

# Climbing (Challenge Courses/Towers - High Elements)

## An Element That Requires The Use Of A Belay In Normal Operation

### ELEMENTARY - CURRICULAR 2025

- Consult [Disability-Centred Safety](#) if your groups of students include students with disabilities.
- Permanent Installation on a School or Commercial Site
- *Grades 1, 2, and 3:* are to participate on low elements only. A low element course is one in which no rope belay system is required as fall protection is present for the climber. For most low element courses, spotting is needed. Also consult [Climbing \(Challenge Courses - Low Elements\)](#).
- *Grades 4 to 8:* climbing and belaying are permitted.
- Consult [Risk Management](#).
- The safety standards for this activity must be presented to the activity provider prior to the activity taking place. The activity provider must meet the minimum requirements listed in the safety standards. For more information on planning trips using outside providers, consult [Outside Activity Providers](#).
- Also consult [Climbing \(General Procedures\)](#).

## Equipment

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- All of the equipment must be inspected by qualified on site ropes/challenge course personnel prior to the activity to determine that all of the equipment is safe to use.

- All of the equipment must meet the current **ACCT (Association for Challenge Course Technology) standards.**
- Belay devices must be connected with a locking carabiner rated at 22kN/2200kg/4945lbs, where commercial friction or camming devices are used.
- The climbing ropes must be compatible with the chosen belay device and the climbing activity.
- A Qualified Instructor must check the harness and connection to the fall protection operating system for any student prior to him/her leaving the ground.
- The climbing harnesses (sit, sit/chest, or full body) must be appropriate to the age and/or body size of the climbers.
- For all indoor challenge courses, mats (for example, Velcro utility mats, wrestling mats) must be in place at the ascending and descending points.
- 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

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- Clothing and footwear appropriate to the activities and environmental conditions must be worn. Open-toed shoes, (for example, sandals) are not permitted. Loose clothing are not permitted (for example, scarves). Tops with drawstrings are not permitted.
- Sharp objects are to be worn or carried in pockets.
- Exposed jewelry is not 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

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- Determine that all facilities are safe and accessible for the students participating. Students must be encouraged to report facility problems to the teacher.
- All of the challenge course elements must be inspected by qualified on-site personnel prior to use to determine that all of the facilities are safe to use.
- All of the challenge course elements must have been installed, or have passed an annual professional inspection by a Qualified Challenge Course Professional as defined in the most current edition of **The Association for Challenge Course Technology (ACCT), Challenge Course Standards** or equivalent.
- All of the challenge course elements must meet the ACCT Standards that are in place at the time of installation.
- All of the challenge course elements must be inspected annually by a Qualified Challenge Course Professional, using the most recent edition of the ACCT Standards. This inspection must be documented in a written report in accordance with the ACCT Standards. Necessary maintenance/changes to the elements noted in the report must be addressed.
- The challenge course must be managed and operated in accordance with the most current ACCT Standards, including having a designated Challenge Course Manager who is responsible for overseeing the staffing and operations of the challenge course.
- The challenge course must be used in accordance with the current Challenge Course Professional's recommendations.
- Courses installed in trees must be inspected annually by a professional challenge course vendor.
- Dead limbs and any live branches that might be considered hazardous must be removed.
- Courses built in trees must have an adequate thickness of wood chips at the base of all elements.

- Treed courses must be inspected annually by a professional challenge course vendor and dead limbs removed.
- Treed courses must not be used in high winds or thunderstorms.
- 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

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- 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. In situations where a higher standard of care is presented (for example, outside activity providers,

facility/program coordinators), the higher standard of care must be followed.

## Special Rules/Instructions

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- 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.
- Previous training, fitness level, and the length of time and intensity of physical activity must be taken into consideration.
- Activities must be modified according to the age, ability level, language, and experience of students, number of participants, and the facility available.
- 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.
- Activity and course elements that are introduced must be based on skills that are taught and appropriate for the age, ability level, language and and experience of the students.
- Students must be allowed to select a challenge at their comfort level, including the choice to not participate.
- Students must be made aware of expectations as they relate to:
  - behaviour
  - emergency procedures
  - signal to assemble
  - boundaries for activities
- The site must have a written Policies and Procedures Manual for the management and operation of all challenge course activities. This manual must include an Emergency Action Plan consistent with the most current **ACCT Challenge Course Standards**.
- A method of rescuing a tired/stuck climber must be available (for example, ladder, scaffold, top-rope belay).

- Students waiting at the top of rappel towers must be outfitted in proper fall protection or a barrier must be put in place.
- 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 Qualified Instructor skills and who are 16 years of age or older can assist with instruction but must be directly supervised by a Qualified Instructor.

## Fall Protection Operating Systems

- Programs may be offered utilizing the following fall protection operating systems:
  - **Climb Only**
  - **Full Belay**
  - **Participatory/Team Belay**
  - **Auto Belay**
  - **Individual Lanyard System**
- Programs are required to follow the ratios related to the Grade Level and fall protection operating system as indicated in the Supervision section.
- 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.

## Full Belay

- When students are belaying, an introductory lesson incorporating the following elements must precede top-roped climbing:
  - must be identified as challenge course specific
  - must be identified as specific to the belay system/device being used
  - must include instruction and repeat practice on:
    - correct use of harness
    - correct use of knots and tie-in points
    - concept of top-roping
    - correct use of belay device/system
    - general principles for belaying with the specific system
    - lowering procedures with the specific system
    - communication and the climber/belayer contract
- When students are belaying, a system/technique must be employed that will not allow the climber to ground-fall in the event that the belayer becomes incapacitated must be incorporated.
- Direct Supervision must occur.

## Participatory Belay/Team Belay

- Students may participate as part of a Participatory/Team Belay when:

- a locking assisted braking device is used AND a Qualified Instructor lowers the climber, OR
- a Qualified Instructor's hands are on the brake rope at all times.
- Direct Supervision must occur.

## Individual Lanyard Systems

- Students must participate in a ground school which prepares them for the course.
- Students must be directly supervised at all transitions between elements and each transfer of lanyards, unless using a mechanical control system.
- Students must not use lanyards for fall arrest (for example, transferring anchor points while climbing vertically).

## Supervision

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- 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.
- Direct Supervision is required when students are participating in the challenge course.
- On-Site Supervision is required by the Teacher when students are being monitored by a Qualified Instructor(s).

- 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

- After the introductory lesson, the following ratios must be maintained:
  - Climb only:
    - Grades 4-5: 1 Qualified Instructor per 1 active line
    - Grades 6-8: 1 Qualified Instructor per 1 active line
  - Full Belay:
    - Grades 4-5: Not permitted
    - Grades 6-8: 1 Qualified Instructor per 1 active line
  - Participatory/Team Belay:
    - Grades 4-5: 1 Qualified Instructor per 2 active lines

- Grades 6-8: 1 Qualified Instructor per 2 active lines
- Auto Belay:
  - Grades 4-5: 1 Qualified Instructor per 4 actively participating students in close proximity
  - Grades 6-8: 1 Qualified Instructor per 6 actively participating students in close proximity
- Individual Lanyard Human:
  - Grades 4-5: Not permitted
  - Grades 6-8: 1 Qualified Instructor per 6 actively participating students
- Individual Lanyard Mechanical:
  - Grades 4-5: 1 Qualified Instructor per 4 actively participating students
  - Grades 6-8: 1 Qualified Instructor per 6 actively participating students

## Qualifications

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### Applicable to All Installations

- Qualified Instructors must be trained in, understand, demonstrate, and adhere to a directly relevant skill set for Challenge Courses/Towers - High Elements. A relevant skill set is a described set of skills developed by recognized Challenge Course 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 Installations on 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 (for example, Toronto District School Board Guidelines and Standards for Indoor Climbing in-service program).

## Applicable to Permanent Installations at a Commercial Site

- All Qualified Instructors must hold a current certificate demonstrating successful completion of training from an accredited, recognized, challenge course professional training company.
- The site must have a Challenge Course Manager. The role of the Challenge Course Manager is to make and implement the necessary decisions about programming and risk management. The Challenge Course Manager must either have a Challenge Course Manager Certificate or have knowledge and skills equivalent to the course content (for example, knowledge/training relating to staff training and supervision, program administration, development of policies and procedures, risk management, maintenance and inspection, ANSI-ACCT standards and other relevant standards).

## First Aid

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- 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

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- **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
- **Individual Lanyard System:**
  - An Individual Lanyard System is a system where the student is directly connected to the anchored safety cable via a pair of lanyards. There are two types of control systems:
    - Human control system: is used to manage continuous connection to the life safety system
    - Mechanical control system: is used to manage continuous connection to the life safety system (for example, SmartBelay, Clic-it, Bornack)
- **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.

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