



**FIELD TRIP GUIDELINES:**

**Ropes or Challenge Courses**

**OVERVIEW:**

Both indoor and outdoor challenge courses are becoming an increasingly popular addition to the physical education class curriculum and to team-building programs in schools throughout the state.

These courses can include:

1. Climbing walls or towers - stand-alone structures that may reach a height of 40 feet.
2. Some towers are connected to other course structures and become the focal point of the course. Individual climbers attempt to scale the vertical or near-vertical face by using hand holds and footholds built onto the surface.
3. Cable/rope traverses, or team log - participants cross a traverse or log which is usually installed between trees or telephone poles.
4. Ropes courses - there are both low and high ropes courses. In the first, activities take place on or very close to the ground. They may also be set up indoors and normally do not require any special safety system other than diligent spotting by teammates. Many low ropes activities are portable and can be quickly and easily moved to other sites. In high ropes courses, activities take place at higher elevations, typically 20 - 40 feet above ground level. Equipment is generally fixed in place and usually requires the use of climbing equipment and a belay system for safety. High ropes courses may involve the use of trees and/or utility poles in creating the elevated platform needed for the activities. Some courses combine both low and high ropes activities.
5. The use of harnesses, carabineers, pulleys, and ropes protect participants in case of a fall while accessing, participating in, and exiting the "high" elements. Participants are instructed on how to use this equipment, practice the use of equipment, and are supervised by trained staff while participating in "high" elements of the Challenge "Ropes" Course.

**KEY INJURIES ARE:**

Project Adventure's 20-Year Safety Study found an injury rate of 4.33 injuries per million hours of ropes course program exposure. (Compare that to 4,500 injuries per million hours of soccer programs).

While the safety of participants is top priority for ropes courses, potential injury can occur as a result of participation. These injuries include, but are not limited to, scrapes, splinters, rope burns, and injuries from falls. Because most ropes courses take place out-of-doors, natural risks of the setting include but are not limited to, exposure to sun, heat and other weather conditions; roots, pine cones, and uneven terrain; poison ivy, mosquitoes, and other plants and animals.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Verify that the course you are intending to visit is run by a company that uses certified instructors and uses properly inspected courses. Records and certifications should be available. A course run by a disreputable company can be a dangerous place.
2. Each ropes course is different. Call ahead to speak to the management and determine the physical and mental requirements for the participants. Make sure the equipment selections are appropriate for the age and behaviors of the participating students.

3. The minimum ratio of adults to students is 1:10. The variety of courses may require a greater number of adults.
4. Most courses are strenuous, and you will need to bring water. The course management will be able to describe what supplies you will need to bring.
5. You will get dirty. Wear old clothes that are not too tight or too loose. Long pants, long sleeves, and proper footwear will be needed. Ask the course management for recommendations.