

## When should survival training begin?

Actually, to be safe, you should gradually begin providing survival training to your Scouts from their first camping trip with you, especially if your Scout Group has an active outdoor program that provides progressively more challenging outdoor activities as your Scouts become older.

During the early 1970s there was a case where a young Scout became lost during a Troop winter camping trip in a State Park in Vermont. Although these Scouts were from a city in another state, they were quite well prepared for emergencies. The first item on the weekend program was a short training course in winter survival technique.

The Scout in question was one whose temper could get the better of him. Something happened in camp, and it did. He stomped off into the forest. The other Scouts didn't think much about this, since he had done such things before. This time, though, he didn't return, and was not noticed to be missing until dinner-time, when the other Scouts first noticed he was not around.

After a quick search of the area, the adult Leaders called the sheriff's department, and search teams began assembling. It was beginning to snow, and would continue snowing heavily for the next several hours. It was after dark, the snow was falling so heavily that sounds were very muffled. In conditions like these, the only searching that could be done was accomplished by walking the area roads, to see if he had crossed any. This was inconclusive, because the snow was falling fast enough to cover footprints only a half an hour old. Further activity would place the searchers at risk, so the night passed with planning, resting, and interviewing the Scouts, their Leaders, and the boy's parents, who had now arrived at the campsite.

The victim profile we derived from the interviews told us that the Scout was very intelligent, but that he had trouble controlling his emotions and that he had very little experience in camping or other outdoor skills. As bad as the weather was, we feared the worst.

Meanwhile, their Scout was making the best of the survival training he had been given earlier in the day. It had taken him awhile to figure out that he was lost. He had very little with him in terms of equipment, but was well-dressed for the weather. He tried shouting, but soon figured this was futile, since he could hear the falling snow soaking up the sound.

It was getting dark, and he knew he could not move around safely in the woods in the dark, so he found a spruce tree with low branches that came to the ground, and he made use of this tree, with some added snow, to make himself a small shelter against the tree's trunk. He had trail mix and other snacks in his pocket, and he used these for food. Although his night was certainly much chillier than he would have liked, and he didn't get any sleep to speak of, he made it through the night in good shape.

The next morning, the Scout thought about whether or not he should stay where he was, and wait for someone to come and get him. It was still snowing hard, and he could not see very far. There was a point, though where he distinctly heard the sound of a snowmobile not very far away. Reasoning that his best chance of being found would be if he was on a snowmobile trail, he moved off in that direction.

Not long after he reached the snowmobile trail and began walking along it, he was found by one of our searchers. In this case, chances are that he would not have been found in time if he had remained at his tree shelter. As it was, he was very fortunate in that he only had very mild hypothermia and minor frostbite to a few toes.

The thing to keep in mind here is that he survived ONLY because of the brief training he had received before and at the beginning of this, his first winter camp. Would he have received basic survival training early enough in YOUR Scout Group?