

New Caver Orientation – Leader Outline



1. Welcome and Introductions – tailor per the audience
 - a. New cavers – What is it about caving that appeals to you?
 - b. Seasoned cavers – How long have you been a caver? How did you get into caving?
 - c. Leaders – How long have you been a caver? Share a BRIEF story about a cave trip you were on where something went wrong or where you dodged a bullet
2. Purpose of orientation
 - a. Not to be considered “training,” but to give you information that you can use to keep yourself and those that you cave with safe and avoid a rescue situation
 - b. Explain rescue math (for every hour into the cave that you have travelled, it could potentially take 8 hours for you to be rescued from the cave)
 - c. Explain rescue resources and the toll that a rescue can take on a cave
3. How would you describe caving? Participant responses may include—
 - a. Dark
 - b. Underground
 - c. Dirty
 - d. Summarize with this quote: “It’s kind of like twister. It’s a three-dimensional puzzle you got to solve with your body.” —Keely Owens, DC Grotto (WAMU Metro Connection, Feb 3, 2012)
4. Cave environment (Keep it brief and appropriate to your audience! This is more relevant to use with scouts and youth groups.)
 - a. Formations – define basic formations
 - i. Stalactite and stalagmite – how to remember which is which
 - b. Critters – bats, insects, lizards
 - c. Physical environment – dark, humid, dusty, and cool
 - i. Temperature generally stays constant at the average annual temperature of the region—around here, that is 55-56 degrees
5. Cave conservation
 - a. Protecting the cave environment
 - b. White nose syndrome – decontaminating your gear
 - c. Everything presented in this orientation supports conservation of cave resources
 - i. Being mindful of what you learn today will help you to protect yourself and the cave
 - d. Overview of NSS
 - i. What’s a grotto?
 - ii. Caver’s motto: Take nothing but pictures; leave nothing but footprints; kill nothing but time.
6. Types of caving/movement through cave (Keep it brief and appropriate to your audience! This is more relevant to use with scouts and youth groups.)
 - a. Horizontal – may require many types of movement through the cave
 - i. Walking
 - ii. Crawling
 - iii. Climbing
 - iv. Chimneying
 - v. Shimming
 - vi. Swimming
 - b. Vertical – not the focus of this orientation – this is for advanced cavers
 - i. Rappelling
 - ii. Ascending

- c. Cave diving – again, not the focus of this orientation – can be very dangerous!! Requires specialized training.
- 7. Common dangers and fears
 - a. Claustrophobia
 - b. Getting stuck
 - c. Getting lost
 - d. Falling
 - e. Drowning
 - f. Falling rocks
 - g. Hypothermia
 - h. Flooding
 - i. Illness (discuss medical concerns)
 - j. Running out of light
- 8. Caving safety and trip etiquette (Refer to Dos and Don'ts handout)

Dos	Don'ts
Check the Closed Cave List for cave closure status, and get permission from the landowner if necessary.	Never enter a cave without express or implied permission from its owner.
Cave in groups of 4 or more people.	Never cave alone.
Move cautiously. Be aware of your surroundings, and look before you move. Maintain three points of contact at all times when climbing (and even when walking!).	Don't jump. Don't run. Don't be a daredevil.
Honor your personal limitations. Choose the safer alternative. Ask for help.	Don't do anything you don't want to do. Don't get hurt!!
Inform your trip leader of any medical conditions. Bring any medications you may need.	Don't get sick.
Feed and water yourself as needed. Do your best to stay warm and dry. Wear the right clothes.	Don't wear yourself out or let yourself run out of steam. Don't get hungry. Don't get cold.
Stay with the group. Give each other space. <i>Leader: Explain the "Angel" philosophy, whereby cavers should keep an eye on the person behind them, offering helpful advice or offering a hand as needed. This keeps the group together.</i>	Don't leave the group. Don't rush people. Don't wander off. Don't get lost! <i>Leader: Don't follow too closely – especially when climbing. Don't stand directly below someone who is climbing, and wait until they give an "all clear" before you start up.</i>
Pay attention to your surroundings. <i>Leader: Note that passages often don't look the same from the other direction, so remind people to turn around frequently to see how the passage will look on the way out.</i> <i>Remember to be an angel for the person behind you!.</i>	
Carry a minimum of three sources of light. Be prepared. Bring everything you need. Self-sufficiency is key. <i>See the BATS gear list for minimum requirements.</i>	Don't rely on others in your group for personal supplies.
Point your light at the ground or ceiling when you turn	Don't shine your lights in people's eyes.

to talk to someone

Get informed. Join the NSS. Join a grotto. Learn from those more experienced than you. It's a lifelong adventure! Don't be stupid!

NOTE: Always tell someone where you're going, when you expect to be back, and when they should call for a rescue (trip leaders should leave a "callout time" with a trusted person not on the trip).

9. Personal care in the cave
 - a. Food – suggestions of good options for cave food
 - b. Water
 - c. Going to the bathroom in the cave
10. Equipment and clothing
 - a. Hand out equipment list – it's not necessary to go over the equipment list item by item; rather, plan to show off your personal cave pack and gear; this will be much more interesting than reading the gear list to people)
 - b. Point out what is considered personal gear and what is considered group gear
 - i. For example, every person doesn't need to have first aid stuff
 - c. Emphasize minimum requirements for personal gear:
 - i. Helmet
 - ii. Three sources of light (with ample batteries)
 - iii. Personal food and water
 - iv. Something to carry it all in
 - d. Cave pack show and tell (including peeing/pooping demonstration)