



EXPLORATIONS ACADEMY

BACKCOUNTRY EQUIPMENT LIST

Students are **required to complete an equipment check** before arriving at school. This procedure may be repeated at school with the leaders of the trip. Different length trips will require different amounts of the specified items. Students need to keep 25% space open for group gear.

MANDATORY CAMPING GEAR:

Clothing: NO COTTON!

- ☐ 2 pairs of wool socks
- ☐ 2-3 pairs of underwear (not baggy, not cotton)
- ☐ Raincoat & rain pants (breathable, not plastic, no ponchos)
- ☐ Non-cotton pants and shirts (wool or synthetic, 1-2 pairs each)
- ☐ Non-cotton jacket/ puffy
- ☐ Trail runners or hiking boots

Personal Items: Travel-sized preferred

- ☐ Toothbrush and toothpaste, floss
- ☐ Glasses/ contact lenses/ saline solution/ tampons/ pads (as needed)
- ☐ Journal and pen
- ☐ Basic wristwatch
- ☐ Personal snacks (no cooking required, fit into ziploc bag)

Camping Gear

- ☐ Backpack (40-60 liter capacity)
- ☐ 30 degree or lower rated sleeping bag or quilt (down strongly recommended. NO COTTON)
- ☐ Sleeping pad (closed-cell foam or inflatable)
- ☐ 3' x 6' ground-sheet (Tyvek works best)
- ☐ Headlamp or flashlight (with new and extra batteries)
- ☐ Lighter (Bic type)
- ☐ 2x 1-Liter Bottles
- ☐ 1 large plastic garbage bag (.9 mm thick)
- ☐ Pocket knife (3" max. blade)
- ☐ Lightweight dish and fork/ spork
- ☐ Trekking poles

OPTIONAL CAMPING GEAR:

Weather-Dependant Gear Items

- ☐ Wool, silk, or synthetic long underwear
- ☐ Wool or fleece hat & gloves
- ☐ Wool or synthetic midlayer (short or sweater)
- ☐ Sunhat, bandanna, neck gaitor, or buff

Comfort Items

- ☐ Lightweight camp shoe/sandals
- ☐ Binoculars (compact & lightweight)
- ☐ Camera
- ☐ Insect repellent
- ☐ Change of clothes for drive home (cotton OK, left on bus)
- ☐ Compass
- ☐ Pillow

SCHOOL PROVIDED BUT STUDENT CARRIED:

- ☐ All food (except lunch first day)
- ☐ Whistles, first-aid, and other safety gear
- ☐ Tarps/tents/stoves/fuel
- ☐ Pots/pans/cooking utensils/water treatment
- ☐ Gear repair
- ☐ Toilet supplies (pack it out)

DO NOT BRING:

- ☐ Tobacco, alcohol, or non-prescription drugs
- ☐ Phones, music players, smart watches, electronic games, etc
- ☐ Expensive or fragile equipment, jewelry, sentimental items
- ☐ Makeup, deodorant, perfume, or soap
- ☐ Weapons
- ☐ Cotton clothing
- ☐ Excess clothing or luxury items

There is no such thing as a perfect packing list that works for every student and every trip! A list is a good starting point, but packing for the backcountry is very personal, and will depend on environment, trail length, elevation profile, seasonal conditions, pacing/schedule, body type, fitness level, personal preference, etc. It is normal for students or parents to insist on overpacking out of nervousness or a desire to be comfortable, but consider that there are two kinds of comfort: comfort at camp (warmth and luxury items), and comfort on trail (a light, balanced pack). In most cases, one comes at the expense of the other, and only through experience can a student learn how to balance those goals in a way that works for them. Remember that knowledge weighs nothing! Learning tricks like bringing multifunctional items, sleeping in all of your layers or stuffing a nalgene filled with hot water in your bag can be every bit as effective as buying new gear, with less weight and cost. *If that all sounds complicated, our trip leaders are here to help!* **Please reach out to your advisor with any questions** about what to bring or any concerns you have, and we will work to give you more personalized advice.

Explorations Academy Backpacking FAQ

Gear-Related Questions

1. **Why is cotton not allowed?**
 - Cotton retains moisture, and waterlogged items lose their ability to insulate, become very heavy, and are slow to dry, which can lead to hypothermia or discomfort. Acceptable alternatives are synthetics (dry quickly) and wool (stays warm when wet).
2. **Do students need to buy all this gear? Can anything be borrowed from the school?**
 - The school has loaner gear that students can check out. Contact your child's advisor to communicate what is needed and find a time to look through the gear room.
3. **How big should their backpack be? Is 60L too big for a smaller student?**
 - 40–60L is standard, but fit is more important than size. Packs should be properly adjusted to the student's torso and hip measurements. You can go to REI and get appropriately sized. Broadly speaking, 40L is sufficient for all EA trips *if* the overall gear system is dialed in.
4. **What's the difference between hiking boots and trail runners? Which should we choose?**
 - Trail runners are lighter and more flexible, which saves energy while moving and reduces blisters. Conventional hiking boots do not provide any meaningful level of ankle support and are generally not recommended.
5. **Why are phones and electronics not allowed? Can they bring a phone for photos/emergencies?**
 - This is a chance to unplug and build community. Leaders carry communication devices for emergencies. Most backpacking locations don't have cell service anyway.
6. **What kind of sleeping bag should we get if we don't have one?**
 - A down or synthetic sleeping bag rated to 30°F or lower is required. Down is lighter and more compressible, but synthetic performs better if wet. Listed temperatures are rated for survival, not comfort - you should generally get a bag rated for a lower temp than expected conditions. Rated temperatures also assume the use of a sleeping pad and warm clothes.

Health & Safety Questions

9. **What if my child has a medical condition or takes medication daily?**
 - In accordance with the law, Explorations Academy does not administer, remind or ask students to take medication. Instructors can hold medication for students and provide that medication to the student upon request. All medications must be disclosed in medical forms and pre-arranged with office administration.
10. **How do students handle toileting in the backcountry?**
 - We teach Leave No Trace principles. The school provides toilet kits and instructions, which vary depending on the trail. Some of the more popular trails and wilderness campsites in our area provide a basic pit toilet.
11. **What if my child gets their period while on the trip?**
 - Staff are prepared to support students, and we encourage students to bring supplies even if they don't expect their period. Staff can meet with students and train them how to successfully backpack while on their period.
12. **How much water do they need to carry? Will there be places to refill?**
 - Students carry two 1-liter bottles. Leaders provide water treatment and plan for refill points. The school will provide water filtration systems, but students are encouraged to bring their own filters if they'd like..
13. **What about bears or other wildlife?**
 - We follow best practices for food storage and camping in wildlife areas. Leaders carry bear spray where required. Dangerous animal encounters are extremely rare in Washington.
14. **Do you always come back from trips on time?**
 - You'll receive a trip logistics email at least a week before departure with context and details about departure and return times. These times are our best estimates—on multi-day trips it's common to be a little ahead or behind schedule due to weather, trail conditions, or group pace. Parents will be notified by email or text of ETA times the day of return if the return time is later than expected. When students return, they'll need to complete a trip clean-up before leaving. Please check with a staff member before heading out, even if the group is behind schedule.

15. What happens if my child gets injured on the trip?

- Staff is trained and certified as either Wilderness First Responder or Wilderness First Aid. As a staff we have emergency practices and protocols that we review prior to trips. The Head of School will contact parents with details at the first possible moment to coordinate reunification.

16. What if the weather turns bad?

- We monitor weather patterns using trusted sources like Windy in the days and weeks before a trip. We have established go/ no- go scenarios and will cancel or reschedule a trip in favor of exercising caution. If weather unexpectedly changes during the trip, the trip leaders will initiate an early departure and notify the Head of School. The Head of School will call and text all parents with early arrival time. We require parents to be reachable or provide an alternate contact during trips. Please coordinate alternate contact with the main office. Parents/ Guardians, please leave your phones on at night.

Preparation & Experience Questions

14. My child has never done anything like this—how can they prepare?

- It is normal for new students to arrive at EA with little or no backpacking experience. Practice hikes with their packed bag, and sleeping outside if possible are great ways to prepare. We will train students in essential skills, the trip itinerary, and safety practices prior to leaving and while on the trail.

15. How will the gear check work? Can we get help before the trip?

- Students must complete a pre-check at home, and trip leaders will do a second check. Advisors can provide personalized advice in advance. We ask that parents allow students to pack their own bags and check off the items alongside them. Parents engaged in the packing process helps set students up for a successful trip.

16. Will my child be warm enough?

- If they follow the gear list and learn layering strategies, yes. Warmth is a priority in gear checks.

17. What if something breaks or my child forgets something?

- Leaders carry group repair kits and backups for essential gear. We check bags for essential items prior to departure.

Emotional & Social Questions

18. Will my child be okay being away from home and without their phone?

- It's natural to feel nervous. Our staff is trained to support students emotionally, and trips are designed to develop independence and connection.

19. What if my child feels overwhelmed or wants to come home early?

- Staff are trained to handle challenges in the field. Evacuation is rare and only done for safety reasons. Mental health can be a safety reason and staff will support students for early departure in coordination with the Head of School. The Head of School will notify parents and coordinate early reunification. .

20. How do you handle group dynamics and conflicts?

- Leaders facilitate respectful group culture and use restorative practices to address conflicts. We encourage parents to talk with the child after the trip and listen to how they are thinking and feeling about past conflicts. If there are unresolved or continuing issues please contact your child's advisor or the Head of School.

21. Can my child bring extra items for comfort, like a stuffed animal or favorite hoodie?

- Students may bring comfort or luxury items provided their bag is not too full or heavy after adding all essential gear and group food. Irreplaceable items should be left at home.

22. Why can't my child have their phone on the trip?

- We ask students to leave phones at home or stored in the office so they can fully engage with nature, their peers, and the experience without distractions. Being unplugged helps build confidence, presence, and real connection. Phones often don't work in the backcountry anyway, and staff carry emergency communication devices. For most students, this becomes one of the most refreshing parts of the trip, even after initial resistance.