



Walk Leaders Guide

Latest Update
February 20, 2018

PLANNING A WALK

- A. Gather the details required for your newsletter announcement. These will be used to fill in the online [Outing Description Form](#).
- Select the park and find a clear meeting point. Walks should be TTC accessible.
 - Determine the main focus of your walk. E.g., birds, flowers, trees, insects, geography
 - How long is the walk you'd like to lead; either in hours, kilometers, or both?
 - Are there difficulties along the way (stairs, rough ground, slopes)?
 - Will your walk be a circular route or have a different end point?
 - Should participants bring anything special? E.g., lunch, binoculars
 - Are washrooms available?
 - Is there other information that would be helpful for participants? E.g., TTC info, joint outing, expected sights, end location, safe drop-out spots if people have to leave early, after-walk coffee shop meet-up
 - Since a few walks per month are publicly advertised we would like to know if you would be comfortable leading one of these and if your walk location would be suitable? If chosen for a public walk you might be contacted to provide a photo or two for promotional purposes. This is not compulsory.
- B. Plan your welcome.
- Print off the [Walk Leader Checklist](#) to help you remember what to say at the welcome.
 - Rehearse your welcome before the walk.
 - Bring TFN brochures.
 - Bring information handouts or field guides if you wish.
 - Bring an area map if it is suitable.
- C. Do a pre-walk.
- 1-2 days prior to your scheduled walk it is best to check the route. You may find construction blocking the planned route or TTC access.
 - Note safety hazards along the route and consider how to point them out or avoid them.
 - Note sightings of birds and plants you are likely to see.
 - Select a lunch site, if planned.
 - Verify washroom availability.

DURING THE WALK

A. At the welcome:

- Arrive early.
- If possible, greet everyone as they arrive.
- Allow about 5 minutes grace time for latecomers.
- Greet newcomers, make them feel welcome and offer them a TFN brochure.
- Count the participants.
- Face people and speak loudly. If the meeting location is noisy, move to a quieter area.
- Introduce yourself; describe the route, length and purpose of the walk; mention washroom breaks, and forewarn people of any difficult terrain or icy conditions that will be encountered.
- Encourage people to bring interesting sightings to the attention of the group.
- Encourage people to post their photos from the walk to social media using the hashtag #TFNWalk so that others can easily find them.
- Point out other experts in the group.
- Ask participants to adhere to the participant guidelines. Particularly: stay on the paths, do not pick or collect specimens, do not bring pets, thoroughly clean your footwear to avoid spreading invasive seeds.
- Stress the importance of walkers staying with the group behind the leader. If the group is large, select a helper to shepherd any stragglers.

B. On the trail:

- Set an appropriate pace so that everyone can keep up, yet allowing sufficient time to see and enjoy interesting things. (A common complaint is going too fast.)
- Point out plants/animals/natural features in a loud voice, allowing an opportunity for all to see.
- Try to include interesting information about what is seen, not just identification, but don't make long speeches.
- Optional: Broaden the interest of the outing beyond its main focus by mentioning any environmental, historical or architectural aspects of the route.
- Welcome questions and try to be accessible to all participants. If someone asks an interesting question while walking, repeat the question and answer for the group at the next pause.
- Include beginners by taking time to help them understand how things are identified. Encourage experts to share their knowledge.
- Make sure everyone has an opportunity to see what is being described, and be specific in pointing out the location of a bird.
- Stop periodically and gather the group to point out items of interest. Pick quiet locations and be sure to speak audibly and clearly. In summer, look for a shady spot.
- On long outings, pause by washrooms.
- In the interests of safety, keep group together when crossing roads; be aware of hazards or obstacles; and help less agile walkers with barriers, slopes, uneven terrain or icy conditions.
- Be flexible, adjusting to bad weather conditions.
- Enthusiasm, humour and interesting anecdotes add to the enjoyment of an outing.

C. At the end of the walk:

- Provide a clear ending to the outing.
- Ask for feedback - anything that would have improved the group's experience.
- Provide travel instructions if they are not obvious.
- Announce any after-walk social gatherings (e.g., coffee shop).

CHALLENGING SITUATIONS AND HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM

A. Keeping the group together

- Make sure you have done a count at the start of the walk and confirm the count at stopping points. You can have a helper do this for you for large groups.
- Ask participants to report leaving the walk.
- Offshoot groups lagging at one spot may slow the pace. See if they have found something of interest before getting them to move on. Having a clear purpose for the walk will reduce this, as participants won't have conflicting goals. e.g., A vigorous hike vs bird sightings.
- Participants may move at different paces. Ask a back-up person to watch for stragglers so you know who has left and who may be lost.
- After lunch is an especially difficult time to keep track of the group. Announcing at the start of lunch how long the break is and when and where to meet back will help.

B. Dealing with rule breakers

- If a participant arrives with a pet, gently inform them that pets are not allowed on TFN walks.
- If a participant walks off the path, picks flowers, mushrooms, removes a nest, etc, remind them to respect nature, and to obey both Toronto park bylaws and Ontario laws.

C. Physical challenges

- The leader can cancel a walk at the meeting place due to inclement weather.
- Find a shady spot for information sharing on a hot day.
- Make the group aware of poison ivy in the areas you are passing.
- Point out icy spots during winter walks.

D. Outing Safety

- Discuss safety at the start of the walk, identifying any special challenges or hazards along the route. This allows members to either opt-out or find help to overcome obstacles.
- Carry a cell-phone or identify if someone in the group has one.
- Carry a first aid kit. At minimum have bandages and hand-wipes.
- Keep a reasonable pace.
- Cross streets at traffic lights or crosswalks.
- At the junction of a path, either wait for everyone or post someone to direct the followers.
- Offer directions for safe early leaving along the route.