

# TBBCF Walk Leader Guide



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## YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

The purpose of a training walk is to provide a supportive environment for walkers to learn and train for the Walk Across Southeastern Connecticut. Training walks are an opportunity for walkers to meet others, get in some great training, and learn from each other. Your role as a volunteer Training Walk Leader is to be a model for safe walking and a friendly guardian to other walkers.

You do not need to be an expert walker, an experienced athlete, or even a fast walker - you cannot keep your eye on everyone if you're out pushing hard.

You will, however, be helping others. You will have the motivation of a group of walkers ready and willing to join you on your walks. You will also have the opportunity to meet new friends, share stories, and exchange training experiences as well as fundraising ideas. Your main responsibilities as a volunteer Training Walk Leader are:

1. Scout out a walk route and submit your schedule on a regular basis
2. Collect *Training Walk* waiver signatures from all participants, and retain copies of the completed waivers until the end of the training season
3. Lead pre-walk group stretches
4. Model safe walking habits, including attention to stretching and hydrating
5. Help new and returning walkers feel welcome and included
6. Keep an eye on walkers to ensure that everyone is able to complete the training walk safely

We are committed to providing you with the support you need to feel comfortable leading your walks and to ensure that your experience as a leader is a rewarding one! As you read through these materials, if you think of other resources or tools that would be useful to the program, please let us know!

## **PLANNING A TRAINING WALK**

Many of the walkers you'll be training with will be new to distance walking and/or do not currently have a training regimen. You may be new to it yourself. Start out with easy walks (low mileage and on flat surfaces) and gradually increase difficulty. When you plan longer walks, you may want to provide options for shorter distances (shortcuts, loops, etc.)

### **Distance Guidelines**

Use the Training Schedule in the TBBCF Walker's Guide (Appendix 1) to help plan your training walk regimen.

### **Restroom and Hydration Stops**

As you plan your route, scout out available restroom and hydration stops. There is a direct correlation between the frequency of restrooms and walkers' willingness to continue hydrating while walking. Frequent restroom stops reduce the risk that someone will suffer from dehydration on your training walk. Please make an effort to locate toilets and hydration stops no more than 3 miles apart on your route. This will also help walkers build good hydration habits that will ultimately make their Walk Across Southeastern Connecticut experience safe, more successful, and more enjoyable.

### **Hills**

If your regular training walk does not include hills, you may wish to periodically alternate with a hilly course, in order to prepare for every type of walking condition. When including hills on your route, try to give walkers enough distance before the hill to warm up.

### **Varying your Distance**

There are different ways to make your training walks adaptable for different walkers' abilities:

1. **Loops.** Plan a circular route of a relatively short distance. This way, walkers can decide for themselves how many times they want to walk the loop.
2. **Go out and back.** Plan a route that goes out in one direction and returns on the same course. Walkers have the option of turning around at any point.
3. **Shortcuts.** Build shortcuts into a longer route and tell your walking group about them before you start, or detail them on your route map or directions.

### **Route Maps and Directions**

If you choose to use printed route maps or directions, make sure they are easy to read and understand. Keep them legible and brief, while still pointing out any hazards, toilets, hydration stops, etc. Be sure to include noticeable landmarks if there are not street signs or distance markers. Otherwise, briefly talk about the route before you begin walking. Make sure that slower walkers will know where to go if they become separated from the group.

## Tips for Route Directions:

1. If you hand out a map, make sure street names are legible. Written instructions are also helpful.
2. Don't forget to indicate toilets and hydration availability.
3. If you are walking in an urban area, indicating the number of blocks walked may be clearer than indicating distance in some cases.
4. Point out landmarks for easy recognition of the route.
5. Pre-Planned Walk Routes - If you are having trouble finding a safe walk route, contact the Walker Training Captains. Often, they will be able to recommend a walking route to you, or even have one already planned that you may use.
6. Be Available for communication from walkers - Many training walk leaders choose to collect RSVPs from their walkers, so they know in advance about how many people are going to show up.

## ON THE DAY OF YOUR TRAINING WALK

### Show Up Early

Plan to arrive at your starting location several minutes prior to your meeting time. By arriving early, you will be able to spot and gather walkers (so they are not walking around anxiously wondering if they are in the right place!) You will also be available to new walkers and be able to answer any questions they may have. Wear either your Walk Across Southeastern Connecticut hat so others can spot you.

*Training Walk Waivers* (Appendix 2) - Every walker or participant must sign the Training Walk Waiver before participating in the training walk. This waiver states that walkers are participating in the training walk voluntarily and are aware of the risks involved. It protects all parties from liability for the actions of the participants. This waiver can double as a sign-out sheet! After all your walkers have signed it, put it under someone's car windshield wiper or inside their car with a pen. If anyone from your group returns before you do, she can simply put a checkmark next to her name to signal she has returned safely and gone home.

### Rules for Training Walks

The Walk Across Southeastern Connecticut has established several rules for training walks in order to ensure the safety of all participants, as well as to provide you with a more manageable environment.

Please read the rules in the next section and contact your coordinator if you have any questions.

### Friends and Family Members

Except for children under the age of 12, friends and family members are welcome to join in the training walks. Minors under the age of 18 must be accompanied by a guardian. The only requirement is that every person, regardless of whether they are actually registered for the Walk Across Southeastern Connecticut, must sign the Training Walk Waiver in order to participate. Be aware that as your training group progresses; you will begin to take on longer and more difficult walks. While you and your group will be prepared for these walks since you have been training all season, friends and family members may not know what they are getting into. As a training walk leader, you have the right to restrict people who are obviously not ready for your walk from attending. Explain your feelings to the person privately and gently to avoid causing embarrassment and either suggest an abbreviated route for them if you know one, or ask that they not participate at all.

## **Route Directions**

Pass out your route directions. We recommend waiting until after the speech to pass these out so walkers are not distracted during the speech. Highlight any important points on the route (restrooms, tricky intersections, etc.) and answer any questions walkers have about the route.

## **Designate a "Caboose"**

On the actual Walk Across Southeastern Connecticut, there is one person called the "caboose" that follows the very last walkers. If you are leading a large group, you may wish to designate a person to be the caboose for your training walk. You may choose to be the "caboose" yourself, or you may wish to ask a friend or one of the "regulars" on your walk to be the "caboose." If you are asking someone else to be the "caboose," please do so discreetly before the walk so as to avoid putting someone on the spot.

## **Stretching**

Stretching is the most effective way to prevent injury during training and the actual Walk Across Southeastern Connecticut. Many walkers are not familiar with stretching and need encouragement to develop good stretching habits during training. You have an opportunity to set a good example for walkers by leading stretches before you begin our training walks and to encourage stretching five minutes for every hour of walking.

## **Hydration**

Dehydration and hyponatremia (loss of sodium) are the causes of the most severe medical cases seen on the Walk Across Southeastern Connecticut. Both of these conditions are easily preventable. Unfortunately, they are also life-threatening. While hydration and hyponatremia are experienced most often during hot weather, they can occur during moderate and cold weather as well. On the event, walkers are encouraged to drink a bottle of water and a bottle of sports drink between each pit stop (every two to three miles). Please encourage walkers to start this regimen during their training - drinking before, during, and after all their training walks - even short ones - and regardless of weather.

## **Accidents**

If you experience an accident or injury on your walk, first and foremost, call 911. It is a good idea to bring a cell phone on your walks. Please remember to stop walking before using your cell phone.

## **SAFETY**

### **Attitude & Alertness**

Most training accidents can be attributed to an inattention to the principles of safety or a lack of awareness to one's surroundings. You must remain alert at all times.

### **Obey all Traffic Laws**

Walkers must obey traffic laws at all times. This includes waiting for lights at controlled intersections and crossing in designated crosswalks where evident. Walkers should always look both ways before proceeding across an intersection. When a car is stopped at an intersection, walkers should make eye contact with the driver before proceeding across to ensure that the driver sees you.

### **Share the Trail**

Safety among other pedestrians is as important as safety among traffic. When using a trail or sidewalk, it is important for walkers to pay attention to pedestrian traffic traveling in both directions. This includes looking ahead to oncoming traffic and listening to what is coming up from behind. It is important to always leave enough room on the trail for traffic to pass - keeping in mind that a bike or skater requires more room to pass than another walker. Walkers should always stay to the right of the trail unless passing another pedestrian. When you hear "passing" or "on your left" from behind, move as far to the right as possible to allow the person or bike to pass.

## Walking in a Group

Please don't bunch up while walking or block the trail or sidewalk. Walkers should always leave plenty of room for traffic to pass and be conscious and courteous of passing.

## Passing

Walkers should always pass on the left side of those in front of them. However, when walking next to vehicle traffic, walkers should always pass on the traffic side (even if this is the right side).

## HYDRATION

It is very important to stress hydration on training walks for two reasons:

1. Walkers build habits on training walks. Walkers who do not learn to hydrate during training are less likely to hydrate adequately during the Breast Cancer Walk Across Southeastern Connecticut and may face serious medical conditions as a result.
2. Long walks and high temperatures can easily lead to moderate-to-severe dehydration or a related condition called hyponatremia. We want to alert walkers before this happens, so you are not faced with potentially serious medical conditions while leading your training walks.

Note: While the term hydration is often associated with water, when participating in extended exercise, especially in high temperatures, it is very important to associate hydration with both water and sodium intake. When you talk about hydration with other walkers, stress the importance of consuming BOTH water and sports drinks. Insufficient intake of sodium during exercise can lead to hyponatremia, which can become very serious, very quickly. Hyponatremia means a low concentration of sodium in the blood. When lost fluid is replaced with water only, the sodium levels in the blood stream are diluted. Without adequate sodium in the bloodstream, your body's cells cannot absorb water properly and you become dehydrated - even though you're consuming plenty of water. Hyponatremia can be prevented through adequate intake of sodium during training. This includes hydrating with sports drinks in addition to water and snacking on salty foods such as pretzels, peanuts, etc. If walkers are diluting their sports drink with water in order to make it more palatable, they need to be consuming twice as much sports drink. When you are discussing hyponatremia with walkers, please DO NOT use the term "over-hydration." While this term is sometimes used to describe hyponatremia, it can be misinterpreted to mean that hydrating less is better.

## STRETCHING

Leading a group stretch before you begin the training walk is a good way to bring the group together and demonstrate stretches for walkers who may be unfamiliar with stretching. You should warm up before stretching by walking for about five minutes in order to prevent pulled muscles. So designate a spot about a five- to ten- minute walk from the starting point and have your entire group of walkers stop and regroup for group stretches. If this is not possible, encourage walkers to warm up before stretching by walking or jogging in place.

## On the Route

While on the route, encourage walkers to stop and stretch for five minutes after each hour of walking. It may help to designate "stretching stops" on your route directions or map. Remember that you lead by example. When you stop to stretch, encourage others to stop with you.

## Post-Walk

Remind walkers to stretch immediately after the training walk. This will help prevent stiffness later in the day and will help prevent injuries in the long run. This is particularly important for walkers intending to get out and walk again the next day.