and hot. You have a full canteen of water (about one litre) with you. You should:		
a) ration it—about a cupful a day	_____	_____
b) not drink until you stop for the night and then drink what you think you need		
c) drink as much as you think you need, when you need it		



4. Your water is gone and you become very thirsty. You finally come to a dried-up watercourse. Your best chance of finding water is to:
- a) dig anywhere in the stream bed \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) dig up plants and tree roots near the bank \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) dig in the stream bed at the outside of the bend \_\_\_\_\_
5. You decide to walk out of the wild country by following a series of ravines where a water supply is available. Night is coming on. The best place to make camp is:
- a) next to the water supply in the ravine \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) high on a ridge \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) midway up the slope \_\_\_\_\_
6. Your flashlight glows dimly as you are about to make your way back to your campsite after a brief foraging trip. Darkness comes quickly in the woods and the surroundings seem unfamiliar. You should:
- a) head back at once, keeping the light on, hoping the light will glow enough for you to make out landmarks \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) put the batteries under your armpits to warm them, and then replace them in the flashlight \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) shine your light for a few seconds, try to get the scene in your mind, move out in the darkness, and repeat the process. \_\_\_\_\_
7. An early snow confines you to your small tent. You doze with your small stove going. There is danger if the flame is:
- a) yellow \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) blue \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) red \_\_\_\_\_



8. You must ford a river that has a strong current, large rocks, and some white water. After carefully selecting your crossing spot, you should:
- a) leave your boots and pack on \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) take your boots and pack off \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) take off your pack but leave your boots on \_\_\_\_\_
9. In waist-deep water with a strong current, when crossing the stream, you should face:
- a) upstream \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) across the stream \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) downstream \_\_\_\_\_
10. You find yourself rimrocked; your only route is up. The way is mossy, slippery rock. You should try it:
- a) barefoot \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) with boots on \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) in stocking feet \_\_\_\_\_
11. Unarmed and unsuspecting, you surprise a large bear prowling around your campsite. As the bear rears up about ten metres from you, you should:
- a) run \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) climb the nearest tree \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) freeze, but be ready to back away slowly \_\_\_\_\_



## Wilderness Survival Group Briefing Sheet

Decision by consensus is a method of problem solving and decision making in groups in which all the parties involved actively discuss the issues surrounding the decision. The group thus pools the knowledge and experience of all its members. Any final decision must be supported by each member of the group. The ideas and feelings of all the members are integrated into a group decision, thus allowing several people to work together on a common problem rather than produce a “we-they” stand-off.

As you might imagine, decision by consensus is usually difficult to attain and will consume more time than other methods of deciding an issue. As the energies of the group become focused on the problem at hand (rather than on defending individual points of view), the quality of the decision tends to be enhanced. Research indicates, in fact, that this approach to problem solving and decision making results in a significantly higher quality decision than other methods such as power (voting), minority power (persuasion), and compromise.

### **In the decision by consensus process, each group member is asked to:**

1. Prepare his/her own position prior to meeting with the group (but to realize that the task is incomplete and that the missing pieces are to be supplied by the other members of the group).
2. Recognize an obligation to express his/her own opinion and explain it fully, so that the rest of the group has the benefit of all members' thinking.
3. Recognize an obligation to listen to the opinions and feelings of all other group members and to be ready to modify one's own position on the basis of logic and understanding.
4. Avoid conflict-reducing techniques such as voting, compromising, or giving in to keep the peace and to realize that differences of opinion are helpful; in exploring differences, the best course of action will make itself apparent.

You have just completed an individual solution to Wilderness Survival: A Consensus-Seeking Task.

Now your small task group will decide on a group solution to the same dilemmas. Remember, decision by consensus is difficult to attain and not every decision may meet with everyone's unqualified approval. There should be, however, a general feeling of support from all members before a group decision is made. Take the time you need to listen for understanding, consider all members' views, make your own views known, and be reasonable in arriving at a group decision.



## Facilitator Notes:

### Wilderness Survival Work Sheet

Briefly explain the activity by explaining its purpose, outline, and origin.

- Give the participants 10 minutes to complete the Wilderness Survival Work Sheet and to read the Wilderness Survival Briefing Sheet. After 10 minutes, briefly discuss the Briefing Sheet.
- Have the participants form groups and work on the consensus-seeking task (~ 25 minutes).
- When the groups have completed their tasks, post the statistics for each group as follows:

<b>OUTCOME</b>	<b>GROUP 1</b>	<b>GROUP 2</b>	<b>GROUP 3</b>
Range of individual scores			
Average of individual scores			
Score for Group Consensus			

- Have the groups discuss their consensus-seeking process and outcomes. The focus should be on behaviours that help or hinder group productivity.
- Hand out a copy of the Wilderness Survival Answer and Rationale Sheet to each participant. Announce and post the correct answers and have each participant score his/her own work sheet. A volunteer in each group scores the group's solution and computes the average for the individual scores within the group.
- Lead a group discussion about the process and outcomes. You may include discussions of leadership, compromise, decision-making strategies, psychological climate, roles, and applications of the techniques learned.



## Wilderness Survival Answer and Rationale Sheet

*Ref: Ontario Management Development Program, Effective Supervisory Communications, Module 10: Group Communication*

Here are the recommended courses of action for each of the situations on the Wilderness Survival Work Sheet. These answers come from a comprehensive course on Woodland Survival taught by the Interpretive Service, Monroe County (New York) Parks Department. These responses are considered to be the best rules of thumb for most situations; specific situations, however, might require other courses of action.

1. a) Call help loudly but in a low register. Low tones carry farther, especially in dense woodland. There is a much better chance of being heard if you call loudly, but in a low key. "Help" is a good word to use, because it alerts your companions to your plight. Yelling or screaming would not only be less effective, but might be passed off as a bird call by your friends far away.
2. a) Make a lot of noise with your feet. Snakes do not like people and will usually do everything they can to get out of your way. Unless you surprise or corner a snake, there is a good chance that you will not even see one, let alone come into contact with it. Some snakes do feed at night, and walking softly may bring you right on top of a snake.
3. c) Put a bit of the plant on your lower lip for five minutes; if it seems all right, try a little. The best approach, of course, is to eat only those plants that you recognize as safe. But when you are in doubt and very hungry, you may use the lip test. If the plant is poisonous, you will get a very unpleasant sensation on your lip. Red berries alone do not tell you much about the plant's edibility (unless, of course, you recognize the plant by the berries), and birds just do not have the same digestive systems we do.
4. c) Drink as much as you think you need when you need it. The danger here is dehydration and, once the process starts, your litre of water will not do much to reverse it. Saving or rationing will not help, especially if you are lying unconscious somewhere from sunstroke or dehydration. So, use the water as you need it and be aware of your need to find a water source as soon as possible.
5. c) Dig in the streambed at the outside of a bend. This is the part of the river or stream that flows the fastest, is less silted, the deepest, and the last part to go dry.
6. c) Midway up the slope. A sudden rainstorm might turn the raving into a raging torrent. This has happened to many campers and hikers before they had a chance to escape. The ridge line, on the other hand, increases your exposure to rain, wind, and lightning, should a storm break. The best location is on the slope.



7. b) Put the batteries under your armpits to warm them, and then replace them in the flashlight. Flashlight batteries lose much of their power, and weak batteries run down faster in the cold. Warming the batteries, especially if they are already weak, will restore them for a while. You would normally avoid night travel, of course, unless you were in open country where you could use the stars for navigation. There are just too many obstacles (logs, branches, uneven ground, and so on) that you might injure yourself on - a broken leg, injured eye, or twisted ankle would not help your plight right now. Once the sun sets, darkness falls quickly in a wooded area; it would usually be best to stay at your campsite.
8. a) Yellow. A yellow flame indicates incomplete combustion and a strong possibility of carbon monoxide build-up. Each year, many campers are killed by carbon monoxide poisoning as they sleep or doze in tents, cabins or other enclosed spaces.
9. a) Leave your boots and pack on. Error in fording rivers are a major cause of fatal accidents. Sharp rocks or uneven footing demand that you keep your boots on. If your pack is fairly well-balanced, wearing it will provide you the most stability in the swift current. A waterproof zippered backpack will usually float, even when loaded with normal camping gear; if you step into a hole or deep spot, the pack could become a lifesaver.
10. b) Across the stream. Errors in facing the wrong way in fording a stream are the cause of many drownings. Facing upstream is the worst alternative; the current could push you back and your pack would provide the unbalance to pull you over. You have the best stability facing across the stream, keeping your eye on the exit point on the opposite bank.
11. c) In stocking feet. Here you can pick your route to some degree, and you can feel where you are stepping. Normal hiking boots become slippery, and going barefoot offers your feet no protection at all.
12. c) Freeze, but be ready to back away slowly. Sudden movement will probably startle the bear a lot more than your presence. If the bear is seeking some of your food, do not argue with it; let it forage and be on its way. Otherwise, back away very slowly toward some refuge (trees, rock outcrop, etc.).