



# SURVIVAL SKILLS

---

**Grade level:** 4-7

**Provincial curriculum links:** Ontario

**Subject:** Science and Technology

## SPECIFIC LESSON GOALS

- ☆ Teamwork
- ☆ Learn the seven basic survival needs of our bodies
- ☆ Discover what materials will help us meet these needs to survive emergency situations
- ☆ Understand the consequences of decisions affecting personal health and safety.

## DESCRIPTION

Learning how to survive in an emergency situation is important for everyone. Although wilderness-based survival situations are most common, survival situations can occur in urban and rural environments, too. The following activities will help participants learn about the definition of a survival situation, what basic needs must be met to ensure survival, and creative solutions for survival situations.

The three mini-activities in this lesson will work well for school conservation days, in class presentations, after school activity, Boys and Girls Clubs, camp nature session, and many other learning situations

## PREPARATION

**Length of lesson:** 30-60mins

### **Do Ahead:**

- Cut out and laminate the “Basic Needs” and “Length of Time” signs
- Assemble a survival kit (optional)

## RESOURCES REQUIRED:

- Writing utensils and paper (1 per group)
- “Basic Needs” signs
- “Length of Time” signs
- “Essentials to Put in Your Daypack” handout
- “The Seven Basic Survival Needs” handout
- Complete survival kit (optional)
- Evaluation

## **PROCEDURE**

### **Activity: Introduction to Survival Skills**

Bring the group together and facilitate a discussion about their current ideas on the topic of “survival skills.” Ask them to name a “survival situation.” Typically, they will identify situations like a plane crash or hurricane that has a remote chance of happening to them. Then ask them to describe an event that *could* happen to them. What events could quickly turn into survival situations? Some possibilities include:

- Car crash, particularly in the winter time
- Getting lost in the woods
- Hunting accidents
- Boating accidents
- Severe local weather incidents, such as thunderstorms or tornadoes

Explain that the group will work together to learn about survival skills in everyday situations and decide what basic needs our bodies need to survive and what items can help us meet these needs.

### **Activity: Seven Basic Needs**

For this activity you can keep the group together or divide into smaller groups. First, ask participants to identify the seven basic needs their bodies need to survive. When a youth or small group correctly names one of these needs, hand them the sign for that need and have them stand in front, holding the sign so everyone can see it.

As each need is listed, briefly define this need for the group and highlight why it is important. Ask the youth to give examples of when they have gone without each need for any extended period of time. For example, “Has anyone ever gone 24 hours without sleeping? What did you feel like? How did your body behave?” Continue until all the “needs” are up in front.

Now, ask the group to arrange the needs from “most” to “least” important. The need that we can live without for the least amount of time should be first and the need we can live without for the most amount of time should be last. Allow the group several opportunities to get the order correct. After each attempt, tell them which needs are in the right spot and which are still wrong. Once they have the correct order, ask them to also guess how long a person can go without that need.

As they correctly come up with the answers, give the “needs” their corresponding “length of time” sign. When all of this is done, ask if there are any questions and clarify any points that the participants do not understand. Emphasize that they will need to know and use this information in the next activity.

### **Activity: Gilligan’s Island**

Divide the group into small groups of 3-4 participants. Each group should have a piece of paper and a writing utensil.

*Present the following scenario to the groups:* You have been ship wrecked on an island that is exactly like where you are right now. It has the same climate, vegetation, and weather. You must survive on this island for seven days. Unfortunately, the wreckage of the airplane has disappeared. You only had time to take three things out of the airplane to help you survive. Your group may take any three items you can think of, *but* all of the items must fit into a small backpack. Tell them that electronic devices used to contact others for help do not work on this island. What three items did you take?

Give the group about 10 minutes to discuss which three items they would have taken from the airplane to help them survive. When the groups are done with their discussions, each group will present their three items to everyone. The groups should list their three items and give reasons why they choose each item. Other groups are welcome to ask them questions. Discuss the merits of each group's answers and the pro and cons of their selections.

## **Activity: Top Ten Survival Items**

This final activity assists the youth in applying this information to an imaginary survival situation. When all the groups are finished, present the "Top 10 Survival Items" that the experts believe are important in a survival situation. The three items each group decided on may or may not be on this list. By presenting the "Top Ten" list, it gives the youth a chance to analyze the decision of survival skills "experts." After the list is presented, you may want to give the youth time to talk about the list and if they agree or disagree with the items and their importance.

If possible, it is nice to collect the ten items (or pictures of the items) in advance and place them in a bag. As you discuss an item, pull it out of the bag and show it to the group.

### **TALK IT OVER**

#### **Reflect:**

- What is the most important thing to remember in a survival situation?
- What piece of information will you most likely remember?
- If your group was really stranded on an island, what would have been the most helpful thing to remember?
- How did your small team perform during this activity? Were you an effective team?

#### **Apply:**

- What from this activity could you apply to your life?
- What are some ways that you could be a more effective team member in the future?
- What new teamwork behaviors did you learn during these activities? Where else could you use them in your life?

## HELPFUL HINTS

You may switch the order of the activities by facilitating the “Gilligan Island” activity first. In this method, the youth would be involved in a hands-on activity at the start of the lesson. By facilitating the lesson in the order presented (Gilligan Island activity after the Seven Basic Needs activity), the youth have an opportunity to use the knowledge they learned about basic needs and apply that to their group decision in “Gilligan Island.” The order of activities is left up to the individual facilitator.

Because this lesson is meant to encourage the development of teambuilding skills and youth/adult partnerships in its participants, it’s a good idea to keep the following ideas in mind:

- Youth who have pre-existing knowledge or experience in the area of survival skills can be recruited to co-facilitate some of the activities or give examples of their personal experiences in survival or semi-survival situations. These youth can also serve as team leaders or “resources” for the groups during the Gilligan Island activity.
- If possible, know your group ahead of time; have an idea of what size small groups will facilitate effective teamwork. Sometimes groups of three work well, other times groups of five may work better. Split the entire group into the optimum-sized small groups for the Gilligan’s Island activity.
- Front-load the lesson and individual activities with tips for good teamwork. For example, before the Gilligan’s Island activity, you can highlight traits of effective teamwork: listening to each other, using all the team members’ skills, using a group decision-making process, and engaging all team members in the discussion.
- If desired, you can break the entire group into small groups for the Seven Basic Needs activity. Each small group may be asked to come up with a basic need as a group and then present their answer to the entire class. When the youth are working in small teams, walk around and facilitate effective teamwork through questions and short discussions. Ask the entire team to present their answers, not just one spokesperson.

# The Seven Basic Survival Needs

In any survival situation, the following seven basic needs must be met.

- 1. PMA (Positive Mental Attitude, or “Don’t lose your head!”):** The most important thing in any survival situation is not to panic. Your brain is your best tool for inventorying what resources you have and for coming up with a plan to provide for your needs. Panic can lead to making irrational, counter-productive decisions that actually make the situation worse, not better.  
**How long? 3 seconds.** If your car breaks through the ice on a frozen lake and you panic, you may waste time pounding against the windows when you should be rolling them down. People have saved themselves by popping the trunk, pulling down the back seats and swimming out.
- 2. AIR (oxygen):** Although we take air for granted, in a drowning, choking, or toxic fume situation it becomes critical to maintain an adequate supply of oxygen to the brain.  
**How Long? 3 minutes.** After that, brain cells begin to die.
- 3. SHELTER:** A shelter is used to conserve the heat your body already has. Clothing is considered shelter because it traps a layer of warm air and holds it next to your body. Shelters do *not* add heat. Fires or electric blankets may add heat. Would you be warmer standing outside in winter in a swimsuit next to a fire, or in a parka and snowpants with no fire? The best way to keep warm is to keep from losing heat.  
**How long? 3 hours.** If you are wet and exposed to wind and/or cold temperatures, failure to seek shelter can lead to fatal hypothermia. Keeping yourself *dry* and out of the *wind* are the two most important assets of any shelter.
- 4. WARMTH:** If you are in an extended survival situation that may last for days, shelter alone may not be enough to prevent frostbite and/or hypothermia. Warmth can be added through building a fire or drinking hot liquids. Physical activity of any kind will increase blood flow and raise body temperature. The body heat from a warm person can be used to add heat to a cold person.  
**How long? 3 hours-3 days:** The length of time varies, depending upon conditions.
- 5. REST (sleep):** Any physical activity will burn calories – energy that cannot be used later. Resting will conserve calories so that they may be burned slowly for warmth over time. Before any activity, make sure to weigh the benefits and costs, especially if you have no food to give yourself more energy.  
**How long? 1-3 days:** Variable, depending upon conditions. About 24 hours without sleep or rest will lead to fuzzy thinking and bad decision making for most people.
- 6. WATER:** It is possible to survive a full three days without water, but as the body dehydrates it begins to function less efficiently. Water loss can occur through breathing, sweating, and evaporation.  
**How long? 3 days:** Especially in winter, people forget to drink because they are not hot. Drink even *before* you are thirsty! Thirst is a warning signal telling you that you are already dehydrated. If snow is the only source of water, melt it first so you do not cool your body temperature by eating snow.
- 7. FOOD:** In most survival situations, food is not a top priority. However, food helps your body stay warm by adding calories to burn and raising body temperature by activating your metabolism.  
**How long? 3 weeks:** Without food, your body will burn fat reserves as fuel. After fat reserves are used up, the body will begin to metabolize protein, burning muscle as a food source.

## Essentials to Put in Your Daypack

Here are 10 essential items that you will want to take with you on a hike . . . plus five extra optional items.

1. Knife: a small, folding model with a locking-blade will do. All-purpose knives are big and bulky and tend to get left behind.
2. Cigarette lighter: The plastic variety. The striker won't work if wet, so keep it dry and warm.
3. Garbage bag: You can use it as a sack for an unplanned "bivouac." You can use it as a rain jacket when you're caught in a storm. You can even use it as an insulating layer by putting it on, then stuffing it with leaves or grass. It also works well for carrying water.
4. 1-2 full bottles of water.
5. High-energy food like a sports bar, candy bar, or dried fruit.
6. Map and compass.
7. Rain gear.
8. Extra warm clothes.
9. Whistle and mirror for signaling.
10. Small medical kit.
11. Sunglasses.
12. Headlamp with spare batteries and bulbs.
13. Fire starter.
14. Iodine for treating water.
15. Emergency kit with everything from fish hooks to nylon cord.

SAM

**Positive Mental  
Attitude**

**3 Seconds**

**Air**

**3 Minutes**

Shelter

3 Hours

Warmth

3 Hours -

3 Days



**Rest**

**1 - 3 Days**

**Water**

**3 Days**

Food

3 Weeks

SAMPLE L

### Evaluation: Survival Skills

Please circle the number that shows your level of understanding or learning in this session.

	<u>A little</u>		<u>Some</u>		<u>A lot</u>
1. I understand the basic needs for survival:	1	2	3	4	5
2. I feel confident that I will be able to use the safety guidelines:	1	2	3	4	5
3. I feel confident that I adequately understand the need for safety in order to survive:	1	2	3	4	5

Final comments:

SAMPLE LESSON