



# Kids are OuttaSight!

## Lesson Plan ([https://svtrr.org/kaos\\_resources](https://svtrr.org/kaos_resources))

**Course Overview:** The Kids are OuttaSight! (KAOS) Program is an adaptation of the American Canoe Association Introduction to Kayaking course. It is designed as a multi-day program emphasizing safety, enjoyment and skill acquisition for entry level visually-impaired or blind children and their parents or guardians, siblings, and friends. Team River Runner encourages this program as a means of providing Community outreach opportunities to chapter Veterans. Train your chapter's paddlers in the methods and techniques required to host a local KAOS event then see how this engages your Veterans in the chapter!

This course is appropriate for all kayak craft, including traditional decked kayaks, inflatables and sit on tops. It is assumed the boats will be paddled solo. The instructor may want to limit this program to one type of craft, but should announce this prior to the start of the course.

***All course participants must be able to perform all skills listed in the section below independently or with minimal assistance from the Paddler's Guide:***

- Be able to participate in all skills and activities listed in the course outline while also maintaining an appropriate and safe body position
- Be able to, without assistance and wearing a properly fitted lifejacket, hold their breath while face-down in the water while independently turning from a face down to a face up position; maintain a "safe swimmer" body position their head above water until assistance arrives.
- Be able to effectively communicate with their Guide, the instructor, and other course participants
- Be able to manage all personal care independently, or with the assistance of their Guide
- Be able to manage all personal mobility independently, or with the assistance of their Guide

### **Course Prerequisites:**

- Every Paddler under the age of 18 years of age must bring their own properly-sized USCG approved PFD to both the Pool Session and the Open Water portion of the course.
  - PFDs will be inspected for form, fit, and function at the Pool Session
  - This same PFD must be used at the Open Water portion of the class

***NOTE:*** The requirement for each minor Paddler to own a PFD is to ensure that they have their own floatation device for future paddling activities. We are not teaching kids how to paddle in a structured class with TRR – we are teaching them how to paddle with a trained Guide for fun! This requirement is absolute; however, if cost is a barrier for a particular child, consider purchasing a PFD for them from your chapter budget, donations, or other

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*means. DO NOT send a child away because they can't afford a PFD – help their parent or guardian purchase a proper device for the class.*

- Every adult Paddler must have access to a properly-sized, USCG-approved PFD. TRR loaners are certainly OK; however, encourage each Guide to purchase their own PFD so that they will have this equipment available.

**Instructors:** One ACA/TRR Level 1 endorsed instructor (or higher) per four kayakers (two guides and two paddlers)

**Assistants:** One TRR Level 1 endorsed kayaker (or higher) per four kayakers (two guides and two paddlers)

**Safety:** (On-Water days only) One ACA/TRR Level 1 endorsed kayaker (or higher) per eight paddlers (four guides and four paddlers)

### Course Duration: 8-12 hours

- Day 1 (Classroom): 2 Hours
- Day 2 (Classroom): 2 hours
- Day 3 Pool: 2-4 Hours
- Day 4 Open Water: 2-4 hours

### Course Location / Venue:

- Classroom Portion: Any familiar environment for the Paddlers and Guides such as their school, church, outreach facility, etc.
- Pool Portion: Any pool that has a TRR agreement in place; meets ADA access Guidelines, and has a lifeguard on duty.
- Open Water Portion: calm, flat water, protected from wind, waves and outside boat traffic, with minimal current and within swimming distance of shore.

### Class Ratio:

- 1 ACA Level 1 (or higher) Instructor to every 5 Paddler/Guide teams (10 Paddlers)
- 1 additional ACA Instructor or TRR Endorsed Paddler to every 10 Paddlers

### Child Safety Concerns

- In today's environment, we need to be aware of child safety laws and requirements whenever we are working with minors or "vulnerable populations." You might be required by a partner organization you work with on this program to obtain a child safety clearance.
- TRR's stance on this course is that we are not ever in direct control of a child; the children who participate in our programs are always in the direct control of their legal parent or

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guardian. If their parent or guardian cannot attend themselves, they will need to appoint someone who is not a TRR staffer to be in charge of their child at all times. This is critical.

***Note:** be sure to check your local and State laws concerning child safety background check requirements for any staff that may be left alone with a child (for example, acting as their Paddling Guide). In many states, these clearances are free for volunteers and turnaround is generally 1-2 weeks. However, as this course is set up, no TRR staffer is ever in direct control of the child. Their parent or guardian will act as the paddling guide or will authorize a person known to them to act in this role.*

**REMEMBER:** While kayaking, **if you're not smiling, you're doing it wrong!**

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### **Day 1 (Classroom): 2 Hours**

***Note:** The use of sprayskirts is discouraged but not prohibited for all Kids are OuttaSight! paddlers and is not part of this curriculum. Use proper ACA curricula for sprayskirt if a paddler will be using one.*

#### **Introduction, Expectations, & Logistics:**

- Welcome, introductions, paperwork
- Course itinerary & site logistics
  - o Remind the kids we will play a game of their choice at the end of class – take some time to figure out what we'll be playing while the grownups are doing paperwork.
- Review TRR waiver / media release and medical release information; paperwork
  - Appropriate personal behavior
  - Always be courteous
  - Raise your hand and say something if you have a question or need help
  - Don't interrupt someone who is speaking
  - Wait your turn
  - Trust your Guide, instructors, and safety boaters – we're there to help!

#### **Guiding Basics**

- On-Me! exercise overview and demonstration
  - If you have the ability to review one of the short OuttaSight videos on the TRR website with the group, this is a great time to do that.
  - PREVIEW the video to ensure the language is “kid friendly”

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***NOTE:** Brief the parents/guardians/Guides on the PFD requirement. Ask that they have these purchased no later than the Pool Session as fitting and inspection will take place on that day.*

- Partner Exercises
  - Have the Paddlers and their Guides work out a guiding method anywhere in the building or on the facility grounds so long as it is safe to do so.
  - “On-Me!” is not required (we’ve used “Marco-Polo,” “Hey Dude-Hey Mom,” or really anything that works.
  - If the Paddler is visually impaired but not totally blind, blindfold them for this exercise. It helps immensely when they’re out on the water and get disoriented.
  - SWITCH! The Paddler now gets to guide the Guide! This is so much fun for the Paddlers and it gives the Guides an idea about how their Paddler has to trust them. Blindfolds are required for this activity

### Wrap-Up

- Round Robin discussion
  - What I Liked
  - What I Didn’t Like
  - What Surprised Me
  - Coolest Thing
- Let’s Play a Game!
  - Let the kids come up with a 15-20 minute “cool down” game so they can burn a little energy.

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### Day 2 (Classroom): 2 hours

#### Kayak Equipment Basics

***NOTE:** Be sure to bring enough gear for each Paddler team to explore the equipment. If you have enough manpower and gear, bring the actual gear for each Paddler and fit them for gear at this session. That will minimize fitting time at the subsequent pool session.*

- Welcome, introductions, paperwork
- Itinerary & site logistics
  - Remind parents/guardians about the PFD policy.
  - Remind the kids we will play a game of their choice at the end of class – take some time to figure out what we’ll be playing while the grownups are doing paperwork.

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- Remind class of appropriate personal behavior
  - Always be courteous
  - Raise your hand and say something if you have a question or need help
  - Don't interrupt someone who is speaking
  - Wait your turn
  - Trust your Guide, instructors, and safety boaters – we're there to help!

### Kayak Equipment Basics

*NOTE: This is a tactile activity. Encourage the kids to explore each item as you present it. If you would like to make it more fun, turn it into a scavenger hunt. Present the item to one blind or visually impaired child, let them explore it and describe it to the rest of the kids. Then tell the kids that there is one of these for each of them hidden around the room and that they need to go find them. Encourage this to be as done as independently as possible (i.e. the parent shouldn't lead the kid by the hand to the paddle and pick it up for them). Encourage the kids and Guides to sit in the boats, climb down into them, and find all the pieces and parts.*

- PFD Exploration (NO RESCUE KNIVES ON PFDs!)
  - How do you wear it?
  - How do you adjust it?
  - Does it have pockets?
  - Can you find the whistle?
- Paddle Exploration
  - How heavy is it?
  - How long is it?
  - Can you tell if it is upside down or backwards?
- Kayak Exploration

*NOTE: Encourage the kids and Guides to sit in the boats, climb down into them, and find all the pieces and parts. Pick them up, flip them over, find the drain plug; let them get used to the boat and all its interesting parts.*

- Find the Cockpit
- Find the grab handles – how many are there and where are they?
- Find the seat – can you adjust it?
- Find the foot pegs / bulkheads – can you adjust them?
- Where is the drain plug – does it have one?

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- Other assorted gear as you see fit
  - What is it?
  - What is it used for?
  - How does it feel?
  - What is it made of?
  - Is it big or small?

### The On-Me Obstacle Course Race

*NOTE: It helps to have this planned out during the first session; have the guides get their heads together to think about the best way to do this. That way if they need to bring anything special to this session they have planning time. We've had people use the kayaks, couch cushions, collapsible maze tubes, chairs, and so on. A familiar playground is ideal for this!*

- Have the guides build a SAFE obstacle course that they will navigate in a relay race – the Guide guiding the Paddler, on the out-bound leg, then the Paddler guiding the Guide back to the beginning. You can do this as teams or as simple pairs – whatever makes sense. Instructors keep time and stand safety watch throughout the exercise.
- Guides and Paddlers should wear PFDs as part of the race. Be sure to have these available.

### Wrap-Up

- Round Robin discussion
  - What I Liked
  - What I Didn't Like
  - What Surprised Me
  - Coolest Thing

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### Day 3 Pool: 2-4 Hours

*NOTE: Be certain to ensure that you procure from TRR National insurance certificates well in advance for the venue in which this session will be held.*

### Pool Session Intro

- Welcome, introductions, paperwork
- Itinerary & site logistics
  - PFD Inspection
    - Look for USCG Type 3 approval logo

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- Kayak fitting should take place before the class starts as participants are filling out paperwork and getting changed into swimsuits
- Paddle indexing should take place at this time as well for those paddlers who need it. We have found that younger children benefit from paddle indexing regardless of their level of vision.
- Remind class of appropriate personal behavior
  - Always be courteous
  - Raise your hand and say something if you have a question or need help
  - Don't interrupt someone who is speaking
  - Wait your turn
  - Trust your Guide, instructors, and safety boaters – we're there to help!

### PFD Fitting

- Walk the guides through proper fitting of their own PFDs, then help them fit their paddlers' PFDs
  - Fit should be snug, but not restrictive
  - You should not be able to remove the PFD by pulling it up
  - It should be comfortable!
- Check the fit on everyone's PFD before getting in the water

### Water Comfort Test

***NOTE:** Successfully completing this test is a requirement to continue in the training program. Work individually if need be, but if a paddler is unable to successfully complete this test, they will be unable to continue with the program as this is a safety issue.*

- Safely enter the pool (guides help their paddlers to enter as required) and talk about why we wear PFDs.
- The water comfort test is designed to establish if the paddlers are comfortable in the water – since we will be teaching the wet-exit, they need to feel comfortable in the water while wearing their PFD.
  - Address any concerns on an individual basis – encourage, but don't require, that the paddler complete this step. **HOWEVER**, if the paddler is unable to do the water comfort test, they will not be able to proceed with the training program.
- Demonstrate the test:
  - Lay face-down in the water (try to stay here for 3-5 seconds)
  - Roll-over without help on your back
  - Keep your feet up while floating

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- Explain that if we were in a river, we would point our feet downstream (Safe Swimmer Position)

*NOTE: Blind and VI paddlers cannot often tell which direction is “downstream.” Stress that it is very important to keep your feet up until your guide tells you it is safe to put them down (i.e. out of swift-moving water). You can use the command “SPIN-Left/Right” to get them to orient properly in current. Practice this in the pool.*

- The Test
  - Instructors test each guide first
  - The guide (with the instructor’s assistance) tests their paddler
  - Provide constructive feedback – applause for a good test is definitely constructive!

### PFD Demonstration

- Explain that our PFDs only work if they are worn and worn properly. Too many boaters sit on them or wear them incorrectly (unzipped, too loose, etc.) to do any good.
- The Instructors/assistants should demonstrate this in the deep end of the pool:
  - Unzipped PFD – jump into the pool wearing an unsecured PFD; don’t grab it or otherwise secure it so the PFD will bob to the surface while the jumper swims back up.
  - Loose-fitting PFD – wear a very loose PFD and jump into the water with your arms extended above your head; the PFD will likely slip off over the jumper’s head and bob to the surface while the jumper swims back up.
  - Properly-adjusted PFD - jump into the water with your arms extended above your head; the PFD will remain on the jumper and will help them to the surface where the jumper attains the Safe Swimmer Position
- OPTIONAL: invite any paddler who is wearing a properly fitting PFD to jump into the water to see for themselves how the PFD helps them float and makes getting into the Safe Swimmer Position easier. Provide safety over-watch during this exercise.

### Wet Exit and Buddy Rescue

*NOTE: This skill is critical and must be completed prior to being allowed on the open water portion of the course. It does not, however, need to be scary. Frame this exercise as fun and celebrate success with resounding applause. Have a helper standing in the water next to the paddler to provide moral support as much as physical assistance. DO NOT use a sprayskirt for this demo (if a paddler will be using a sprayskirt, teach them the additional steps privately after teaching the basic technique to the rest of the paddlers.*

- There are three steps to the Wet Exit:
  - Tuck

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- A popular technique for the tuck is to grab the sides of the kayak while flipping. Bend forward at the waist; this is to protect the paddler's head from striking the bottom of the river.
- Adding three "hull bangs" during this process will ensure that the paddler slows down a little bit while making others aware that they have flipped.
- Exit
  - Simply fall out of a large kayak or, if the boat fits a little more snugly like a whitewater kayak, "take the boat off like a pair of shorts."
- Safe-Swimmer Position
  - Surface near the boat, feet up and downstream. Holding on to the boat for extra buoyancy is not a bad idea at all.
- Following the wet exit, a Guide or Safety boater will pull alongside the swimmer and tow them to shore where they will remount their trusty steed (once emptied of water); simulate this rescue in the pool to build confidence in both the Guide and Paddler.
- Demonstrate to the Guide how to safely empty a swamped kayak of water.

### Basic Boat Control

***NOTE:** You will need to tailor the instruction to the paddler. Paddlers with some sight (Visual Impairment) may be able to watch you demonstrate a technique. Blind paddlers will need to have a tactile approach. Let them feel your paddle as you slowly move it through the stroke; guide their paddle with your hands as they try the stroke; provide verbal feedback on their stroke as they do it by themselves. Use the model where you teach the guide and then help the guide teach the paddler – this will help build the paddler's trust in the guide as they learn more and more from them.*

- Forward Stroke
- Back (stopping) Stroke
- Draw Stroke
- Sweep Stroke
- Reverse Sweep
- Rudder
- Low brace to avoid capsize

### On-Water Obstacle Course

- This is where you should be as creative as you can! We have used people bobbing in the water as the obstacles to be avoided, pool noodles, kickboards, etc. to create the path the guide and paddler need to follow.

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- DO NOT do this as a race – kids become frustrated very quickly and competition can induce this frustration. Keep this a positive exercise. Applaud frequently and frame feedback in a positive light:

*“I really liked how you listened to your guide’s instructions and you did really well with your paddle. Just remember that the faster you try to go, the more difficult it will be to go straight. Slow down a little and see how that works. You’re doing really well!”*

### Free Paddle

- Use the remaining time in the class to allow the paddlers to get more and more comfortable with their boats, their guide, and so forth. Let them have some unstructured fun! Provide assistance where it is needed, but for the most part, the Guides are the bosses at this point.
- Encourage fun and laughter!
- Remember the motto: **If you’re not smiling, you’re doing it wrong!** So long as the kids are having fun and smiling, it really doesn’t matter if they can’t paddle five strokes in a straight line.

***NOTE:** A Lonnie Bedwell technique for flat-water direction finding is for the guide to take a waterproof speaker and play music. This provides a constant source of sound for a blind paddler to queue on. This doesn’t work as well in rapids as the sound is drowned-out by the noise of the water. This will, however, mask sounds of nature, so use it according to your personal preference.*

### Wrap-Up

- Round Robin discussion
  - What I Liked
  - What I Didn’t Like
  - What Surprised Me
  - Coolest Thing

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### Day 4 Open Water: 2-4 hour

***NOTE:** Be certain to ensure that any required permits, insurance certificates, launch licenses, etc. are taken care of well in advance of this portion of the program. Many states require trip guides to obtain permits from the Fish and Boat Commission (or equivalent) before using any state-managed waterways for classes or guided trips of this nature. Check your local laws to see what is required in your state.*

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### Float Plan

- Be sure to develop a float plan well in advance. This is not something that you can put together a day or two before the event. Consider:
  - Waterway (river or lake) – you should know this stream or lake intimately!
  - Length of trip (two miles of slow water might be more than enough for a seven year-old blind child while five miles of faster water might be too short)
  - Permits (as required)
  - Put In and Take Out accessibility, especially for the visually impaired
  - Mid-route “bail-out” locations in case of problems
  - On-Water communications

### Safety Management

- Think about each leg of the trip and look at it from things that are most likely to go wrong; plan for a resolution for each
  - Example: the put-in in steep and the current swift – how will you keep paddlers and guides together until their group can all get in the river? What will you do if a paddler flips at the put-in? A guide flips?
- Plan the pace to match you slowest boater and brief the paddlers that we need to stick together for safety as well as fun. It is hard to splash your friend if they are 200 yards behind you!

### Staffing

- You need a put-in crew and a take-out crew to help boaters in and out of the water.
- Ideally, one dedicated safety boater should be assigned to each group of 4-6 paddlers; those paddlers stick with their safety boater.
- One roving safety boater should be available to move between two groups of 4-6 paddlers to provide assistance to the primary safety boater as required should anyone flip.
- You need a Gopher in case someone forgets or loses something critical.

### Equipment

- Boats, paddles, PFDs, etc. – the standard fare
- Water, snack, etc.
- Rugged footwear (old sneakers, water shoes, booties, etc. – NO FLIP-FLOPS!)
- Hat, sunglasses, sunscreen, sunshirts, etc.
- Paddling jackets if the weather indicates they are needed
- One basic first aid kit and basic rescue gear for Safety Boaters per 10 paddlers

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### Trip Itinerary

- Plan your itinerary from the perspective of your boaters.
- It is not a bad idea to paddle your proposed route once blindfolded with your own guide to see how it will be for your paddlers.
- Let parents and other volunteers know the locations, put in and take out times, and so forth. Remember, this is potentially one of the most frightening things a parent has ever done – let their blind child kayak down a river without them! Be cognizant of this and remain collaborative, understanding, and sincere.
- Brief the itinerary to all the paddlers before you get on the water
- Most importantly – don't forget to have fun! Feel free to splash and play and joke and generally have a blast. Just do it all safely!
- **If you're not smiling, you're doing it wrong!**

### Wrap-Up

#### “Explorer’s Picnic”

- It is a good idea to have the take-out at a location where volunteers can set up a nice picnic for your paddlers as a reward for doing so well. Games, food, fun are the order of the day.
- Be sure the paddlers help recover all the boats and gear before the dig-in! We're teaching personal responsibility and teamwork throughout this training.
- The sky's the limit when it comes to the picnic – whatever you want to do is great!

### Certificates of Completion

- This course is designed to cover all basic tasks required in the TRR Level 1 Paddler Endorsement. You are encouraged to provide the participants with a certificate of completion to this effect.
  - You can design your own or contact either the Susquehanna Valley chapter or TRR National if you don't know how to go about doing this. We have some templates you can use.
  - Hand these out individually (but as a paddler team); give one to the paddler first, then one to the paddler's guide. Encourage hearty applause and congratulations for a job well done.
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### End Notes

It is our wish that you personalize this course to fit your chapter's needs. We will always be able to help you with ideas, thoughts, forms, format, etc., but we would very much like you to make this program your own.

You are also encouraged to use the KAOS logos and letterheads as part of your program. This logo was designed by visually impaired/blind children who participated in our KAOS program over the years. We have not copyrighted the image and welcome you to incorporate your chapter logo into the theme to personalize your program communications and other media.

Finally, our heartfelt desire is that you use this program to find a new way for your chapter's Veterans to serve their communities through Team River Runner's unique organization and methods. Our Veterans often long for the opportunity to serve; even grievously wounded paddlers have something to offer a KAOS program, up to and including being paddling guides and safety boaters.

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LOGOS

These logos were developed with the help of our Kids are OuttaSight! paddlers, guides, instructors, and staffers. While their use in your own KAOS program advertising, printing, etc. is not mandatory, we encourage it. If you would like the source files (.png or .pptx) so you can edit them for local use, contact Bill Butler.

