

# High Ropes Facilitation



**This manual was developed by Acedelmar Consulting and is used, with permission, by Northern Lakes Partners.**

Revised 10/23

This document was prepared by Acedelmar Consulting at the request of Northern Lakes Partners. Acedelmar Consulting, its staff, volunteers and subsidiaries, are not responsible for the use/misuse of the information contained herein. These are offered as guidelines only and are subject to approval, acceptance, revision, and implementation by Northern Lakes Partners. Northern Lakes Partners, Crescent Lake Bible Camp, Northern Lakes Impact Center, its staff and subsidiaries agree to indemnify, defend, and hold harmless Acedelmar Consulting for incidents including, but not limited to, injury, damage, or death resulting from the use / misuse of the material contained herein. Use of this document will constitute a legally-binding agreement to this clause.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

Introduction.....	4
General Safety Regulations.....	4
High Ropes Physical Description.....	6
Goals of the High Ropes Course.....	10
Posted Rules of the High Ropes Course.....	10
High Ropes Course Setup (Topside Static Lines).....	12
High Ropes Course Setup (Topside Dynamic Lines).....	13
High Ropes Course Setup (Topside Zipline).....	14
High Ropes Course Setup (Bottom).....	16
High Ropes Course Setup (Bottom – Pictures).....	17
High Ropes Ground School / Orientation.....	18
Harnessing / Helmets.....	23
Facilitating The High Ropes Course.....	24
Some Hints.....	28
Zippping Commands.....	28
Clean Up.....	29
Final Safety Notes.....	30
Appendix A: Additional Climbing Commands.....	32
Appendix B: Special Activities.....	34
Appendix C: Skills Class.....	36
Appendix D: Sample Hold Harmless Form.....	37

## **INTRODUCTION**

---

The following are general guidelines for High Ropes Facilitation. This manual is NOT meant to replace on-site, personal training.

Also, this manual is meant to be an add-on to the Climbing Tower Facilitation manual. Because that manual covers things like “Challenge By Choice”, harnessing, belaying, etc., those topics will not be covered here. If you need additional information, you are encouraged to review the information in the Climbing Tower Facilitation manual.

Please note that this manual is subject to change.

## **GENERAL SAFETY REGULATIONS**

---

These safety regulations will be enforced year-round to maintain our high standards. They are:

1. Before opening the course, a working radio / cellphone must be present for emergency situations.
2. All Ropes Courses fall under the supervision of the Ropes Course Administrator. The Ropes Course Administrator must be someone at least 21-years-old and have previous training and experience on all facets of Ropes Course operation.
3. Any changes – either to the structure of the High Ropes Course, the programs in operation, or to the steps described herein – must be preapproved by the Ropes Course Administrator and documented before being implemented.
4. Pursuant to ACCT C.3.2.1, all groups must provide, in writing, a “needs assessment”. This can include, but is not limited to: age of participants, group goals, number of participants, and medical conditions (including nutrition, accessibility, or health concerns.) This information may be requested in advance or filled out upon arrival. (Note: Summer Camp and Camp-sponsored Retreats are exempt from this requirement, provided we have Health Forms on all participating campers and the High Ropes Course is operated as part of our preapproved, structured programming.)
5. A Pre-Use Inspection Form (digital) and a Rope Log (paper) MUST be filled out for each group.
6. Only trained and approved Staff may use the High Ropes Course. No one may set up the High Ropes Course unless they have completed the High Ropes Course Training program and have been approved by a Ropes Course Trainer or higher.
7. Facilitators must be at least 16-years-old. Any minor wishing to be trained can only qualify as a Secondary (ground-based) Facilitator and may only belay if there is a Facilitator 18-years-old or older in the area who is available to assist, if necessary. Primary Facilitators MUST BE 18 years of age or older.

8. Staff who are ill and unable to do their jobs safely and effectively will NOT be allowed to facilitate. (Preferably they will report this, but they may be removed, if a Ropes Course Administrator or Trainer deems it necessary.)
9. Only gear rated for the High Ropes Course will be used. Staff will NEVER use any of the gear from the “Real Rock” bin, the training bins (black with skull-and-crossbones), etc. under ANY circumstances!
10. Personal gear will NOT be used without approval from a Ropes Course Trainer or above. Personal gear of a Ropes Course Trainer must be approved by the Ropes Course Administrator prior to use. If personal gear is approved, a contract will be drafted stating what is allowed to be used and under what conditions.
11. Personal and/or external gear may NOT be used on or by participants. (Rationale: Camp will be unable to ascertain how outside gear may have been used.)
12. Camp gear may not be taken off-camp for use with outside groups. (Rationale: Camp would incur liability if Camp Staff used Camp gear in an unapproved fashion.)
13. Primary Facilitators MUST wear a full-body harness (waist or sternal clipped) and a helmet while in the trees. They must use lobster claws (safety) and daisy chains (positioning) to ensure that they cannot fall more than two feet when standing or while moving. If using screw-gate carabiners, Facilitators MUST lock down the carabiners when they are not moving.

***Facilitator’s Note:*** As we transition to full-body harnesses, an approved seat harness that is attached to an approved chest harness may be used in lieu of a full-body harness. Facilitators who are required to use a seat/chest harness setup for physical reasons will also be allowed this variance.

14. Only steel carabiners and gear are allowed to be used in critical applications. Aluminum may be used for retrieval lines, etc.
15. All gear on the High Ropes Course, with the exception of ATCs, Prusik Cord, p-cord, daisy chains, or webbings, shall be rated at a minimum of 5,000 pounds breaking strength, unless allowed for by ACCT standards. (See “Gear” manual if there are any questions.)
16. If it looks unsafe, it probably is. Always inspect the course, the belay cables, ropes, harnesses, z-posts, carabiners, knots, etc. When in doubt, throw it out....
17. The High Ropes Rescue Bag must be present and in the trees next to a Primary Facilitator any time ANY portion of the High Ropes Course is open.

18. At the first sound of thunder, the High Ropes must be cleared area and participants must seek shelter. If the thunder stops for a period of thirty minutes, you may resume the activity. (Before resuming activities, a Primary Facilitator should check local radar to make sure that more storms are not on the way.)
19. Upon completion of the activity time, the course must be taken down, pulled up, and/or secured to prevent unauthorized use. Under no circumstances can gear be left out, unattended, overnight.
20. If you must leave the High Ropes Course unattended for ANY reason and for ANY length of time, the ground-based elements have to be pulled up and secured, ladders removed and secured, ropes pulled up or pulled down, and NO gear left sitting out.
21. Any piece of equipment dropped from a height of over six feet is immediately retired and may not be used again, unless approved by the Ropes Course Administrator. Any questionable equipment must be removed immediately and brought to the Ropes Course Administrator for inspection before it may be used again.
22. All High Ropes participants must go through a “ground school” that includes: strength of gear, encouragement of positive behaviors, “Challenge by Choice”, basic climbing techniques, description of a verbal contract, etc. (Note: Any Camp program which offers this as a Free Time activity may skip portions of the ground school; however Facilitators are still required to explain “Challenge by Choice” and the verbal contract.)
23. Any participant who states that they hope someone “falls”, “dies”, etc. – even as a joke – is to be removed IMMEDIATELY from participation. This is a policy on all of our Ropes Courses. (“Drop” and “Fall” are four-letter words on a Ropes Course!) Making fun of someone who did not climb as high as others is also unacceptable.

## **HIGH ROPES PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION**

---

With the rebuild of the High Ropes Course in 2022, the following descriptions represent the current elements that are available in the course:

### Entrance / Vertical Playpen

The Vertical Playpen offers two activities: Cargo Net can have variable challenges ranging from easy (net is anchored to the ground AND teammates keep tension on the ropes), to mid-level (net is NOT anchored, teammates pull straight down on the net to keep tension on the ropes), to difficult (net is NOT anchored and teammates do not assist); and the Rope Climb.

### *Note(s):*

1. Facilitators need to pay close attention on the transition from the Playpen to The Log.
2. Only one person is allowed on the Vertical Playpen at a time as there is only one belay cable at the top.
3. The most common issue is entanglement in the Cargo Net if a participant slips. Failure to



keep the rope tight while the participant is on the Cargo Net may result in a serious rescue situation!

4. There IS a slight “pinch hazard” at the top of the elements. Participants should keep their hands away from the rapid links. (On the Cargo Net, stay in the middle of the PVC pipes; on the Rope Climb, keep hands outside of the cable clamps.)
5. Facilitators working the Entry Elements should communicate with agreed upon hand signals with the Primary Facilitator in the tree should they have a participant who seems unusually nervous. This way, the Primary can help keep an eye on them as they go!

### The Log

The Log is simply a suspended telephone pole. Participants move directly from the Vertical Playpen to The Log. Once on The Log, participants can choose to move left (more difficult/longer) or right (easier/shorter).

#### *Note(s):*

- Although unlikely, Facilitators should watch out for the possibility of a participant slipping on The Log and tangling with the Vertical Playpen. If the belay is kept tight enough, this should not be an issue.



### Short Course: Pirate's Crossing

Participants moving to the right will next encounter the Pirate's Crossing. This is a single foot wire with two hand ropes that cross in the middle. Participants who choose to lean forward (uphill, toward the High Ropes Shed) will find the crossing easier than those who try to stand straight up and down.

#### *Note(s):*

- While this element is fairly straightforward, the greatest risk is participants tangling their safety tether around the hand ropes. Facilitators – both on the ground and in the air – as well as their fellow teammates always need to double-check the position of the participant in relation to the ropes. (If you have the participant start on the downhill side of the element and lean uphill, not only will they keep their tether clear, they will also be more successful.)

### Long Course: Kitten Crawl

The Kitten Crawl is the first element in the Long Course. Participants MUST place their hands and knees on the ropes to cross. (This works best if they have their knees on the outside and ankles on the inside or vice versa.) Then, while facing down, they make their way across the element.

#### *Note(s):*

1. Do NOT allow participants to stand on the ropes! This brings their hair right up to the pulley where it can become easily entangled!
2. Make sure to slack the tether to the point where a person can crawl without restriction. When in doubt, after installing the tether, the Facilitator should attempt the element to make sure it can be accomplished.

### Long Course: Burma Bridge

The Burma Bridge consists of one foot wire and two hand ropes. Burma Bridges (made of ropes) have been utilized for thousands of years all around the globe and are still actively used in many countries today...over large canyons...without annual inspections...and those crossing the Bridge have no safety gear!

#### *Note(s):*

1. Although unlikely, participants can tangle their tethers on the hand ropes if they are allowed to crawl under them. Facilitators need to keep watch on this.
2. Participants, when nervous, tend to pull their arms close to their body. A Burma Bridge actually becomes more stable if they push their arms straight out!



### Long Course: Tension Traverse

The Tension Traverse is a single foot wire and a hand rope that is only secured on one side. The participant advances by leaning back (toward the Zipline platform) and allowing the rope to slide through their hands as they move.

#### *Note(s):*

1. This element was chosen for its level of difficulty. People who are nervous should be carefully informed about what is involved so that they can make an educated decision.
2. Because the hand rope is only secured at one end, no participant should ever be allowed



to attempt the element “backwards” – moving from Zipline platform to the Tension Traverse platform. (Facilitators may use the foot wire and their tether to cross during setup and rescue.)

3. If a Facilitator asks to do it while facing backwards – the participant faces the Zip Platform – they MUST keep the rope, the p-cord, and their tethers all on the same side! This is a choking hazard, otherwise!



#### Final Element: Zipline

The Zipline is a 200’ long cable with a pulley that rides along it. A Facilitator will clip the participant in, make sure that the verbal contract is completed, and then allow the participant to leave the platform.

#### *Note(s):*

1. If the ladder is still in the way, do NOT hook up a participant solely to the Zip Line! A collision with the ladder can result in significant injury! We use a daisy chain attached to a LEAP anchor to prevent someone from zipping before everything is ready.
2. The person taking people off the Zipline does not have to be a Facilitator or even Staff. You may utilize teammates to take people off the Zipline, provided they go through an orientation and the Primary Facilitator oversees their actions.
3. If only one Primary Facilitator is present on the course, they MUST be stationed at the Zip Platform with the Rescue Bag beside them.
4. For younger groups, you can offer what we call “Climb and Zip”. Rig a belay line to the anchor point that has the backup cable in the Zip Tree, belay the participants up the tree, connect them to the Zipline, and send them. Since they are directly under the control of Facilitators at every step, there is very little “risk”.

**Facilitator’s Note:** We NEVER push, nudge, bump, etc. a participant off the Zip platform. (Believe it or not, this is a common request!) The participant needs to make their own choice to go...or not. If we DO push them, we can be liable for emotional damage. If they will not Zip, they can climb back down the tree or we can do a rescue. (Fun Fact: In a rescue, I CAN push someone off the Zip platform, but only if I’m lowering them directly to the ground!)

## GOALS OF THE HIGH ROPES COURSE

---

The goals of the High Ropes Course are:

1. To help participants set and achieve goals. They need to determine what their personal goal is and we will encourage them to achieve it.
2. To help campers to stretch their comfort zones. We will NEVER stress completion of the course as a goal or even a priority. Our goal is that they push themselves. If it's too easy for them to navigate the course, bring out a blindfold! (Please note that they MUST remove the blindfold while transferring.)
3. To provide positive encouragement. We will cheer as loudly for the climber who only takes a single step as we do for people who complete the course. Each person has different abilities and we will celebrate their accomplishments.
4. To provide meaningful ways for those who do not wish to climb to participate. This can include assisting with transfers, moving P-Cords, assisting with belay, etc.
5. To be safe in all things we do.

While the fifth goal is the most critical – everybody must survive intact! – that should be fundamental to any of our programs. The others goals deal with the personal issues at stake for our program participants.



## POSTED RULES OF THE HIGH ROPES COURSE

---

### **Do Not Enter Unless NLP Staff are Present**

**The Goal of the High Ropes Course is NOT to complete the course. It is simply that you try and push yourself. (If you need an additional challenge, please talk to your Facilitator.)**

**“Challenge By Choice” will be enforced for our climbers.**

**The “Forward Progress Rule” will be enforced for our climbers.**

**Age Restrictions:**  
**9 and Under – Climb and Zip ONLY**  
**10 and Older – All Course Elements**

1. A liability waiver must be signed and present for all participants of non-camp sponsored groups (e.g. rental groups).
2. Please follow all instructions from NLP staff members.
3. Please stay focused on your group and positive in your comments.
4. Please keep appropriate gear on at all times – this includes shoes.
5. Please be aware that participants may be asked to assist with the course, as needed.
6. Please do not play on any element unless given permission by an NLP Facilitator.
7. Only approved Facilitators may belay unless part of an NLP training program.
8. Please leave the course as you found it (or cleaner).
9. Failure to follow these guidelines will result in removal from the area.
10. No refunds are given for participants removed from the activity for inappropriate behavior.

**Climbing “After Hours” will result in removal of the individual and/or the group from Camp premises. No refunds are given to individuals/groups removed for disobeying Camp rules.**

**Notes:**

“Challenge By Choice” means that the climber determines how far they will go and when they will come down! We DO NOT force participants to complete the High Ropes Course; regardless of what teachers, parents, or other adult leaders may desire! (The exception to this is At-Risk / Adjudicated Youth programs where the choice may be left to the discretion of the Facilitator per program guidelines.) Forcing a camper to continue is grounds for dismissal.

“Forward Progress” simply means that the participant needs to keep moving forward or attempting to move forward. If they remain in one place without making forward progress, it is at the discretion of the Facilitator to end the climb and either lower them or conduct a rescue, as needed.

The maximum weight for participants allowed in the course, per Mike Barker, Vice President of PRCA and former OSHA Inspector, is 300 pounds. This is conditional upon two things:

1. There is a full-body harness that will properly fit the participant.
2. They do NOT use the Climb And Zip ladder. While I cannot find a duty rating on it, it being a lightweight, aluminum ladder means that it is probably rated at a maximum of 250 pounds. (We’ve routinely had Facilitators who weigh in at around that weight when you add their gear and had no difficulties.)

**Facilitator’s Note:** We do NOT ask a participant their weight! After discussing this situation with Mike Barker, our policy will be that if we can fit them into a harness,

they are within the weight limits. If someone mentions their weight, then you may use that information; however it would be embarrassing for them to have to discuss that in front of a group!

## **HIGH ROPES COURSE SETUP (TOPSIDE STATIC LINES)**

Setup should be accomplished prior to the arrival of the participants. For the most part, the top of the Ropes Course will be setup and taken down every day.; this will give us the opportunity to inspect the gear and the course every day. (Since it's a much more dynamic system – trees, wind, weather, gear, etc. - it's better to go through the course each time before we put participants in it.)

1. Installation of course safety lines may ONLY be done by a High Ropes (Primary) Facilitator or as part of training to become a Primary. (A current Primary must inspect any safety lines installed as part of a training.)
2. To set up ONE safety line for an element, you will need to have one pulley, one rapid link, one tether, and one triple-lock parabiner. (The p-cord for the element should remain attached to the rapid link.) For ease of setup / take down, we leave all of these connected and store them together in the shed.
3. Climb to the top of the course and get into a position where you can reach the top wire. Make sure you do this in such a way that you are safely anchored at all times! While getting into position, verify that the cable, clamps, trees, etc. seem intact. When in doubt, contact the Ropes Course Administrator.
4. Spread the pulley, place it over the line, put the rapid link through the hole, flip it, install the tether and then screw the gate down. (Remember: You never want to “screw up” on a Ropes Course!) If necessary, put the p-cord back into the rapid link. Attach a triple-lock parabiner to the far end. When in doubt, check out the photos:



5. When done, make sure the p-cord has untangled and reaches the ground. Adjust the tether to an acceptable length. The necessary length will allow a participant to be clipped in and reach the lowest part of the element WITHOUT being able to fall underneath it!

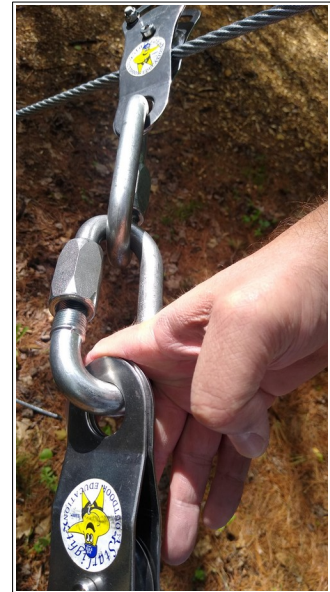
**Be sure to NEVER set up two tethers of the same color next to each other!**  
(You NEVER want a participant to move from “blue” to “blue”! This is especially true for the Zipline which has permanent red and blue tethers!)

## **HIGH ROPES COURSE SETUP (TOPSIDE DYNAMIC LINES)**

There are two places for dynamic (belay) setup. These are the Vertical Playpen and the Zip Tree. (They’re both entrances!) To set up these lines:

### Vertical Playpen

1. Installation of course safety lines may ONLY be done by a High Ropes (Primary) Facilitator or as part of training to become a Primary. (A current Primary must inspect any safety lines installed as part of a training.)
2. To set up the belay cable for the Vertical Playpen, you will need to have two pulleys, two rapid links, and a climbing rope. For ease of setup / take down, we leave all of these - except for the rope – connected and store them together in the shed.
3. Climb to the top of the course and get into a position where you can reach the top wire. Make sure you do this in such a way that you are safely anchored at all times! While getting into position, verify that the cable, clamps, trees, etc. seem intact. When in doubt, contact the Ropes Course Administrator.
4. Spread the first pulley, place it over the line, put the rapid link through the hole, flip it, and screw it down. (Remember: You never want to “screw up” on a Ropes Course!) Then, attach the other rapid link and pulley, being sure to screw the second rapid link down. When in doubt, check out the photo. (Note: the rapid links in the photo are NOT closed to show that they are being screwed down.)
5. Remove your hands from the gear to allow the pulleys to orient themselves. (They opening of the bottom pulley should naturally align to the direction of the Zipline.) Feed the climbing rope through the pulley, with the color-marked tail toward the High Ropes Shed and the end that will receive the knot toward the log. As you feed the rope through, make sure that it stays on the uphill side of the elements!



**Facilitator’s Note:** There are two common errors for Facilitators setting up this safety line:

- First, they fail to check the orientation of the pulley. If this happens, the pulley will turn parallel with the log, causing the rope to run over the sides of the pulley, rather than over the wheel. **THIS DAMAGES ROPE!**



- Second, they feed the rope down between the log and the cable for the Vertical Playpen. **THIS CREATES AN UNSAFE CLIMBING SITUATION!**

**In either case, a Primary MUST fix the situation before it is used with participants!**

### Zip Tree

1. Installation of course safety lines may **ONLY** be done by a High Ropes (Primary) Facilitator or as part of training to become a Primary. (A current Primary must inspect any safety lines installed as part of a training.)
2. To set up the belay cable for the Zip Tree, you will need to have one pulley, two rapid links, and a climbing rope. For ease of setup / take down, we leave all of these – except for the rope – connected and store them together in the shed.
3. Climb to the platform on the Zip Tree. As you do this, make sure that you are safely anchored at all times! While getting into position, verify that the cable, clamps, trees, etc. seem intact. When in doubt, contact the Ropes Course Administrator.
4. Open the rapid link and clip it into the LEAP Anchor (orange) at the top of the climb, being sure to put it over the cable, as well. Screw the rapid link down – remember to not “screw up” – and make sure the other rapid link is screwed down, as well. (This means to check to be sure it’s tightened **AND** the gate is pointed down!)
5. Feed the rope through the pulley until both ends are on the ground.



**Facilitator’s Note:** During the Summer, we can leave this pulley set up in the trees, with a p-cord to allow Facilitators to pull a rope up through. If that’s the case, Facilitators still need to check this setup – is it locked, gear intact, screwed down, etc? – each and every time before it is used!

## **HIGH ROPES COURSE SETUP (TOPSIDE ZIPLINE)**

To set up the Zip Pulley:

1. Installation of course safety lines may **ONLY** be done by a High Ropes (Primary) Facilitator or as part of training to become a Primary. (A current Primary must inspect any safety lines installed as part of a training.)



2. To set up the Zip Pulley, you will need to have one zip pulley, four triple-lock parabiners, two zip tethers (red and blue), and one retrieval line with an aluminum, non-locking carabiner. For ease of setup / take down, we leave all of these connected and store them together in the shed.
3. Climb to the platform on the Zip Tree. As you do this, make sure that you are safely anchored at all times! While getting into position, verify that the cable, clamps, trees, etc. seem intact. When in doubt, contact the Ropes Course Administrator.
4. Attach the zip pulley tethers to the cable on the platform side of the cable clamps. This ensures that even if you drop the pulley, it can't hit the ground.
5. Reach out, spread the base of the pulley, and place it over the cable. Close the fins and attach the shorter (blue) primary tether to it using a triple-lock parabiner.
6. Clip the backup (red) tether through the hole in the back of the pulley, being sure to clip over the cable.
7. Place one triple-lock parabiner on the opposite end of each tether. (The pictures show the setup in process and the final product.)



6. Shout “Rock” and, if someone is around, wait for the response “Clear”. Then, drop the retrieval line – carabiner and all – to the ground.

***Per ACCT Standards, Staff must “cycle” or test the Zipline before it is used by participants. This means that, upon completion of the setup, a Staff member MUST ride the car down. This will require two people to be present: one to zip, one to move the ladder.)***

7. At the end of the day, disconnect the pulley, reattach the parabiners and tethers, clip the retrieval line to the pulley, and use the p-cord to lower the entire assemblage to the ground. (This will save you from having to carry 20 pounds of gear on your harness!)

***Facilitator’s Note:*** During operation, the retrieval line MUST attach to the shorter (blue) tether; otherwise you can damage the pulley or the cable itself! (Also, check to make sure the pulley doesn’t flip over BEFORE someone tries to

bring it back to you!)

***“Rock” is the universal command for something falling from the sky. If you hear  
“rock” above you, duck and cover, never look up!***

## **HIGH ROPES COURSE SETUP (BOTTOM)**

---

Setup should be accomplished by a Primary Facilitator prior to the arrival of the participants.

1. Check the grounds for sticks, rocks, tree stumps, roots, etc.; remove them, if possible. (If not possible, do NOT use the course!) Check for snags or damaged trees; especially those the course is built in, but also in the surrounding trees.
2. Unlock the aluminum ladder from the side of the Ropes Course Shed and lean it up against the Zip Tree. (There are marking for top and bottom and these should be facing toward you!) The angle for the ladder should be between 65-75 degrees. Be sure that the ladder is firmly seated and doesn't rock BEFORE moving on.
3. If using Climb and Zip, untie the p-cord on the Zip Tree. Tie the p-cord through the rope loop on the taped end of the climbing rope using a simple double overhand knot. (The alternative involves a long, hard climb to re-thread the p-cord!) Pull the rope up, through the pulley, and back down to the ground. As you pull it up, let it flow through your hand so you can visually and tactilely inspect the rope.



4. If using the full course: unlock the Cargo Net and lower it to the ground, untie the Rope Climb, and attach the Net by rapid links to the ground anchors.
5. Needed to install ONE climb on bottom: one triple-lock parabiner, one screw-gate carabiner, one belay device, and one webbing for ballast. (This is a general guideline.)
6. Tie your belay knot (double bowline w/ triple-barrel) and attach the triple-lock parabiner.
7. Tie a stopper knot and attach the belay device and screw-gate carabiner to the other end.

8. Tie the Water Knot in the webbing and attach it to the back of the Facilitator harness. All staff must “ballast” themselves, no matter the weight of the participant climbing, with a minimum of one (1) participant. (More is better!) Do not allow campers to wrap the tether line around their hands to prevent possible injury.

**Facilitator’s Note:** The webbing of the ballast line MUST go around the belt of the harness or through an approved belay loop. It cannot be attached to gear loops, leg loops, etc. as many of these are only rated for ten (10) pounds of force.

## **HIGH ROPES COURSE SETUP (BOTTOM – PICTURES)**

To help with setup, here are some photos to help you to understand what we’re trying to describe. Again, when in doubt, ask! Also, don’t assume that ANYONE can set up the High Ropes Course correctly and double-check their work before using it!



(Take a bight of rope and push it through ONE SIDE of the ATC.)



Double Bowline  
w/ Triple-Barrel



Water Knot  
(For Ballast)

**Facilitator’s Notes:** To make things easier to remember, we are going to require:

- A minimum of three inches of tail in the ropes for Water Knot, past the Triple-Barrel, on a Prussik, etc. This matches the requirement of three inches (or more) of tail on the straps of the harness.
- The overall length of any tail shouldn't be over a hand-span (approximately eight inches), as they may tangle around objects.
- Finally, on the Double-Bowline with Triple-Barrel Bight, the knot of the bowline can't be big enough for a participant to put their fist through; and, if you leave space between the bowline and the triple-barrel, that space can't be big enough for a participant to put their fist through.

**If you are uncertain, call another staff person over! Never *assume* you have it correct!**

## **HIGH ROPES GROUND SCHOOL / ORIENTATION**

---

The goal of the "ground school" is to try to familiarize participants with the High Ropes Course and the experience they are about to have. This can range from a quick introduction during Family Camp to a longer spiel during a Teambuilding event. Basics of ground school can include:

*Welcome -*

The welcome can be simply, "Welcome to the High Ropes Course!" Typically, I also like to include facts like: (1) The High Ropes Course is an obstacle course approximately 28 feet in the air; (2) you will be in full mountain climbing gear as you go through it; (3) the ropes and other gear break at 5,000 pounds; and (4) if you weigh more than a school bus loaded with children, you MIGHT be in trouble; otherwise, if you follow all directions, you will be safe.

As always, we will be doing "Challenge By Choice". You get to decide how far you want to go. Now, we may ask you to try something that will push you a little bit; for example, maybe doing a sit-up on The Log. If you want to take the challenge, great! If you tell us to be quiet, great! Oh, and by the way, for some of you, the challenge may be putting on a harness. If that's pushing your limits, then please do that! We won't even make you climb.

By the way, if you DO go into the course and want to come back down, the easiest rescue points are the Vertical Playpen and the Zip Tree due to their dynamic belay options. So we may ask you to move forward or backward to get to one of those. It's just easier. Otherwise, we can come and get you!

*Boundaries -*

Explain to the participants that they must stay out from under the elements while the course is in operation. Also, they need to stay out of the High

Ropes Shed, unless they have permission to enter.

Caution the participants to NOT sit on cables! (Also, please do NOT let them slide the cable markers up and down!)

Finally, ask them to stay active and involved. It really does make a difference to some people to have a team cheering them on!

Participants moving the Zip Pulley or holding onto the Cargo Net MUST be wearing a properly secured helmet. Participants moving retrieval lines may choose not to wear a helmet; after they've moved the line, they are to step back out of any potential "Fall Zone". (The "Fall Zone" is the space within five feet of the base of a tree or directly under an element where a person might get struck by falling shoes, swinging climbers, etc.)

**Facilitator's Note:** Staff who may end up under a climber or inside the "Fall Zone" when someone is climbing must wear a properly secured helmet, as well.

**Dress Code -** Before we put people in harnesses, there IS a dress code:

- All climbers need to have close-toed shoes (or close-toed sandals).
- Shoelaces need to be done up and, if extra long, they should be tied up, as well.
- If someone's pants are "sagging and bagging", have them pull them up and secure the pants with a belt, if possible.
- Participants SHOULD be wearing t-shirts and those should be tucked into their pants. If at all possible, avoid putting the belt strap onto bare skin. (The fashion of short t-shirts may work against you here.)
- Participants with jackets need to decide if they will climb in that jacket. If so, the harness goes OVER the jacket. (This only applies if the harness can fit appropriately over the jacket.) Otherwise, have them remove the jacket, harness them, and then allow them to put the jacket back on. In the second case, they will need to remove the jacket before climbing.
- Participants with loose, long hair need to tie it up with a band. (We have spares in a baggie in the Ropes Course Shed.)
- Participants with hats need to take them off to put a helmet on. (I get a lot of people who ask if they can put a helmet on over the hat!)
- Jewelry, especially hoop earrings or long necklaces, should be removed prior to putting on a helmet and/or climbing.
- Anything else that might prevent a harness and/or helmet from being properly secured needs to be dealt with.

**Facilitator's Note:** There is a bin of "Modesty Clothing" in the High Ropes Shed. This is for females who are wearing very short t-shirts or any participant with very short shorts.





(Good job with the dress code here!)

*Roles -* Explain that they will be working in teams of (ideally) three participants. That gives you one climber and two ballast each and every time.

Ballast. All climbers will be required to have at least one (1) ballast holding onto the Facilitator before a climber may leave the ground! This ballast should be of “appropriate counterweight”. (For example, a 200-pound man CANNOT have his four-year-old daughter serve as his only ballast.)

Ballast participants follow the “Rule of Two’s”: two feet firmly on the ground; two hands firmly gripping the webbing; two eyes on the climber; two ears listening to commands; and two lips closed, other than for encouragement.

***Facilitator’s Note:*** There are three main points that we need to discuss with ballast:

- Due to the fact that the High Ropes Course is on a hill covered in wood chips, I CANNOT encourage you enough to have more than one person acting as ballast! (Really, the more the merrier!)
- In Free Time during Family Camp, the belayer MAY ballast, via a webbing, to a healthy, live tree of a minimum of five (5) inches in diameter. (Rationale: Sometimes Family Campers come up alone. Sometimes other Staff aren’t available to ballast during work periods.)
- Finally, the webbing MUST clip into something “structural” on the harness. This can be a back belay loop, dorsal clip, etc. **Facilitators may NEVER attach the webbing to a gear loop, as these are NOT rated for safety purposes!** When in doubt, they must wrap the webbing around the belt of their harness.

Other roles that can be assigned to participants in a group include:

Emergency Brake. The Emergency Brake is a participant who stands to the side of the belayer, maintains a few feet of slack in the climbing rope,



and can activate the brake function of the belay device in an emergency by simply gripping the rope to activate the brake. This will activate the ATC attached to the Facilitator. (It IS strongly recommended that this role be used when teaching belay skills to participants.)

Rope Tender. The Rope Tender is a participant who stands past the Emergency Brake (if used) and makes sure that the climbing rope is “coiled” nicely on a tarp to keep it out of the mud. (This is ideal for days when the Tower is in operation after the rain.)

**Facilitator’s Note:** Using multiple Ballast participants, an Emergency Brake, and a Rope Tender gets more participants involved rather than simply having one person climb at a time! This is especially beneficial if you are working with younger students.

*Positive Speech -* My spiel here goes something like this:

*Our here, there are two swear words we don’t want to use. Actually, please don’t use ANY swear words, but these two are especially bad. They’re both four-letter words: The “D” words and the “F” word. Everyone know what I’m talking about? “Drop” and “Fall”! (When participants start giggling, I usually say, “Wait! What words were you thinking of? Shame on you!”)*

*If someone says, “Don’t worry, you can’t fall!”, what’s the one word that someone who is nervous hears? Fall. Exactly. We want to avoid using those words out here!*

Also, encourage participants to cheer on each other; to praise each other. (I want them to cheer for someone who is so nervous that even getting in a harness is a big deal!)

Finally, explain to the participants that if they are continually making fun of others or they say something like, “I hope you fall and die!” they are out of the activity. There are NO second chances on this!

*Verbal Contract -* Before climbing, we will do a verbal contract with ALL participants – this includes Staff! While this manual will cover more options later, this does NOT need to be complicated. (For a group that is there for fun, I will have the participant ask, “Ready to rock?” I will conduct a “Toe-To-Toe Check”, and respond with “Rock on!” At that point, they may begin climbing.

When you explain this to the group, ask them if someone can tell you WHY we do a verbal contract. This helps the group process the need for it and, in my experience, helps to fix the need for a contract in their memory.

*Transfers -*

Here's my spiel for transfers:

*While you're getting in your harnesses, or while you're waiting for someone else to get into a harness, practice opening a triple-lock parabiner! Do it over and over until it feels comfortable, because you will have to do that up in the trees to transfer from one element to another.*

*When you get to the end of an element, you will step around the tree and someone will slide the new tether over to you. You will clip the new one in through the belay loop on your harness, but you will NOT take the old one off!*

*When you have the new one in, we're going to have you pull away on the new tether so we can see where you're connected to.*

**Facilitator's Note:**

I have seen people clip BEHIND their belay loop, not through it! I've also seen people clip through the carabiner they are about to remove! If you cannot tell where they clipped, have the Primary in the trees verify it. If they cannot see it clearly, they MUST go over and verify!

*Once we can see it, we'll have you squeeze the carabiner with two fingers; one on the gate – the part that opens – and the other on the back side. Be sure to do it with the back of your hand against your belly so we can see if from down below. (Again, if it can't be seen clearly, the Primary in the trees needs to verify it!)*

*Once we've done those checks, you can take off your old tether and just let it go behind you! (Don't let them throw it off!) We'll then have you pull out on the tether again, squeeze again, and then you can go!*

(This is SO much easier to explain if you're in a harness with a tether to demonstrate with.)

*Climbing Tips -*

For the Cargo Net, it's all about careful placement of feet. Use your legs to go up the element. (If someone is really struggling, have two people hold down on the Cargo Net, anchor it to the ground, or both!)

For the Rope Climb, if they can get the rope pinched between their feet, it saves a 25-foot climb on just arms!

For the Zip Tree, they can use anything except LEAP Anchors to grab onto. (They can even use LEAP Anchors, but it can hurt their fingers!) When they get up to the platform, they may grab onto any cables, supports, Facilitator's shoelaces, or whatever else they need to get up onto the platform!

**Final Thoughts:**

Teammates who are moving tethers back to participants should do so gently! If they whip the p-cord, there is a possibility of someone catching a steel carabiner in the face! Also, remember that teammates moving p-cord are not required to wear a helmet, as they are not directly under someone who is in the trees. Participants holding the Cargo Net should wear a properly-fastened helmet!

---

## HARNESSING / HELMETS

---

To save space, and as these sections are covered in-depth in the Climbing Tower Facilitation Manual, we will not repeat them here. Please refer to that document for a detailed description.

***Facilitator's Notes:*** Okay, there are a few things that we need to consider when it comes to harnessing participants in the High Ropes Course:

- First, if a participant inverts (flips upside down) and their harness is NOT tight, they will plummet 25 feet and most likely die. While we joke about asking “Can you still breathe?” at the Tower, I really DO tighten harnesses at the High Ropes Course until they are snug. I would rather have a participant be uncomfortable than have them die.
- Second, check EVERYONE’S harness before they climb, even if you put it on them! (I’ve had people “readjust” their harnesses in the time it took me to go and get my climbing rope!)
- Third, if you have someone with a different body shape, there ARE chest harnesses available. (We will be getting some full-body harnesses within the next couple of years, as well.) If you are concerned that the harness is NOT held snugly between their hips and their ribs, use one or call in another Primary if you don’t know how to put one on safely.
- Finally, the Primary at the Zip Tree needs to double-check EVERYONE’S harness before they Zip! If it’s not on right or tight, it is VERY dangerous! (Going back to the idea of “Do NOT assume other people can do it right!”)



## FACILITATING THE HIGH ROPES COURSE

To successfully facilitate the High Ropes Course:

### On The Climber's End -

1. Invite the new climber (and their team) over.
2. Take this moment to learn the climber's name and be sure that they know yours. This establishes a working relationship.
3. Have the participant connect the triple-lock carabiner through the belay loop on the harness. (This gives them practice with you watching!)
4. While standing next to the participant, check to be sure their harness is tight enough, if ALL belay loops are backed off, and if the knot and rope are ready.
5. Check their helmet to make sure it won't slip off.
6. Check to see if their clothing is acceptable. (Not talking terms of fashion here, but be sure that shoelaces are tied, jewelry is not an issue, etc.)

**Facilitator's Note:** Per direct order of Don Nagy of Experiential Systems in the Fall of 2021, **backup carabiners are no longer to be used!** We are to use a single, steel, triple-lock parabiner through the belay loop ONLY!

### On The Facilitator's End -

1. Return to your position outside of the "Fall Zone".
2. Have the ballast team take their position. (Again, remember the "Rule of Two's": two feet firmly on the ground; two hands firmly gripping the webbing; two eyes on the climber; two ears listening to commands; and two lips closed, other than for encouragement.)
3. Assign Emergency Brake and Rope Tender, if used.
4. Assume your stance. This usually means feet approximately shoulder-width apart, your front foot facing toward the Tower, and weight evenly distributed. (For heavier climbers, a wider stance with weight toward the back foot will help keep you more firmly anchored.)
5. Take out the slack.
6. Cue the participant to start the verbal contract. When they ask, "Ready to climb?", do a "Toe-To-Toe Check". This includes:

- Climber Footwear
- Climber Harness (Is it snug? Above the hips? Free of twists? Closed off? Adequate tail?)
- Knot (Is it still tied tight? Has the bight slipped down or come undone?)
- Rope (Follow it up from the climber and through the pulley. Are there twists?)
- Belay Device (Is it set up correctly? Any twists?)
- Locking Carabiner (Is your carabiner locked? Do a quick squeeze check!)
- Facilitator Harness (Is it snug? Free of twists? Closed off? Adequate tail?)
- Facilitator Footwear (Are YOUR shoes tied? Do you have a solid base?)

(Adapted from the American Mountain Guides Association 2016-2017.)

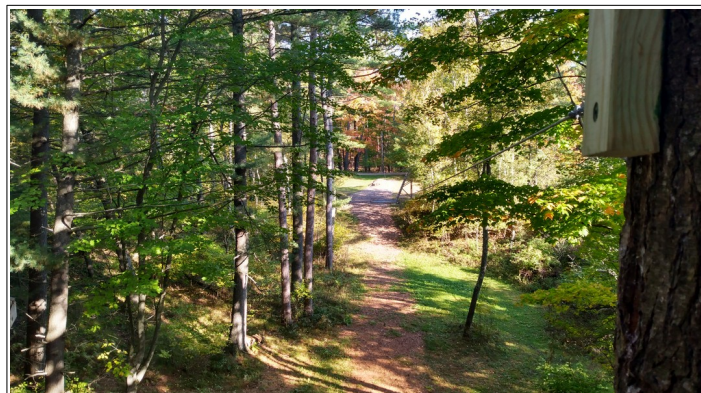
7. When the “Toe-To-Toe Check” is completed satisfactorily, give the climber permission. “Climb on!”
8. As the climber moves, the Facilitator needs to pay close attention to them. This means listening to what they say, asking for information, and taking out slack.
9. To remove slack, every time the participant moves, the Facilitator pulls rope from the climber side with one arm while simultaneously pulling that slack through the belay device, locking the climber off, and repositioning hands.
10. When the participant reaches the top of the Vertical Playpen, ask if they wish to continue on. If not, have them move to the side of the Cargo Net – less likely to tangle – and lower them down. If they wish to go on, have them move to the tree in the direction they wish to go and wait for further instructions.

**Facilitator’s Note:** A Facilitator on the ground CAN do transfers if: (1) they are a High Ropes Secondary AND (2) they have an unobstructed view to allow them to verify the participant is doing things safely. If one of these conditions is not met, they can start the process, but only the Primary in the trees can give them permission to disconnect the old line and begin to move again.

11. For the Zip Tree, have participants wait, locked off, on your belay system. The Primary Facilitator will give you instructions which you need to both repeat and do. (If they say “slack”, give them some slack while you respond with “slack”. This lets them know you heard the command.) When they say “Off belay”, respond with “Belay off” and pull slack through your belay device so the rope can be lowered back down.
12. In any case, after the participant has disconnected from the belay rope, click the counter to indicate a climb.
13. When ALL climbers are done, have them unlock their harnesses – not undoing the buckles; loosen the belts, and slip them off! If you do it as a group, participants are less-likely to “spaghetify” the harnesses!

### Zipline ONLY Notes -

14. To remove a participant from the Zipline, wait until they stop moving and then drag them over to the ladder area. (You can grip an ankle or hand them the retrieval line and drag them by that.)
15. Wheel the ladder over to them and have them climb up high enough to create slack. (Smaller participants may have to climb to the top.) If a participant climbs to the top, have them sit down facing you.
16. Have them disconnect the blue tether from their harness. (You may have to help.)
17. Clip the retrieval line to the carabiner on the end of the blue tether; NOT to the carabiners on the Zip Pulley!
18. Have them disconnect the red tether from their harness. (You may have to help.)
19. Have them gently let go of the Zip Pulley. (Double-check to make sure the Zip Pulley doesn't flip over when it's released. If it does, fix the issue immediately!)
20. Have the participant turn around and climb down the ladder with their face facing the ladder. (I usually stay right behind Day Campers and other smaller participants to keep them from slipping.)
21. When they're on the ground, give them the END of the retrieval line and have them RUN it back up to the Zip Tree. When the Zip Pulley is received by the Primary and they drop the retrieval line, have that participant take the END of the retrieval line and run it back down to the ladder. (This works well since they're already in a helmet anyhow!)
22. While someone is running the retrieval line, move the ladder back to the end of the platform.





*Facilitator's Notes:* Okay, I have a few here:

- **At NO TIME does the Facilitator EVER release hold of the brake rope!** There is NEVER a reason to do that, regardless of what is happening around you! (If necessary, get the participant down quickly and safely and then deal with an issue!)
- If the Facilitator doing the belay is concerned about a participant's anxiety, they NEED to signal the Primary in the trees and make them aware that there is a potential problem. Please do this without embarrassing the participant! (I usually call the Primary's name, point at my eyes, and then point at the participant. The Primary responds with a clear head nod and now both of us now pay special attention!)
- The tighter you keep the rope on the High Ropes Course, the less likely it is that you will have to do a rescue! If a participant slips and tangles in the Cargo Net, it is a HUGE pain – for them, as well as for the rescuer!
- If you make the tethers too long on any given element, you will be doing a lot of rescues! You want them long enough to reach the obstacles, but not long enough to allow someone to hang UNDER the obstacles!



- You can avoid doing most rescues if you have a sense of humor! Tell a joke, get them laughing or talking, and they will, in general, be able to continue moving. (Sometimes you will need to silence everyone else so that you can be clearly heard.)
- The easiest rescue points are the Vertical Playpen and the Zip Tree due to their dynamic belay options. If a participant cannot move to one of these locations, they will need to be lowered using the Rescue Bag.
- If a group cannot behave in a safe manner, do NOT do this activity! The Camp will support you if you decide that the group is not acting in an appropriate fashion. (I've had groups that sat and talked, rather than ballasting, moving retrieval lines, etc. We literally hit a point where the course could NOT function and the teachers didn't care.)
- Never leave the High Ropes Course area without pulling up (or dropping) the ropes, picking up the gear and locking the ladders. Access should be controlled at all times for

the safety of the program participants.

- Finally, here's another motto: "If it looks unsafe, it probably is!"

## SOME HINTS...

---

Here are some tips and tricks for moving through the High Ropes Course:

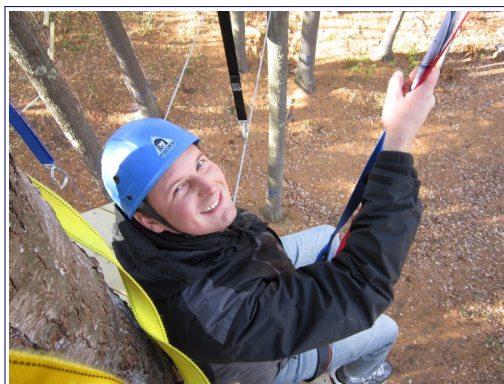
1. Standing up straighter makes it easier to go across the obstacles.
2. Extending your arms on the Burma Bridge will stabilize it...somewhat.
3. Leaning out away from the wire on the Pirate's Crossing makes it easier...somewhat.
4. Be very careful moving from one element to another! If not, you can tangle yourself around cables, ropes, platforms, etc. which will take you longer to sort yourself back out. If you get stuck, don't give up. Stop and reevaluate your position.
5. If you need a hint, ask for one! (My typical hint is, "Go up!" or "Keep going!")
6. It's okay to not finish the course. Just try your best.
7. Some people like big goals while others do well on little goals. Decide what works well for you when you set your goals!

## ZIPPING COMMANDS

---

The Zipline has its own series of commands. Before we get to those, however, let's cover a basic safety rule:

**If the ladder is still in the way, do NOT hook up a participant solely to the Zip Line!**



A collision with the ladder can result in significant injury! We use a daisy chain attached to a LEAP anchor to prevent premature zipping. When the ladder is moved, the participant has been

hooked onto the Zip Pulley (but still attached to the Zip Tree by means of a tether), and they have taken a seat, you're ready to begin the verbal contract.

Please note that while the Climbing Commands can be adapted for different groups, the Zipping Commands are "static" and should ALWAYS go as follows:

CLIMBER  
"Ready to Zip!"

FACILITATOR  
"Zip Clear!"

**Facilitator's Note:** While the Climber is asking if they are cleared to zip, the Primary in the trees will conduct a squeeze check of the carabiners on the Zip Pulley, verify that there are no straps to tangle on the platform, etc. At the same time, the High Ropes (Zipline) Facilitator checks to make sure the ladder is moved safely and completely out of the way, that the Zipline appears to be in usable mode, that there is no traffic they can see/hear, and that no one is under the Zipline.

If all is set, ***the Primary has the participant grab BOTH zip tethers in one hand*** – this prevents them from accidentally putting their head between the tethers! – and removes the daisy chain connecting the participant to the trees. (The Primary still keeps a grip on the zip tethers until the next part is complete.) Then comes the second half of the verbal contract:

CLIMBER  
"Zipping!"

FACILITATOR  
"Zip On!"

At this point, the participant is cleared to go.

***Remember: We do NOT push people off!***

---

## CLEAN UP

---

At the end of the event, the routine is as follows:

1. Get the Rope Log and record the number of climbs per rope. (All ropes are color-coded with tape that matches the log.) Reset the counters, when finished.
2. Untie all knots and remove all gear from the climbing rope.
3. On the Zip Tree, tie the p-cord to the end of the climbing rope and pull it back through. Just like when you pulled it up, let the p-cord run through your hand. This prevents knots from getting tangled in the spin statics at the top. When the p-cord is back down, tie it onto the screw-eye.
4. The Primary Facilitator needs to go through the course and remove all of the pulleys / tethers. For ease of removal, close the rapid link, clip the carabiner onto the link, and use the p-cord to lower the whole ensemble to the ground. (Beats lugging it through the

course with you and a Facilitator on the ground can pick it up.)

5. Visually and tactilely inspect the climbing ropes as you “butterfly” them. Tie them off and hang them by the ropes over the pegs! Do NOT hook the middle loop over the peg as it puts stress in the middle of the rope!
6. Put all harnesses back on hooks. If participants did spaghetti a harness, please reassemble it immediately. Do NOT leave it for someone else to fix!
7. Put all hardware on the shelf. (I typically leave a triple-lock, a screw-gate, and a belay device hooked together for ease next time.)
8. Untie the water knot and either roll or daisy chain the webbing.
9. Return the High Ropes Rescue Bag to the big shelves.
10. Take the helmets outside of the shed, spray them down with disinfectant, and store them right-side-down on the racks! (You want the disinfectant to be able to drip out of the helmets!)
11. Wrap the Rope Climb into the Cargo Net and use the chain to pull both up into the trees.
12. Move the ladder at the Zip Tree back to the Ropes Course Shed and padlock it.
13. Get your two cones, thread the chain through them, and padlock the Zip Ladder away from the Zipline.
14. Do one last “ground sweep”! (Gear is too expensive to leave lying on the ground!)
15. Be sure to shut and lock the Ropes Course Shed before leaving the area.

### **FINAL SAFETY NOTES**

---

The High Ropes Course is supposed to be used in the most straight-forward manner you can; leave the “imagination” and “creativity” for Crafts! I've heard of people on other courses rearranging safety lines, coming up with exciting ways to Zip, putting additional “challenges” in the course; etc. Most of these end up being used in my stories of maiming, death, and destruction that I share during training. So, when in doubt...don't!

1. Other than when doing a rescue, only ONE person is allowed on each element at a time. (During a rescue, you can have two Facilitators and one victim on a cable at a time.)
2. The Primary Facilitator should stand on the Zip platform for ease of access for rescue.
3. Zipline injuries are the most common. You will see hair, earrings, skin, etc. tangled in the Zip Pulley. None of my courses have EVER had this difficulty because we always do

things properly! Always use the Zipline in the manner intended.

4. Do not put unreasonable stress on the equipment. (We've had Facilitators allow participants to "scoot" toward the final Zip Pole after their momentum has stopped. The gear is NOT designed for this!)
5. Rain / snow will undermine your footing for seat belay. ALWAYS ballast!
6. Night programs are inherently dangerous/lethal if you don't know what you're doing! Nighttime High Ropes activities will ONLY be conducted under the direct supervision of the Ropes Course Administrator. (This usually involves doing "Night Climb And Zip".)
7. Every day is different. Never assume that you've seen it all...otherwise you will be proven wrong and that's not going to be happy... (I'm speaking from experience.)

## APPENDIX A: ADDITIONAL CLIMBING COMMANDS

The commands in the next two sections are meant to expand your communication with participants. While these are NOT required, they are nice additions to any “training” programs or a week-long Skills Class.

### Verbal Contract (Long)

A longer verbal contract looks like this:

CLIMBER

“(Name) On Belay?”

BELAYER

“(Name) Belay is on.”

\*The Climber is asking if they are safe. The Belayer, after visually double-checking the connections, the condition of the rope, looking for twisted ropes, etc. responds with is all hooked up and ready to climb. Usually, at this point, the Belayer makes sure that there is no slack in the rope. When the climber feels the rope tug on the harness, they know they are secure.

“(Name,) Climbing?”

“(Name) Climb on.”

\*Before beginning to climb, the Climber checks one more time for permission. The Belayer, if ready, gives that permission and begins the process of belaying the participant.

Please note that the sample verbal contract provided here is only a suggestion. (The most basic one that I’ve used is: (Climber) “Ready to rock?” (Facilitator) “Rock on!” However it’s done, all Staff ARE REQUIRED to use some sort of a verbal contract with EVERY climber! ***There is to be no exception to this rule!***

***Facilitator’s Note:*** Be aware that you may need to adapt this with special populations. For nonverbal participants, hand gestures may be substituted, instead.

### Special Commands

The following are special commands which will improve Belayer/Climber communication:

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| “Clear” -   | The area underneath a participant / Facilitator is clear of participants. (Usually said in response to “Rock”.)  |
| “Falling” - | This command is given if the climber starts to fall, alerting the belayer to use the brake.  |
| “Free” -    | This means someone is disconnected. Typically it’s used when the Primary has descended for the day and removed their last claw / tether / etc. It can also be used to alert the Primary of the need for a rescue if a participant disconnects. |



- “Got You” - The belayer has removed the slack and is prepared for the climber to sit back on the rope. (Usually used with “Ready To Lower”.)
- “Lowering” - The belayer tells the climber that they are being lowered.
- “Okay” - The belayer’s response to all of the above commands to let the climber know the team has heard them.
- “[Name] Rescue” - This is a command from one Facilitator to another to let them know a rescue is needed / underway. More on rescues will be discussed in a different manual section.
- “Ready To Lower” - The climber has sat back into the rappel position and is ready to come down.
- “Rock” - The longer phrase is, “Oops! I dropped something and it’s coming right at your head!” If you hear this, duck and cover! Do NOT look up! (If this is part of the Zipline, then, before dropping the retrieval line, wait for a ground-based Facilitator to respond with “Clear”.)
- “Rope Good” - Used in a rescue to indicate that the rope has spooled out with no knots.
- “Slack” - If the climber feels the rope is being held too tightly they give this command. The belayer replies by letting out a little slack.
- “Tension” - The climber wants ALL slack removed from the system and the rope to be held tightly. (Usually done before they make a more serious move.)
- “Up Rope” - If the climber notices too much slack in the belay rope they give this command. The belayer should take in the loose rope so if the climber falls, they will only fall a minimum distance.

**Facilitator’s Note:** Please note that “Falling” is a nicety; not a necessity. If a climber KNOWS they are going to fall, they can inform you. However, many participants do NOT know they are falling. This is why Facilitators need to be paying close attention and keep the slack in the rope to a minimum.



## APPENDIX B: SPECIAL ACTIVITIES

---

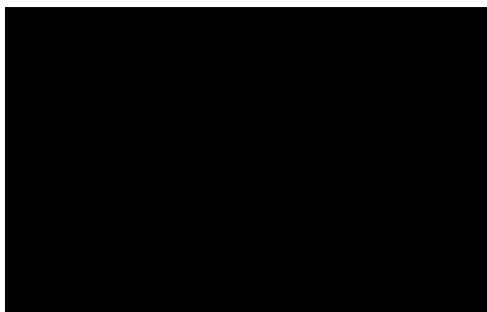
These are the following “modifications” that can be made to the traditional use of the High Ropes Course. Any other special activities need to be submitted in writing and approved prior to being implemented.

### Climb And Zip

As we’ve discussed, Facilitators may set up just the Zipline. Participants are belayed up to the Zip Tree, hooked onto the Zipline, and zip down.

- This requires one Primary, on the Zip platform, with the Rescue Bag beside them, and responsible for transferring participants from the belay to the Zip.
- This also requires a second Facilitator – Primary or Secondary – at the bottom of the Zip Tree, harnessing/helmeting participants, and belaying participants safely up the ladder.
- Finally, there needs to be one other adult who can function as the Zipline Facilitator.

**Facilitator’s Note:** There IS one modification that can be made to this setup. A Primary can harness/helmet all of the participants ahead of time and teach them how to clip in to the belay rope. Then they can take their place and belay from the Zip Tree platform. This modification is considerably slower, but requires one fewer Staff. (You can also use this to belay people up to do Zipline while another Facilitator is belaying people up the Vertical Playpen.) Permission is needed from the Ropes Course Administrator to approve a Facilitator to do this.



(Actual photo of Night Climb And Zip!)

### Night Climb And Zip

Night Climb and Zip functions in the same way as regular Climb and Zip, except it’s done in the dark. To do this, you will need to:

- Use a flashlight to clip the participant onto the belay rope before climbing; this also gives you a chance to visually inspect the climber and the gear. (Turn the light off before they climb.)
- Use a flashlight on the Zip platform to hook the participant up to the zip pulley. This also gives you a chance to visually inspect the climber and their gear. (Turn the light off

- before they zip.)
- Use a flashlight to disconnect the participant at the other end. Also, use the flashlight to ensure that the ladder is safely out of the way. (Turn this light off before a participant zips.)

***Facilitator's Note:*** Surprisingly, this is NOT unsafe. Why? Because we can clearly see how to connect the participants. We belay by feel, making sure that the rope is ALWAYS kept tight. We use lights to verify the ladder is out of the way. And, most nights, it's not really that "dark" in the course! (This is more about perceived danger!) Permission and approval are needed from the Ropes Course Administrator to approve a Facilitator to do this.

### Vertical Playpen

Groups looking for a different challenge than just the Climbing Tower can use the Vertical Playpen entrance as a stand-alone activity. To do this, you will need to:

- Have a Primary set up the Vertical Playpen, complete with the rescue bag hung up above The Log. They must remain on the platform for the duration of the activity.
- Have another Facilitator – Primary or Secondary – harness participants and have them try climbing the various elements.

***Facilitator's Note:*** If you do this, please get EVERYONE involved! Have multiple "ballasts", people holding the Cargo Net, etc. This activity does NOT require special permission or approval, as this is within the parameters of the normal functioning of the Ropes Course.

**At this time, NO OTHER modifications are approved for this program area!**



## APPENDIX C: SKILLS CLASS

---

The High Ropes Course is available as a Skills Class during Summer Camp. Unfortunately, due to the Staff-intensive nature of the program, it may not be available due to lack of Facilitators. Please be sure to check with the Program Director to verify if it can be done.

Advanced options include:

- Participants self-harnessing.
- Participant belay.
- Self-Rappel from top.

Primary Facilitators who would like to lead any of the advanced options will need to have a Ropes Course Trainer or Ropes Course Administrator to assist.





## APPENDIX D: SAMPLE HOLD HARMLESS FORM

### Northern Lakes Partners

2750 Bible Camp Road  
Rhinelander, WI 54501  
(715) 203 - 0502

#### SPECIALIZED PROGRAM RELEASE, INDEMNIFICATION AND HOLD HARMLESS AGREEMENT

In consideration of participating in the indicated Specialized Programs, and for other good and valuable consideration, I hereby agree to release and discharge from liability arising from negligence Northern Lakes Partners, its subsidiaries, owners, directors, officers, employees, agents, volunteers, participants or entities acting for them (hereafter referred to collectively as "NLP") on behalf of my children, parents, heirs, assigns, personal representatives and estate and agree as follows:

1. I accept the fact that there are inherent risks in simply being in an outdoor environment. While a safety orientation will precede all Specialized Programs, I acknowledge that environmental factors may change and render an activity area unsafe.
2. I accept the fact that, while course leaders are skilled, trained and experienced, they cannot guarantee my total safety since some risks are beyond their control.
3. I agree to follow all instructions and guidelines provided by the Specialized Program Instructors and to act in a safe and responsible manner toward all participants. I realize that if I fail to follow directions or act in a manner that is inconsistent with the safety guidelines that I will be removed from the program and/or asked to leave the grounds without a refund of my program fee.
4. I fully comprehend and willingly assume the responsibility and risks of participating in the Specialized Programs selected below and as explained to me by the Instructors. My participation in this activity is purely voluntary and I elect to participate despite the risks.
5. I am sufficiently fit to participate in the Specialized Programs selected below. I agree to inform the Instructors if there are any medical concerns. I agree to notify the Specialized Program Instructors if any changes to my emotional, mental and/or physical health occur during the course of my program. Should I become ill or injured, I give permission for the program facilitators to render first aid and to seek emergency medical or rescue services, as they see fit and at my cost. I represent that I have adequate insurance to cover any injury or damage I may suffer or cause while participating in this activity or else I agree to bear the costs of such injury or damage myself.
6. I hereby voluntarily release, forever discharge, and agree to indemnify and hold harmless NLP from any and all claims, demands or causes of action which are in any way connected with my participation in this activity or my use of their equipment or facilities, arising from negligence. *This release does not apply to claims arising from intentional conduct.* Should NLP or anyone acting on their behalf be required to incur attorney's fees and costs to enforce this agreement, I agree to indemnify and hold them harmless for all such fees and costs.
7. I understand that by signing this, I am giving permission to use photographs, videos or other media-related items of me or my child for use as they see fit and without compensation.
8. I acknowledge that this agreement will cover the following Specialized Programs (please indicate all applicable programs):

<input type="checkbox"/> Equestrian Programs	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-Site Trips	<input type="checkbox"/> Paintball
<input type="checkbox"/> Ropes Courses	<input type="checkbox"/> Target Sports (e.g. Riflery)	<input type="checkbox"/> Waterskiing / Tubing

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Parent or Guardian Agreement (For participants under the age of 18)

In consideration of \_\_\_\_\_ (print minor's name) being permitted to participate in the indicated activities, I further agree to indemnify and hold harmless NLP from any claims alleging negligence which are brought on behalf of the minor listed above or are in any way connected with such participation by the minor.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Event (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Failure to sign this document will result in removal from the activity and a refund of any program fees.**