

KTA Guidelines for Hike Leaders

Revised October 2025

For the safety and enjoyment of the hikers you are leading, KTA recommends the following.

When Planning the Hike:

- Keep the size of the group manageable. In most cases, KTA will cap groups at 15 people.
- Plan the hike thoroughly using current maps and resources.
- Describe your hike clearly. Include hiking distance, pace, and elevation gain.
- When you scout the hike, make notes on directions to the trailhead(s), hiking time, lunch spot, parking, and car shuttle. Scout the trail within two weeks of the event to check trail conditions.
- The leader should provide clear driving directions from the meeting site and a map of the hike route to KTA ahead of time so these items can be made available to hike participants.
- Prepare your gear. Include maps, rain gear, spare synthetic or wool shirt, basic first aid supplies, food, and water.
- Hike leaders should have a basic Emergency Response Plan (ERP) in their possession on the day of the hike. This will contain the name, address, and phone number of the closest hospital, and other helpful information. KTA will provide the template.

At the Meeting Site:

- Have everyone sign-in. Make sure they each provide an emergency contact phone number if one isn't already on the sign-in sheet/roster.
- Recap what the hike will entail (mileage, elevation gain, highlights, etc.) to make sure everyone understands what they will face/encounter.
- Make a circle and lead informal introductions among the group. Introduce yourself as the hike leader and identify the person acting as the sweep.
- Use the introductions to ask qualifying questions of hikers you don't know: The leader asks the group if anyone has "medical or physical limitations" that should be made known to the leader. Response should be made in private. Suggest another (easier) guided hike (if available) if it sounds like a hiker lacks the experience necessary to enjoy your hike.
- Distribute trail maps and driving directions. Share your phone number with participants and the KTA Emergency liaison phone number (this will be provided to you).
- The leader should observe and inquire if each person has:
 1. Proper footwear
 2. Rain gear and weather-appropriate clothing
 3. Medications - Especially an Epi Pen if they have known sting allergies and an inhaler if they have asthma.
 4. Food/Water

- Make sure that all participants understand that they are responsible for their own safety and go over potential hazards (e.g., ticks, tree roots, stinging insects, windfall, electrical storms, etc.). Each participant had to sign a waiver when registering for the hike and has already acknowledged inherent risks in their participation. **Hike should be cancelled if there is a high likelihood of thunderstorms.**
- Explain expectations of everyone on the hike:
 1. The hike leader will remain first, manage pace, keep on track/navigate, watch the group from the front, remove barriers, etc.
 2. Sweep will be last in line, ensure no one falls behind, watches the group from the rear, picks up lost belongings, etc.
 3. Hikers in between also are responsible to help manage the group. Be aware of who is behind and ahead of you; do not turn a corner until you can see the person behind you; if someone is falling behind or getting too far ahead - call out; etc.
 4. During breaks, sweep and lead should check in. Is anyone showing signs of fatigue; does anything need to be discussed as a group before moving on? Orient the group to where you are by showing your location on a map.
- Go over what to do if lost:
 1. Remain calm. Try to retrace your steps for a short distance. Make noise to make yourself more easily found.
 2. If you have no luck finding the group, stay where you are. Note noteworthy features (big tree, waterfall, large rocks, etc.). Note the time. Call the hike leader. If there is no response, call the KTA emergency line. If there is no connection or success, stay where you are.
 3. Stay hydrated and comfortable. Help will eventually arrive.
 4. If you have an emergency locator beacon, only summon emergency help if you are in medical distress or other serious situation OR if darkness is coming OR multiple hours has lapsed since you've been lost. You may try to use the device to message the hike leader or KTA personnel -if it has that functionality.
- Ask for volunteer drivers to set up a carpool. If there is a car shuttle involved, make sure there are enough empty seats to complete the shuttle. If applicable, announce the amount passengers owe the drivers. Hand out the direction sheets you prepared.
- **Important Note:** You are in charge. Take charge. Trust your instincts. If you have a gut feeling that something's wrong, you're probably right. You decide who goes or stays. Gently, but firmly, deny those who you feel will be "in over their heads."

Driving to the Trail Head:

- Keep track of the number of cars in your convoy. With a large group you may have to pull over and wait after stop lights or all way stops.
- It is impractical to convoy on the Interstate for any distance so be sure all the drivers know which exit to use.
- Drive at a safe and legal speed.
- Slow down on dirt roads.

During the Hike:

- Keep the group together. No one should be left behind.
- The hike leader should stay in front of the group. The co-leader or appointed sweep stays at the back of the group. Both leader and sweep should be familiar with the hiking route.
- Take head counts before, during and after the hike.
- Wait at ALL turns and road crossings to avoid losing hikers. Cross roadways as a group.
- Arrange for periodic "nature breaks" so folks can go to the bathroom.
- Encourage adequate hydration.
- KTA hikes adhere to "Leave No Trace" principles. (Pack it in, pack it out; leave what you find: etc.).
- Periodically orient the group to where they are on the map, especially during water breaks or lunch stops.
- No route changes (e.g., "Let's explore this side trail.") except for short, necessary detours (bridge is washed out).
- Use extra caution towards the end of a hike when the hikers are most tired – especially on steep downhill segments.

After the Hike:

- Hike leaders must call the KTA contact (emergency line) or notify KTA in-person that the hike has ended, and all participants have been accounted for.
- Text or hand-off the completed hike roster with signatures to KTA.
- Make sure everyone knows how to get home (or to a town/place where they have cell service to access Google Maps).
- Do not leave until all hikers have started their car (to ensure no one has vehicle trouble).

KTA Emergency Line:

Kate Prisby, Manager of Events & Programs: (717) 538-8530

