Climbing and Rappelling: Safety Activity Checkpoints

Girls (except for Girl Scout Daisies) may participate in three types of climbing:

- **Bouldering:** Climbing without a rope but at a height not greater than 6 feet off the ground. Spotters (participants who safeguard the movements of a member of the group) provide support and protect the head and upper body of a climber in case of a fall. Spotting is used on descending and ascending high elements or climbing routes and bouldering.
- **Top roping:** A climbing method in which the climb is anchored from the top of the climbing route, using belays (safety ropes to secure a person to an anchor point). The belayer (person who controls belay/safety line to prevent long and dangerous falls) may be set up at the top or the bottom of the route.
- **Multi-pitch climbing:** For experienced climbers only; a climb on a long route that requires several pitches the length of a rope or less (a "pitch" is the rope-length between belay stations). The climbing group climbs to the top of the first pitch. The lead climber climbs the next pitch, anchors in, and belays each remaining climber individually to the anchor.

Rappelling is a means of descending by sliding down a rope. The rope runs through a mechanical device, and a safety belay is used in all rappelling activities. Rappelling is not recommended for Girl Scout Daisies and Brownies.

Know where to climb and rappel. Climbing and rappelling may be done on indoor or outdoor artificial climbing walls, climbing/rappelling towers, and natural rock. Connect with your Girl Scout council for site suggestions.

Include girls with disabilities. Communicate with girls with disabilities and/or their caregivers to assess any needs and accommodations. Learn more about the resources and information that National Center on Accessibility provides to people with disabilities.

Climbing and Rappelling Gear

Basic Gear

- ☐ Sturdy shoes
- ☐ Long pants or bike pants are recommended for activities when skin abrasions on legs are possible
- ☐ Close-fitting clothing; avoid wearing loose clothing, especially around the head and neck
- ☐ Portable drinking water

- ☐ Sunscreen
- ☐ Raingear
- ☐ Nonperishable, high-energy foods such as fruits and nuts

Specialized Gear

- ☐ All equipment used for belaying—ropes, webbing, harnesses, hardware, helmets—is designed, tested, and manufactured for the purpose of this type of activity and appropriate for the size of the user.
- ☐ A chest harness with seat harness or full-body harness is recommended for younger girls when climbing.
- ☐ Climbing helmets that have the UIAA-approved label (Union of International Alpine Association) must be worn for all climbing situations where the participant is more than 6 feet off the ground or on belay. It is recommended that a disposable liner, such as a shower cap or surgical cap, be worn underneath the helmet to protect against the spread of head lice.

Prepare for Climbing and Rappelling

- ☐ **Communicate with council and parents.** Inform your Girl Scout council and girls' parents/guardians about the activity, including details about safety precautions and any appropriate clothing or supplies that may be necessary. Follow council procedures for activity approval, certificates of insurance, and council guidelines about girls' general health examinations. Make arrangements in advance for all transportation and confirm plans before departure.
- ☐ **Girls plan the activity.** Keeping their grade-level abilities in mind, encourage girls to take proactive leadership roles in organizing details of the activity.
- ☐ **Arrange for transportation and adult supervision.** The recommended adult-to-girl ratios are two non-related adults (at least one of whom is female) to every:
  - 12 Girl Scout Brownies (climbing only)
  - 16 Girl Scout Juniors
  - 20 Girl Scout Cadettes
  - 24 Girl Scout Seniors
  - 24 Girl Scout Ambassadors

  Plus one adult to each additional:

  - 6 Girl Scout Brownies (climbing only)
  - 8 Girl Scout Juniors
  - 10 Girl Scout Cadettes
  - 12 Girl Scout Seniors
  - 12 Girl Scout Ambassadors
- ☐ **Verify instructor knowledge and experience.** An instructor with documented experience, indicating competence in equipment maintenance, safety and rescue techniques, proper use of the course and hands-on training or documented experience according to your council's guidelines, as outlined in *Volunteer Essentials* directly supervises the group. The instructor has provided written documentation of the completed training. Ensure that there is a regular process of review and update for all instructors. A minimum of two instructors are present, and instructors are skilled in selecting appropriate activities, teaching and supervising spotting and belaying techniques, and modifying tasks to provide an appropriate experience for the ages and skill levels in the group. Before use, instructors inspect all equipment, course components, and landing areas in the activity area.
- ☐ **The instructor/participant ratios are as follows.**
  - **Bouldering and top roping:** 1 instructor to 10 participants
  - **Multi-pitch climbing:** 1 instructor (qualified lead climber) to 3 participants
- ☐ **Select a safe site.** Permits and permission requests are filed as required for climbing sites and facilities. All permanent structures and the belaying system are planned and constructed by experienced individuals. Plans and procedures are established to avoid unauthorized use of the site, structures, and equipment. The artificial climbing site must be posted to warn against unauthorized use.

- ☐ **Compile key contacts.** Give an itinerary to a contact person at home; call the contact person upon departure and return. Create a list of girls' parents/guardian contact information, telephone numbers for emergency services and police, and council contacts—keep on hand or post in an easily accessible location.
- ☐ **Prepare for emergencies.** Ensure the presence of a waterproof first-aid kit and a first-aider (level 1) with current certificate in First Aid, including Adult and Child CPR or CPR/AED, who is prepared to handle cases of injury from falls as well as abrasions and sunburn. A sharp knife, hardware, and extra rope of appropriate length for rescue are available at the site. Emergency transportation is available; if any part of the activity is located 60 minutes or more from emergency medical services, ensure the presence of a first-aider (level 2) with Wilderness and Remote First Aid. Specialized safety and rescue procedures are planned and practiced to ensure the ability to remove a participant from a rappelling or climbing situation. See *Volunteer Essentials* for information about first-aid standards and training.
- ☐ **Dress appropriately for the activity.** Sharp objects, jewelry, and watches are removed and pockets emptied. Long hair is pulled back from the face and fastened under the helmet to prevent tangling.

On the Day of Climbing or Rappelling

- ☐ **Get a weather report.** If climbing and rappelling outdoors, on the morning of the activity, check weather.com or other reliable weather sources to determine if conditions are appropriate. Be prepared to alter the activity plan or have an alternate activity prepared if weather conditions change. Write, review, and practice evacuation and emergency plans for severe weather with girls. In the event of a storm, take shelter away from tall objects (including trees, buildings, and electrical poles). Find the lowest point in an open flat area. Squat low to the ground on the balls of the feet, and place hands on knees with head between them.
- ☐ **Use the buddy system.** Girls are divided into teams of two. Each girl chooses a buddy and is responsible for staying with her buddy at all times, warning her buddy of danger, giving her buddy immediate assistance if safe to do so, and seeking help when the situation warrants it. If someone in the group is injured, one person cares for the patient while two others seek help.
- ☐ **Ensure that equipment is well-maintained.** There is a documented maintenance schedule and periodic inspection by instructors and outside professionals of all artificial structures and equipment used in the activities. A use log is kept on all equipment subject to stress, wear, and deterioration. A written equipment monitoring and retirement process is established and followed.
- ☐ **Participants learn about and prepare for climbing and rappelling.** Instructors teach a set of readiness and action commands to all participants for climbing, spotting, and belaying. All participants utilize muscle warm-up and stretching activities before beginning physical activities. Instructors describe the objectives, safety procedures, and hazards to the participants before beginning an activity.
- ☐ **Participants practice safe climbing and rappelling techniques.** Spotting techniques are taught, demonstrated, and practiced by participants prior to any climbing or rappelling activity. All activities are appropriately spotted. For activities where partners are needed, instructors match participants according to size and skill level, if appropriate. Instructors supervise all tie-ins, belays, and climbs on climbing sites and spotting on bouldering sites.

Climbing and Rappelling Links

- **International Mountaineering and Climbing Federation:** www.theuiaa.org
- **Rockclimbing.com:** www.rockclimbing.com

Climbing and Rappelling Know-How for Girls

- **Leave no trace.** When climbing and rappelling in natural areas, it's important to respect rocks and the environment. Read tips from the U.S. National Park Service Web site.

Climbing and Rappelling Jargon

- **Carabiner:** A metal ring with a spring-hinged side that is used as a connector and to hold a freely running rope
- **Anchor:** An arrangement of one or several pieces of gear set up to support the weight of a belay or top rope