

MODULE 1 · LEARNER GUIDE

WHY EOTC, AND THE RISK WE MANAGE

An introduction to risk management for teachers running Education Outside the Classroom: the gain, the risk, and the mindset that bridges them.

MODULE OVERVIEW

This module sets the foundation for the rest of the course. By the end you'll understand **why** we take students outside the classroom despite the risk, **how** good teachers think about risk before and during an activity, and **what** the high-level risk management process looks like. Modules 2–8 then take you through each step in detail.

1 WHY DO EOTC AT ALL?

Every EOTC event involves risk — sometimes real and serious. So why do it? Because the gains are also real and serious. Students who don't shine in the classroom find their feet outdoors. Learning becomes self-driven. Memories last. Life skills — resilience, judgement, leadership — develop in ways that the classroom alone can't produce.

"You have kids who shine when they're outdoors who don't do well in the classroom ... you can see these kids coming out of nowhere to be leaders."

EDUCATION OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND — FINAL REPORT, MARCH 2020

2 WHAT IS RISK?

Risk isn't inherently a bad thing. The standard definition we work from is broader and more useful than "chance of harm":

DEFINITION

"Risk is exposure to the consequences of uncertainty. It includes the possibility to gain or lose something of value."

THE GAIN

What students stand to learn, experience, and become through the activity. The reason we're doing it in the first place.

THE LOSS

What could go wrong — injury, illness, distress, loss of property or trust. The reason we manage risk carefully.

3 THE BARGAIN WE MAKE

Taking students outside the classroom is a deliberate choice. Whenever we do it, we accept an obligation:

- **The outcomes must be worth it** — we should not be exposing students to risk if the same learning could be achieved more safely elsewhere.
- **The risk, when managed, must be acceptable** — not zero (that's impossible), but reduced to a level we can defend to ourselves, the school, the parents, and the law.

23
IN 24 YEARS

Aotearoa New Zealand schools have experienced **23 EOTC-related fatalities** over the last 24 years — most involving **water environments**.

Themes that recur across the incident investigations: **inadequate supervision** · **insufficient staff competencies** · **systems not being applied in practice**. These three themes shape the rest of this course — Modules 3, 5 and 6 directly address each one.

5 A SAFETY CULTURE MINDSET

Risk management isn't a paperwork exercise — it's a culture. In a strong safety culture, every adult on the trip takes responsibility for what happens. The reframe to make is small but important:

DON'T ASK

"Am I responsible?"

ASK

"What am I responsible for?"

We all need to take reasonable care that anything we do — or do not do — will not cause harm.

6 THE CRITICAL-THINKING CHAIN · FIVE QUESTIONS

Before and during every event, five questions run in the background. These five questions are the **spine of this entire course** — every subsequent module is the answer to one of them in depth.

Q1 · Purpose

Why am I doing this? Is the outcome worth the risk?

This module

Q2 · Hazards

What could go wrong?

Module 2

Q3 · Causes

What could cause it to go wrong?

Module 2

Q4 · Prevention

What can we put in place to stop it going wrong?

Modules 3–6

Q5 · Response

If it still goes wrong, what will I do?

Module 7

7 THE 5-STEP PROCESS — PREVIEW

When the thinking lands on paper, it lands as a 5-step process. Module 2 unpacks the assessment step in depth; the other modules cover the rest.

1

Identify

What could go wrong (the harm), and why this would happen (the hazards).

2

Assess

Rate the level of risk for each hazard you can control.

3

Develop controls

Put measures in place for each hazard to lower residual risk.

4

Manage & monitor

Brief, supervise, watch for change, adapt in real time.

5

Accept?

If the residual risk is acceptable, proceed. If not — loop back, or don't go.

COMING NEXT

Module 2 takes the "Assess" step in depth — how to rate likelihood and severity, the 5 × 5 matrix, and the difference between absolute and residual risk. The reference cards and activity sheet from this module will support you all the way through.