



Adventurous activities and gap years

A parents' guide to British Standard BS 8848

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Lots of young people take part in organized activities abroad each year – from abseiling in France to teaching in Africa and hiking in the Himalayas. Activities such as school or university expeditions, adventure holidays, charity challenges and gap years can be great fun, broaden horizons and teach new skills.

But, if your son or daughter is taking part, their safety is bound to be your biggest concern. To help manage risks, British Standard BS 8848 provides a guide to good practice for all visits, fieldwork, expeditions and adventure holidays outside the UK.

BS 8848 – the basics

The British Standard for Adventurous Activities (BS 8848:2007 + A1:2009) sets out minimum safety standards for all aspects of a venture – from activities to transport, staffing and accommodation. It has three core principles:

- **Informed choice** – all risks should be assessed and clearly explained to participants and parents before they book
- **Single provider** – there should be one organization that takes overall responsibility for the venture
- **Capable staff** – all ventures should be run by competent and experienced staff

BS 8848 – the details

The standard can be used for all types of overseas ventures for young people and adults. Organizations that choose to sign up to the standard should:

Assign clear roles and responsibilities

- Identify one individual or organization as the ‘venture provider’ with overall responsibility for all parts of the venture, including those run by third parties
- Appoint a leadership team with relevant training, experience and knowledge of the activities and environment

Plan and prepare

- Assess all aspects of the venture, including travel, accommodation and equipment, for suitability and safety
- Gather information about participants, including any medical conditions, to assess their ability to take part in activities





Provide clear, accurate information

- Give potential participants clear information about price, timings, itineraries, activities, staff expertise and safety issues
- Provide detailed information after booking about accommodation, transport, meals, payment schedules, insurance, and the participants' own responsibilities, for example to obtain relevant visas

Appoint competent staff

- Employ staff with good communication skills and proven competence for the job
- Assign an overall supervisor who knows the skills of the group
- Carry out checks on all staff working unsupervised with children under 18

Be prepared

- Develop written plans to analyse risks and manage safety
- Make all staff aware of the risks of specific activities and locations, for example dehydration or altitude sickness, and develop procedures to minimize and manage risks
- Ensure staff have access to medical advice and support and know what to do and who to contact in the event of illness, accident or emergency
- Produce a written incident and emergency plan for each venture

Checklist

- **Choose the right venture** – Help your son or daughter find a project that suits them. Where do they want to go? What do they want to do? How long do they want to go for? Are they fit enough to take part? What will it cost in total? It's worth getting information from several providers to compare what's on offer
- **Check credentials** – How long has the organization been running? Can you speak to previous participants? Does the venture comply with BS 8848? If not, ask why
- **Know before you go** – Before booking, it is vital that you and your child know exactly what is involved in the venture. Where will they stay, what will they be doing and what are the potential safety issues? Make sure you have all the information you need and don't be afraid to ask questions
- **Find out who is responsible** – There should be one clearly identified 'venture provider' and a named venture leader in charge. Make sure you know who it is
- **Signing up** – Read the terms of the contract carefully before you book. If your son or daughter is under 18, you will need to sign on their behalf
- **Information pack** – Once you've booked you should get a detailed pack of information about the venture
- **Emergency contacts** – Know how to contact your child while they are away and make sure the venture provider has your contact details
- **Complaints** – If you have any complaints, contact the venture provider in the first instance. If you need any help or advice about making a complaint, contact your local Citizens Advice Bureau (see 'Useful information')

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Frequently asked questions

Q. What is BSI?

A. BSI is the UK National Standards Body, which has been developing standards for more than 100 years to make products and services safer for consumers. Standards set out good practice and guidelines for organizations to follow.

Q. Must all organizations that run adventurous activities abroad comply with the standard?

A. No, the standard is voluntary. If an organization decides to use the standard, it can choose to 'self-assess' or to employ an external auditor to check that it complies with the standard. Before booking, ask for written confirmation that the venture is compliant and how this compliance was assessed.

Q. If an organization doesn't follow the standard is it breaking the law?

A. It is not a legal requirement to follow the standard. But, if an organization claims to comply with the standard, then doesn't, it is a misrepresentation and can be reported to Trading Standards. Even if it does not claim compliance, in the event of a serious complaint or incident, the standard could be used in a court of law to provide a benchmark of best practice.

Q. Where can I find a copy of BS 8848?

A. Your local public library may be able to help you access a reference copy, or you can buy a copy from BSI at shop.bsigroup.com

Useful information

British Standards (BSI)

020 8996 9001

www.bsigroup.com

Citizens Advice

www.adviceguide.org.uk/consumer

Foreign & Commonwealth Office

(for travel advice)

www.gov.uk/fco

GapAdvice.Org

www.gapadvice.org

Royal Geographical Society

020 7591 3030

www.rgs.org/GO

Trading Standards

www.tradingstandards.gov.uk

Universities Safety and Health Association

www.usha.org.uk

Year Out Group

www.yearoutgroup.org

Young Explorers' Trust

www.theyet.org

The BSI logo consists of the lowercase letters 'bsi' in a bold, black, sans-serif font. A small red dot is positioned to the right of the 'i'.

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