

Use of Mobile Phones etc on Expeditions

Guidance Note

Introduction

Mobile phones and similar devices have revolutionised the way in which we communicate with each other, enabling us to stay in touch while on the move. During an expedition, they can be of real assistance to supervisors and participants alike, but their use needs to be closely managed, for a number of very good reasons.

Two-way radios ("walkie-talkie" or CB) might also be considered for use during expeditions; they used to be quite popular. The guidance on phones that follows should generally be considered to apply, where appropriate, to radio communication, and it should be remembered that radio may well have range and line-of-sight issues.

Current mobile devices are often internet-enabled, thus opening up a wide range of uses other than simply phoning. These include GPS navigation aids, weather forecasts and information obtained from search engines about features along the route.

Young people will normally use their phones to take photos or make videos. During an expedition, they could find this particularly useful, to capture their memories and also to help them to prepare their post-venture Presentation, and they may find it difficult to understand why there is a need for any restriction on the use of mobiles.

The use of mobiles by **participants** is *generally* discouraged during expeditions because:

- Some groups may split up into twos and threes, trying to keep in touch with each other using their mobiles.
- Some groups may try to "phone a friend" – usually someone familiar with the area or the route – for guidance or advice.
- Some group members may phone home, for example in adverse weather to say they're not enjoying it – "Get me out of here!" This can cause distress to parents (who can usually do nothing in such circumstances) and can add to the pressure on the Supervisor.
- Some groups may be tempted to use the navigational abilities of their mobile's GPS rather than make their own decisions based on map and compass.
- Where inter-personal issues arise in a group, the aggrieved party may seek outside reassurance that "they were right".
- Tweeting is unnecessary during an expedition; they may also post something that they later regret!
- Some groups may wish to contact Supervisors frequently, to say they're running late, or simply that they're lost.
- Being able to talk to someone "in the outside world" whenever they want can undermine a group's feeling of remoteness and self-reliance.
- Most importantly, however, many of the areas in which expeditions take place have patchy mobile phone reception or none. Groups must not believe that they can rely on summoning assistance by phone "at the drop of a hat", when in reality they may have to provide first aid for several hours if they're in a remote location, for example at D of E Gold level.
- It is also worth noting that satellite phone communication and GPS cannot always be relied upon, particularly in woodland areas.

The use of mobiles by **supervisors** and **assessors** can be very helpful, particularly to share details of the known location of the group, or to advise one another of their plans, especially when looking for a group. However, supervisors should NOT expect to make contact with their group by phone, incoming or outgoing, unless there is an emergency. In particular, using phone contact in place of checkpoint meetings is wholly unacceptable and potentially very unsafe.

What the BB Expedition Craft Manual says about Mobiles

The Craft Manual has helpful advice about how mobile phones should be used in an emergency (Pages 79 and 80). It does not, however, provide more general guidance.

What the DofE Handbook says about Mobiles

The Handbook for DofE Leaders states on Page 72:

“Using mobile phones on expedition can destroy the sense of isolation and solitude core to the learning and self-reliance of the Expedition section. While useful additional safety tools, and in many cases a useful means of capturing evidence, the DofE strongly recommends that mobile phones be used for emergencies only. The expedition team, Supervisor and Assessor should agree in advance the policy of use during their expedition, for example their use as a camera to record evidence for eDofE and not as a means of communication. Mobile phones must always be considered an unreliable safety tool due to possible lack of reception etc.”

DofE Advice on Mobile use by Participants

The Expedition Guide has extensive advice on Pages 175 to 181. This requires a Policy for the use of mobiles to be selected by the Supervisor and/or the Licensed Organisation, in our case the BB. The Policy of Boys' Brigade (England and Wales), which was set out in 2009, remains essentially valid. It has been updated and is given in the highlighted box later in this Guidance Note. This Policy should be adhered to for ALL unaccompanied expeditions (not just DofE) run under BB auspices.

DofE Advice on Mobiles for Supervisors and Assessors

The Expedition Guide has the following advice (Page 167):

“A mobile phone is an extremely useful tool for Supervisors and Assessors supporting Bronze and Silver teams in normal rural and open country, but is more limited in wild country, coastal waters, or outside of the UK.

An expectation of mobile contact in unreliable areas of reception can increase the anxiety of Supervisors and Assessors. This has led to unnecessary call outs to mountain rescue for teams who are in fact in excellent condition and needing no assistance. This is an inexcusable waste of the mountain rescue team's time.

Establish the Supervisor or the Base Contact as a hub for all phone communication, ensuring they have mobile communication and a landline back up available. This ensures fast and accurate information updates and allows the team to call for emergency assistance. This hub can get updates from Supervisors and Assessors as they see participants, relay information in an emergency situation, and let parents know if teams are running late to the pickup point on the last day.

It is unacceptable, at any DofE level, for Supervisors to rely on text messaging or phone calls with participants for updates rather than seeing the team.”

Use of Mobile Phones in an Emergency

The following points are important, and expedition teams should be made aware of them.

- The number to call in an emergency is 999 or 112.
- If the casualty is near the roadside, then the caller should ask for **Ambulance**. IN ALL OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES they should ask for **Police**, and then for **Mountain Rescue** if appropriate, or explain to the Police the nature of the incident.
- Calls to the emergency services will generally be connected using any available network regardless of the user's tariff or contract. The call will be made even if no credit is available.
- The Emergency Services will want to know
 - **Who is calling?** Who is the injured person(s)? In due course they will need the names and details of everyone in the party.
 - **What happened?** Give a description of the accident, and as much information as possible about the casualty's injuries and condition.
 - **Where did it happen?** A six-figure Grid Reference, together with the name of a nearby place on the map and a description of the location. (The Emergency Services should be able to locate the source of the phone message with some accuracy.)
 - **What is required?** Advise them of anything that you know will be needed.

Supervisors should consider registering the party's phone in advance to enable SMS text messages to be sent from it to the Emergency Services. This can be invaluable if reception in the area is poor, as texts require a very short signal time and rarely break up in the way that voice communication often does. **To register a mobile with the Emergency Services, text "register" to 112 or 999.** You will receive a text in reply; follow the instructions and the mobile will be registered. This enables emergency SMS text messages from this mobile to be accepted.

When a group sends a text to 999 or 112, they should include brief "4 Ws" information shown above. A reply will normally be received from the Emergency Services within two or three minutes. If this doesn't happen, the text should be re-sent.

If the mobile has been registered, the party need to be aware of this, and how to use the SMS texting arrangement properly.

The DofE website has many useful links on <http://www.dofe.org/go/expeditiondownloads/> Particularly helpful are those on Emergency Texting Services at the foot of the web page.

Control of Mobile Phones before and after Expeditions

This is generally a matter for the BB Company concerned. However serious issues can be created through participants making incorrect observations in phone calls to parents – such as reporting that the staff are down at the pub when in fact they are having a final planning session before the expedition sets off, or that another group is "lost in the hills" when they are simply running a little late in arriving at the finishing point. A simple precaution might be to restrict the use of mobiles for the entire duration of the venture, including travelling time.

Boys' Brigade Policy on Mobile Phones

The following Policy should be applied to all expeditions by BB Companies in England and Wales. If for any reason it is considered inappropriate, a written request for amendment should be made in advance to the BB DofE Manager.

Boys' Brigade (E+W) Policy on Mobile Phones

In line with guidance given by DofE, Boys' Brigade (England and Wales) as a Licensed Organisation observes the following practice on ALL unaccompanied expeditions.

- **One mobile phone will be carried by each expedition team, for use in a genuine emergency only.**
- **It will remain switched off except in emergency.**
- **The Assessor and Supervisor may agree to additional mobiles being carried for specific purposes (such as taking photographs or videos, or to use as an alarm clock) but these are not to be used for other purposes except in emergency.**
- **Any unauthorised use of phones should be discussed by the Assessor and Supervisor, and action taken, as appropriate.**

It is a basic principle of expeditions that if a team gets into difficulties, then it is up to the team, and the team alone, to extricate itself from the situation it has got itself into. If however there is an accident, illness or injury, then it is an entirely different situation; rescue teams would expect to be involved and the group should have no hesitation about attempting to use a mobile phone.

Use of GPS devices

Official DofE guidance is given on Pages 94 to 96 of the Expedition Guide. Use of GPS may be appropriate under certain circumstances, for example in darkness, restricted visibility, featureless terrain, or where the group has become disoriented and distressed. However, navigation on expeditions should always be by map and compass, with GPS being regarded only as a safety back-up. If GPS is to be carried by groups, then they will require additional training, as described in the Expedition Guide, to ensure that they can use it effectively.

The BB's position on this is that use of GPS will generally not be appropriate for Bronze or Silver ventures, and that if an expedition team proposes to carry GPS this should be agreed with both Supervisor and Assessor.

Use of Tracking devices

Trackers, which can be carried by expedition parties, can greatly ease the task of Supervisors when trying to locate a group particularly in adverse weather conditions. However they can have an adverse effect on the group, who may be less careful with navigation as "the supervisor will always be able to find us." They also mean that the Supervisor can see exactly where groups have gone, including where they have not been able to follow their planned route, and care needs to be taken that the device is not used as a "spy in the rucksack" to interrogate the group at the end of the day. Equally the desire to intervene when a group is seen on the tracker to have taken a wrong turning should be resisted unless there is a clear safety risk.

Pages 98 and 99 of the Expedition Guide set out the DofE guidance.

The BB's position on this is that if a Supervisor proposes that the group carry a tracker this should be discussed with the Assessor, and agreement reached on how it will be used. The carrying of a tracker in no way diminishes the need for the Supervisor to meet the group during the course of the venture. The three trainee Soldiers who died of heatstroke in 2013 on the Brecon Beacons were carrying trackers, which were being monitored by Army personnel at base.

It should also be noted that many tracking devices have a "panic button" for summoning emergency help. This has been misused accidentally in the past, with the unnecessary mobilising of helicopter assistance. It is possible that if a similar incident occurs in the future, the group could be asked to pay thousands of pounds towards the cost of such an unnecessary call-out.

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