

Fire Lighting

Having a campfire is a fantastic multi-sensory experience for all young people, and one they might not have previously had. This activity is high risk and requires confidence and skill from the leader as well as adequate health and safety preparations. However, the benefits are numerous, and it allows for multiple curriculum linked activities – from cooking to storytelling.

How to have a safe campfire

Fires can pose a significant risk to people, and the environment. When leading this activity, it is important to follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

Where possible, use a container to have the fire in – such as a fire bucket or the base of a kelly kettle.

If this is not possible, you could dig a small pit to have the fire in – make sure to keep the top layer of soil nearby, so that you can replace it once the fire is out.

Never light a fire on peatland – if the fire gets into the ground it can spread easily and be very difficult to put out.

If there is an area where campfires have already been lit, try to re-use these. This prevents too many areas being disturbed in any given location.

It is often best to take your own firewood, as deadwood is an important habitat. Also, a lot of wood will be too wet to light (green wood) and will just release a lot of smoke when lit rather than flames. Kindling is readily available at certain stores and garages. If you would like to use wood from the site – collect some in advance, and make sure it is seasoned wood (dry).



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How to light the fire

- Before doing anything – double check that you have items needed to put the fire out, and to carry out the fire safely and that all participants are safely attired (water, fire gloves, fire blanket, first aid kit, hair tied back, no scarfs/ties etc).
- Put two or three pieces of kindling in the container, or pit.
- Place a fire lighter on top of this – these can be purchased, or you could use a natural item such as birch bark.
- For the tinder, you could add some cotton wool. Smear it with some petroleum jelly and tease the material apart. Then place it on the top of your kindling.
- Use a fire steel to create the spark needed to light the fire.
- Once it is lit, monitor the fire safely and continue to add larger pieces of firewood when needed. Birch twigs are a good natural source, when dry (collect dead ones only; those trapped in living branches are best, rather than twigs from the ground).
- If running this activity with a group, it is a good idea to set out a fire circle, and explain the health and safety rules, before (and throughout) the activity.

How to put the fire out

- Allow a good amount of time (at least 10 mins for a small fire) for the fire to slowly go out.
- Once you are satisfied it is out, use the fire glove to tip the remains out onto the ground.
- Immediately douse them with water
- Observe the remains for ten minutes, checking that they are cooling and that there are no lit embers remaining. If needed, douse again with water.
- You can poke some holes in the ground to allow the water to seep through, if needed.
- If you have used a pit – take any large pieces of wood away with you, and scatter the smaller remains. Then carefully replace the layer of topsoil that you removed at the start.



Using the base of a kelly kettle © Catherine Leatherland