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## Climb On Safely Training Outline

### Introduction

Climb On Safely is the Boy Scouts of America's recommended procedure for organizing climbing and rappelling activities at all levels of the Scouting program—Tiger Cubs BSA, Cub Scouting, Webelos Scouting, Boy Scouting, Varsity Scouting, and Venturing. For council and district climbing and rappelling activities, the Climbing/Rappelling National Standards (current year), No. 20-102, must be followed. Climb On Safely applies to climbing and rappelling at both natural sites and specially designed facilities such as climbing towers and walls, whether fixed or portable.

### Purpose

Climb On Safely is designed to help adult leaders organize a climbing and rappelling program for their unit, similar to Safe Swim Defense and Safety Afloat.

It is not designed to teach leaders how to instruct BSA youth in the skills of climbing and/or rappelling. Teaching climbing or rappelling requires a trained climbing instructor who meets the criteria under "qualified instructors" in Climb On Safely. Ideally this person has a current certificate of completion of training for BSA climbing director or BSA climbing instructor.

Training in Climb On Safely can be conducted by anyone who has an interest in climbing or rappelling; it does not require a skilled climber or rappeller. Training for Climb On Safely should not include skills training and therefore should not be done at a climbing/rappelling site or facility.

### Training Location

This training should be a part of the leader's orientation at a roundtable or summer camp. Ideally, every unit leader in summer camp will have an opportunity to attend this orientation under camp leadership. This training may also be conducted in connection with any BSA training program for Cub Scout, Boy Scout, Varsity Scout, or Venturing leaders, and it can be offered in connection with any other supplemental training programs or roundtables.

Training will take about 40 minutes. The training instructor should use the following Climb On Safely text as a resource for review and discussion.

### Learning Objectives

At the end of this session, each participant should be able to

- Explain how each of the eight points of the Climb On Safely program contributes to the objective of assuring safe unit climbing/rappelling.
- Understand why the first and last points—**qualified supervision** and **discipline**—are crucial and why all other points rely on these two points.
- Organize and carry out a safe unit climbing/rappelling activity, observing the eight points of the Climb On Safely program.
- Review the materials list for a better understanding of the resources available and how these can be used to help plan and safely carry out a climbing/rappelling activity.

### Materials

1. *Climb On Safely: A Guide to Unit Climbing and Rappelling* brochure, No. 20-099, one per participant
2. *Topping Out: A BSA Climbing/Rappelling Manual*, No. 32007
3. *Mountaineering: The Freedom of the Hills*, seventh edition, Don Graydon and Kurt Hanson, editors; Mountaineers

### Books

4. Parental Informed Consent Agreement from the appendix of Topping Out
5. *Passport to High Adventure*, No. 4310
6. Personal Health and Medical Record Form—Class 1 and Class 2, No. 34414; and Class 3, No. 34412
7. *Principles of Leave No Trace*, No. 21-105

## The Problem

Invite the participants to relate their personal experiences with an accident or close call during a unit climbing/rappelling activity. Supplement their accounts with examples of actual incidents (news items, personal experiences, reports, etc.). Conclude the opening discussion with Scouting's excellent safety record with Project COPE and climbing/rappelling-related activities.

## The Response

Scouting is responsible to provide for the safety of those participating in climbing/ rappelling activities. The Climb On Safely program is designed to promote safety and help prevent accidents. Accidents occur when Climb On Safely procedures are not followed.

## The Policy

Explain that before any BSA group can engage in any climbing/rappelling activity, adult leaders for the activity must have an appreciation for the potential hazards they might encounter and should be sure steps are taken to reduce risks. Adherence to the eight points of Climb On Safely will help units avoid significant risks.

Distribute a copy of the Climb On Safely brochure to each participant. Explain that you will be reviewing each of the eight points in detail.

**BSA Youth Protection**All adult leaders should comply with their local council's youth protection procedures before participating in any Scouting event or activity involving youth members. Your local council has materials about this required training.

### 1. Qualified Supervision

Ask participants to note the first and last points of the plan—qualified supervision and discipline. These are crucial points of the plan, because all the other points depend upon them. Review the following text material closely with participants before discussing each point in the Climb On Safely brochure.

### 2. Qualified Instructors

A qualified instructor for rock climbing/rappelling must supervise all BSA climbing/ rappelling activities. A currently trained BSA climbing director or climbing instructor is highly recommended. Contact your local Scout service center to locate a qualified individual. Other climbing instructors must be at least 21 years of age and must have completed a minimum of 10 hours of climbing/rappelling instruction from a nationally or regionally recognized organization, climbing school, or college-level climbing/rappelling course.

### 3. Physical Fitness

Participants need to have a Personal Health and Medical Record—Class 1, No. 34414 or higher. Point out that when accidents occur, they frequently are related to unknown physical conditions or are the unexpected result of some known physical problem. Climbing/rappelling requires the person in charge to review the medical record for each participant. Good safety requires an understanding of the risks of any individual health conditions. A fitness regimen is recommended prior to participation in climbing or rappelling. This should include strength and aerobic exercise.

### 4. Safe Area

Emphasize that all climbing/rappelling activities must be conducted using an established climbing/rappelling site or facility including a portable or commercial facility. A qualified climbing instructor checks the site in advance of the activity to evaluate possible hazards and determine if the site is suitable for the intended participants.

## 5. Equipment

The climbing instructor should verify that the proper equipment is available for the size and ability level of the participants. Helmets, rope, and climbing hardware must be approved by the UIAA (Union Internationale des Associations d' Alpinisme) and/or be CE-approved (European Community Norm), or meet ASTM standards. All equipment must be acquired new or furnished by the instructor. An approved climbing helmet must be worn during all BSA climbing/ rappelling activities where the participant's feet are more than shoulder height above ground level. When using a commercial climbing gym, the climbing facility's procedures apply.

## 6. Planning

Each youth participant should have written parental consent to participate in any BSA climbing/rappelling activity. The unit must acquire the services of a qualified climbing instructor, who should have a map of the area. In advance, obtain any needed permits or written permissions to climb on private or public property. A leader should know where a nearby medical facility is located and how it can be contacted. The instructor should obtain a current weather report for the area before the group's departure. In the event of severe weather or another problem, share the climbing/rappelling plan and an alternate with parents and the unit committee. It is suggested that at least one of the adult leaders has an electronic means of communication in case of an emergency.

## 7. Environmental Conditions

The instructor, each leader, and each participant assume responsibility for monitoring potentially dangerous environmental conditions such as wet rock, poisonous plants, wildlife, and inclement weather. The adult leader is responsible for making sure the group leaves no trace of its presence at the site. Check weather forecasts before departure. Participants should be knowledgeable of the principles of Leave No Trace.

**The Buddy System.** Use the buddy system to monitor concerns such as dehydration, hypothermia, or an unusually high degree of fear or apprehension. The buddy system reinforces the rule that no one climbs alone or without proper supervision.

## 8. Discipline

The first point, qualified supervision, recognizes that youth of Scouting age who are having fun with friends in or around the climbing area may not be concerned about their own health and safety. Even if they are concerned, they usually are not able to protect themselves fully. For this reason, qualified adult supervision is the first and most important element of Climb On Safely.

Emphasize that for supervision to be effective, there must be discipline. Point eight, discipline, means all climbing/rappelling participants should know, understand, and follow the BSA's safety rules and procedures. The climbing instructor must ensure the rules are fairly and impartially applied and followed. Involving Scouts in planning a climb or rappel is a good way to promote cooperation and discipline.

Review and discuss the text of these two points. The adult leader must ensure that someone in the group is currently trained in American Red Cross Standard First Aid and CPR (a 61/2-hour course). Wilderness First Aid Basic, a 16-hour course offered by the American Red Cross, is recommended for units going to remote areas. This person should assist in planning the climbing/rappelling activity.

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. The ARC's Emergency Response, a 431/2-hour course that includes CPR, is highly recommended.

Reemphasize that qualified supervision and discipline are the basis for all the other Climb On Safely rules.

## Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

Discuss the following questions and answers with the group. These questions are designed to increase the adult leader's understanding of BSA climbing and rappelling procedures.

Question: A non-Scout group wants to use the council's climbing tower and equipment and offers to provide its own

instructors. What should you do?

Answer: Explain that you are unwilling to turn over the council's equipment because of the need to keep an accurate log of the history of its use. The non-Scout group may use its own equipment and instructors, or the non-Scout group may use the council's equipment as long as the council also provides a BSA climbing director or instructor to be present and monitor the use of all equipment. In no case will a non-Scout group be allowed to use a BSA climbing or rappelling site or facility without first signing a Hold-Harmless/Release Agreement and presenting a certificate of liability insurance in the amount of at least \$1 million.

OR

The non-Scout group may use the council's climbing site or facility and climbing equipment with the supervision of BSA climbing director or BSA climbing instructor who is at least 21 years of age.

Q: A Scout unit wants to use a non-BSA climbing site or facility and instructors from another organization. What should you do?

A: When Scouts use a commercially operated climbing gym or other non-BSA facility, that facility's procedures apply. If participants are asked to sign a Hold-Harmless/Release Agreement, make sure they carefully read and understand the provisions. Signing such a document is the individual's decision and in no way obligates the local council or the BSA. (The unit or outside organization must provide the climbing instructors, climbing ropes, and equipment for its activities.)

Q: A Cub Scout pack asks to go to a climbing gym. What do you do?

A: Make sure the gym has liability insurance. Make sure the instruction and equipment are age-appropriate for Cub Scouts. Climbing gym procedures should be consistent with the points of Climb On Safely, except participants may elect not to require or use climbing helmets.

Q: A Venturing crew wants to learn lead climbing. What do you say?

A: Guidelines found in Topping Out (including requiring top-roping for all climbers) apply whenever groups take part in council or district climbing/rappelling activities. Units that elect to participate in lead climbing, snow and ice climbing, etc., must comply with Climb On Safely and should receive training from a nationally recognized organization that trains climbing instructors.

Q: You, a BSA climbing director or BSA climbing instructor, receive a phone call from a Boy Scout troop that has decided to go climbing on its next outing. What do you say?

A: Point out that at least one or more leaders should be trained in Climb On Safely. Ask about the qualifications of the climbing instructor(s). How are the instructors trained? Are they accustomed to coaching youths of the same age group? How long have they been instructing? What are their limitations in instructing others? (Beware of instructors who say they have "no limitations.")

## Age-Appropriate Climbing and Rappelling Guidelines

### Cub Scouts

- Bouldering 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.
- Climbers will be lowered by a belayer; no rappelling by Cub Scouts.
- No belaying by Cub Scouts.

### Webelos Scouts

- Bouldering no higher than the climber's shoulder height, with trained adult 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 adult belayer.
- No belaying by Webelos Scouts.

### Boy Scouts Ages 11 to 12

- 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.

### **Conclusion**

Conclude the session by restating the importance of protecting youth and adults during climbing/rappelling activities. Request individual commitment to the principles of Climb On Safely, and thank the participants for their interest and attention.

Last Updated: 05 MAR 2004

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