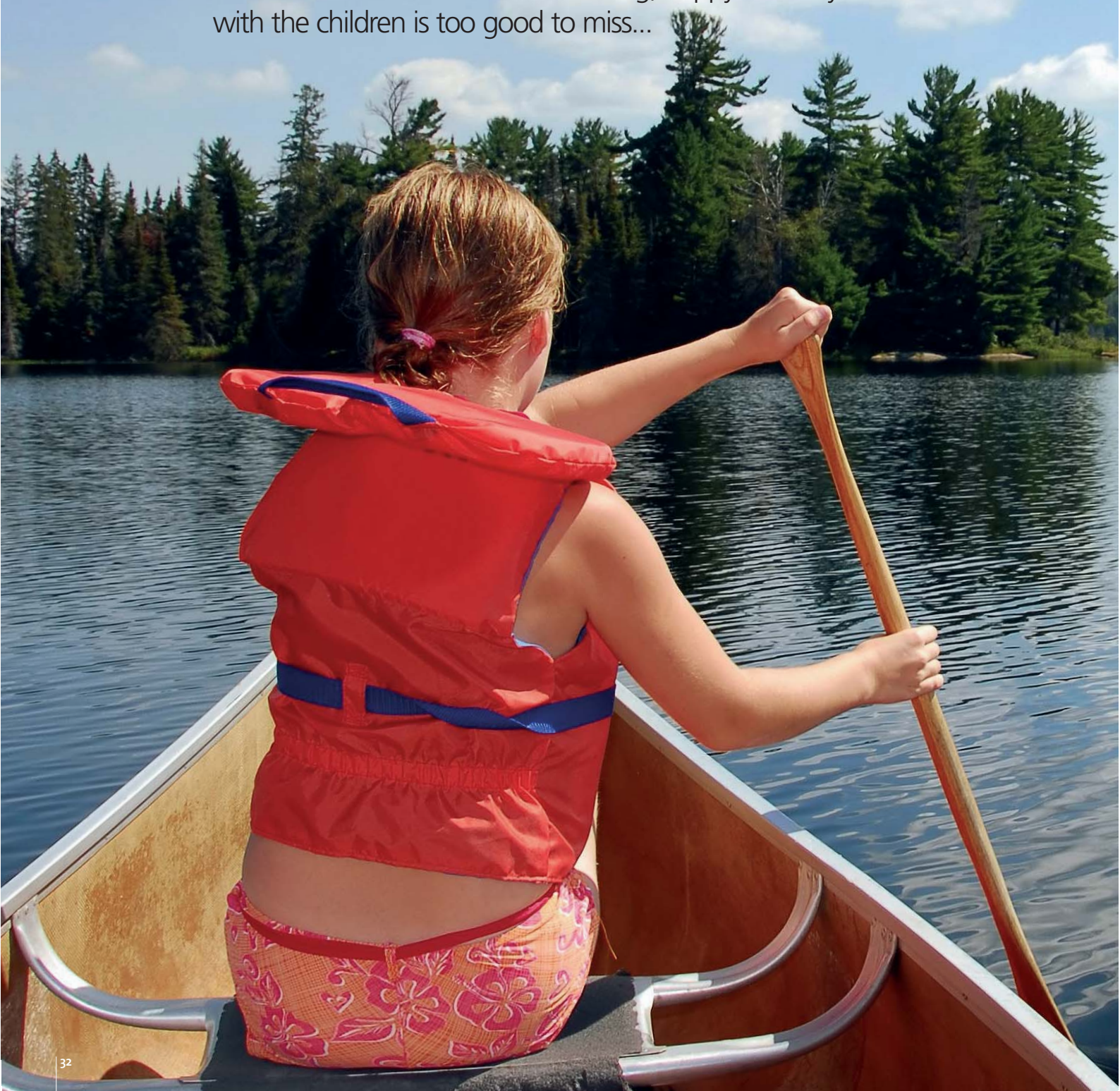


have a **good** trip



Don't let potential litigation put you off a residential adventure, says **Kevin Harcombe**. The chance to share a lasting, happy memory with the children is too good to miss...



As a young teacher, my first 'residential' was based in a manor house on the Isle of Wight, from where we explored the island, with a focus on history. The curators at Osborne House would metaphorically slap wrists and tut whenever the children – or, more usually, I – touched one of Queen Vic's dusty old nick-nacks. Perhaps they were helpfully trying to recreate a Victorian ethos?

I once took a class of children camping (the 'once' is significant). I recall with fondness the gentle hiss and friendly glow of the Tilley lamps in the darkness after the children had turned in for the night. This was offset by having to don a fourth pair of socks at two in the morning to stave off frostbite, followed by stumbling and squelching, with an inadequate torch, across cowpat-strewn fields to the lavatory block at four in the morning...

The truth is, I've loved each and every trip I've ever done. Residentials are key moments in any child's school life, looked forward to with anticipation and fondly recalled many years later, long after your stunningly planned and executed maths lesson has been forgotten.

Schools, it's alleged, are cutting back on residential trips because of potential litigation if something goes wrong – and there have been a few high-profile tragedies, certainly – but most schools I know use them as an integral part of their curriculum, year in, year out, with barely a minor mishap. The learning is first hand and immediate, and the chance to get to know the children as individuals, rather than as walking data, is immensely rewarding.

Making plans

If you haven't been put off, the first thing to do is look at your curriculum to see how it could be supported by a residential visit – there may, indeed should, be elements of a 'jolly' to any residential, but its main purpose remains learning and social development. You need to think about how far afield you want – or need – to go, as well as what is affordable for the children's parents. (The volcano trip would be lovely, but falls down on cost, proximity and health and safety...) You must decide whether to buy an 'off the shelf' package or shape your own itinerary, and don't forget timing: autumn term is great for building a team, spring prices can be cheaper and summer is a lovely way to end the school year.

Whatever you opt for, a 'reccy' is essential, not just to maximise the learning but also to risk assess. For all the scepticism about the wilder excesses of health and safety, never skimp on making sure everything is secured with belt and braces for a trip where you are responsible for a group of other people's children in unfamiliar settings. Crossing roads, walking along the shore, digging for fossils – everything needs to be thought about and risk assessed. Indeed, local authorities will not sanction a trip unless they can be sure this essential preparatory work has been done.

TRY THIS:

- Many LAs will offer training certification in 'Leading in Open Country' or some such, and it's a very worthwhile investment. Certainly a lot of fun and a lot of learning can take place without taking risks.

Cost the trip, factoring in travel and accommodation (usually including meals) per child, and add on a sum to pay for the staff accommodation. Providing you give plenty of notice – at least two terms, preferably three – even hard-up parents will be able to pay monthly or weekly. Local charities – Rotarians and Lions organisations, for example – often have hardship funds available for such cases and are sensitive in making contributions without publicity. There are even occasions where better-off parents pay more than the sum required to help some less well off children take part. All children should have the opportunity to be included. If you have a child whose behaviour is likely to put at risk the safety of themselves or the group you will be perfectly entitled to leave them behind, but usually, and this is the wonder of residentials, your real behavioural worries surprise you and have a fantastic time.

TRY THIS:

- Take lots of photos and put them on a disk for parents so they can see where their money went. You can sell the disk!

Picking a team

You need to pick a team who can work together well, and include at least one person who has done the same or similar trips before. A 50-50 balance between the CAs and teachers helps affordability.

Each member of the supervising team should have contact details for each child, as well as the school (including home and out of hours numbers for senior school staff), and carry a mobile phone (but be wary of more remote spots where there is no signal). Medical details are also essential as are personal idiosyncrasies: does a child bed wet / sleepwalk / snore like a freight train etc.?

Despite the out of school atmosphere, it's also essential for staff not to put themselves in situations where an accusation of impropriety might take place. Never be alone with one child – if a child is poorly, homesick or hurt, always deal with it in twos. Physical contact should be avoided unless absolutely necessary for the child's safety or well being.

TRY THIS:

- Think about incentives for staff who give up their free time to make these trips possible. A thank you goes a long way, but some heads / governors offer a day off in lieu for anyone who goes.

I want to go home!

CHILDREN SUFFERING SEPARATION ANXIETY? READ ON...

You might think that nothing could spread faster than that Norovirus in the lucky dip trough at last year's Christmas Fair, but homesickness is even more virulent. It's usually the beefiest, most loud-mouthed and cocky boys who succumb. You notice Shay is looking a bit distant over his meal; the merest hint of a trembling lip and a blink that might have been a tear, and you ask solicitously, "Missing home?"

You fool! At the sound of those words, the entire group are now sniffing, wailing and weeping (apart from Ryan, who has never been fed hot food at home and is using the diversion to Hoover up sausages from the other children's plates). Allowing a phone call to mum will not help because the sound of their parents' voices makes them sob more than ever, and now you've got parents anxious too. Distraction and isolation is your only hope – nipping down to the tuck shop or ice cream kiosk with them and a friend can often ease the blues, as well as getting them away from the other children.