



# Escape School®

## **Campfire Safety Tips**

Warm weather provides opportunities for families and friends to enjoy nature by heading for the woods, fields or mountains, with tents and sleeping bags in tow, ready to create a memorable vacation experience. Once there, building the campfire is often the first order of business.

To avoid a true horror story involving a careless campfire, make sure that you start by clearing a wide space for your campfire. Not just where the fire itself will burn, but an additional 10 feet from the outside of the fire area. Plan to use bare ground, stones or a grill as your surface. A popular combination is to also surround the dirt patch with stones.

Make sure there is a large clearing above the area, as well. A roaring campfire can reach quite high.

Explain to children what you are doing, while you are doing it. Also explain how dangerous a campfire is, that they should not attempt to put fuel or wood on it unless asked by an adult and that playing around a campfire is not permitted. They can be seriously hurt if someone trips and falls inside the fire ring.

Likewise, keep all materials out of the fire area. Many people have found out too late about the dangers of leaving their nylon camp chairs, pitching their tents or drying their wet clothes too close to a campfire.

If conditions are windy, flying sparks can pose a danger. In cases like these, use a shovel to dig a pit into the ground, and gather more stones than usual to build a safety wall around the ring.

Just because you're roughing it, doesn't mean you shouldn't have a fire extinguisher. Having one that can tackle vegetation and fabric fires, as well as the one you keep in your vehicle for possible fires involving your engine, can be the difference between a minor scare and a full-fledged forest fire.

Never leave a campfire unattended, even if you're just going to the creek to wash the breakfast dishes. Leave another camper behind to watch the fire, if you intend to keep it going. Otherwise, cover the campfire with water, then dirt, to hold the moisture in and stifle oxygen to the flames. Stir the campfire with a stick to ensure that flames are not going to start up again. Cover any hot spots with more dirt and more water.

There's no reason to let the seriousness of the campfire overwhelm what could be a pleasant outing. As long as a watchful parent follows sensible safety rules, explains what he or she is doing and why, and corrects potentially dangerous behavior on the part of the children, the time in the woods will be educational and produce memories that will last a lifetime.