

Challenge Ropes Course Introduction

The Challenge Course is a unique program: it is a high reward, seemingly high risk activity. While there is some risk involved in participating on the Ropes Course, it has been greatly minimized by strict and thorough safety measures. On high elements, for example, participants wear a safety harness system. If they fall, they are suspended in the air by a safety (belay) line. The participants may logically understand that they are safe, but their knees still shake when they are 30 feet up. In other words, the perceived risk is much greater than the actual risk. This is what makes the Ropes Course a mental challenge as well as a physical one.

So WHY participate?

- It is a thrilling and fun thing to do.
- Commitment to perform where there is uncertainty of results is a healthy decision-making process.
- Proving to oneself that a seemingly insurmountable problem can be overcome is enlightening and satisfying.
- There is evidence that there is a significant positive carry over from the experience of successfully completing a demanding, fabricated problem as compared to overcoming everyday problems.

Getting out there and playing, and enjoying the Challenge Ropes Course is what it is all about. Most of all have fun! It is an incredible process.

GOALS and OBJECTIVES

Each ropes course program should have some established goals and objectives. This creates a focus for the program and a deliberate and clear set of expected outcomes. These outcomes can be set by the group, individuals or the sponsoring organization.

The facilitators and ropes course program will also have predetermined, underlying objectives that support and complement the group's objectives. In very basic terms, these may be:

- Provide a fun and safe experience.
- Provide an appropriate, sequential series of activities / experiences.
- Create an atmosphere where the participants feel comfortable enough to 'stretch' personally beyond self-imposed limits.

A generally accepted overriding goal for the entire ropes course program: '*The Improvement of Self-Concept*'. This includes 6 key elements (or objectives) for a program to support the main goal, these are:

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| Trust Building | Peak Experience |
| Goal Setting | Humor / Fun |
| Challenge / Stress | Problem Solving |
| Team Work | Communication |

Every course and group that is run will be different in some way, so a strict set of objectives that everyone must follow may not be the best approach. By giving the group and their leader's time to reflect and think about what their goals and objectives are for their program is one way to ensure a positive and successful rope / challenge course program.

“We are the sum total of our experiences”

If you can believe and understand that statement, you understand how, Challenge Courses, Initiative Games, and Ropes Courses work. Each of us have had a history, a past, a set of experiences which has molded us, formed us and taught us to respond, think, and behave in the manners we do. These experiences were varied and different; therefore we all saw, felt, and reacted differently.

What if we all had the same experience, at the same time, with the same people?

We would all have the same point of reference to build on. In Challenge courses that is what we strive for. The experiences are “set up”, non-threatening, challenging “problems” that the facilitator fabricates and leads the participants through. Some experiences need elaborate props or “elements” while others require nothing but the participants themselves. Each activity builds on the previous one; reinforcing and encouraging further growth and expansion.

Deciding which activities to incorporate into the program to accomplish the participant’s desired objectives is the responsibility of the facilitator. All eight objectives should be incorporated, giving particular emphasis to one or two. Whatever the goals, the experience should be facilitated to accomplish them. Participants should be challenged to develop team goals for each activity. After several activities a reflection is accomplished through nondirective questioning that encourages participants to analyze how they did as a group and as individuals, how they could do better in future endeavors including life skills, and how the learning applies to school, jobs, and their future life.

There is an orderly progression through the activities. Remember we are imitating life, experiential learning in a “controlled environment”. Until the participants can walk, the facilitator does not ask them to run. Every activity has check points to evaluate the participant’s level of preparedness. For examples, “wind in the willow”, teaches spotting techniques and breaks down the participant’s personal bubble. It also is a good gauge of the group’s maturity and trust level. The “cookie machine” is another activity to break the personal bubbles, establish trust, and show how many hands lighten the load for everyone. The “port hole” is a lead in activity to the “spider web”, and so forth. Attached is a bibliography of books with hundreds of activities. Find and use the ones that support the path to the goals your participant’s desire.