

Climbing and Traversing Walls

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The Outdoor Education & External Visits website is at
<https://slp.somerset.org.uk/sites/sccoea/SitePages/Home.aspx>.

The Adventure Activities Licensing Authority website is at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/aala/>.

CLIMBING WALLS

An increasing number of secondary schools and colleges have a climbing wall on site and many primary schools have traversing walls. The information provided here relates particularly to the use of climbing walls and belaying. Please also see the information on [traversing walls](#) and [certificated training](#).

The Adventure Activities Licensing Authority has given careful consideration to the ways in which young people, or adult novices, participate in belaying and summarised their views in a “Collective Interpretation”, produced in December 2005.

As AALA state within the article:

“The vast majority of what the Licensing Authority sees and hears regarding peer and team belaying is of a very high standard. Most instructors, whether trained and assessed by an NGB or in-house, perform very competently and safely, and are carefully managed by employers and managers. Inevitably though, accidents will happen...”

No attempt is made to encourage a prescriptive method of working. The Licensing Authority recognises that safety in the outdoors is largely the result of good judgement by the instructor in charge to choose and implement the most appropriate techniques for the situation.”

The Licensing Authority refers to the advantages and disadvantages of a range of methods, including:

- Tailing
- Bell-ringing
- Outward facing belayer
- Auto-lock devices
- Ground anchors
- Italian hitch at the top
- Haul-sack method
- Conventional one-to-one belaying with a friction device or Italian Hitch, but no further back up.

Please alert colleagues who are responsible for the management of a climbing wall or to the supervision of climbing to the full article, entitled *Team and peer belaying in climbing and climbing related activities by licensed providers*, available on the [HSE website](#).

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TRAVERSING WALLS

Traversing walls encourage balance, co-ordination and movement within curriculum time or as part of lunch-time and break time activities. Using some or all of the holds, children may set themselves challenges appropriate to their own ability. As the name implies, traversing walls are designed to allow movement along, rather than up, the wall. A traversing wall does not require specialist climbing equipment or specially qualified supervisors; it provides “low level” climbing.

- Follow manufacturer’s guidance with regard to fitting holds. Extra holes may be drilled and sleeves fitted, to allow subsequent swapping and movement of holds.
- Provide holds of different colours, sizes, shapes and locations so that young people may vary their route and set themselves different challenges.
- Risk assess the location of the wall:
 - Consider the surface at the foot of the wall. Ensure there are no obstacles (eg drains or kerb edges) onto which children are likely to step down awkwardly.
 - Consider the location in terms of any immediately adjacent activities.
 - As a guide, protective surfacing should be considered where the highest footholds are more than 600mm off the ground. Protective surfacing is not a legal requirement but should be considered as part of your risk assessment for the wall and its use.
 - Consider ease of supervision and observation, e.g. lunchtime use
- Check the holds on a regular basis to see if any have become loose, and tighten where necessary. Ask pupils to report any loose holds.
- Children should be informed about good practice (and may be able to draw up their own code of practice) for example:
 - Give people on the wall time and space to move along.
 - Use sensible footwear, no rings etc to be worn.
 - Encourage the use of 'spotters'.
 - Be considerate towards other people on the wall.

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CERTIFICATED TRAINING

Certificated Training for staff to supervise sessions on **traversing** or **climbing** walls can be provided. These can be run at your own site or at a local venue. Please contact the OEA for further details at oea@somerset.gov.uk.

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