

Kids' Nights Out: Making Sure Children Travel With the Right Paperwork



Parents with children headed for trips with scouts or school often contact me about what forms they need to complete for their children before the group leaves town.

What questions should a parent address concerning paperwork that will accompany a child on a trip with a group or a non parent? The following represent some good starting points for grandparents or aunts and uncles taking a grandchild for the week, the group leader of any outing, or even for the parents of any traveling child:

1. What States Will the Trip Be Traveling Through?

Requirements for paperwork can vary from state to state, and any permission slips, medical consent forms, or any other instruments should meet the requirements of every state your child will be traveling in. Parents need to get directly involved in reviewing the forms which family members, coaches, teachers, or expedition leaders plan to use before giving up control of their children. This is true for weekend trips to grandma's for one child at age four, as well as for class trips to Washington, D.C. with a hundred children at age fourteen.

2. Will the Trip Involve Any Travel Outside the United States?

Even the traveling child's parent needs special documentation for their own child if both parents are not traveling with the child. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, or family friends cannot expect to be allowed to get on airplanes, buses or trains which will be passing over international borders without proper documentation for the child signed by both of the parents (not just one) and, in most cases, notarized. The U.S. State Department website lists each country's standards and requirements, which will certainly include a passport, and in some cases, visas and immunization records that may take several months to complete. For even more information, parents can contact each nation's foreign consulate or U.S. Embassy.

3. What About Medical Care for My Child?

Medical permission slips are essential for any minor of any age who is traveling with a non parent. In addition, when a child has a special medical condition his or her medical forms should specify what specific level of treatment will be within the powers of the accompanying adult. Furthermore, access to medical information is a larger issue since the passing of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA); parents should make certain that adults who have custody of their children for a trip have satisfied all requirements from the doctors who may be providing care during the trip. In other words, just having a permission slip to seek medical care is not enough—custodians need to carry medical information releases for each child attending an outing.

4. How Many Adults Are on the Trip?

A permission slip which specifies grandparents or aunts and uncles individually will usually be adequate for most uses. Slips should be individually written for each child, rather than attempting to use a family group form for more than one child at a time.

Many of the permission slips used by adults on group trips for the children taking the trip make a general statement about the group's leaders having clearance to make choices for the child. The problem with this approach is that a careful medical care giver, camp director, or customs officer may ask for proof that all of the adult members of the group are present. It is far more prudent to obtain the names of all adults on a given trip with any group, and to list those adults' names individually on the form to substantiate their authority under the form.

The overriding principle for any parent whose child is under the care of another adult is to assure that no medical care giver or other provider of essential services has any concern about honoring the permission forms offered by the adult who is caring for the child away from its parents.

This is important enough that a parent should be prepared to provide forms which have been approved by an attorney for the supervising adult. If a parent's attorney has reviewed a form and found it inadequate for the trip in question, that parent should consider providing a second form to the leader which does satisfy counsel's concerns.

Finally, I have advised more than one parent over the years to go on the trip with the child who has a medical condition that the adults supervising the trip are not familiar with. I always accompanied my own children with medical conditions when they traveled or attended summer camp, simply because an adult who is not familiar with the symptoms of asthma, diabetes or other conditions cannot be expected to react appropriately to symptoms of those conditions. But even though I was on the excursion, I still provided the other leaders with documents for my children, as well as consent forms and a HIPAA form for myself.



Donald A. Hunsberger practices law in Orange, California. He can be contacted via email at Don@HunsbergerLaw.com or telephone at (714) 663-8000.

