

## Programming the Solo

**Rationale:** A fundamental precept of experiential education suggests that learning is significantly enhanced by reflecting on experience. Solitude provides an environment conducive for such reflection.

**Operational Definition of Solo:** The Solo refers to an extended period of time (24-72 hours) during which the participants are intentionally placed alone for the purpose of physical rest and reflection. Typically, they will have spent several days traveling together along with other wilderness activities before the Solo begins.

### Educational Objectives of the Solo

To provide individuals with the opportunity for an intentional time of solitude which may promote:

- A. Reflection (life, their course, leadership, decision making, etc.)
- B. Physical Rest
- C. Increased attunement to relationships with oneself, others, nature and God or their own spirituality
- D. Distinct contrast from other course components and the rest of life

**Solo Guidelines** (these guidelines are suggested for solos and vary for course location and group)

- ✓ Students will have had the opportunity to spend smaller periods of time alone prior to a longer Solo
- ✓ There will be at least one instructor on “Solo watch” at all times – located at the group’s basecamp which is ideally centrally located to the Solo sites
- ✓ Students must receive a safety briefing prior to the Solo which includes:
  - The boundary of their Solo area
  - The location of the Solo basecamp
  - The emergency procedures:
    - Blow your whistle three times and go to the nearest person for help.
  - Instructors will have drawn a map of the solo area with student names at each solo site
  - Students will be checked at least once every 24 hours
  - If the Solo site is on a ridge, shelters must be constructed away from open spaces and exposed caves due to lightning danger
  - Swimming is not permitted on Solo because of the potential for an un-noticed drowning
  - Knives and fires are not permitted on Solo because of the risk involved
  - Be sure to arrive at the Solo site early enough in the day to allow for a relaxed atmosphere in which to choose individual sites, brief students, and escort students to sites
  - Solo will be a new experience for many people. Intentionally place those with fears of being alone in the wilderness closest to the instructor basecamp
  - If a participant needs to “break” their Solo – they should return to the basecamp and not bother other students
  - Be sure to locate students along a water source or provide water during your visits
  - Students should not have to practice any skills necessary for the solo that they have not already demonstrated earlier in the course (i.e. shelter construction, water purification, journaling, etc.)

### Framing the Solo

- The framing of the Solo experience is critical to the success of the activity – allow enough time to clarify expectations of staff and students.
- Be sure to discuss the rationale behind taking time for intentional solitude and any activities you want the students to do while alone.
- Discuss any logistical information that they will need to know. (Ex: do they have enough water, what if they need to use the bathroom, what if they have an emergency, how will Solo end)
- The intent of the Solo is to provide an opportunity to experience silence and solitude in the wilderness – something many of us have never done. It is to be a personal time of rest and reflection in a small personal area of the wilderness. Use this time to focus on personal reflections in the journal. Please do not go for a hike, visit other group members, etc. This can be a distraction and a safety concern.

- Consider the location of the Solo. Can you provide a space for each student that is along a lake or stream or on a high vista. This can enhance their experience. Instructors MUST know where each student is and students MUST know how to return to the “basecamp” in an emergency. Find a place that offers solitude!
- You may want to provide the students with a guided reflection question(s) or activity to do during part of their Solo. Find a balance between providing structure and allowing them to utilize their time as they wish.

### **Solo Activities or Questions:**

- Students can write about their role within the group, decision making, their leadership and teaching style, etc...
- Have students set goals for after the course that connect what they are learning now with life at home. (this can come in the form of a letter that is mailed to them later)
- Ask students to reflect on the important relationships in their life.
- Consider asking them to reflect on one or more of the following questions:
  - List 5 things about yourself that you like. List 5 things about yourself that you would like to change.
  - Name one person in your life that you admire and why.
  - What is the group’s greatest strength and greatest weakness?
  - Describe the leadership qualities that you have observed in yourself and others in the group and make recommendations for areas of improvement.
  - List one or more things that you would like to change about your role in the group
  - Name something about each group member that you respect and something they could improve
  - When have you felt the closest with the group and why?
  - When have you felt the most separated from the group and why?
  - What have you learned about yourself and how do you plan to apply that learning after the course?

### **During the Solo**

- Students should be located out of sight of each other if at all possible but must be close enough to respond to hear/respond to a whistle blast in an emergency.
- Respect the student’s experience and do not bother them. Be clear regarding when they can expect you to come by to visit at the end of their experience.
- Do not disrupt the students with instructor activity at the basecamp, etc.

### **At the End of the Solo**

- Consider walking out individually to each student and taking the time to check in 1:1 with them regarding their experience on the course thus far, their role in the group, etc. Research shows that a 1:1 discussion with instructors prior to rejoining the group is very helpful in transferring the experience.
- Plan a group debrief and celebration of the experience soon after the solo. It is NOT recommended to return to the group in the early afternoon and wait to debrief the experience until the evening gathering. Have a plan for what you would like individuals to share and encourage students that their experience is unique – there is no RIGHT way to Solo.

**“You cannot harvest the lessons of life except in aloneness and I go to the length of saying that neither the love of man nor the love of God can take deep root except in aloneness” Kurt Hahn**