The School
Travel Consultancy

A guide to planning exceptional
educational adventures & school expeditions

Part 2

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Section 2:
Communications and Crisis management

Communication Structure

Good communications are vital to managing groups in the field in the case of an incident. They also provide the opportunity to bring the benefits of expeditions and field trips to the wider audience back home. However, poor communication policies and inability to contain incidents can have dire consequences in the case of an emergency.

Your tour operator will have the necessary communications in place to contact the group at anytime, day or night. Your school's communications structure should be able to:

- Relay non-emergency news and updates from the field, as the trip and terrain dictate.
- Send information and news to the group from home (via the tour operator if necessary)
- Restrict the flow of information through certain channels in a crisis situation.
- Communicate with parents in a structured way, in ordinary and crisis situations.

Establish a Home Contact

You should have in place at least one designated member of staff (ideally two) who is familiar with the school's crisis response plans and who can be contacted 24 hours a day. Details of this member of staff and contact numbers are collected through our pre-departure information form.

The responsibilities of the home contact are:

- To be contactable 24 hours a day whilst the group is overseas.
- To instigate the school's crisis management system in the event of an incident.
- To act as first point of contact for parents if issues arise in the UK that require the group to be contacted (e.g. illness or death of a family member).
- To disseminate information to parents, colleagues, and other students as to the progress of the expedition/tour as and when updates are received (see also blogging / social media and communication systems)

Prior to departure we will provide the following information for your home contacts (see sample crisis sheet in the Appendix):

- Emergency numbers of the tour operator
- In-country contacts for local operator and guides
- Emergency services numbers
- British Embassy / Consulate contact information
- Your insurance details and emergency contact information
- A spreadsheet of participant information covering:
    - Dates of birth, passport names, numbers and expiry dates
    - Pre-existing medical conditions & special dietary requirements

It is the school's responsibility to ensure that your home contact has the necessary training and access to the following information:

- Next of kin contact details for all those abroad – including staff
- Emergency crisis plan and contact numbers. These might include:
    - Legal advisers
    - A nominated person to deal with media enquiries and provide interviews
    - Local Authority / Governors

Telephone Trees

Telephone and/or text 'trees' are useful ways of updating parents on the progress of the trip, as well as letting all necessary parties know of changes in arrival / departure timings.

Student mobiles: Should they stay or should they go?

We live in a world where there is mobile signal in the middle of the Sahara Desert and on the summit of Mount Everest. Such access to communications is both a blessing and potentially a huge problem. You should consider what policy you have on students taking mobiles abroad.

Potential issues with students bringing mobiles

- Ill thought through text messages (to or from home) can create unnecessary worries, anxiety or instigate emergency responses when there is no emergency.
- In a crisis, information flow needs to be carefully controlled through the right channels. If you decide to allow student mobiles, we recommend mobiles are handed in to staff in an emergency situation.
- Facebook updates and text messages ruin the ambience of remote camps in desert/jungle/mountainous areas (trust us, we've seen it happen!!)
- Students are on the trip to discover different cultures, scenery and experiences. Are updates from back home necessary and/or do they have a place?

Should you ban mobiles? Pros and Cons

- If you decide on a blanket ban, you risk students finding a way around it and mobile use going 'below radar'.
- For many young people, their mobile is their only camera.
- As a society, there is a commonly held view that young people don't take responsibilities for their own actions. If we ban mobiles, we are removing the chance for them to handle the responsibility.
- Sometimes on remote trips, information from the outside world, as long as trickled through at appropriate times, is a good thing. It could be felt as a 'bit of a luxury' rather than an intrusion into the expedition environment. News creates conversation and makes you feel that you are involved with the rest of the world, even if for a short time.

Establishing a mobile policy

For effective management and containment of crisis information whilst abroad, mobile policy should be discussed and agreed with the underlined students and parents prior to departure. The potential issues and reasons for any mobile bans or limited use policies should be outlined and are key to successful implementation. See also *'Establishing tour/expedition rules'*

Using mobiles abroad

Ensure any personal or school mobiles taken overseas will work. **Contact your network provider to check:**

- You have the necessary network permissions to make and receive calls in your destination.
- Your handsets are set up to receive calls in the country you are visiting.
- If planning to use an overseas SIM card, will it work in your phone?

How to call a UK mobile that is abroad (e.g. staff leader mobile) from the UK:
Just phone the normal number with no 00 or country code. Calls should automatically route through to you wherever you are.

How to call a UK mobile (in-destination) from a landline also in-destination:
00 (or equivalent international dialling code) + 44 + mobile number (minus initial 0)

How to call a UK mobile from another UK mobile – both are abroad:
00 (or equivalent international dialling code) + 44 + mobile number (minus initial 0)

Crisis Management Overview

Even the best planning and safety management systems cannot guarantee that incidents will never occur. The key to successful crisis management is preparation, planning and good communication. Here we look at an overview of crisis management and what basic procedures your school should have in place.

Professional advice should be sought from commercial organisations and/or Local Authorities in order to set up a full crisis response plan for your school.

What constitutes a crisis?
Possible crisis situations may include one or more of the following;

- Health – acute illness, allergic reaction etc
- Group caught in civil unrest, or as victims of crime
- Natural disaster – flood, earthquake, fire
- Terrorist activity or civil insurrection
- A student, teacher or leader is arrested or jailed
- Road traffic accident
- The death of a student, teacher or leader
- Serious incident / death at home (parents / family) or at school

Crisis Test
Will any of the following parties be likely to become involved in the incident? If yes, then deal with the incident as a crisis.
- Media
- LEA
- School / Governors
- Parents
- Medical
- Lawyers
- British Consulate (possibly)

What if…?

This is perhaps the most important question to ask in the build-up to your trip. You need to identify 'what if' scenarios and analyse possible reactions. What if ….. … happened? What would we *actually* do? How would we overcome the problem? Some example 'what ifs?' include:

- A teacher suddenly comes down ill the night before you are due to travel. Can a replacement teacher get a visa in time or will the whole group have to remain at home?
- Ash clouds from a volcano mean the group cannot fly home at the designated time.
- Someone in the group loses his/her passport?
- Two students fail to come back from a market visit in central Marrakech.
- Your coach crashes. The driver, guide and all teachers sitting in the front are killed. Would the students know what to do or where to get help?
- A power cut at school means your emergency / crisis computer records are not accessible.
- Two teachers get confused over who is responsible for head counts.
- A parent at home is taken seriously ill. Who is going to break the new to the student abroad and when is the right time? (see "incidents at home" in next section)

What other "What if?" scenarios can you think of and how would you react?

Notification & receiving '*the* call'

The school could be notified of a crisis situation by any of the following parties:
- A student or teacher on the trip
- The Tour Operator
- Local Police
- Parents (either having heard about an incident on the trip, or notifying the home contact of an incident at home)
- Media

Notification may come through:
- Telephone
- Email
- Text
- Media reports
- Social media 'leaks'

The crisis phone call

Whether calling from abroad to indicate a crisis, or receiving a call from abroad as home contact, it is vital that as much of the following information as possible is delivered/obtained as quickly as possible:

- Name of who is calling
- Their telephone number and any other contact details they can provide
- What has happened
- Where they are – exact location (including name of hotel/hospital, town and country)
- Ask how they are

If your home contact is unsure of what the caller is saying then it may be necessary to repeat things to the caller for clarification. If possible, offer to call the person back to save their phone costs or phone credit. Then continue to collect information as follows:

- More details of what has happened
- What time did incident occur?
- How did it happen?
- Who is involved – obtain exact names.
- Was anyone else involved?
- Where is everyone now?
- Who is aware of the incident?

With media spread around the world there may be **less than an hour** for the story to be controlled so it is important to get facts in place as quickly as possible.

It is vital that your home contact records all of the above details and immediately initiates the crisis response plan. They need to be prepared to generate a short press release that can be circulated if necessary.

Record all communications and actions – who did what, where and when.

The crisis team and planning ahead

A crisis is a challenging and emotionally draining time for anyone involved. Your home contact will be stressed and having a support network they can put in place immediately will help the smooth handling of a crisis.

Have you considered:

- Provision for in-coming and out-going calls on different lines?

- Access to school records?

- Food & drink provision for those working in the crisis room and/or parents waiting at school for information?

- On-site sleeping arrangements?

- Who is part of the wider crisis team?

- Who will look after other students in the school if teachers / management are involved in the management of an overseas crisis?

- A nominated person to

    o Brief parents?
    o Deal with the media?

- Establishing passwords for parents and next of kin to ensure information is not given to the wrong people and/or the press?

- How will details of the incident and information relating to those involved be contained?

Incidents at home

While much effort is concentrated on the safety of the group overseas (and the management of an incident involving them) it is also worth spending some time considering how to manage an incident back home.

Typical incidents back home might include:
- A death or serious illness of a family member
- An incident amongst the school community (death of a pupil/staff member, for instance).

There are various aspects that need to be considered:

- **The lead teacher needs to know.** Communication between the school's home contact and the lead teacher is important. This may be through the tour operator or direct, but the leadership team needs to be aware of the situation as they are in the best place to make decisions on who should be told what and when.

- Managing inbound communication into the group (e.g. mobiles and/or comments on blogs/social media etc) is critical in case bad news is revealed to an individual in a poor situation.

- At a Young Explorers' Trust Forum debate on the topic, there was general agreement that in some circumstances (e.g. if evacuation or returning home would be difficult and/or lengthy), it may be better not to tell individuals of an incident back home until nearer the time of return or likely evacuation.

Dealing with next of kin

Dealing with passengers and their family directly can be the most stressful and worrying part of any crisis and it is very easy to become emotionally involved. Passengers and next of kin are likely to become stressed, sometimes angry, usually because they feel that events are not moving quickly enough for their liking.

Top tips:

- It is very important to remain calm.

- Issue passwords to parents and next of kin to ensure information is only passed on to those that should receive it.

- Ensure parents are regularly kept up to date – either in person or through pre-arranged channels such as email or text messages.

- Keep to promised update times, even if there is no news to update with.

- If a student or staff member has died then <u>the police should always inform next of kin</u> as they have specially trained people for this.

In summary

- Ensure sound procedures are in place well before you travel
- Identify "What if" scenarios and plan accordingly
- Ensure all members of staff understand their roles (includes staff on the trip and staff back home)
- Decide early on what documentation you need to take with you when abroad so you have all relevant contact details and insurance information ready in case of an incident.
- Consider asking for passport sizes photos of each student so should a student become lost then local police know who to look for.
- Put together a contingency plan and policies for dealing with / informing parents, local and national media, and other students in case of incident.

What to do at the scene:

If your group is involved in an incident overseas, the following is recognised as a useful checklist to follow:
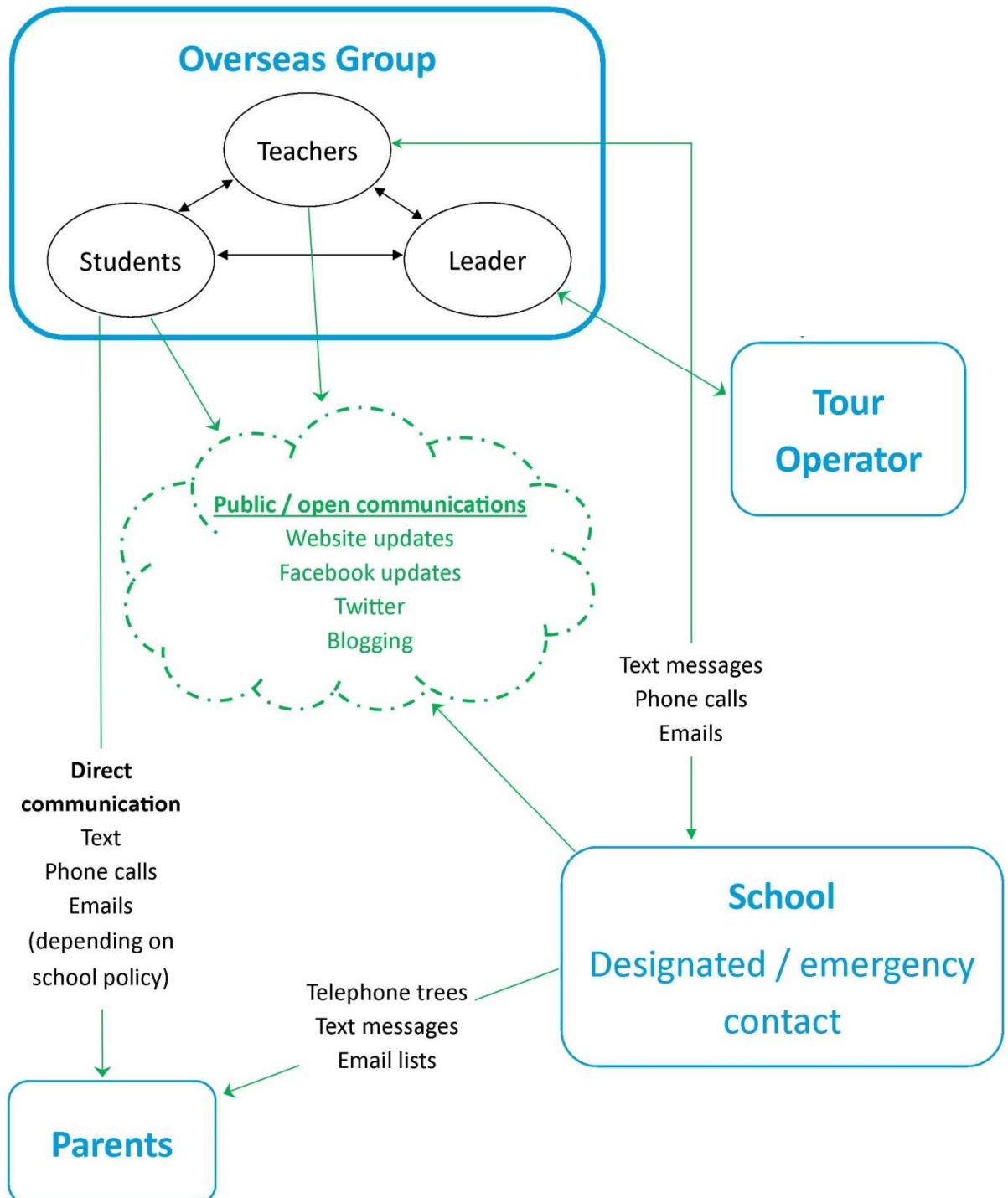
- Assess the situation & establish the nature and extent of the situation

- Ensure you are safe. If you become injured then you cannot help other people

- Ensure the rest of the group are safe

- Establish casualties and get immediate medical attention if required

- Ensure all group members are aware of the situation and follow emergency procedures

- Keep the group together as far as possible

- Ensure casualties are accompanied to hospital

- Monitor the group

- Control use of mobiles by collecting in all mobiles from the group.

- Inform appropriate organisations (tour operator, local operator, home contact, travel insurers)

- Notify the police if necessary

- Keep a record of all details of the incident. e.g. nature, time, incident, location, names, injuries, action taken etc.

- Gather contact names and numbers of witnesses, police, hospitals. Take photos of the scene if applicable. Do not admit liability.

- Complete accident report form

Above All: REMAIN CALM

Record all communications and actions – who did what, where and when.

Non-emergency Communications

Suggested communications route for non-emergency situations:

Overseas Group

Teachers

Students

Leader

Public / open communications
Website updates
Facebook updates
Twitter
Blogging

Tour Operator

Text messages
Phone calls
Emails

Direct communication
Text
Phone calls
Emails
(depending on school policy)

School
Designated / emergency contact

Telephone trees
Text messages
Email lists

Parents

Crisis or Emergency Communications

Suggested communications route for crisis situations:

Overseas Group

Teachers

Students

Leader

Tour Operator

Press releases

Public / open communications
suspended during crisis situations

Consider all communication through tour operator to ensure no loss of information

Direct communication
Suspended during crisis situations

School
Designated / emergency contact

Telephone trees
Text messages
Email lists
Meetings

Parents

Police
Local Authority

Press releases

That's all folks. Look out for our next instalments which will run you through:

Section 3: Educational Opportunities
Maximising the educational benefit
Communicating the adventure experience

Section 4: Marketing & Fundraising
Marketing your expedition/adventure
Fundraising
Fundraising: keeping it Legal & Safe
A to Z of fundraising ideas

Section 5: Whilst you are away
Money Management
Tipping Guide
Personal Health & Hygiene
Safety management abroad
Water Safety
Returning home

Section 6: Responsible Tourism
Introduction
Environmental Considerations
Ethical Awareness
Cultural Awareness

Section 7: Sources of Information & Sample Forms
Useful links
Sample forms

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