

Fieldcraft Academy

Planning Method



When venturing in the outdoors, sometimes the only thing you can truly expect is the unexpected. From a sudden change in the weather, to a chance encounter with wildlife just over the next hill, or a slip on wet ground and the turn of an ankle, it is always best to be prepared for all possibilities. Sometimes the unexpected can be a potentially serious situation; a fall with a head injury, a more severe leg injury due to fall on rough terrain, or a weather related injury. An unexpected situation can quickly become life threatening, even when it happens to experienced outdoor adventurers. Knowing what to do in an emergency situation can be the difference between life and death, so having a four phase plan and a specific emergency plan are essential before setting out on any outdoor adventure.

Sound planning guidelines call for a four phase process using the **PACE** method:

- **Primary**
- **Alternate**
- **Contingency**
- **Emergency**

When faced with an emergency situation, you should always follow the emergency response strategy:

- **Gather all information and make a full assessment**

Make a full assessment of the situation. Is anyone injured, or does anyone require immediate first aid or medical attention. Stop, drop your gear and gather the entire group together. Take a moment to breathe and if necessary, start to make a series of notes on your situation, the resources that you have available, and allow for input from every member of the group. Taking a little time at the moment that a situation presents itself to calm down and gather all of the available information will help you to determine what you are dealing with, and contribute to your course of action/action plan.

- **Orient yourself to your surroundings**

Stop and look at your map, and take a detailed look at your surroundings. Are you certain of your location, and can you confirm it using terrain association. Where is the closest road or pick-up point if you need an emergency extraction.

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What resources are available in your immediate area, and how accessible are additional resources. Are there any physical barriers to communicating with any support or Search and Rescue Team. Does the terrain present any obstacles to getting back to a base camp or pick-up point or vehicles.

- **Determine if you need to bug out or stay put**

Is there a life threatening injury or situation that requires advanced medical care - as in the situation with heart attack or stroke symptoms. Is there a threatening weather front approaching that can threaten your entire group? Will you need additional equipment to move an injured person? Is there a Search and Rescue Team available to alert for assistance, or can you get back to your base camp or vehicles. Is there any difficulty communicating from your current location, and would moving allow for definitive communication with any support or assistance? If there is any doubt in being able to get your entire group out safely, it may be better to hunker down and wait out any storm or wait to travel in the daylight rather than risk additional or further injuries.

- **Determine the best course of action**

Once you compile all of the information and consider all facets of your situation, you can make a decision on your best course of action. Is it best to stay put, or try to walk out of your current situation. Should you call for assistance from Search and Rescue, or send a few members of your party for assistance. Whatever course of action you chose, it is essential that you do not put any members of your group in greater danger or higher level of risk. It is also important to know the capabilities of your group to not push group members beyond their limits in an already emergent situation.

- **Delegate tasks and responsibilities**

In any emergency situation, it is always essential to delegate as many tasks as possible. What task and how much you can delegate depends on the skill set of the members of your group, and their confidence in being able to fulfill an assigned task. Sharing the tasks not only allows you to continue to monitor the situation as a whole, but it also keeps other group members involved in the entire process, and helps to maintain the morale of the group. It also allow you as the group leader to make any necessary adjustments to your action plan and re-assign tasks as needed to maximize the collective efforts of the group.

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- Make use of all available equipment

Every member of the group should have the *Absolute Essentials*, and their full outdoor kit. The group should have two team-level first aid kits. Look around in your area for any additional resources, and make an inventory of everything that you have available to the group as a whole. Use the first aid kits one at a time to conserve the limited resources of the group. If possible, have every member of the group replenish their canteen/water bottle provided there is a reliable water source in the immediate area.

- Continue to reassess the situation, and make adjustments as needed

Your situation may change in an instant, and without warning; any injured person may take a turn for the worst, or the weather may shift more rapidly than expected. It may become dark quicker than you thought. It is essential as the group leader to be aware of the overall situation and the status of the group members. Make sure that all of the members of the group are maintaining their physiological needs of core body temperature, their level of hydration, and to keep their caloric intake up while under stress - both physical and situational. If the situation is changing more rapidly than your initial plan, don't hesitate and stop a movement if possible, and wait out the dark or severe weather. Keep in mind that as the group leader, the overall safety of every group member is your primary concern.