

Dear Parent or Guardian

My name is Mike Russell and I am the Acting Head of Centre at Kent Mountain Centre. As you plan to send your son or daughter on a residential visit to Kent Mountain Centre, I thought it would be helpful for you to know something about the team of instructors who will be leading the adventure activities in which your son or daughter will take part.

Our instructors are all caring people who have a commitment to working with young people in the outdoors. They are holders of nationally recognised qualifications in the activities which they instruct and are very experienced in working with young people. The permanent staff are all qualified teachers.

The week's programme is agreed between the visiting leader and myself, and is designed with flexibility in order to take account of weather and other conditions. The aims of the course are usually to give the young people the chance to find out more about themselves, others and the environment by facing a number of exciting challenges as a member of a supportive team.

Some aspects of the course will be hard work, and we make no apology for that. A mountain which is easy and effortless to climb would not be much of a challenge or much of an achievement. However, we would like you to know that we never force young people to do things they are afraid to do or unable to do.

We see our role as being to lead the activities in a safe way and one which makes the individual feel involved and secure and we do a lot of encouraging. We have so many experiences of seeing young people conquer their own fears and doubts to do things they never thought they could do, that we are prepared to spend however long at the top of an abseil or the bottom of a climb, to help a student to achieve. The decision to tackle the challenge has to be that of your son/daughter in the end and when a member of one of our groups chooses not to do something, that decision will be respected by the instructor and the group will be encouraged to be supportive too.

It is natural that as a parent/guardian you may have worries about your son/daughter and if there is anything you would like to discuss with me you are most welcome to telephone Kent Mountain Centre at any point.

Your son/daughter will be able to contact you by telephone during the visit. Each part of the Centre has a public telephone. Please do not expect long, chatty telephone calls from your son/daughter. The excitement of being away from home and with friends is very powerful for young people and their reactions to this are varied. If you do not hear from your son/daughter for several days, it is probably because they are so busy and having such a good time. Equally, if you have a call and your

son/daughter is upset about something, please try not to panic. Young people on a residential sometimes get tired and emotional, so that a falling out with a friend feels like a disaster, or a reprimand from a teacher the end of the world. Tomorrow it will all be forgotten, but unfortunately, in the meantime, you are worrying. If it helps, please contact the Mountain Centre and ask to speak to one of the visiting leaders or one of the instructors who has been working with your son/daughter. They may be able to reassure you that all is well, or arrange for you to have a private telephone conversation with him/her to put your mind at rest.

We would prefer you not to allow your young person to bring a mobile phone to the Mountain Centre. The main reason for this is that we would like the young people who come here to be completely involved in what they are doing and the group they are with. We find that the use of mobile phones is a distraction for everyone and works very much against the teamwork and the enjoyment of the moment which we feel are so important to what we are trying to achieve. We hope that you will understand this and help us by ensuring that your son/daughter leave their mobile phone at home.

Please ensure that you have received and taken note of the recommended packing list. Every item on it is important. We hope you will not need to buy anything especially for this trip. All outdoor equipment such as walking boots and waterproofs are provided. Bringing some thick woolly socks is probably the thing which will make the most difference to the comfort of your son/daughter on one of our courses!

Finally, nothing is more important to us than the safety and welfare of each and every one of our visitors. We believe in having fun and adventure, but everything we do is based on keeping safety as the priority. Our safety record is excellent. If your son/daughter does have an accident or becomes ill during the visit to the Centre, we will inform you immediately, and a plan of action will be made by yourself and the visiting leader, with our help and support.

I have spent most of my working life in outdoor education centres and am absolutely committed to the value of this kind of experience for young people. I hope that you will see the results of our work when your son/daughter comes home having had a wonderful time, and perhaps a little more mature and self-confident than before.

Yours sincerely

Mike Russell  
(Acting Head of Centre)