



**By Catherine A Eubank**

Building your own escape adventures can be a lot of fun but it does take some well thought out strategies to make them successful. Anyone with an active imagination, good organizational skills, and is detail oriented can create a very rewarding experience for any aged group visiting your site.

The very first thing you need to think about is the site you're using. Are you inviting guests to come to your site, physically or virtually, or are you going to a different site to raise awareness about what you're doing at your actual site (schools, libraries, parks)? If you're organizing an adventure on your own site things can be much easier. If you're doing them elsewhere, a well written plan needs doing along with some well-placed initial phone calls or emails to get the necessary permission to proceed. If you think in terms of liability, things will be much easier to plan.

The next step is the adventure. This is where the fun starts. Ask yourself what you're trying to achieve by offering an escape adventure. If you work at a museum and would like to showcase a new exhibit, this would be a great way to bring folks in. For example: You have a new bat exhibit highlighting the changing times and the challenging issues they're facing. You could write an escape adventure about being lost in a cave and they need to follow the clues to find their way out. The cave is imaginary, of course.



Now comes the real work! Writing the backstory and creating the clues. The backstory could be as simple as 'you and your team got separated from the tour and are now lost...'. I always write my backstories using historical fiction. This is my opportunity to engage people of all different backgrounds and ages in some cool facts. The fiction parts are the easy parts and where the adventure begins.

Creating the clues. This is where your imagination and your organizational skills must come together. Visualize the start and finish of the game. Where do you want them to start? Are they working together as a team, against other teams, or are they working singly, racing against other people?



Our Escape the Forest Adventures always begin at Base Camp. Participants have previously chosen which adventure game they want to play (we have 11 games to choose from) and what skill level they want to try (beginner, intermediate, advanced). The backstory for each game remains the same but, because of the skill level and ages of the participants, the clues need to be written specifically for each group. We always take the average intellect of the average age range of each group into prospective, when writing the clues. When booking an adventure, we require 48-hours' notice to give us time to write clues and set-up the forest.

Depending on your budget, not all of your clues need to be riddles. We've slowly been accumulating puzzles, dummies, wardrobe (for the dummies), locks and lock boxes, and all sorts of other 'set' decorations to help aid in the illusion of the games we play. This is where your imagination can have a lot of fun!

We start off our games with a lockbox for each person or team. On the lid of each box is a copy of the backstory along with their first directions. They need to solve the math to find the lock combination. The first team into their box gets a head start on their game. Each box contains a site map, a compass, and the next clue. And, the game is afoot! Participants race around the forest, solving riddles and puzzles, hoping to be the first to reach the end. The winning team is greeted with a final lockbox that contains a congratulatory letter with directions to head back to Base Camp, waters, and snacks. At Base Camp we present them with Certificates of Accomplishment or Achievement, as a small token of their 'survival'.



Each game lasts roughly 90 minutes. One staff member per team accompanies them through their adventure so they don't actually get too lost or too stuck, or too off-track. Teams are also offered two 'cheats' where they can ask the staff member for the answer. If they get stuck and need help a third time, they're disqualified.

Offering any type of adventure game for your site will really help further engage your visitors to whatever you're doing or promoting. An added bonus is that you, your staff, and your visitors, will get to play and have fun!

In our hectic lives, many of us focus so heavily on work and family commitments that we never seem to have time for real fun. Somewhere between childhood and adulthood, we stopped playing. When we carve out some leisure time, we're more likely to zone out in front of the TV or computer than engage in fun, rejuvenating play like we did as children. But play is not just essential for kids; it can be an important source of relaxation and stimulation for adults as well.

Playing is a sure way to fuel your imagination, creativity, problem-solving abilities, and emotional well-being. Adult play is a time to forget about work and commitments, and to be social in an unstructured, creative way. Play could be simple; there doesn't need to be any point to the activity beyond having fun and enjoying yourself. By giving yourself permission to play with the joyful abandon of childhood, you can reap oodles of health benefits throughout life.

While play is crucial for a child's development, it is also beneficial for people of all ages. Play can add joy to life, relieve stress, supercharge learning, and connect you to others and the world around you. Play can also make work more productive and pleasurable.

Play helps:

- Relieve stress.

Play is fun and can trigger the release of endorphins, the body's natural feel-good chemicals. Endorphins promote an overall sense of well-being and can even temporarily relieve pain.

- Improve brain function.

Playing forest games, completing different tasks, or pursuing other fun activities that challenge the brain can help prevent memory problems and improve brain function. The social interaction of playing can also help ward off stress and depression.

- Stimulate the mind and boost creativity.

Young children often learn best when they are playing—a principle that applies to adults, as well. You'll learn a new task better when it's fun and you're in a relaxed and playful mood. Play can also stimulate your imagination, helping you adapt and solve problems.

- Improve relationships and your connection to others.

Sharing laughter and fun can foster empathy, compassion, trust, and intimacy with others. Play doesn't have to include a specific activity; it can also be a state of mind. Developing a playful nature can help you loosen up in stressful situations, break the ice with strangers, make new friends, and form new business relationships.

- Keep you feeling young and energetic.

In the words of George Bernard Shaw, "We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing." Play can boost your energy and vitality and even improve your resistance to disease, helping you function at your best.

Play performs an essential role in building strong, healthy relationships by bringing people closer together, creating a positive bond, and resolving conflicts and disagreements.

Just remember to be safe, have fun, and enjoy your adventures!