



# **Climb on Safely**

***A Guide to Unit Climbing and Rappelling***

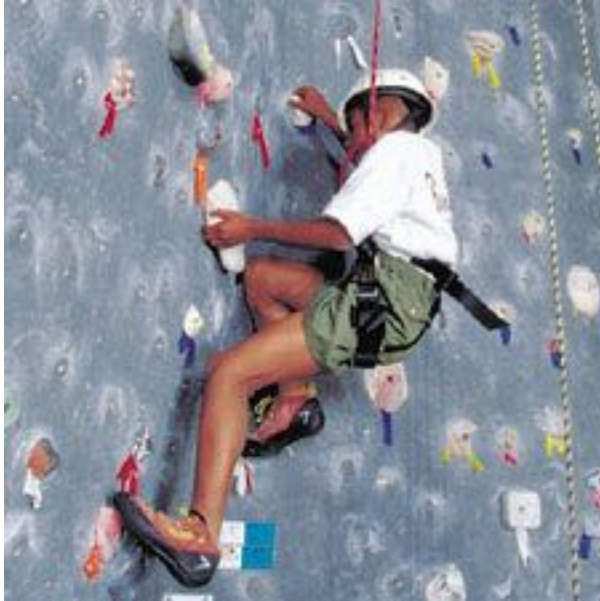


Climb On Safely is the Boy Scouts of America's procedure for organizing BSA climbing/rappelling activities at a natural site or a specifically designed facility such as a climbing wall or tower. All unit-sponsored/planned climbing activities, regardless of where they are held, fall under Climb On Safely. This applies to a single unit or multiple units that may be participating in a joint unit climbing activity.

Tour leaders are responsible for making sure all points of Climb On Safely are followed. Unit committee chairs and local councils must ensure that an adult on the tour has taken Climb On Safely training.



Young people today seek greater challenges, and climbing and rappelling offer a worthy challenge. The satisfaction of safely climbing a rock face is hard to top. While introduction of the

Climbing merit badge in spring 1997 spurred interest in these activities through the BSA, the proliferation of climbing gyms and facilities has also made climbing and rappelling readily available throughout the United States.



This increased interest has made climbing and rappelling a very popular unit activity. More accidents occur during unit rappelling than during council-managed climbing or rappelling, and more accidents have occurred during rappelling than climbing. Many climbing/rappelling accidents could be avoided by having qualified instruction from a conscientious adult who has the attention and respect of the youth entrusted to his or her care. Supervision by a caring adult who fully understands and appreciates the responsibility he or she assumes helps assure safety when youth engage in or prepare for climbing or rappelling.

The adult supervisor's relationship with youth participants should reinforce the importance of following instructions. The adult leader in charge and the climbing instructor share this important responsibility. The instructor is responsible for all procedures and for safely conducting the climbing/rappelling activity. The adult supervisor works cooperatively with the climbing instructor and is responsible for all matters outside of the climbing/rappelling activity.

**Belay On** , No. 430-500, is a recommended reference. Cub Scouts are encouraged to engage in climbing; Webelos Scouts are encouraged to engage in climbing and rappelling in a controlled environment with close supervision by instructors who are knowledgeable about instructing this age group. Normally, this means going to a climbing gym where the degree of difficulty is age-appropriate and the harnesses are size-appropriate for Cub Scouts. **Age-appropriate guidelines**  can be found at [www.scouting.org](http://www.scouting.org).

Each of the following points plays an important role in Climb On Safely. Fun and safe climbing/rappelling activities require close compliance of Climb On Safely by the adult supervisor, the instructors, and all participants. These points also apply to bouldering—traversing a few feet above ground level.

### **1. Qualified Supervision**

All climbing and rappelling must be supervised by a mature, conscientious adult at least 21 years of age who understands the risks inherent to these activities. This person knowingly accepts responsibility for the well-being and safety of the youth in his or her care. This adult supervisor is trained in and committed to compliance with the eight points of the Boy Scouts of America's Climb On Safely procedure and responsible for recruiting and verifying the qualifications of the qualified instructors.

One adult supervisor is required for every 10 participants with a minimum of two adults for any one group.

The adult supervisor is responsible for ensuring that someone in the group is currently trained in American Red Cross Standard First Aid and CPR (a 6 ½-hour course). In addition, Wilderness First Aid (a 16-hour course) is recommended for units going to remote areas. A course of equivalent length and content from another nationally recognized organization can be substituted. A higher level of certification such as emergency medical technician (EMT), licensed practical nurse (LPN), registered nurse (RN), and

licensed health-care practitioner is also acceptable if the person is trained in backcountry medical care. The ARC's Emergency Response, a 43 ½-hour course that includes CPR, is highly recommended.

## **2. Qualified Instructors**

There must be a minimum of two instructors for all climbing and rappelling activities (up to 12 participants) and one additional instructor for each additional six participants, maintaining a 6-to-1 ratio.

The **qualified instructor** managing the climbing/rappelling activity must be at least 21 years of age, and be current in his/her training from one or more of the sources listed below or equivalent:

- BSA Level II climbing instructor or climbing director
- BSA Level II COPE instructor or COPE director (artificial structures only)
- Instructors trained by professional organizations or their accredited providers:
  - American Mountain Guides Association (AMGA)
    - Rock instructor
    - Single pitch instructor
    - Climbing wall instructor (artificial structures only)
  - Professional Climbing Instructors Association (PCIA)
    - Base-managed climbing instructor
    - Top-managed climbing instructor
    - Single pitch instructor
    - Climbing wall instructor (artificial structures only)
  - Professional Climbing Guide Institute (PCGI)
    - Top rope guide
    - Single pitch guide
    - Lead guide
    - Multipitch guide
  - Climbing Wall Association (CWA)

- Climbing wall instructor (artificial structures only)
- Professional climbing guide/instructors who are licensed by the state or accredited according to:
  - AMGA, PCIA, or PCGI for natural rock climbing
  - AMGA, PCIA, CWA, PRCA, or ACCT for artificial structures
- University or college climbing/rappelling instructors who are current in their training (assessment within three years) as rock climbing instructors (or climbing wall instructors for artificial structures only)

Additional **instructors** required to meet the 6-to-1 ratio requirement must be competent as determined by the **qualified instructor** and be at least 18 years of age.

There are many institutions and/or businesses that offer training for climbing and rappelling; however, most do not prepare instructors to lead groups of people on climbing and rappelling outings. Your local council COPE and Climbing Committee, Area COPE and Climbing Advocates, and Region COPE and Climbing Chairs are good sources to determine if an alternative training experience is equivalent to one of the sources listed above. For guidance or additional information, contact the BSA's Outdoor Programs/Properties Department through your local council office.

### 3. Physical Fitness



Adult supervisors must require evidence of fitness for the climbing/rappelling activity with a current BSA [Annual Health and Medical Record](#). The adult supervisor should adapt all supervision, discipline, and precautions to anticipate any potential risks associated with individual health conditions. The adult supervisor should inform the climbing instructor about each participant's medical conditions.

### 4. Safe Area

All BSA climbing/rappelling activities must be conducted using an established climbing/rappelling site or facility. A qualified climbing instructor should survey the site in advance of the activity to identify and evaluate possible hazards and to determine whether the site is suitable for the age, maturity, and skill level of the participants. The instructor should also verify that the site is sufficient to safely and comfortably accommodate the number of participants in the activity within the available time. An emergency evacuation route must be identified in advance. A separate area should be established for onlookers.

Each participant and staff member in the fall zone of a climbing/rappelling site must wear a UIAA- or CE-approved rock-climbing

helmet. Everyone must be belayed or tethered when within 8 feet of an edge where a fall of more than 6 feet could occur.

## 5. Equipment



The climbing instructor should verify that the proper equipment is available for the size and ability level of the participants. Helmets, harnesses, rope, and climbing hardware must meet appropriate requirements as outlined in Belay On. All equipment must be acquired new and/or furnished by the instructor and retired according to the manufacturer's recommendations. When using a climbing gym, the climbing facility's procedures apply.

## 6. Planning

When planning, remember the following:

- Share the climbing/rappelling plan and an alternate with parents and the unit committee. This plan should include what to do in case of emergencies.
- Secure the necessary permits or written permission for using private or public lands.
- Enlist the help of a qualified climbing instructor.

- Be sure the instructor has a topographic map for the area.
- Obtain a current weather report for the area before the group's departure. It is recommended that at least one of the adult supervisors take Severe Weather training prior to the trip.

It is suggested that at least one of the adult leaders has an electronic means of communication in case of an emergency. Before any activity, an adult leader should develop and share an emergency plan that includes the location of a nearby medical facility and the means of communicating with parents during the activity.

## 7. Environmental Conditions



The instructor, each adult leader, and each participant assume responsibility for monitoring potentially dangerous environmental conditions that may include loose, crumbly rock; poisonous plants; wildlife; and inclement weather. Use the buddy system to monitor concerns such as dehydration, hypothermia, and an unusually high degree of fear or apprehension. The adult supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the group leaves no trace of its presence at the site.



## **8. Discipline**

Each participant knows, understands, and respects the rules and procedures for safely climbing and rappelling and follows Climb On Safely and Leave No Trace. All participants should respect and follow all instructions and rules of the climbing instructor. The applicable rules should be presented and learned prior to the outing and should be reviewed for all participants before climbing or rappelling begins. When participants know the reasons for rules and procedures, they are more likely to follow them. The climbing instructor must be strict and fair, showing no favoritism.