Climbing (Climbing Wall and Related Activities)

ELEMENTARY - CURRICULAR 2026

- Consult **Disability-Centred Safety** if your groups of students include students with disabilities.
- Climb only and belaying conditions for grades 1 to 8 when wall climbing.
- Portable Installation on School Site, Permanent Installation on School Site, Permanent Installation on Commercial Site
- Consult **Risk Management**.
- Also consult **Climbing (General Procedures)**.

Equipment

- Determine that all equipment is safe (for example, no sharp corners, cracks, or splinters) and all assistive devices (for example, a walker) are in good working condition and properly adjusted for the height and mobility needs of the student prior to participation.
- All of the equipment must be commercially and specifically manufactured for the intended climbing related activity and adhere to one of: UIAA, CE, NFPA, ULC, CSA, ASTM standards.
- All equipment must be inspected by qualified personnel prior to activity.
- The belay rope must be compatible with the chosen belay device and the climbing activity.
- The climbers must use climbing harnesses (sit or full body) appropriate for their age and/or body size.
- Belay devices must be connected with a locking carabiner rated at 22kN/2200kg/ 4945lbs., where commercial friction or camming devices are used.
- The top anchors must have 2 individual points or belay bar.

- The top anchors must have locking devices. The climbers must not be able to climb above the anchors. The top anchors must be able to sustain a load of 22kN/2200kg/4945lbs.

- The bottom anchors must be one of: 2 individual floor anchors, or belayer harness, (a belay system/technique that will not allow the climber to ground- fall in the event the belayer becomes incapacitated) or combination harness and floor.

- The bottom anchors must have a belay device connected with a locking carabiner and be capable of sustaining a load of 10kN/1000kg/2240lbs.

- Mats (for example, Velcro utility mats, wrestling mats) must be in place at the ascending and descending points for all of the indoor walls.

- Mat thicknesses:

    - cross-link foam 5 cm (2”)

    - open-cell foam 5 cm (2”)

    - polyurethane 5 cm (2”)

    - dual-density 5 cm (2”)

    - mats of equivalent compaction rating as determined by the manufacturer.

- Helmets:

    - The wearing of a helmet (or not) must be professionally determined based on the existing hazards in the facility (for example, toe/hand holds, features) and/or the operating system (for example, auto-belay).

    - Facilities must provide helmets when their use is not hazardous or when they are required by the school/board, or parents/guardians.

    - When appropriate, helmets that are commercially and specifically manufactured for climbing must be properly fitted (as per manufacturer’s guidelines) and properly worn.

*Refer to the **First Aid** section for first aid equipment requirements.*

Clothing/Footwear/Jewellery

- Clothing and footwear appropriate to the activities and environmental conditions must be worn. Tops with drawstrings are not permitted.
- No exposed jewellery permitted.
- Long hair must be secured. Devices (for example, hair pins, elastics and barrettes) used to tie back long hair must not present a safety concern.
- Students must not participate when the length of fingernails poses a safety risk to themselves or others.

Facilities

- Determine that all facilities are safe and accessible for the students participating. Students must be encouraged to report facility problems to the teacher.
- The climbing wall must be appropriate for the ability levels, age and size of the students.
- All of the providers must follow the **Ontario Building Code Act**, and all applicable By-Laws and Regulations.
- All of the climbing equipment must be installed by a qualified professional (e.g., Qualified Instructor/Outside Activity Provider). The initial installation of the climbing equipment must be inspected by qualified personnel upon completion of the installation, and at least once a year thereafter by qualified climbing inspection personnel. This inspection must be documented with a written report. Necessary changes noted in the report must be addressed.
- When walking, running, or wheeling takes place off school site for a warm-up, conditioning and/or is an integral part of the activity:
    - Teachers must do a safety check in order to identify potential problems prior to initial use of route or course.
    - Teachers must outline to the students the route or course (for example, notice of areas to approach with caution) before the start of the activity.

- Teachers must determine that students are not crossing busy intersections unless directly supervised.

Environmental Considerations

- When environmental conditions may pose a risk to student safety (for example, thunderstorms [lightning] or student(s) with asthma, triggered by air quality), Teachers must take into consideration their school board/school's protocols and procedures related to:
  - environmental conditions (consult **Weather**); and
  - insects (for example, mosquitoes and ticks [consult the school/school board's protocols and/or regional Public Health Department's website]).
- Students must receive instruction on safety procedures related to environmental conditions and be made aware of ways to protect themselves (for example, sun burn, heat stroke, poisonous plants).
- At all times the school board's weather and insect procedures are the minimum standards.

Special Rules/Instructions

- Be aware of students whose medical condition (for example, asthma, anaphylaxis, casts, previous concussion, orthopaedic device) may affect participation. Consult **Medical Conditions**.
- Students must not participate in the activity until they receive information on concussion prevention specific to the activity, inherent risks of the activity (for example, outline possible risks and ways to minimize the risks), and procedures and rules for safe play. Students must receive instruction on the importance of reporting symptoms related to a suspected concussion.
- Refer to school board policies and procedures (i.e., transportation, excursion/field trip) for communication with parents/guardians, the location of an off-site activity, means of transportation, supervision ratios, and parent/guardian permission.
- Activities must be modified according to the needs of the students (for example, age, ability, language, experience), number of participants, and the facility available.
- Previous training, fitness level, and the length of time and intensity of physical activity must be taken into consideration.
- Skills must be taught in proper progression.
- A warm-up and cool-down must be included.

- Adequate liquid replacement (personal water bottles, water fountains) must be accessible for students before, during, and after physical activity to prevent dehydration.
- Students must be informed that the use of equipment and the gymnasium are prohibited without supervision. In addition to verbal communication, the doors must be locked or signs must be posted indicating that students are not allowed to use the gym unless appropriately supervised.
- Completed medical forms for each participating student must be accessible.
- Prior to the first lesson, Teachers must inform Qualified Climbing Instructors of students who have special needs.
- Risks involved with each activity, and how to lower the risk of an injury from occurring, must be communicated to the students.
- Teachers, Qualified Instructors, and students must be aware of safety procedures.
- Students must be allowed to select a challenge at their comfort level, including the choice to not participate.
- A belay system suitable to the age, maturity, size and skill of the students must be used.
- When students are belaying, the following elements must be addressed in an introductory lesson prior to top-rope climbing:
    - the introductory lesson be identified as top-rope specific
    - the introductory lesson must be identified as specific to the belay device being used
    - the introductory lesson must include instruction on and repeat practice of:
        - correct use of harness
        - correct use of knots and tie-in points
        - concept of top-roping
        - correct use of belay device

        - general belaying principles
        - lowering procedures
        - communication and the climber/belayer contract

- A Qualified Instructor must do a safety check of any student leaving the ground.
- Teachers and Monitors must be aware of the possibility of peer pressure and make sure no student is coerced into participating.
- Individuals who have been trained and can demonstrate the required instructor skills and who are 16 years of age or older can assist with instruction but must be directly supervised by a Qualified Teacher Instructor.
- A trained adult must be instructed in the safe and correct way of moving and handling the Climbing Wall (e.g.,lifting, setting up/taking down/adjusting).

Fall Protection Operating Systems

- Programs may be offered utilizing the following fall protection operating systems:
    - **Climb Only**
    - **Full Belay**
    - **Participatory/Team Belay**
    - **Auto Belay**
- Programs are required to follow the ratios related to the grade level and the fall protection operating systems as indicated in the Supervision Section.
- A Qualified Instructor must check the harness and connection to the fall protection operating system for any student prior to them leaving the ground.
- The fall protection operating system utilized must be one that was installed and recommended by a qualified Challenge Course Professional.

- The climber-to-belayer weight ratio must be taken into consideration when determining the number of buddy belayers necessary in any non-ground anchored system. In most conventional top-roped belay systems, an approximate climber-to-belayer weight ratio is 1:1.
- A body belay is not to be used.
- A belay system/technique that will not allow the climber to ground-fall in the event that the belayer becomes incapacitated must be used by student belayers.
- Ground/floor anchors must be backed up by a harness attachment unless they have been specifically installed for climbing and conform to recognized standards (see equipment list).
- Students in grade 6 and below are not allowed to belay.
- Lead climbing by students must not be done.

For Climb Only Programs

- Rules must clearly be explained to students prior to climbing by a Qualified Instructor.
- Students are not permitted to:
    - belay
    - apply harnesses to themselves or others
    - tie knots for themselves or others
    - connect to an auto belay system themselves
- Belaying, applying harnesses, tying knots, and connecting to an auto belay must be done by a Qualified Instructor.

Supervision

- All activities must be supervised.

- The type of supervision must be commensurate with the inherent risk of the activity. The level of risk is related to the number of participants, the skill level of the participants, the type of equipment used, and environmental conditions.
- On-Site Supervision is required during the safety and initial skill instruction.
- On-Site Supervision is required by the Teacher when a Qualified Instructor(s) is providing safety and initial skill instruction, and monitoring.
- On-Site Supervision is required for the duration of all other components of the activity (e.g., equipment setup and take down, warm-ups/cool downs, application of the skills and games).
- In-the-Area Supervision is required when the activities are situated at a combination of locations.
- A Volunteer, under the direction of a Teacher, can monitor students during physical education activities. Refer to your school board's policy on Volunteers assisting with students' physical activities.
- Responsibilities must be clearly outlined for additional Teachers and Volunteers who are monitoring the activity.
- Where a Qualified Instructor is used and the Teacher is not directly with the Qualified Instructor, the Qualified Instructor must provide safety and initial skill instruction, and monitoring for the safe application of skills and student behaviour for the duration of the activity.

Supervision/Monitoring Ratios Applicable to All Installations

- Climb only:
    - Grades 1-3: 1 Qualified Instructor per 1 active line
    - Grades 4-6: 1 Qualified Instructor per 1 active line
    - Grades 7-8: 1 Qualified Instructor per 1 active line
- Full Belay:
    - Grades 1-3: Not permitted
    - Grades 4-6: Not permitted
    - Grades 7-8: 1 Qualified Instructor per 2 active lines
- Participatory/Team Belay:

    - Grades 1-3: Not permitted
    - Grades 4-6: 1 Qualified Instructor per 4 active lines
    - Grades 7-8: 1 Qualified Instructor per 4 active lines
- Auto Belay:
    - Grades 1-3: 1 Qualified Instructor per 4 actively participating students in close proximity
    - Grades 4-5: 1 Qualified Instructor per 6 actively participating students in close proximity
    - Grades 6-8: 1 Qualified Instructor per 8 actively participating students in close proximity
- After introductory lesson, above ratios must be maintained.

Intramural Wall Climbing Clubs Ratios

- For Grades 7 and 8 intramural Clubs (for example, Wall Climbing Clubs) that go to a commercial site provider, all of the above ratios apply for the first three visits (total time 6 hours minimum) that take place within a reasonable time frame. After three separate visits (total time 6 hours minimum):
    - a Qualified Instructor provides a belay check for each student
    - a climbing professional provides On-Site Supervision
    - 1 Qualified Instructor to 12 students

Qualifications

Applicable to All Installations

- Qualified Instructors must be trained in, understand, demonstrate, and adhere to a directly relevant skill set for Climbing Walls. A relevant skill set is a described set of skills developed by recognized climbing professionals.

- All Qualified instructors must be at least 18 years of age or older to teach the introductory lesson and/or be a Qualified Instructor.

Applicable to Permanent School Sites

- Qualified Instructors for permanent school sites must hold a current certificate (within the last 3 years), demonstrating successful completion of a training workshop that directly addresses the climbing activities they are teaching.

First Aid

- A fully stocked first aid kit must be readily accessible. (Consult **Sample First Aid Kit**)
- A working communication device (for example, cell phone) must be accessible.
- Off school site: At least one Qualified Instructor or designated individual responsible for providing first aid must have current First Aid qualifications equivalent to or exceeding St. John Ambulance Emergency First Aid with CPR Level C + AED.?

Definitions

- **Auto Belay:**
    - Auto Belay is a mechanical fall protection system where the student is connected to a self-retracting lanyard that controls their descent.
- **Climb Only:**
    - Climb Only is when only the instructor belays students.
- **Full Belay:**
    - Full Belay is when students belay other students using a top rope belay.
- **In-charge Person:**
    - Some activities refer to an “In-Charge” person. While the teacher is in-charge and responsible for the overall safety and well-being of students under their care, sometimes there are other personnel who must be identified as “In-Charge” related to specific situations (for example, a pool lifeguard). In activities where an “In-Charge” person is designated, that person, in consultation with the teacher, must make final decisions regarding safety of the students
- **Monitor:**

- An individual who assists the Teacher with a group of students, (e.g., Volunteer, Qualified Instructor) and has a responsibility to monitor student behaviors for the duration of the activity.

- **Monitoring:**
  - The role of monitoring is to observe, identify, act, and report:
    - Observe: Observe with attention to detail the actions of the students.
    - Identify: Identify the student and the unsafe behaviour.
    - Act: Take appropriate actions to safeguard students and others (e.g., stop the activity).
    - Report: Provide the name of the student and the unsafe behaviour to the teacher for management and direction.

- **Outside Activity Provider**:
  - A commercial company, volunteer organization, or individual, not associated with the school board, who possess the required qualifications to provide safety and initial skill instruction, and monitoring for the duration of an activity.

- **Participatory/Team Belay:**
  - Participatory/Team Belay is when students participate in a belay team with an instructor belaying other students using a top rope style belay.

- **Qualified Instructor:**
  - An individual who provides safety and skill instruction, and monitoring for an activity, and possesses the required qualifications (e.g., experience, certifications). This role could be fulfilled by a teacher, volunteer, or an employee of an outside provider. An instructor does not have the authority to supervise.

- **Supervision:**
  - The vigilant overseeing of an activity for management or direction. Activities, facilities, and equipment have inherent risks, but the more effectively they are supervised, the safer they become.
  - The Ontario Physical Activity Safety Standards in Education includes three Types of supervision, Direct Supervision, On-Site Supervision, and In-the-Area Supervision. These types of supervision take into consideration the level of risk, which is related to the number of participants, the skill level of the participants, the type of equipment used, the environmental conditions, the age, and developmental stage.

- The three types of supervision described are not hierarchical but represent the type of supervision that activities require and the type of supervision that is inherently possible.
- Some activities in OPASSE transition from one type of supervision to another type of supervision (e.g., Direct Supervision to On-Site Supervision OR On-Site Supervision to In-the-Area Supervision).

- **Teacher**:
  - A person with a current certification from the Ontario College of Teachers and under contract by the school/school board (i.e., teacher, vice-principal, principal). This person is legally responsible for the students and has the authority and responsibility to supervise.
- **Types of Supervision**:
  - **Direct Supervision**:
    - Direct Supervision requires that the Teacher is physically present at the activity, providing visual and verbal oversight for management and direction of both, the activity and student safety.
      - Provisos:
        - No other activity can occur when part of the activity or the entire activity is under Direct Supervision when there is only one Teacher supervising.
        - The Supervision section of the relevant activity safety standards page in the Ontario Physical Activity Safety Standards in Education describes when parts of an activity are under Direct Supervision.
        - Where a Qualified Instructor(s) is providing the safety and initial skill instruction and monitoring for one activity and requires the Teacher to be present at that activity for management and direction.
      - An activity may be under Direct Supervision:
        - During the entire duration of the activity;
        - During the set up and take down of equipment; .
        - During the safety and initial skill instruction;
        - During the performance/practice of the activity skill; and
        - When the activities transition from Direct Supervision to On-Site Supervision.
  - **In-the-Area Supervision**:

- The Teacher is located in proximity to a combination of locations where the student activities take place, is circulating, and is accessible for providing management and direction of the physical activity and student safety.
    - Provisos:
        - The Teacher is circulating between the activities occurring at separate locations, and is readily accessible, or the location of the Teacher is communicated to the student.
        - Where a Qualified Instructor(s) is providing the safety and skill and instruction and is monitoring at a combination of locations, the Teacher is located in proximity to where the student activities take place, is circulating between the activity locations, and is accessible for management and direction.
        - Students may be out of sight for periods of time.
    - An activity or a component of the activity is under In-the-Area Supervision:
        - Where the same activity is located in separate locations (e.g., Fitness activities);
        - Where two or more activities under In-the-Area Supervision occur in separate locations (e.g., Badminton, Table Tennis, Handball (Wall));
        - Where the skill application of the activity takes place at a separate location from the teacher (e.g., Cross Country Running, Skiing (Alpine), Cycling, hiking on trails);
        - When the activities occur in double or triple gymnasiums; and
        - Where more than one Qualified Instructor is providing activities at a combination of locations.

- **On-Site Supervision**:
    - The Teacher is present at one location where the student activity takes place (e.g., gymnasium, sports field, climbing wall at an Outside Activity Provider’s facility, campsite) and is accessible for providing management and direction of the physical activity and student safety.
        - Provisos:
            - Where more than one activity occurs in one location, the Teacher is circulating between the activities and is accessible for management and direction.

        - Momentary presence in adjoining rooms (e.g., equipment room, outdoor storage shed, boathouse, staff tent) is considered to be On-Site Supervision.
        - Where a Qualified Instructor(s) is providing the safety and initial skill instruction and monitoring for an activity or a combination of activities at one location and the Teacher is present and is circulating and accessible for management and direction.
    - An activity may be under On-Site Supervision:
        - During the entire duration of the activity;
        - During the safety and initial skill instruction;
        - With activities using multiple stations while the Teacher is circulating;
        - When combining two or more activities at one location while the Teacher is circulating; and
        - When activities transition from On-Site Supervision to In-the-Area Supervision.

- **Volunteer**:
    - A responsible adult (e.g., Educational Assistants, Retired Teachers, Co-op Students, Parents/Guardians, Teacher Candidates) approved by the Principal/Designate who is under the direction of a Teacher and has been instructed on their monitoring responsibilities. Refer to your school board's policy on volunteers assisting with student's physical activities.

Last Published
Tue, 08/18/26 04:00 pm