

Inherent Risk Form, Parent Release, Permission Slip, or Consent Form – no matter what you call them, it is important that you review all your forms to make sure they include specific requirements.

The primary intent is to *notify* the student's parent/guardian of an activity or event that is not considered a traditional school activity. This would include events not held on school premises, during regular school hours, or that would be considered non-traditional. Examples could include:

- A new unit in art class that involves glass blowing.
- Allowing an animal to visit or reside in the classroom.
- An assembly where the content or images shown could be considered disturbing or potentially controversial.
- Student participation in sports or after-school programs.
- Class field trip.
- Student participation in class with regular off-campus activities.

The form should also include information regarding when, where, and how the students will be getting to and from the activity, and any specific dress requirements, such as waterproof shoes or warm clothing if needed. Keep in mind that there is no such thing as a blanket or "one-size-fits-all" informed consent form. For example, you cannot create one form that covers all field trips for the year or all sports that a student may participate in. A new form should be signed by the parent/guardian for each unique activity.

The second intent is to *inform* the adult custodian of the specific risks the student may encounter during the activity. The courts have reasoned a guardian cannot give their informed consent to an activity if the school district has not fully informed them (and the student) of the dangers. Your district must determine the foreseeable hazards for each event/activity and which ones cannot be mitigated or removed, even with appropriate safety standards in place. Each activity should have an inherent risk form that is specific to the dangers associated with that activity. Sample risk language is included at the end of this article. WSRMP has samples for all sports sanctioned by the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association (WIAA) available on our website in both Spanish and English.

The third intent is to *document* that all parties were fully aware of the activity and its perils and voluntarily agreed to allow participation. This is also an avenue for the district to provide additional information they wish to convey to the parents/guardians. This could include a statement reminding parents the district does not provide medical or accident insurance for students. In some cases, specific behavioral expectations should be listed here for agreement and documentation by both the student and their guardian(s). Staff and students should receive instruction on the behavioral expectations and participation requirements described in the statement.

Other important information that should be included on the form is asking parents about any limitations or health concerns that staff should be aware of when allowing the student to participate. That allows the parent/guardian and district to better prepare or make alternative plans. For example, if the activity includes contact with animals, an asthmatic child with an animal dander trigger should have a plan in place with the school on how to recognize when they need medical treatment and what steps should be taken to administer medication. Appropriate staff should be notified as necessary of student limitations and health concerns.

A common misconception is that a signed parental permission slip means the parents/guardians have waived the right to bring a claim against the district and/or employee(s). While the parents/guardians may assume the normal risks associated with the activity, they do not waive their rights for any and all injuries that may occur. They cannot waive the student's rights, either. While a carefully constructed form cannot absolve a school district of liability, it can be an important part of any defense in case of an accident or injury.

After being notified and informed of the planned event, parents/guardians can request that their child opt out of the activity due to health, religious, or other reasons. Be prepared to have an alternative activity available that does not make the child feel they are being punished or singled out. The alternative activity offered should have a similar educational benefit and outcome to the planned activity.

WSRMP Risk Services staff are available to help you review activities and events and provide additional guidance when developing these forms. We can be reached at 206.394.9737 or [riskservices@wsrmp.com](mailto:riskservices@wsrmp.com).

**Examples of inherent risk language to be input into permission form:**

Water activities: This field trip involves water activities such as [*swimming, diving, boating, ferries, water parks, beaches, shores, docks, piers, etc.*] that have certain inherent risks, including but not limited to risks associated with drowning, hypothermia, hyperthermia, and waterborne disease/illness/infection.

Animal activities: This field trip involves animal activities such as [*petting zoo, farm, barn, aquarium, zoo, agriculture, wildlife encounters, etc.*] that have certain inherent risks, including but not limited to risks associated with exposure to disease-carrying animals or insects resulting in zoonotic disease (such as campylobacter, salmonella, E. coli, influenza, and other possible infections), allergic reaction, bites, stings, and scratches.

Wilderness/outdoor activities: This field trip involves wilderness/outdoor activities such as [*outdoor education, hiking, remote setting, local/state/national park, etc.*] that have certain inherent risks, including but not limited to risks associated with exposure to inclement or extreme weather, hazardous terrain, environmental conditions, remote location, limited cell phone access, slips, trips and falls, heat-related risks (sunburn, heat exhaustion, dehydration), and exposure to disease-carrying wildlife or insects.

Physical activities: This field trip involves physical activities such as [*sports, non-WIAA sports, ropes/challenge course, strenuous activity, physical exertion, etc.*] that have certain inherent risks, including but not limited to risks associated with slips, trips, and falls, concussion/head injury, sudden cardiac arrest, equipment failure, dehydration, sprains, fractures, contusions, and abrasions.

Food/beverages: This field trip involves the consumption of food and beverages that have certain inherent risks including, but not limited to risks associated with food-borne illness, gastritis, contamination or cross-contamination, and allergic reaction.

Overnight field trip: This field trip involves overnight activities that have certain inherent risks, including but not limited to risks associated with travel, third-party lodging or accommodation, and risks associated with periods of independent unsupervised activity.