ADVENTURE ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

# Artificial Climbing and Abseiling

Schools must follow the Department’s Excursion Policy and Guidelines and the requirements outlined in this document when planning, conducting and approving adventure activities.

These guidelines are for developing risk management plans specific to the location, activity and group participating. They are not intended to be used as a training manual. Staff instructing the activity must have sufficient knowledge/expertise in the activity.

These guidelines apply to activities conducted on artificial walls or structures that are either indoors or outdoors, fixed or mobile. For climbing or abseiling on natural cliffs and boulders please refer to the separate Rock Climbing and Abseiling guidelines.

Artificial walls can also be used for bouldering, which is traversing along the lower level of a climbing wall or structure at a height not greater than two metres.

Artificial walls are used to support the activity of ascending objects secured to a human-made wall or other structure. Artificial walls can also be used for abseiling, that is, descending in a controlled manner with the use of ropes and associated equipment.

If an overnight camping component is planned, please also refer to Camping guidelines.

## ACTIVITY Definitions

**Belay** – refers to both the system and to the managing of the system that anchors a person who is at height.

**Bouldering** – a climbing technique where the climber traverses, rather than ascends, a wall or structure. Bouldering generally occurs close to the ground without a belay system.

**Climbing gymnasium** – a purpose-built facility that offers a variety of climbing structures with a variety of grades to support different abilities. Typically, climbing gymnasiums offer equipment and instruction.

**Lead climbing** – an experienced climber ascends a wall or structure and connects a safety rope to anchor points as they progress.

**Single-pitch ground belay** – a system that involves the climber starting next to the belayer with the safety rope going from the belayer up through an anchored point at the top of the climb and back down to the attached climber. The climber will climb the wall or structure. As they do so, the belayer will take the rope in to secure them. Once the climber reaches the anchor point they will be lowered back down to the ground.

**Spotting** – a technique used for climbers close to the ground to protect the climber’s head/neck in the event of a fall. The spotter maintains an alertness and proximity to the climber, allowing the spotter to use their open hands to provide support to the head and upper body of the climber in the event of a fall.

## Staffing definitions

**Staff** – any adult approved by the principal who provides supervisory, instructional or educational elements of the activity or excursion. See Excursions Guidelines: Staffing for further details.

**Teacher** – a staff member registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching who provides a supervisory role on a program.

The following roles can be filled by school staff, a teacher or an external provider, or a volunteer (See [Volunteers in Schools](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/volunteers/policy) policy).

**Designated Instructor** – the appointed staff member on a program who provides the lead technical expertise and supervision for the activity.

**Instructor** – a staff member who provides professional, technical expertise and supervision for the activity.

**Assistant Instructor** – a staff member who provides assistance to the instructor(s) in the provision of technical expertise and supervision for the activity. An assistant instructor role may be filled by a volunteer (See: Volunteers in Schools Policy).

## Student preparAtion and skills

Planning for activities should begin with an assessment of each student’s current knowledge, skills and experience in climbing activities.

The assessment of students’ current knowledge, skills and experience in the activity should be documented using [Documentation of Participant Preparation, Prerequisite Skills/Knowledge​ ​ (doc - 139kb)](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/safety/participrep.doc).

First time climbers and beginners must receive competent instruction in basic skills.

Instructional staff must brief students on:

* the use of the safety equipment including harnesses, helmets and descending devices
* safety measures appropriate to control any reasonably foreseeable risks of injury associated with the activity
* proper belaying technique and back-up belaying technique
* abseil stance for descending the climbing route
* basic rope management and tying in
* environmental conditions and potential hazards.

##### Student belayers

The responsibility of belaying must be emphasised. All student belayers must have a belay backup. A belay backup normally involves another student holding, or using a second belay device on the same rope. Staff must vigilantly monitor belayers.

## Equipment

All equipment used must be in sound condition, suitable for the activity and meet applicable industry safety standards.

A log describing the use of all climbing equipment must be maintained by the owner and shown to the group leader on request.

##### Belay devices

Use only belaying devices that are in good working order and meet [Union Internationale des Associations d’Alpinisme (UIAA)](https://www.theuiaa.org/safety-standards/) standards, [Comite Europeen de Normalisation (CEN)](https://www.cen.eu/Pages/default.aspx) or the Australian equivalent standards.

Anchor points on the structure must satisfy engineering design regulations and be used in the manner for which they were designed.

It is recommended that belay devices are anchored with an engineered anchor point.

##### Harnesses

Staff working at heights should comply with the Department’s Prevention of Falls policy.

Providers of artificial climbing and abseiling activities must refer to manufacturers and installers to establish appropriate operating parameters. These parameters must address the correct fitting and attachment of harnesses. The harness must also ensure the student or staff member will remain secure in the event of an inversion.

Harnesses must be regularly checked and replaced, if necessary, with a recommended maximum life span of five years.

If a student is wearing a harness, an appropriately qualified or experienced staff member must visually check the harness to ensure that it has been fitted correctly.

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##### Helmets

Helmets which meet UIAA standards or equivalent CEN or the Australian Standards must be worn by all students and staff climbing and those who are spotting or observing from below. Caps must not be worn under helmets. Before participating in a climb or going on belay, a check should be undertaken to ensure that the students have their helmet fitted correctly.

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##### Ropes

Before the activity commences, an experienced staff member should inspect the ropes and the wall or structure.

Ropes used for climbing and abseiling on artificial structures must be rated for the intended load and style of use. These ropes must be stored in a cool, dry place free from ultraviolet light, chemical or physical hazards. The ropes should be logged and used in accordance with manufacturer recommendations and must meet design standard EN 892 Mountaineering equipment – Dynamic mountaineering ropes, or similar.

Dynamic climbing ropes should be used on artificial walls and the diameter used will depend on local conditions and policy.

During an abseil session, systems which enable the arrest of an uncontrolled descent must be employed. For beginners, this must include a belayed safety rope. For more experienced abseilers, a bottom belay is acceptable.

When a climber or abseiler connects to a safety rope, they must use a recognised attachment knot, such as a figure of eight with a finishing knot. When connecting to a harness the correct attachment point, defined by the manufacturer must be used. All attachments must be checked by a staff member before ascending or descending.

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##### Shoes

Special climbing shoes are best for climbing on artificial walls.

Climbing shoes or securely fitting shoes with good grip are appropriate for abseiling. Shoes must be securely fitted to prevent them from falling off during a climb.

## Clothing

Glasses or sunglasses should be secured and long hair tied back to prevent catching in a belay device or other equipment. Loose jewellery must not be worn. Rings should be taped (if not removed). Items of jewellery or rings which students remove should be placed in a secure location so they do not get lost.

## Experience and qualifications

Staff instructing the activity should have sufficient knowledge and experience of the activity and the activity environment to operate in all reasonably foreseeable conditions.

The designated climbing and abseiling instructor(s) must hold one of the following:

* a Single Pitch Guide award accredited with the [Australian Climbing Instructors Association](http://www.acia.com.au/)
* equivalent documented training and experience from another training provider or education institution
* equivalent documented experience in lieu of certification/accreditation.

A guide to the knowledge and skills required by the designated instructor is as follows:

Required knowledge:

* the implications of relevant Australian and international standards on equipment use and performance
* relevant State legislation impacting on roping activities
* accepted industry best practice or recommendations (as specified in operating procedures, risk management guidelines, professional association's recommendations or current texts)
* manufacturer's design specifications and recommendations for equipment use
* the principles of anchor systems (equally shared load, single component failure and effect, redundancy, angle of separation)
* the principles of belay systems and devices
* different types of belay systems, e.g. top and bottom belays
* advantages and disadvantages of various knots in a variety of situations
* equipment usage in rescue situations
* first aid appropriate to location
* the selection and use of equipment for climb.

Required skills:

* personal climbing skills to a high level of technical competency
* appropriate rescue skills.

This set of skills and knowledge can be found in the National Recreation Industry Training Package SRO03 within the Unit of Competency, ‘Guide Climbing Activities on Artificial Surfaces’, SROCLA008A. For current information about relevant recreation industry training please refer to [training.gov.au.](http://training.gov.au/)

The designated assistant to the instructor must:

* be able to assume a supervisory role during the activity
* be competent in emergency response procedures
* have conferred with the instructor to establish the emergency response and supervision responsibilities.

 [Documentation of staff qualifications and experience (doc - 151kb)](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/safety/staffqual.doc) must be used to document staff experience and training in lieu of the listed qualifications.

Where an external contractor is chosen to run all or part of this activity, see: Excursions Guidelines – External Providers.

## Supervision

Supervision is a critical factor in managing risk in the outdoors.

A minimum of two staff members must be present for each activity, one with main responsibility for activity instruction and the other to assist the instructor.

It may be necessary to increase the staff allocation based on ability to observe or monitor students on activity with consideration to:

* students (medical conditions, age, physical, mental and emotional maturity, ability and experience)
* group (dynamics and size)
* staff (medical conditions, age, ability and experience, qualifications and skills)
* location (remoteness, communications and environmental conditions).

Reasons for increasing staff allocations must be documented.

The following table shows the minimum staff-to-student allocation that must be used for climbing or abseiling activities on artificial climbing structures activities.

|  |
| --- |
| **Climbing** |
| Staff numbers | Total students  | Active climbers | Belaying\* |
| 2 | 12 | 4 | 8 |
| 3 | 18 | 6 | 12 |
|  |  |  |  |
|  | Abseiling |  |
|  | Staff numbers | Student numbers |  |
|  | 2 | 1–2 |  |
|  | 3 | 3 |  |

\* Staff must determine if students are capable of belaying. The minimum age for belaying is 11 years of age. If students are not capable of belaying, supervision ratios must be adjusted accordingly.

The teacher in charge is responsible for the supervision strategy, which must be endorsed by the school principal as part of the excursion approval process. Staff members must supervise students according to that strategy, and in accordance with their duty of care. It is the role of the teacher in charge to clearly and adequately explain the supervision strategy to all participating staff members.

Students not directly participating in the activity must be separately supervised in line with Excursions Guidelines – Supervision.

## Peak bodies and expert advice

Australian Climbing Instructors Association <http://www.acia.com.au/>

Outdoors Victoria <https://outdoorsvictoria.org.au/>

For further enquiries, please contact community.stakeholders@edumail.vic.gov.au

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