

COVID 19 Update – Summer 2020
Chicago Adventure Therapy
May 2020

We are not cancelling our summer season. However, Summer 2020 will look different than other seasons.

The safety of everyone involved is our first priority. Within that parameter, we hope to provide as much fun, respite, and release as we possibly can in what is likely to be a challenging, unpredictable, and scary summer. To achieve that goal, we will be thorough about precisely defining risk, creative about mitigating it, and cautious about taking steps to run programming.

As an organization, CAT has never been risk-averse. However, we take risk very seriously.

CAT has two primary areas of risk – financial risk and health risk. The health risk includes the risk of infection among our staff, young people, and the staff of partner agencies; and the risk of transmission of the virus. CAT works with populations across the city; if our mitigation of the risk of transmission is insufficient, we run the risk of seeding hot spots across the city. We cannot live with that outcome – so we are being VERY careful about our risk assessment and mitigation strategies.

During the Stay at Home order, we are focusing on referrals to concrete resources to meet immediate needs for the young people we work with year round, and on maintaining connection. Like so many Americans right now, folks in our community are kind of “over” the Zoom experience. It’s challenging to maintain connection via internet. But connection is a vital part of what we do. We’ve learned that when youth and young adults alike are struggling the most is when they’re most likely to be MIA. So we’re working on additional ways to maintain connection. We’ve worked hard to secure our financial situation – and are lucky to be able to commit additional staff time to this priority.

We’re hiring a summer team and expect to be able to offer “virtual” programming before we can offer programming more similar to our “regular” outdoor summer programming. This might mean creating PDF’s of outdoor venues in Chicago or videos of safety information or virtual tours of our favorite local hikes. It might mean creating “treasure hunts” or “Bingo” for children or families to find unexpected bits of nature on walks through their neighborhoods. It might mean engaging some of the young adults we work with in creating educational materials for younger kids. We don’t know yet. Whatever the end result, we hope to provide online services and resources that will be useful. We’ll share these resources publicly as we develop them, in the hope that they will be broadly relevant and helpful.

We will be monitoring the situation as the State of Illinois loosens guidance and restrictions on residents. We will adhere to all guidance issued by the State – it represents the minimum safety precautions we will take; the “floor,” not the “ceiling.”

We are also offering to consult with our partner agencies about the potential risk involved in outdoor programming they would like to run. We believe it is our responsibility to share our expertise about frameworks for assessing risk, in addition to the very detailed mitigation strategies involved in each sport that is part of our programming. We want to make sure our partner agencies can feel confident about engaging in any programming. Where risk can be defined and mitigated, uncertainty about potential risk shouldn't be the reason our partners lose the opportunity to participate in programming.

As it becomes possible to offer outdoor programming safely, we will work with partner agencies to offer outlets for Chicago youth to get outside, to let off steam, to find peace and calm in natural spaces. We have an incredible team of program staff who've worked with us in previous summers and have agreed to be part of our Staffing Pool this summer, allowing us to be nimble and quick if programming becomes safely possible.

The financial risk to the organization comes from the likelihood of severely decreased outdoor summer programming, with the potential that we lose a full season. We realized the potential severity of the coronavirus pandemic and the economic fallout from it early. We've been working since the beginning of March to secure our financial situation. We're grateful to so many people who have been generous in the midst of their own uncertain financial situations. Thank You. Our finances are still uncomfortably tight – but we will not be closing our doors, and we will be providing summer programming of some sort, whether virtual, in person, or a mix.

You can make a donation to CAT by following this link.

<https://app.etapestry.com/onlineforms/ChicagoAdventureTherapy/onlinedonations.html>

If you would like to know more about how we assess and manage risk, and specifically how we're thinking about risk related to COVID 19 in outdoor programming, here is a summary of our risk assessment process.

Risk, Outdoor programming, and COVID 19

We spend a lot of time managing some very real risk. As an organization, we have never been risk-averse. However, we take risk VERY seriously. We believe there are three pieces to managing risk – defining the risk as precisely as possible; mitigating the risk where we can; making decisions about whether the mitigation brings the risk to an acceptable level. The assessment of risk is a dynamic process – it changes as circumstances and information change.

Definition of risk:

We believe the risk inherent in the coronavirus pandemic is two-fold. There is personal risk for all involved in our programming. There is public health risk associated with the highly contagious nature of this virus. We do not want any of the youth you work with, or any of your staff or volunteers, or ours, to contract the virus. We also do not want to organize an event that can seed multiple hot spots of the virus across the city in a variety of communities.

Mitigation of risk:

The variety of restrictions that may be in place when the Illinois Stay at Home order is lifted are the mitigation strategies that the State will put in place. Our job at that point is to determine if we can run programming within those restrictions; this is only partly about meeting legal requirements, and largely about mitigating the personal and public health risks to youth, staff and volunteers, and their families and communities. It is also our job to determine if there are additional mitigation strategies we need to take. We have gone through all of the potential restrictions we've read might go into place when the Stay at Home order is lifted. We have worked out whether and how we would safely run programming under each of those restrictions. We are also researching guidance for a variety of industries similar to ours, and specific guidelines for outdoor providers in states that have delineated them.

Acceptability of risk:

This is the area that is subjective. Decisions about the acceptability of risk have to do with the probability of the risk and the consequence of the risk. Decisions are easy when the probability and the consequence are both low (no problem), or if they're both high (No Go situation). We are in the most difficult and most subjective scenario – the probability of most of the risk is low; the consequence is potentially devastating. We expect that there will be some times in the summer that we can run programming safely with some modifications – smaller groups, masks, changes to transportation logistics, etc. There will be some things we won't be able to do in a safe, responsible and ethical way. We won't do those things. Because this determination is subjective and potential consequences are high, we will not pressure you to run programming we believe has acceptable levels of risk if you determine the risk to be unacceptable.

Dynamic risk:

There is a saying in the paddling world. Plan your paddle – but don't expect to paddle your plan. If conditions are different from what your best research suggested they will be, you have to change your plan. Conditions might change multiple times during a paddle, requiring that you change your assessment of the situation multiple times, and change your plans on the fly accordingly. Our plans will likely change a lot this summer. We will continue to assess the risk, and make changes to our plans accordingly. To make sure you can feel as confident as possible about any proposed programming, we will be 100% transparent about our assessment of the risk and our mitigation strategies. We will be happy to talk with you in as much or as little detail as you'd like.