ADVENTURE ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

# Rock Climbing

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.

Rock climbing is the process of moving on rock faces including boulders. It involves determining or following certain routes on a rock face. Naturally formed handholds and footholds are identified and used to climb the rock. Specialised equipment and systems are used to support safety.

These guidelines apply to rock climbing on natural rock cliffs and boulders, not on artificial structures. For climbing on artificial structures please see the Artificial Climbing and Abseiling guidelines.

A climber being lowered to the ground off a climb is not considered to be abseiling. Abseiling is descending a cliff by sliding down a rope in a controlled manner. It is a skill used by rock climbers or done as a separate activity. Separate guidelines have been developed for abseiling.

Note on lead climbing: the risks involved in lead climbing are higher and less controllable than other forms of climbing such as top roping or seconding. Students must not be involved in leading rock climbs.

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

## activity Definitions

**Single-pitch ground belay** – top rope systems using a bottom belay involve the climber starting next to the belayer with the safety rope going from the belayer up through an anchored point and down to the attached climber. As the climber ascends the belayer takes in the slack rope. Once the climber reaches the anchor point they are lowered back down to the ground.

**Single-pitch top belay** – top rope systems using a top belay involve the climber starting at the bottom of the climb and the belayer at the top of the climb. The safety rope goes from the belayer straight down to the attached climber. As the climber ascends the belayer takes in the slack rope.

**Multi-pitch climbing** – requires multiple individual sections of single-pitch top belays to complete the climb. Multi-pitch climbing requires a progression in a climbing program, and is only appropriate for more experienced students. This can be done independently by the participant or as a **tramline** with an instructor at each section.

**Lead climbing** – involves a climber ascending a rock face, safeguarded by the ongoing placement of protection while belayed from below. Students must not lead climb.

**Bouldering** –is a form of climbing on smaller rock formations and on artificial climbing walls without traditional climbing ropes and harnesses. Bouldering on rock surfaces can involve climbers moving upwards and traversing close to the ground. Spotting provides safety for the climbers and padded mats are often used in and outdoors to provide additional safety.

**Spotting** –is a safety technique applied to bouldering and sometimes to the beginning of difficult climbs. The spotter places hands on or near a climber’s hips or shoulders, to change fall momentum and to protect the climber’s head from hitting the ground.

## 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).

## Environment

Rock environments are usually hardened and elevated landscapes commonly referred to as cliffs or crags. Geologically their origins are diverse. The elevation of rock environments offers a vantage point from which unique perspectives can often be drawn. Where surrounding landscapes have been disturbed, rock environments may be a refuge for remnant flora and fauna and thus require sensitive use and management. Vegetation in rock environments is susceptible to damage by human activity and effects can be long lasting.

## 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 instruction in basic skills.

The instructor should ascertain the previous experience of each student.

Instructional staff must brief students on:

* equipment, clothing and footwear that is suitable for the activity and location
* safety measures appropriate to control any reasonably foreseeable risks associated with the activity and the environment
* minimal environmental impact techniques relevant to the activity and location
* historical and cultural considerations relevant to the activity and location
* activity scope and boundaries
* communication and communication signals
* relevant terminology
* the appropriate use of safety equipment including harnesses, helmets and descending devices
* 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.

The responsibility and importance of correct 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 must meet applicable industry safety standards.

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A log of use of all climbing equipment must be maintained by the owner.

##### Belay devices

Belay devices that are in good working order and meet Union Internationale des Associations d’Alpinisme (UIAA) standards or Comite Europeen de Normalisation (CEN) or the Australian equivalent must be used.

##### Harnesses

Harnesses that meet EN 12277:1998 or the equivalent UIAA or Australian standards. Harnesses must be in good working order and correctly fitted by the instructor. Students and staff must be vigilant in ensuring that harnesses are correctly refitted between sessions or after removal.

##### Helmets

Helmets that meet UIAA standards or equivalent CEN (EN 12492) or Australian standard must be worn by all students and staff when rock climbing or in the vicinity of the rock face.

##### Ropes

Dynamic ropes must be used for rock climbing activities. Ropes should measure between 10 mm to 13 mm in diameter. Half ropes are not to be used as the climb rope.

Abrasion of set up ropes frequently occurs where ropes rub against the cliff. Rope protectors or padding are strongly recommended and help prolong rope life. Any rope protection used must be rigged to ensure it cannot be dislodged onto the climbers or increase the likelihood of dislodging rocks.

The rope should be secured to the harness according to the harness manufacturer’s instructions.

Belay devices must be attached to harnesses with a locking karabiner.

##### Leader Rescue

Leaders must carry rescue equipment appropriate to the activity.

## Clothing

Gloves may be used at the discretion of the instructor.

Special rock shoes are not necessary for rock climbing. Sturdy runners or boots with pliable rather than stiff sole are adequate. Participants must wear shoes at all times.

Glasses should be secured and long hair tied back so as not to be caught in belay device or other equipment. Loose jewellery should not be worn and rings should be taped if not removed.

Hats must not be worn under helmets.

## 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.

Staff qualifications must be valid and relevant for both running the activity and the activity set up.

The designated single-pitch top rope rock climbing instructor/s must have one of the following:

* Single-Pitch Top Rope climbing guide units of competency or above
* equivalent documented climbing and abseiling training and experience from another training provider or education institution
* equivalent documented climbing and abseiling experience in lieu of certification/accreditation.

The designated single-pitch rock climbing instructor/s must have one of the following:

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

The designated multi-pitch rock climbing instructor/s must have one of the following:

* a Multi-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.

It is recommended that where the instructor does not have an award accredited with the Australian Climbing Instructor Association that they have lead climbing experience. Having lead climbing experience indicates that the instructor is more likely to have the broad range of technical skills required for instructing rock climbing experiences and will be able to respond to a wider range of situations.

Equivalent training and/or experience includes staff having experience and knowledge of:

* setup of secure and efficient top rope and abseil teaching systems using a variety of belays and sites
* methods for conducting students safely and efficiently on single-pitch climbs
* self-rescue techniques relevant to single-pitch situations
* site choice in relation to safety, environmental factors and outcome for the participant
* teaching techniques and group management
* environmental and land-management issues.

The designated assistant to the instructor must:

* have experience in the activity at the level being offered to students
* be familiar with the requirements of the activity
* be able to assume a supervisory role during the activity
* have the ability to participate competently 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 undertaking the 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 known or anticipated environmental conditions).

Reasons for increasing staff allocations must be documented.

The following table shows the minimum student-to-staff allocation that must be used for rock activities.

|  |
| --- |
| **Single-pitch top belay** |
| Staff numbers | Student numbers |
| 2 | Up to 12 |
| 3 | 13–18 |
| 4 | 19–24 |
| Single-pitch ground belay |
| Staff numbers | Student numbers |
| 2 | 1–12 |
| 3 | 13–18 |
| 4 | 19-24 |
| Tramline multi-pitch |
| Staff numbers | Student numbers |
| 2 | Up to 4 |
| 3 | 5-6 |
| 4 | 7-8 |
| Independent multi-pitch |
| Staff numbers | Student numbers  |
| 2 | Up to 4 |
| 3 | 5-6 |
| 4 | 7-8 |

For single pitch climbing the ratio describes one climb instructor to two climbing teams. A team comprises one climber, one belayer and one backup belayer. For example, for 12 students you have two instructors and four teams of climbers.

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/>

Parks Victoria <http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au/>

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

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