



DALLAS YMCA ADVENTURE GUIDES CURRICULUM

Mission Statement: To put Christian values into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind and body for all.

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Please use this as a resource to help navigate through your years with the Adventure Guides Program! These are all key points in the program, and we hope this will help lead circle/group meetings, campfire chats, and make this experience the best it can be!

The Circle/group meeting is the key ingredient to a successful Adventure Guides program experience. Investing time in planning meetings that run on time, are interesting to adults and children, and have a sense of ritual and purpose results in a more positive experience and greater commitment for all members. Most Circles meet twice each month of the school year—once for a Circle meeting and once for a Circle outing or Expedition gathering. Some Circles meet twice a month in addition to adventures and Expedition gatherings. Continuity and regular meetings make for a stronger Circle.

CURRICULUM

PURPOSE

FOUR YEAR OVERVIEW

AREA	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4
CORE CONCEPTS	INTRODUCE	LEARN	PARTICIPATE	REFLECT
KEEPSAKES	FAMILY	CIRCLE	COMMUNITY	REFLECTIVE
VALUES	RESPECT	RESPONSIBILITY	HONESTY	CARING
SERVICE	FAMILY FUN	SMALL ACTS	ORGANIZED EVENTS	MENTORSHIP
ACTIVITIES	SIMPLE GAMES	SKILL-BASED	YOUTH-LED	CEREMONIAL



CIRCLE NAME

Naming a new Adventure Guides Circle is an integral part of the program. We encourage you not to take the task lightly, as this is the name that you will be living with for years to come. We recommend several principles to consider when choosing a Circle name.

- Give the name meaning
- Give the name a link
- Be original
- Build your name on a program theme
- Choose a name that will stand the test of time

AG NAME

Just as naming your Circle requires careful consideration, so does the selection of a nickname by each member of your Circle. Nicknames are used in the program as a way of equalizing members of all ages. There is a silliness that comes from using nicknames that helps children see parents through different eyes.

Your nickname should say something about you, what you like, or what is important to you. It should not copy or mock anyone or anything. A good choice might be the name of an animal or a flower or might describe something about your character. If possible, connect the nickname to your Circle. Have fun picking your own name, and always use it at Circle meetings.

CORE CONCEPTS



The Adventure Guides program is a program with a deep history and rich traditions. Though some of the traditions have changed a bit through the years, the core of what they mean has stayed the same.

In this section, we will dive deeper into these traditions.

The Adventure Guides program is based on the adventures of a parent and child and of their Circle and Expedition. At the heart of the program are the Compass Points, which give members a sense of direction and an inspiration for activities. These points are broad enough in scope to allow for variety and creativity in designing activities.

COMPASS POINTS

NATURE

The natural world and camping experiences are integral parts of the program

FAMILY

The family is the focal point of the program, also known as “True North”

COMMUNITY

The spirit of the program is experienced through belonging to a small community, called a Circle.

FUN

The magic of the program is having fun!



FAMILY

Just being together, focused on each other, and communicating in new ways is sure to strengthen the relationship between a parent and child. Projects such as decorating Adventure Guides vests, organizing communal activities, and incorporating family components into the awards program, like preparing a meal for family members, are effective ways to build strong connections.

Year	Family Related Concepts	Description
1	Family Bonding, Circle, Together Time	Introduce the family as the heart of the program; focus on spending meaningful time together. Emphasize "Circle = Family Unit."
2	Traditions, Quality Time, Shared Values	Explore how families create rituals (storytelling, hikes, game nights) and grow together through program participation.
3	Family Roles, Modeling Behavior, Communication	Kids and parents take more intentional roles — leading games, facilitating meetings. Explore what it means to "lead within your family."
4	Family Legacy, Memories, Mentoring	Reflect on the journey. Create keepsakes, share stories with new families, and recognize how family values have been reinforced or evolved.



NATURE

Be better stewards of the environment by practicing conservation strategies and always recycling. Be better informed about the plants and animals you share this planet with. Ask the Y camp staff to do a presentation on this topic. Select Circle adventures that provide opportunities for everyone to learn about wildlife, plants, and ecology. Experience the outdoors through hiking, rock climbing, and regular campouts. Educate others on the environmental considerations of the camping experience

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Year	Family Related Concepts	Description
1	Outdoor Exploration, Seasons, Observation	Introduce nature as a place of wonder. Focus on exploring local parks, observing wildlife, and embracing the different seasons. Teach kids how to “look closely.”
2	Ecosystems, Respect for Nature, Leave No Trace	Begin to understand relationships in nature. Emphasize caring for nature, minimizing negative impact, and recognizing interconnectedness.
3	Outdoor Skills, Stewardship, Guiding Others in Nature	Participants learn and demonstrate skills (hiking safety, compass use, plant ID). Teach them to lead a nature walk or model good behavior outdoors.
4	Conservation, Nature as Teacher, Lifelong Connection	Reflect on nature’s role in growth. Emphasize protecting natural spaces and passing a love of nature on to others (e.g., mentoring younger members).

COMMUNITY

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Begin by building your Circle community. Then develop a community within the Circle. Learn the names and nicknames of your Circle's members, as well as something about their character and interests. Elect officers (see volunteer roles attachment) and fulfill all Circle responsibilities to help build community. Next, branch out and explore your larger community. Discover what your community has to offer—this will help you plan Circle adventures and decide on Circle or Expedition service projects.

Year	Family Related Concepts	Description
1	Belonging, Circle as Community, Friendship	Introduce the idea that being part of a circle or nation means being part of something bigger. Focus on making friends and feeling included.
2	Helping Others, Kindness, Neighborhood	Learn how to contribute to the local community. Talk about acts of kindness, community helpers, and ways kids can make a difference.
3	Volunteering, Citizenship, Inclusion	Participants begin taking initiative: leading group projects, welcoming new members, and modeling inclusive behavior.
4	Service, Mentoring, Giving Back	Reflect on how they've grown within the community and how they can give back — through mentoring younger kids or organizing service projects.



FUN



The games, songs, stories, campfires, ceremonies, and other activities all contribute to a sense of magic and fun, but what's most important is that you learn to have fun with your son or daughter.

Year	Family Related Concepts	Description
1	Play, Joy, Games	Introduce fun as a central value. Focus on laughter, imaginative games, and shared enjoyment with parents and peers. "Fun is the fuel" for connection.
2	Creativity, Adventure, Trying New Things	Move beyond games — fun is also about exploring, creating, and taking small risks (new foods, new activities). Foster curiosity.
3	Facilitation, Game Leader, Group Engagement	Teach how to lead a fun activity: giving instructions, encouraging others, keeping it fair and safe. Learn that making it fun for everyone is a skill.
4	Tradition, Celebration, Shared Joy	Reflect on favorite memories. Celebrate the joy of the journey. Revisit past games, create legacy traditions, and pass down "classic" fun to new Guides.

SEVEN AIMS

Implementation Ideas:

Year 1: Introduce 1-2 aims each month with stories, skits or visuals.

Year 2-4: Revisit all aims each year, but go deeper into the meaning and application.

Ask reflection prompts:

“Which aim did we see in action today?”

“Which aim was hardest for this month?”

AIM 1: TO BE CLEAN IN BODY AND PURE IN HEART

YEAR 1: Learn healthy habits & honesty

YEAR 2: Talk about inner values

YEAR 3: Model respectful behavior

YEAR 4: Reflect on moral growth

AIM 2: TO BE FRIENDS FOREVER WITH MY DAD/KID

YEAR 1: Bonding through fun & time

YEAR 2: Communications & traditions

YEAR 3: Relationship Growth

YEAR 4: Honoring Bond

AIM 3: TO LOVE THE SACRED CIRCLE OF MY FAMILY

YEAR 1: Identify your family circle

YEAR 2: Celebrate what makes your family special

YEAR 3: Strengthen family roles

YEAR 4: Leave a family gift or story

SEVEN AIMS



AIM 4: TO LISTEN WHILE OTHERS SPEAK

- YEAR 1: Practice taking turns
- YEAR 2: Learn active listening
- YEAR 3: Encourage others' voices
- YEAR 4: Reflect on conversations

AIM 5: TO LOVE MY NEIGHBORS AS MYSELF

- YEAR 1: Be kind and inclusive
- YEAR 2: Understand empathy
- YEAR 3: Lead by caring
- YEAR 4: Pay it forward

AIM 6: TO RESPECT BELIEFS AND TRADITIONS OF ALL PEOPLE

- YEAR 1: Recognize differences
- YEAR 2: Learn about inclusion
- YEAR 3: Celebrate diversity
- YEAR 4: Promote respect and unity

AIM 7: TO SEEK AND PRESERVE THE BEAUTY OF NATURE

- YEAR 1: Explore the outdoors
- YEAR 2: Respect the environment
- YEAR 3: Take action
- YEAR 4: Inspire others to protect nature

KEEPSAKES

These years in life go by so fast, so make sure you take the time to create the keepsake for both you and your child. We have provided different ideas for each year, but use this as a guide.



FIRST YEAR: FAMILY KEEPSAKES

Vests- Either buy one through the Y or on your own. It is a great way to display and store all the patches for the campouts, activities, and events your child will be doing over the years.

Walking Sticks- Find a stick your first weekend, or use a broom as your child's "walking stick". Build on it during every campout by adding beads, arrowheads, feathers, and other items collected. If you get it the same size as your child's first campout, you can see how much they have grown.

Rounders- You can make your necklace out of leather cord, plastic lanyard, natural jute, or other materials selected by the Circle. Decorate however you want with beads, markers, etc.

Torch- Each circle should work together to construct their group's torch. The torch is an important part of the bonfire; unique to each group and a physical representation of its members.



SECOND YEAR: CIRCLE KEEPSAKES



Circle Banner- Your Circle banner says, “We are here!” Find a cut bed sheet or other sturdy material. Use felt or other colored material for stenciled letters, or use markers or fabric paint. Let each member sign the banner. Attach ties to the corners or fashion a shower rod into a holding pole

Circle Drum or Candle- our Circle’s drum can be one of the most important symbols of the Circle. The drum is used as a part of the opening ritual at Circle gatherings and is passed from one host to the next at each meeting. Kits for making drums from natural materials are easy to find at craft stores.

Treasure Box- The Circle Treasure Box should be large enough to hold important supplies but not so large that you can’t easily carry it to Circle meetings. The Treasure Box can be made of wood, cardboard, or plastic.



THIRD YEAR: COMMUNITY KEEPSAKES

With these you will want to get with other circles or groups that you have camped with and do these together. They can be from your school, in your community or you may have just seen them on the campouts throughout the years.

Campfire Stones - Find different stones and paint them during the campout. Then trade them with other groups.

Spirit Feather Exchange - Have your child write a positive message to someone outside their group and attach a feather, patch, or something else small, then “gift” it to them during the campout.

YEAR FOUR: REFLECTIVE KEEPSAKE

Group Scrapbook or Slideshow- each family/pair adds a page or a few slides with pictures, notes, or drawings.

Legacy Tree or Plaque- a shared item (real or symbolic) where names/dates are added yearly.

Broken Arrow Ceremony - Make sure you participate in the Broken Arrow Ceremony during your child's last campout. It is a special ceremony that will also result in a keepsake.



CHARACTER VALUES



The Y's core values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility make up the other directional points that guide the program. Along the journey, adults model, teach, and demonstrate these values as well as give children many opportunities to practice and celebrate them. Adults should also point out and discuss with children any behavior that is inconsistent with these values. Initially, these four values provide guidance in helping children select activities, make decisions, and choose appropriate courses of action—both in the program and in their lives. As children grow, these values become their own internal compass.

RESPECT/ RESPONSIBILITY

HONESTY/ CARING

CITIZENSHIP/ FAIRNESS

These work best with hands-on activities, modeling behavior, and interactive storytelling, especially with kindergartners.

- “We Listen in the Circle/Group Gathering” – There are many ways to participate, such as using a simple puppet or mascot, or passing along a talking stick or stone. Reinforce that listening equals respect.
- Friendship Circle Activity– everyone goes around the circle and says one kind thing about another person
- Respect for Nature Hike– go on a “listening walk” and teach that nature deserves respect – no picking flowers, pick up trash, be quiet

YEAR TWO: RESPONSIBILITY

At this age, children are experiential learners, benefiting best from repetition and positive reinforcement. Here are some developmentally appropriate and engaging ideas to help them build responsibility through adventurous, nature-based, and team-focused activities.

- Camp Chores Rotation – Assign different rotating “chores” for the weekend, such as picking up trash, sweeping the cabin, or gathering supplies for s'mores.
- Mini Leadership Missions – Let kids take the lead on a small part of the trip, such as choosing a hike or activity, organizing a game, etc.
- Responsibility Bingo– create a responsibility bingo sheet with squares like “help a friend”, “cleaned up without asking”

YEAR THREE: HONESTY

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Teaching honesty to 2nd graders through an Adventure Guides program works best when the lessons are tied to real-life situations, imaginative play, and group activities. At this age, kids are beginning to grasp more abstract moral concepts, but they still need concrete, engaging experiences to understand what honesty looks and feels like.

- Truth or tall tale campfire game- Kids tell either a true story or a tall tale, and the rest need to guess which is which. Make sure to talk about the differences between fun, pretend stories, and telling the truth.
- Honesty Role Play Skits - Give small groups short skits to act out, and let the audience decide if they were being honest.
- Campfire Circle of Trust - Sit around the fire and share times when telling the truth helped you or someone else.

YEAR FOUR: CARING

This is an excellent opportunity to help them practice empathy, kindness, and service to others in an interactive and outdoor-focused way. They are developing stronger social awareness and are eager to help when they see the value in it—especially if it's fun and meaningful.

- “Secret Kindness” Mission- assign each child a secret mission to do something kind during the event or campout. You can even have the kids guess who was assigned to them.
- Creature Caretakers Nature Activity- go on a nature hike and look for signs of animals. Discuss the needs of animals to feel safe and cared for.
- Campfire Compliment Circle - Sit around the fire and take turns giving each person a sincere compliment or thank-you.

SERVICE

These years are a great time to incorporate the importance of service to others. Here are some ideas, but do something your child/group is interested in:

- Picking up trash at a local park or neighborhood
- Making letters or cards to thank medical staff, emergency responders, or teachers
- Care packages for members of our armed services
- Coordinating a food or clothing drive for a local non-profit
- Finding fun ways to raise money for your favorite non-profit, like the Dallas YMCA
- Assembling small bags with essentials to either hand out or donate to homeless shelters
- Decorating sidewalks with positive messages
- Creating simple dog toys and/or blankets for an animal shelter
- Visiting a senior center



ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Use the following pages to either supplement other aspects of the curriculum or additional activities you all can do with your group or child.

YEAR ONE: DISCOVER & PLAY

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Developmental Focus: Simple Games

Compass Point Focus: Introduction to all 4

Keepsakes: Family

Core Value: Respect

Activity	Compass Points	Description
Compass Points Obstacle Game	Fun, Nature	Each station represents a compass point with a simple, active task.
Family Tree Craft	Family	Kids bring or draw a family story to share; create a family branch for a wall tree.
Nature Name Game	Nature, Fun	Use natural objects to come up with nicknames or to tell a story in a circle.
Respect Circle	Community, Family	Sit in a circle; everyone says something respectful or kind about the person to their left.
Keepsake: Family Story Stone	Family	Paint or decorate a stone with a symbol that represents a special family memory.

YEAR TWO: LEARN & PRACTICE

Developmental Focus: Skill-Based Activities
Compass Point Focus: Learn about all 4
Keepsakes: Circle
Core Value: Responsibility



Acitivity	Compass Points	Description
Outdoor Skills Day (Shelters, Knots, Fire Safety)	Fun, Nature	Hands-on nature-based skill practice.
Circle Keepsake: Group Banner or Bracelet	Community	Everyone adds their symbol or color to a shared item.
Responsibility Challenge Course	Family, Fun	Partner/team obstacle with task delegation.
Plant & Care for a Tree or Garden Plot	Nature, Community	Practice long-term responsibility and environmental stewardship.
Compass Journaling: What Each Point Means to Me	All	Add thoughts and drawings about what Family, Nature, Community, and Fun mean.

YEAR THREE: LEAD & CONTRIBUTE

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Developmental Focus: Youth Leadership

Compass Point Focus: Participate in all 4

Keepsakes: Community

Core Value: Honesty

Activity	Compass Points	Description
Plan & Lead a Mini Trip	Nature, Fun	Youth teams plan routes, meals, and games.
Community Quilt or Mural	Community, Family	Each person adds their story to a shared visual keepsake.
Truth Trek	All	Hike with stop points for honest reflection on real topics (fears, values, leadership moments).
Teach-a-Skill Day	Community	Older groups teach a basic skill to younger groups.
Compass Point Service Project	Community, Nature	Youth decide how to “give back” in each compass area (e.g., a fun event, trail cleanup, thank-you card to family).

YEAR FOUR: REFLECT & CELEBRATE

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Developmental Focus: Reflection & Ritual

Compass Point Focus: Reflect on all 4

Keepsakes: Reflective

Core Value: Caring

Activity	Compass Points	Description
Legacy Compass Walk	All	Follow a trail with 4 reflection stops (1 per compass point); share memories and growth.
Keepsake: Time Capsule or Memory Box	All	Collect mementos or letters to their future self.
Caring Circle Ceremony	Family, Community	Final group sharing of a message to someone they care about.
Campfire Reflections	All	Youth share one key lesson from each compass point.
Red Feather/ Broken Arrow Ceremony	Community	Graduating youth offer advice or symbolic gifts to younger members.



CONTACT

Information

We are so excited for you to join in on all the Adventure Guide fun this year! If you have questions or would like more information on how to get started please reach out.

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