



Vail Mountain Rescue – Newsletters

Tell Children: If Lost or Scared, “HUG A TREE”

The **Hug-A-Tree** program started in 1981 after the loss of a child near San Diego California. Despite the best efforts of search and rescue volunteers, this mission did not end happily.

As we begin the summer season, we remind, everyone—parents, grandparents, camp counselors—that children can become lost in the back country. Before hiking, camping and other outings, we urge you to share this safety information with the kids you love:



HUG A TREE—Once you know you are lost, hug a tree! One of the greatest fears many of us have is being alone. Hugging a tree or other stationary object and even talking to it can help calm you down, and prevent panic. By staying in one place, you will be found far more quickly, and won't be injured in a fall.

ALWAYS CARRY A WHISTLE AND A TRASHBAG—Whenever you go hiking, you should carry a whistle on a lanyard around your neck and a trash bag. By making a hole in the side of the bag (so you don't suffocate!) for your face, and putting it over your head, it will keep you dry and warm. The whistle can be heard from farther away than your voice, even when you are yelling very loudly. And it takes less energy to use.

YOUR PARENTS WON'T BE ANGRY WITH YOU—Time and again, children have avoided searchers because they were ashamed of getting lost, and afraid of punishment. Anyone can become lost, even adults! So don't be ashamed. Just admit it, accept it and take actions to be comfortable while you wait for the searchers to arrive. Your parents will be so happy to see you again, and to know that you are safe. So there's no need to be frightened or worried about that. And they will be so proud of you for using your head since it is your best survival tool.

MAKE YOURSELF BIG—From a helicopter, people are hard to see when they are standing up, when they are in a group of trees, or wearing dark clothing. Find your tree to hug near a small clearing if possible. Wear a brightly colored jacket (red and orange are easy to see from far away) when you go into the woods or the desert. Lie down when the helicopter flies over. If it is cold and you are rested, make crosses or an “SOS” using broken twigs, branches, rocks or by dragging your foot in the dirt.

ANIMALS ARE AFRAID OF HUMANS—If you hear a noise at night, yell at it! If it is an animal it will run away to protect itself. If it is a searcher, you will be found.

YOU HAVE HUNDREDS OF FRIENDS LOOKING FOR YOU—Many children who are lost don't realize that if they will just sit down and stay put, one of the many searchers will find them. The searchers will be yelling your name, but they are not angry. They are just worried about you and want to find you as quickly as possible. Don't be afraid to let them know where you are.

(Published with permission from the National Association of Search and Rescue, <http://www.nasar.org>)

For younger children, the **Hug-A-Tree** coloring book provides a good guide to instill these techniques, plus it is a fun activity. You may [download the coloring book](#) for your children or grandchildren.

[More resources](#) are available for Teachers or Counselors.



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