



Climb On Safely

Requirements for 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.



Note: Any adult Scouter who successfully completes training in Climb On Safely is entitled to wear the temporary patch, No. 8631. Participants are issued a Climb On Safely card, No. 33774, that is current for two years from the date of training. A Climb On Safely Training Outline, No. 430-101, is available from your local council service center.



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA®



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 should reinforce the importance of following instructions. The adult leader in charge and the climbing instructor share this 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.

Mountaineering: The Freedom of the Hills is a recommended reference.

Passport to High Adventure, No. 34245, published by the BSA, is an appropriate guidebook to safely get your unit to and from the climbing/rappelling site.

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 <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 6½-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 43½-hour course that includes CPR, is highly recommended.

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.

There is inherent risk in climbing and rappelling. With proper management, that risk can be minimized.

Leaders should be aware that Climb On Safely is an orientation only and does not constitute training on how to climb or rappel.





2. Qualified Instructors

A qualified climbing/rappelling instructor who is at least 21 years of age and trained in the specific type of climbing must supervise all BSA climbing/rappelling activities. A capable instructor has experience in teaching climbing and rappelling to youth, acknowledges personal limitations, and exercises good judgment in a variety of circumstances.

There must be a minimum of two instructors for all climbing and rappelling activities (up to 12 participants) and one additional instructor (at least 18 years of age) for up to each additional six participants, maintaining a 6:1 ratio.

Sources of qualified climbing and rappelling instructors include, but are not limited to, the following:

- BSA Level II instructor (climbing director or lead instructor)
- National Outdoor Leadership School
- Wilderness Education Association
- American Mountain Guides Association
- Eastern Mountain Sports
- University or college climbing/rappelling instructors
- Professional Climbing Guide Institute
- Professional Climbing Instructors Association

For specialized climbing activities such as lead climbing, sport climbing, ice climbing, canyoneering, mountaineering, and caving, qualified instructors with specific training and skill in instructing these activities are required.



3. Physical Fitness

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 anchored or tethered when within eight feet of a falling hazard.

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 *Topping Out* or the COPE and climbing manual when it becomes available. 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.



Qualified instruction is essential to conducting a safe climbing/rappelling activity. Some people who claim to be qualified or have had some experience with climbing or rappelling may lack sufficient knowledge to safely conduct these activities. For instance, some climbers with a lot of experience have repeated the same mistakes many times without learning correct procedures.



Cub Scouts and Webelos Scouts are encouraged to engage in climbing 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 instruction is age-appropriate and the harnesses are size-appropriate for Cub Scouts.

6. Planning

When planning, remember the following:

- Submit a tour and activity plan and receive approval from your local council service center.
- Share the climbing/rappelling plan and an alternate with parents and the unit committee.
- 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 being used and obtains a current weather report for the area before the group's departure.

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.



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Age-Appropriate Climbing and Rappelling Guidelines*

Cub Scouts

- Bouldering can be no higher than the climber's shoulder height, with trained adult spotters. (This pertains to climbing on boulders or other steep faces without going more than a few feet off the ground, protected by spotters rather than a rope belay.)
- Climbing in a climbing gym or using a portable wall or other age-appropriate facility with close supervision and age-appropriate instruction and equipment. Climbing is not allowed at natural sites.
- Climbers will be lowered by a belayer; no rappelling by Cub Scouts.
- No belaying by Cub Scouts. Climbers must be belayed by trained belayers.

Webelos Scouts

- Bouldering no higher than the climber's shoulder height, with trained spotters.
- Climbing in a climbing gym or using a portable wall or other age-appropriate facility with close supervision and age-appropriate instruction and equipment.
- Rappelling with a trained belayer.
- No belaying by Webelos Scouts. Climbers must be belayed by trained belayers.

Boy Scouts

- Bouldering no higher than the climber's shoulder height, with trained spotters.
- Top-rope climbing with trained belayers.
- Rappelling with trained belayers.
- Belaying with supervision and a backup.

Older Boy Scouts, Varsity Scouts, and Venturers

- Bouldering no higher than the climber's shoulder height, with trained spotters.
- Top-rope climbing with trained belayers.
- Belaying with supervision.
- Rappelling with trained belayers.
- All council and district climbing must be top-roped.
- Practice lead climbing with a top-rope belay.
- Units with youth who are at least 13 years of age may elect to participate in lead climbing and/or snow and ice climbing with training from a nationally recognized organization that trains climbing instructors. BSA climbing directors and instructors are not trained in lead climbing or snow and ice climbing.

*These minimum requirements may be raised by local councils to be more stringent.

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