

## **Low Ropes Course Camp Edwards YMCA**

**This class has to be taught by an Edwards Staff, unless you have proper training. Training sessions can be done up at Camp Edwards for teachers wanting to teach this class.**

The two Edwards *Low Ropes Courses* are structures consisting of several “elements” (or obstacles) which provide personal challenge for each individual participant while the group provides a safety system by working together as “spotters”.

### **Teambuilding Program Goals**

- To provide participants with a physically safe and emotionally safe environment.
- To provide participants with opportunity to practice and develop skills in working with a group including:
  - Teamwork, cooperation, communication, goal setting, support, respect, trust, planning, decision-making, problem solving, leadership, and followership.
- To learn and practice the Camp Edwards five key components of teamwork: C,C,R,S,T, Communication, Cooperation, Support, Respect, Trust .
- To provide opportunity for participants to develop improved self-image, self-esteem, and sense of self-worth.
- To provide opportunity for participants to develop increased confidence in their abilities to take risks, accept challenge, and pursue new experiences.

### **Role of the Facilitator**

In general, the role of the facilitator is to create an effective learning experience and assist the participants in the accomplishment of the Edwards Teambuilding Program Goals as well as other group or individual goals as fitting.

The successful facilitator instructs, guides, motivates and brings clarity to learning, rather than controlling the group process.

### **Facilitator Responsibilities**

It is the responsibility of the facilitator to provide a positive learning experience and a physically and emotionally safe environment within which participants feel comfortable taking risks and confronting challenges by:

- being familiar with, following, and enforcing all safety procedures.
- being familiar with and performing the inspection of all equipment and structures for safety.
- being familiar with and ensuring the safe use of equipment by participants.
- being a positive role model.
- refraining from judging or criticizing participants.
- help the students develop greater Communication, Cooperation, Respect, Support, and Trust
- prohibiting “cut-downs”, criticizing, judgmental comments or otherwise negative or destructive behavior among participants.
- informing participants of “challenge-by-choice” which allows participants to choose their own level of involvement in each element or activity.

## **Safety Procedures**

The facilitator must:

- perform a pre-use course inspection prior to any course program.
- be present during the entire program.
- clearly communicate safety rules and considerations for each course element.
- monitor course area and equipment throughout the program.
- ensure proper spotting for any activity where injury from a fall is possible.
- stop any activity immediately if there is danger of injury (hanging upside down, diving head first, throwing people, stepping on the middle of people's spines, standing/lifting incorrectly, twisting while lifting, incorrect spotting, etc.).
- cancel the course any time any environmental or weather condition could interfere with safety in any way such as lightning, high winds, extreme cold temperatures, dangerous ice, excessive rain, darkness.
- complete and submit an accident report after any injury or accident.

## **Other Safety Considerations...**

- There must be four spotters for any participant using an element (minimum group size is five, which may include facilitator).
- Groups over 15 are recommended to have an additional facilitator.
- Physical hazards discovered at any element must be removed or corrected (stones, sharp sticks, holes, broken glass, other sharp objects, bees).
- Prior to involvement in the course, participants should be encouraged to remove all jewelry (watches, earrings, rings, bracelets, necklaces, pins/broaches, headbands, etc.) and objects in pockets (pens, knives, keys) that might injure someone in a fall or become damaged. It may be advisable to remove glasses for some activities.
- To prevent hyperextension of the neck and spine, support the head and neck when lifting or lowering a horizontal body. Such lifts should not be above the extended arm's length of the shortest spotter, in order to maintain full contact.
- Edwards Staff does perform a thorough course inspection quarterly.

## **Spotting**

Spotting is the technique of breaking another individual's fall. It is a human safety net and the primary safety system provided for the participant(s) of a course element. This is accomplished by protecting the participant's head, neck and spine from injury when they fall, rather than actually catching them.

All participants must be taught proper spotting technique. The group may not use the courses until the facilitator is confident that the participants are effective spotters and take spotting seriously. The test of readiness is this: "Would I trust this group with my life?"

Falling off things is to be expected. Proper, alert spotting helps prevent falls from causing injury. Improper spotting technique can result in injury to the faller or the spotter.

Additionally, proper spotting builds trust within the group. People who trust their group are more apt to push themselves and "go for it." Accidents and near misses destroy trust and inhibit full participation and involvement.

## **Spotting Instruction**

Teaching spotting is one of the most important responsibilities of the facilitator. Careful instruction is required because beginning spotters often do not recognize or take seriously their importance.

Basic spotting techniques may vary for different elements in order to properly support the climbers body.

Spotting is taught through discussion, demonstration, practice, observation and correction of technique.

### ***Steps for teaching spotting***

1. Explain to the group that spotting is the primary safety technique used on the course. Explain that the job of the spotter is to break the fall and protect the head, neck and spine from injury, not necessarily to “catch” the faller.
2. Demonstrate and explain proper spotting stance.
  - Hands “up and out”, ready to break fall and also protect spotter’s face.
  - Knees and elbows bent to absorb shock.
  - One foot forward and one foot back for stability. (You can reinforce this by letting someone attempt to push you over with your feet together and then with one back)
  - Mentally alert and concentrating on person to be spotted (“awake and aware”).
3. Ask group to demonstrate their spotting stance while you observe and provide coaching on proper technique.
4. Communication through a standard set of signals is used to coordinate the group’s spotting responsibilities.
  - Introduce the spotters contract. Then ask the group to practice calling it out a couple times with you.

Climber:       **“Spotters ready?”**  
Spotters:       **“Ready!”**

**Climber:**     **“Climbing!”**  
Spotters:       **“Climb On!”**

- Demonstrate taking up the spotting stance in synchronization with the signal system, then ask the group to practice the stance and signals where they are standing as you continue to demonstrate. Ask them to shout loudly and be assertive and attentive.
- Now, pretend that you are the climber. Start the command system then act out climbing across the course. Ask the spotters to act out their part. Point out that the spotters may not stop spotting until the climber’s two feet are back on the ground.
- Stress that signals are a contract and a commitment. Do not say “Ready” if not ready and do not stop spotting once giving the “Ready” signal.

### **General spotting guidelines and considerations.**

- Facilitator must insure proper spotting at all times. Supervise spotters closely throughout the course, reminding them of proper technique as needed.
- Minimum of four spotters for each person off the ground.
- Spotting positions can be different in many situations. The facilitators must always be responsible for watching and controlling spotting positions and procedures.

- If the group is unable or unwilling to spot safely and properly the activity must be cancelled. Consider loss of individual's turn or group starting over as consequences of improper spotting.
- Participants off the ground must always be spotted in a 360-degree circle to prevent falling in any direction. Spotters must be positioned where they would be most effective in preventing injury.
- Spotters should at all times keep their eyes and mind on the person they are spotting and be prepared to spot a fall at any moment.
- Spotters Contract should be used at all times to insure all are ready. Infraction of this always means starting over.
- If a participant needs a rest or is not ready for any reason, they must let that be known immediately and clearly before the climber begins. Shout "Stop!"
- Spotting begins before a person starts to climb anything and ends only after the person has both feet on the ground and is steady. Never assume that anyone is safe. Don't rely on statements like, "I've got it!" or "Don't worry!"
- Do not allow participants to free-jump off of any of the elements. To avoid sprained ankles, spotters should provide assistance for those dismounting.

### Tips on Facilitating a Group

- Be familiar with the equipment and the procedures and purpose of all the activities.
- Disruptive participants can be unsafe and may need to be asked to sit out of the element or course.
- Give clear instructions and answer questions to make sure everyone understands.
- Standing or sitting in a circle is a very effective way to communicate within the group. In a circle everyone is equal, and it is easy to make eye contact with each person.
- Help the group establish a goal(s) at the beginning of the course. Get buy-in and agreement from each participant. Refer to the goals throughout the course and revisit them at the end to see how they feel about their level of success and ideas on how to improve in the future.
- Group initiatives should be done in a progressive and sequential manner. The development of trust and skills is needed to perform the requirements of each initiative.
- The facilitator is encouraged not to volunteer solutions to initiatives when groups encounter difficulty. The most benefit is derived from the individual or group solving the problem on their own. The group interaction process is an important part of an initiative task.
- Participants who have experienced a specific initiative before should be encouraged not to give away the answer to the problem. The use of handicapping (e.g. blindfolds, mute, no hands, etc.) may be useful to develop a role that will be challenging to her/him while still allowing others to work through the initiative challenge.
- Encourage participants to ask for help from group if they want it. Encourage group not to help if participant would prefer personal challenge.
- It may be helpful to discuss steps involved in how to solve a problem. S.T.O.P. "Stop, Think, Observe, Plan.
- It can be helpful to briefly discuss each station before moving on. This can clarify learning and lead to greater group success (esp. Group Initiatives Course).
- It is important to be aware of and sensitive to different needs of individual participants.
- The facilitator must realize that genuine changes in behavior take time and these programs only provide a small opportunity for the participants to explore new territory.
- Remember group success can be achieved in many different ways.

- Process a positive closure with the group.
- Use time wisely! Know time limits and constraints. Save time for processing.
- Most of all enjoy what you do!

### **Processing**

Processing provides opportunity for the group to reflect on the experience, to clarify and reinforce learning. It is an important step in transferring learning to other life situations.

Processing may be a brief review of basic concepts or a very involved group exercise, depending on time and the needs and age of the group.

To review, ask the group to identify what is a team? (a group of people working together to meet a common goal) What are the components of “teamwork”? (CCRST Communication, Cooperation, Respect, Support, Trust these are the main ones there are others.) Ask some simple questions such as: “What do you think about what you experienced today?” “How did it feel to be a team member?”, “Did you challenge yourself?”, “Were you able to do something you thought you could not?” etc.

More involved processing can be achieved effectively using the “what?, so what?, now what?” method. First discuss the facts of what took place during the course, then the effects or consequences of this, and lastly what has been learned and changes that can be made in the future. Follow this progression and do not mix categories in order to maintain clarity, highlight cause/effect relationships, and reinforce learning.

- To get started, go around the circle and have each participant describe part of what took place, in detail and progressing in order from beginning to end (the facts).
- Next discuss what happened as a result of “the facts”. Did things go smoothly or not, was the goal achieved, did people speak their minds, etc.?
- Then discuss what insights they have gained and how they can apply their learning to future situations.

### ***Processing Tips***

- Be an active listener. The facilitator should focus attention on the person who is talking. Help them clarify and reflect their feelings, thoughts, ideas, and values. Ask thought-provoking questions.
- Never allow participants to judge or criticize themselves or others.
- Draw analogies to the real world. Try to transfer the experience to the participant’s everyday life.

### **Processing Questions** (Examples for addressing specific topics)

## **COMMUNICATION**

1. Can anyone give an example of when you thought you communicated effectively with someone else in the group through verbal/nonverbal means?
2. How did you know that what you communicated was understood? Try to consider different types of feedback.
3. Which ways were most effective? Why?
4. Which ways were least effective? Why?
5. What did you learn about communication that will help you in the future to communicate more effectively?

### EXPRESSING APPROPRIATE FEELINGS

1. Can you name a feeling you had at any point in completing this activity (mad, sad, glad, hurt, frightened or any of their derivatives)?
2. Have you ever felt this feeling in other situations? If so, when and where?
3. Did you feel safe in expressing your feelings in the group? If not, why?
4. Did you feel safe expressing your thoughts in the group? If not, why?

### LISTENING

1. Who made suggestions for completing the activity?
2. Were all the suggestions made, heard? Explain.
3. Which suggestions were ignored or not acted upon? Why do you think this was so?
4. How did it feel to be heard/not heard if you made a suggestion?
5. Were you a good listener? What interfered with your ability to listen to others?
6. How could this interference have been overcome?

### LEADING OTHERS

1. Who assumed leadership roles during the activity?
2. What were the behaviors which demonstrated leadership?
3. Did the leadership role shift to other people during the activity? Who thought they were taking the leadership role? How did you do it?
4. Why didn't some of you take a leadership role?

### FOLLOWING OTHERS

1. Who assumed a follower role at times throughout the activity? How did it feel?
2. How did it feel to follow different leaders?
3. Do you consider yourself a good follower? Was this an important role in the group today? Explain.
4. How can you improve your ability to be a good follower in the future?

### MAKING GROUP DECISIONS

1. How were group decisions made in completing the activity?
2. Did everyone in the group express an opinion when a choice was available? If not, why not?

### COOPERATING

1. Can you think of specific examples of when the group cooperated in completing the activity/an activity? Explain.
2. How did you learn to cooperate?

### **RESPECTING HUMAN DIFFERENCES**

1. How do differences weaken or strengthen the group as a whole?

### RESPECTING HUMAN COMMONALITIES

1. How did this activity help you discover how you are similar/different to others?

### TRUSTING THE GROUP

1. Is it easier to trust some people and not others? Why?
2. Have there been situations in other times in our life when you did not trust someone? When and why?
3. Once someone breaks your trust is it easy to regain it back?

#### CLOSURE

1. What did you learn about yourself today/from this activity?
2. What did you do today of which you feel especially proud?
3. What was the toughest thing you did today?
4. Was your behavior today typical of the way you usually interact/act in a group? Explain.
5. How can you use what you learn today in other life situations?
6. What would you like to say to the group members?
7. Identify three things you learn during the workshop that you can take with you and use in other situations.