

Low Ropes Course Manual

One of the most unique benefits of a low ropes course is its ability to engage girls by removing them from the challenges they ordinarily face. When confined to the same environment each day, whether it is a classroom or at play, many people will fall into a routine mindset that allows little opportunity for growth or change. Low ropes courses present challenges that appear to be wildly different from the tasks they face on a day-to-day basis. The apparent differences between these challenges and the girls' daily life increase their interest. At the same time, the challenges encourage them to attempt new problem solving methods to achieve success.

Throughout the completion of each low ropes element, girls rely on group members that they have never relied on before while being forced to think about how they communicate with those around them. As the group begins to move toward success, they discover the parallels between these activities and the challenges in their day-to-day life.

Each low ropes element has a different focus. Leaders/facilitators can use each element in several different ways to present a group with exactly the challenge that they need to overcome their weaknesses and become a stronger team. This makes a low ropes course the ultimate team building tool. There are virtually limitless variations on the rules and goals for each low ropes element, providing the opportunity to use the elements multiple times by the same group with different experiences and different lessons each time.

General Safety Guidelines

Before anyone attempts the Low Ropes Course they must participate in spotting practice with lead in activities that also develop trust and confidence.

A walk through the course, describing expectations for maintaining safety for each element is expected. This can be done one element at a time, with the first participant for each group at each activity element.

The facilitator is expected to enforce correct spotting procedures with the appropriate minimum number of spotters to ensure safety. Spotters do not assist participants.

Verbal signals must be exchanged between the participants and spotters before the participant begins. *"Spotters Ready?", "Ready", "Climbing?" "Climb On!"*

Participants trying more challenging variations in technique should be spotted appropriately, upon approval of the facilitator, and in clear communication to the spotters. (i.e. blindfolded, using only one hand, backwards, etc)

All elements must be cleared of loose rock, branches, or sharp objects from around the spotting areas before participants are allowed on the course. Areas should be maintained in a level slope and avoiding soil erosion and compaction.

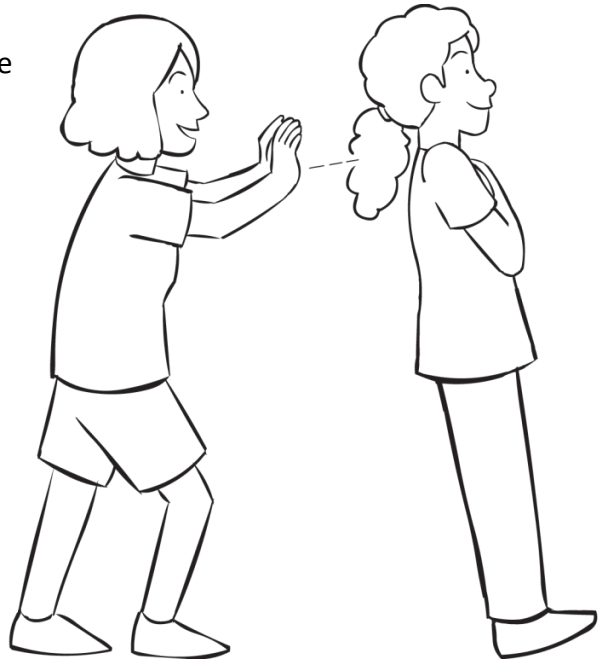
Spotting

Spotting is the most important safety method for the low ropes course elements. The main role of the spotter lies in protecting the climber's head, neck, and upper body should a fall occur. Spotters should understand that although they should always be in a position to support a falling climber, it is usually very difficult to "catch" a falling body, even from a small height.

Teaching Spotting Technique

Teaching spotting to participants is one of the most challenging aspects of the ropes course. The technique itself is not complicated; the difficulty lies in the fact that would-be spotters do not understand their importance until they actually have to spot a falling person. Following is a list of some of the important aspects to remember when teaching spotting:

- Spotters should mimic the movements of the climber, positioning himself or herself to anticipate any falling action.
- Spotters should always be focused on the climber.
- Spotters should anticipate a fall at any time.
- Spotters should be aware of the special dynamics of each element (i.e. swinging from a rope).
- Spotters must understand how important their role is to both the physical and emotional safety of the climbers. Joking around and horseplay are not acceptable.



Spotting Instruction Sequence

Prior to beginning any low ropes course elements, each group must complete a spotting instruction sequence. Below is a suggested sequence, although there are several different activities and techniques that can be used to teach spotting.

1. Explain the meaning of spotting.
 - Start with Human Spring activity (demonstrate first).
 - In pairs, participants face each other standing close together.
 - With feet together and hands up palm out, lean in towards each other.
 - Hands meet and then they push each other back to the standing position.
 - If they feel comfortable with this, take a small step back and repeat process.
 - Continue with this until pair reaches their personal comfort level.
2. Demonstrate the proper spotting technique to the group.
 - One leg in front of the other.
 - Knees flexed to absorb impact.
 - Hands up and ready to support. Thumbs tucked along fingers.
3. Allow the group to practice moving in the spotting position.

4. Demonstrate the two-person trust fall sequence.
 - Faller's position: crossed arms to chest, body stiff and straight, feet together.
 - Four-part verbal contract.
 - Spotter's hand position: aimed directly at Faller's shoulder blades.
 - Spotter's body position: first close to Faller, then increasing angle of the fall as Faller becomes more comfortable.
5. Allow participants to pair off and practice the two-person trust fall sequence.
6. Explain and complete the activity 'Willow in the Wind'.
 - 8 - 14 participants stand in the spotting position, shoulder to shoulder in a circle with one person standing in the falling position in the center of the circle.
 - Following completion of the four-part verbal contract, the center person, remaining rigid, may fall in any direction. The Spotters in the circle stop the faller and redirect him or her to another arc of the circle. This fall-catch sequence continues in a gentle fashion until it becomes obvious that both the Faller and the Spotters are comfortable (stress the gentle aspect - it is not a pinball game!)



Allow each member of the group to have an opportunity to try this activity.

King's Finger

Description

An 8 ft pole with a tire at the base.

Objective/Task

To remove the tire without touching the pole and lower it to the ground safely

Staying Safe: Pre-Check: Facilitators' Responsibility

Check the area for sharp or dangerous objects on the ground and in the trees above. Collect all hazardous clothing and paraphernalia from participants prior to the activity. For example, large earrings, rings, sweatshirts with draw strings, water bottles, or anything else that could get caught on someone else or the equipment. Closed toed shoes must be worn at all times.

Group Size

8-15 participants

Time

10-30 minutes for a group of 12-15

Rules & Safety

- The tire must be lifted off the pole, flipped over and then lowered back down.
- People can touch the pole, but the tire cannot.
- No other materials, save what the group has on them, may be used.
- If the group is younger, or is having problems, you may allow them to use whatever they can find in the immediate area.
- The tire may not be thrown.
- People are allowed on shoulders, if necessary, but only if the entire group is working to spot that person and is capable of protecting them! If not, do not allow it.

Additional Challenge

Don't let anything touch the pole

This Activity

Demonstrates group problem solving.

Helps the group learn effective communication.

Helps the group strategize and sequence participants in a way that allows them to complete the challenge.

Risk Management Procedures

Review the group task. Ensure every member with feet off the ground (especially if they're on shoulders) is properly spotted. Make sure the team stays focused on the goal at hand.

Rowdiness and horseplay can cause accidents.



Trolleys

Description

Four sections of 4"x4" with evenly spaced hand lines that are connecting together to form 2 long skis.

Objective/Task

Together, the group must work together in unison to attempt to traverse an open area without touching the ground.

Staying Safe: Pre-Check: Facilitators' Responsibility

Check the area for pinecones, branches or dangerous objects on the ground and in the trees above.

Collect all hazardous items from participants (i.e. large earrings, rings, sweatshirts with draw strings, water bottles, and loose clothing items).

Closed toed shoes must be worn at all times.

Group Size

8-10 participants

Rules & Safety

- Outline a large space of open flat ground.
- Place the 'trolleys' at one end.
- Remind the group of the possibility of ankle injury with this activity.
- Each member of the team stands with one foot on each ski and one rope in each hand.
- Once on the trolley the team cannot touch the ground or step off. If touch the ground a penalty is incurred (determined by facilitator according to groups progress)

Additional Challenge

Going from a starting point to a finish line.

Going down and around an object and returning back to the initial starting point.

Walking backwards on the trolleys.

This Activity

Requires communication, shared-leadership, listening and concentration.

Helps the group strategize.

Teaches the group to work as a team rather than as an individual.

Risk Management Procedures

Review the group task.

People will lose balance and start to fall off. Encourage people to step down rather than fall into person in front or back them.

Instruct partners to tell the rest of the team if they are stepping down/falling.

Everyone must reset before the next partners are allowed to start.



The Incomplete Bridge Crossing

Description

3 platforms and different sized planks

Objective/Task

For the group to cross from one side to the other without ever stepping off of the stumps or planks.

Staying Safe: Pre-Check: Facilitators' Responsibility

Check the platforms for structural sturdiness and make sure they are on a firm, solid base.

Check boards for splinters and cracks.

Check the area for sharp or dangerous objects on the ground and in the trees above.

Collect all hazardous items from participants (i.e. large earrings, rings, sweatshirts with draw strings, water bottles, and loose clothing items). Closed toed shoes must be worn at all times.

Group Size

4-15 participants

Rules & Safety

- The group can decide in advance how many touches they will allow themselves to have. When a participant or board touches the ground it goes back to the starting platform
- When carrying or passing boards, caution the group to watch where the ends are at all times.
- Caution participants to keep fingers and toes away from areas where two boards meet.
- NO JUMPING! Participants must have one foot touching a platform or board at all times.
- Boards may never be thrown
- Group cannot let the planks rest on the ground without losing use of them.
- Participants may not jump from one stump to another.
- Facilitators must provide all spotting.

Additional Challenge

To increase the challenge take away their ability to talk, or limit their use to just one arm.

Blindfolds, muting, different board lengths, or entry/exit points.

This Activity

Demonstrates group problem solving skills using creative thinking.

Promotes cooperation through teamwork.

Provides new leaders with the support they need to succeed.

Helps vocal leaders to practice followership.

Risk Management Procedures

Review the group task.

Boards may never be thrown!

When carrying or passing boards, caution the group to watch where the ends are at all times.

Caution participants to keep fingers and toes away from areas where two boards meet.

NO JUMPING! Participants must have one foot touching a platform or board at all times.



TP Shuffle

Description

A long beam cemented in the ground horizontally

Objective/Task

For the group to cross from one side to the other without ever stepping off of the stumps or planks. The group should rearrange themselves in a new order without falling off the beam.

Staying Safe: Pre-Check: Facilitators' Responsibility

Check the beam for structural sturdiness and make sure it is on a firm, solid base.

Check beams for splinters and cracks.

Check the beam for slippery surfaces

Check the area for sharp or dangerous objects on the ground and in the trees above.

Collect all hazardous items from participants (i.e. large earrings, rings, sweatshirts with draw strings, water bottles, and loose clothing items). Closed toed shoes must be worn at all times.

Group Size

4-15 participants

Rules & Safety

- When a participant touches the ground, they must start over.
- When carrying or passing boards, caution the group to watch where the ends are at all times.
- Caution participants to keep fingers and toes away from areas where two boards meet.
- Participants may not jump over one another.
- Facilitators must provide all spotting.

Additional Challenge

To increase the challenge, take away their ability to talk. Facilitators may add additional consequences for when participants touch the ground.

This Activity

Demonstrates group problem solving skills using creative thinking.

Promotes cooperation through teamwork.

Provides new leaders with the support they need to succeed.

Builds trust.

Risk Management Procedures

Agree that if a fall is imminent, step off and don't pull others off.

NO JUMPING! Participants must have one foot always touching the beam.

