

Challenge Courses



Council Approval: Required – High Risk

Tier 2

Activity Permitted For: D B J C S A

About Challenge Courses

A challenge course is a set of structures that provide a setting for physical challenges designed to increase participants' self-confidence and physical coordination, to increase group cooperation, and to be fun.

Initiative games and low elements require the group to work together to accomplish mental or physical challenges; spotters safeguard the movements of each member of the group. High ropes challenge courses involve components for individual or group challenges that are six feet or more off the ground. A safety belay (a rope to secure a person to an anchor point) is used with a harness, and participants wear helmets. 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.

Each participant must possess the physical strength and technical skills to use the equipment and understand the safety procedures and consequences of her actions. Connect with your council for suggestions and site approval.

Note that Daisies and Brownies may participate only in activities designed for their ages, with equipment suitable to the size and ability of each girl. Outdoor high ropes, and high elements are only permitted for Juniors and older.

Learn More:

- [Association for Experiential Education](#)
- [Association for Challenge Course Technology](#)
- List of accredited vendors: [Professional Ropes Course Association](#)

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 the [National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability](#) provides for people with disabilities.

Safety Activity Checkpoints

Verify instructor knowledge and experience. High ropes courses require an instructor trained and certified by a verified agency. The instructor must demonstrate competence in equipment maintenance, safety and rescue techniques, proper use of the course, and hands-on training. Initiative games and low ropes courses require a trained and certified instructor or an instructor with training and documented experience, according to your council guidelines and Girl Scouts' *Volunteer Essentials* resource.

Qualified instructors will have competence in equipment maintenance, safety techniques, proper use of the course, and hands-on training. Ensure that the instructor has provided written documentation of the completed training as well as proof of participation in routine instructor review and updates. Instructors need to be 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 should inspect all equipment, course components, and landing areas. A minimum of two instructors need to be present.

Ensure that equipment is well-maintained. There needs to be 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 should be kept on all equipment that's subject to stress, wear, and deterioration. A written equipment monitoring and retirement process should be established and followed by the facility.

Girls learn about and prepare for challenge courses. Instructors teach a set of readiness and action commands to all participants for climbing, spotting, and belaying. All participants should use gentle muscle warm-up and stretching activities before beginning physical activities. Instructors must describe the objectives, safety procedures, and hazards to the participants before beginning an activity.

Girls practice safe challenge course techniques. Spotting techniques are taught, demonstrated, and practiced by participants prior to any challenge course activity. All activities are appropriately spotted. For activities where partners are needed, instructors should match participants according to size and skill level, if appropriate. Instructors must supervise all tie-ins, belays, and climbs on high ropes courses and spotting on low elements courses. Participants must not be stacked more than three levels high vertically (in a pyramid, for example) at any time. No one should stand on the middle of someone else's back.

Instructor-to-participant ratios must meet the standard as identified by the course manufacturer or installer and need to be in compliance with industry best practice standards.

Safety Gear

- Sturdy shoes
- Climbing helmets (with Union of International Alpine Association–approved label) must be worn for all climbing activities in which the participant is more than six feet off the ground and/or on belay and by participants standing in the “fall zone” beneath a climbing element
- Disposable shower cap liner, for use with public rental helmets

- Belaying equipment—including ropes, webbing, harnesses, hardware, and helmets—designed and tested for this type of activity and appropriate for the size of the user
- Long pants or bike pants for activities that may lead to skin abrasions on legs
- Close-fitting clothing (avoid wearing loose clothing, especially around the head and neck)
- A chest harness with seat harness or full-body harness for small framed girls when climbing

These checkpoints should be reviewed with the vendor, facility, or your council as appropriate.