

Climbing (Challenge Courses - Low Elements)

ELEMENTARY - CURRICULAR 2025

- Consult [Disability-Centred Safety](#) if your groups of students include students with disabilities.
- Portable or Permanent Installation at a commercial or school/board site.
- Where students perform a series of activities either while working with others on initiative tasks or responding to personal challenges close to the ground.
- A low element course is one in which the only fall protection is spotting.
- 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

- Determine that all equipment is safe (for example, no sharp corners, cracks, or splinters) and all assistive devices (for example, a walker) are in good working condition and properly adjusted for the height and mobility needs of the student prior to participation.
- 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.

Refer to the [First Aid](#) section for first aid equipment requirements.

Clothing/Footwear/Jewellery

- Clothing and footwear appropriate to the chosen activities and environmental conditions must be worn. Tops with drawstrings are not permitted.
- 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

- 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 low elements must have been originally installed according to the current edition of the [ACCT Standards](#).
- A qualified Challenge Course Inspector must inspect all of the challenge course low elements annually. This inspection must use the most current edition of the ACCT Standards and be documented in a written report.
- Recommended maintenance to the challenge course low elements noted in the report must be appropriately addressed.
- There must be an adequate layer of wood chips at the base of any trees which support low challenge course elements to limit soil compaction.
- If indoors, the floor surface under the ropes must be covered with Velcro mats:

- cross-link foam 5cm (2")
 - open-cell foam 5cm (2")
 - polyurethane 5cm (2")
 - dual-density 5cm (2")
- The mats must be checked regularly for wear and tear.
 - Trained on-site personnel must inspect all of the challenge course low elements prior to use.
 - Both the spotting path and the landing zone for all of the challenge course low elements must be cleared of debris and other obstacles prior to use.
 - 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

- 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

- 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.
- Activities must be modified according to the age, ability level, language, and experience of students, number of participants, and the facility available.
- Previous training, fitness level, and the length of time and intensity of physical activity must be taken into consideration.
- 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 students.
- 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.
- Teachers, Qualified Instructors and students must be aware of safety procedures.
- Students must be made aware of expectations as they relate to:
 - behaviour
 - emergency procedures
 - signal to assemble
 - boundaries for activities
- The low element challenge course must operate in accordance with the most current **ACCT Standards**. A qualified, designate Course Manager who is responsible for overseeing the staffing and operation is required.

- The low element challenge course must establish and follow local operating procedures (LOPS) for all elements.
- The LOPS must incorporate any recommendations made by the qualified Challenge Course Professional.
- Each activity that requires spotting needs the direct supervision of a Qualified Instructor.
- When students are spotting, an introductory lesson that incorporates the following items must precede the activity:
 - the instruction to step down rather than fall off elements
 - the responsibility for another student's safety
 - instruction and repeated practice on:
 - concept of spotting
 - general principles for spotting such as stance and hand position
 - communication and the climber/spotter contract
 - specific instructions for the particular challenge course element
- When students have not been taught to spot or are not able to spot effectively, spotting must be performed by one or more Qualified Instructors.
- Qualified Instructors must rotate spotters so that no one becomes physically or mentally fatigued.
- Qualified Instructors must address the effect of size differences between a potential low rope participant and his or her spotters when assessing the suitability of using student spotters.

- If low ropes course is outdoors, the school board's lightning protocol must be shared with the operator/activity provider.
- 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 instructor skills and who are 16 years of age or older can assist with instruction but must be directly supervised by a Qualified Instructor.

Supervision

- 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.
- 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

- Grades 1-3: 1 Qualified Instructor per 8 students
- Grades 4-8: 1 Qualified Instructor per 12 students

Qualifications

Applicable to All Installations and Sites

- All lead low element challenge course Qualified Instructors must complete an annual training course taught by a qualified challenge course Trainer OR be currently certified in [ACCT Standards](#) as a challenge Course Practitioner (Level 1 or 2).
- Qualified Instructors must be trained in, understand, demonstrate and adhere to a directly relevant skill set for Challenge Courses (Low Elements). A relevant skill set is a described set of skills developed by recognized Challenge Course Professionals. This training must be directly applicable to the course/elements at the site. This training must be documented.
- All Qualified Instructors must be at least 18 years of age or older to teach the introductory lesson and/or be a Qualified Instructor.

First Aid

- 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

- **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

- **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.

- **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.

Last Published

Fri, 03/27/26 11:37 am