USA Climbing Parent Handbook

Important information for creating a great youth climbing experience
About This Handbook

The purpose of this handbook is to serve as a resource to, new as well as existing parents involved with USA Climbing. The information in this handbook is subject to the USA Climbing Rulebook, which you can find linked here. This handbook is not intended to serve as a replacement or brief of the USA Climbing Rulebook. USA Climbing members, parents, and other participants are expected to know and follow the USA Climbing Rulebook.

About USA Climbing

USA Climbing was founded in 1998. USA Climbing is the National Governing Body for the sport of competition climbing in the United States. USA Climbing promotes the sport of competition climbing around the country through the three disciplines of climbing: Sport, Speed, and Bouldering. At the youth level, we organize two competition seasons, one that focuses solely on bouldering and another that features sport climbing and speed climbing. USA Climbing also hosts competition seasons for adult, collegiate, and adaptive athletes.

We are officially recognized by the U.S. Olympic Committee and the International Federation of Sport Climbing. We organize and train men’s and women’s teams for international competitions including the IFSC World Championships and Youth World Championships, the Pan-American Youth Championships, the World University Championships, the Olympic Games and Youth Olympic Games. Our athletes also compete individually on the IFSC World Cup circuit, a series of international bouldering and sport and speed competitions.

Why Climbing?

Competition climbing is one of the fastest growing youth sports in the US. More and more commercial climbing and fitness facilities are popping up around the United States. According to Climbing Business Journal, there were 414 commercial climbing gyms operating in the United States at the end of 2016, with many more expected to open by the end of 2017. This increase in indoor climbing facilities across the country has made competition climbing and climbing in general, more accessible to everyone. Not only that, competition climbing will be introduced to the Olympic Games in 2020. Climbing allows your child to experience something new, exciting, challenging, and unique to themselves. It allows your child to showcase their own physical and mental strength while building confidence.

It will give your child the opportunity to build friendships with other climbers from all over the world. Being involved with a climbing team will teach your child the importance of teamwork, good sportsmanship, how to overcome setbacks, controlling their emotions, discipline, hard work and so much more. Your child will be able to showcase their talents in a sport they can call their own.

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Getting Started

Whether your child is looking to participate in something new at a recreational level or compete at an advanced level, climbing can be a great sport for any child. A great way to learn more about this sport and find out if your child is interested is to find a climbing gym near you and ask about their programs.

Programs Your Gym May Offer

**Intro to Climbing Courses:**
Intro to climbing courses are a great way for your child to learn the necessary information to start climbing. It is highly recommended to seek out a class of this nature if this is their first experience climbing. In these classes, you will be introduced to the fundamental climbing techniques and safe climbing practices.

**Belay Clinics:**
Belay Clinics are a great way for parents to learn how to belay their children. Belaying is how you hold the rope when someone is climbing in order to keep the climber safe. If your child is on a team, but wishes to climb more days than this allows, climbing one on one with your child is a great way for them to gain additional experience. In addition, if your child does not wish to join a team, by learning to belay, you can climb with them on your own without a team.

**Kids Belay:**
If you do not know how to belay, kids belay is a great resource to get your kid climbing in the ropes area. Many gyms offer a program where staff members belay kids on rope walls for a set amount of time on certain days.

**Recreational Team:**
If your child is new to climbing, joining a recreational team is often a great way to be introduced to the sport. Your child will learn the rules and techniques of climbing in addition to meeting other kids with similar interests in the sport. The coach(es) of this team can teach your child a lot about climbing and help them improve to reach whatever level of climbing they wish to be at. This level of team usually does not participate in competitions.

**Competition Team:**
If your child wishes to climb at a more advanced level and compete, then this is the type of team you are looking for. Practices often consist of structured and difficult workouts to build strength and technique in each athlete. As this type of team is more serious, it often offers more and longer practices each week.
Types of Climbing

Top Rope:
Top rope is a type of sport climbing where a rope is connected to an anchor at the top of the wall. The belayer is tied into one side of the rope while the climber is tied into the other.
As the climber climbs up the wall, the belayer pulls up the additional rope on the climber’s side, or slack, to keep them safe should the climber fall. In competition, climbers 13 and under (Youth C and Youth D) use the top rope method for sport climbing routes.

Lead:
Lead climbing is a more advanced type of sport climbing where the rope starts on the ground and as the climber climbs up the wall, they clip into quickdraws.
The belayer stands below the quickdraws and if the climber falls, the belayer will catch them and the climber will fall to the last quickdraw they clipped. In competition, climbers 14 and over (Youth B, Youth A, and Junior) use the lead climbing method for sport climbing routes. Individuals can learn how to lead climb after gaining some experience in the sport.
Types of Climbing

Bouldering:
Bouldering is a type of climbing done on walls about 10-15 feet tall. There is no rope, but instead a padding system is under the climber. The padding system is sort of like a mattress that cushions a climber’s fall. Individual climbs are typically referred to as “problems”.

Speed:
Speed climbing is done on a top rope and executed just like it sounds. The climber is timed from the bottom to the top of the wall. Speed routes are homologous in nature meaning they have the same hold types, hold position, hold angles, etc.
Beginning to Climb

Climbing Grades

Each route is graded to let you know how difficult it is. Often in competitions this rating is not given because the level of difficulty can vary from climber to climber.

In a normal climbing gym setting the rating can be found at the start of each route.

In bouldering, routes are graded on the Hueco “V” scale. Each route starts with a V and the number after the V signifies the difficulty. V0 is the easiest, then V1, V2 and so on up to V17.

Rope climbs are rated using the Yosemite Decimal System. This is a 5 scale system where 5.0 is the easiest followed by 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, and so on. Once the number after the period reaches double digits, a letter is followed (a,b,c,d). So after 5.9, the scale would continue as 5.10a, 5.10b, 5.10c, 5.10d, 5.11a, and so on up to 5.15d.

Starting a Climb

In the gym and in competitions, each hold on a set route will be taped with the same color or have holds of the same color.

Each climbing route is labeled with a taped start box surrounding the starting hold(s) or taped flashes and a taped finish box surrounding the finish hold(s) or taped flashes.

In bouldering, climbers start with their hands and feet on the designated holds marked with tape. The tape will signify how many hands and/or feet must be touching the hold to start. For example, if there is one taped hold then both hands must start on that hold. If there are two taped holds, a hand must start on each hold. Two hands must control the finishing holds.

The start of sport climbs are usually signified with a box around the start holds. To finish a sport climb, one hand must control the finishing hold.

In onsight format climbing competitions, there is often only one route per section of the wall, so the tape or colored holds are not needed to signify which holds are on the route. Instead, all holds in that section of the wall may be used. The boundaries for the section of the wall are signified by black or red tape, when applicable.

During a competition, it is important not to yell beta, or information/help about a climb while a climber is on the wall, as this will disqualify the climber.
If all rules are followed correctly, climbing can be a very safe activity!

Here are some general tips to follow:
• Don’t stand under climbers!
• Climb with friends! They can serve as a spotter or belayer to catch you when you fall.
• Practice falling! Learn how to fall correctly to avoid injury.
• Learn how to belay correctly at your gym and test for a belay card. Belay classes are offered at most gyms daily.
• Perform safety checks before climbing to ensure both you and your belayer are properly tied in and your belay device is locked in.
• Start off climbing easier routes and then progress to harder routes.
• Know your limits. Pushing your body too much can result in injury.
• Stretch before and after climbing to prevent cramps and soreness.
• Be careful with intense workouts for a young child, as their growth plates are not yet sealed and therefore susceptible to injury.
• Make sure your child is eating healthy and getting plenty of water and sleep. Rest and recovery time is important in addition to training time.

Creating a Safe Environment for All
USA Climbing has created policies and programs that protect our athletes and members and help create an environment free from misconduct and abuse. The safety of its athletes are USA Climbing’s top priority. SafeSport includes policies prohibiting sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, hazing, bullying and threats.

SafeSport offers education and awareness training for identifying, reporting, and responding to abuse and other misconduct. Coaches and certain others are required to complete SafeSport training and a background screen.

Parents are encouraged to complete the SafeSport Parent training program. This program helps parents become active participants in creating safe, positive sports environments for their child.

For more information on SafeSport, please visit: www.usaclimbing.org/Officials/Coaches/SafeSport.htm
Season Breakdown

USA Climbing has two youth competition seasons. A bouldering season that runs from September to February and a sport and speed season from March to July.

The country is currently divided into sixteen regions. Regions are paired together to create eight divisions. This map shows which state/areas are in your region.

For an interactive version that shows where competitions in your region are, please visit www.usaclimbing.org

Each youth competition season has four levels of competition, Locals, Regional Championships, Divisional Championships, and National Championships.

Locals:
Each season begins with local competitions. Each climber is given a score card with all the climbs on it. There is a set amount of time given for climbers to try and complete climbs. This type of competition is called “redpoint” format, meaning that climbers can watch other climbers try routes as well as take multiple attempts to finish a climb. There are two “redpoint” formats: classic and modified. In the classic format, each climb is assigned a value based on difficulty. The climber’s goal is to complete climbs with the highest value. With the modified format, each climb is valued at 25 points. The goal is to complete the highest quantity of climbs. Each climber must compete in at least 2 USA Climbing sanctioned local competitions, as a USA Climbing Competitor or DAY-Member, anywhere in the country in order to advance to Regionals.

Regional Championship:
Regional consists of one round of “onsight” format competition over a single day. Climbers are held in an isolation area and not allowed to watch their peers. In sport climbing, the climber has one try per climb. In bouldering, a set amount of time is given and the climber may attempt each climb as many times as they want in the time period. A route preview is often given for the sport climbs, where all the athletes get to look at the climb before the climbing starts. This does not happen in bouldering. For speed climbing, each climber gets one run on each lane and their quickest time is recorded. Generally, if you place top 10 in your region, you move on to Divisionals.

Divisional Championships:
Divisionals are “onsight” format as well and therefore extremely similar to Regionals. However, this competition consists of a qualifying round and a final round and is a two day competition instead of one. Generally, if you place top 6 in your Division, you move on to Nationals.

National Championships:
Nationals features the best climbers in the entire nation. There are three rounds in this competition: qualifiers, semifinals, and finals. Bouldering and speed climbing have the same formats as in Regionals and Divisionals. Sport climbing is similar to Regionals and Divisionals for semifinals and finals. However for qualifiers, the format is “flash” format, meaning that climbers can watch other climbers climb the routes before them, but they still only have one try to complete each climb.

PanAmerican & World Championships:
Generally, if a climber places top 4 in their category at Nationals, they are invited to the Youth National Team and will receive an invitation to compete in the PanAmerican Championship (every two years) and World Championship (every year). The IFSC only recognizes competitors in the Youth B, Youth A, and Junior categories.
Age Categories

At the youth level, athletes are split up into five categories. Youth D, C, B, A, and Junior. Males and Females compete in separate categories. What category climbers are placed in is determined by your birth year and gender. Every other year, your child will move up in age category.

Once they are 16, they are also eligible to compete in our Open (adult) competitions.

USA Climbing also offers a Collegiate level series that your child can choose to compete in once he/ she is enrolled in a college or university.

Membership

To compete in Youth competitions, a climber must have either a Competitor Membership or a DAY-Membership.

Competitor Memberships are annual memberships that are good for all levels of competition (Locals, Regionals, Divisionals, Nationals).

As the name suggests, DAY-Memberships are only good for one day. You are eligible to compete as a DAY-Member at the Local level ONLY. If a climber purchases a DAY-Membership but wishes to compete in their home Regional Championship, they will need to purchase a full Competitor Membership prior to the close of Regional registration to be eligible to compete.

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<th>Youth C</th>
<th>Youth B</th>
<th>Youth A</th>
<th>Junior</th>
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</thead>
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Climbing Parents

Getting Involved

Involved parents can be a huge relief to your child’s coach, the team manager, regional coordinator and other parents! Ask your coach or team manager about ways you can start volunteering within the team.

Even if you don’t know anything about climbing, you can still make huge contributions to your team by volunteering. Everyone has different strengths and abilities they can offer! Any contribution helps!

Look into volunteering at competitions! Competitions run on volunteers so this is a perfect way to become more involved in the climbing community as well as learn about the sport. You can sign up for a volunteer position by contacting the volunteer coordinator or regional coordinator of your region. Example of positions available are judge, belayer (must be certified), isolation monitor, runner, scorecard runner, scorekeeper, and many more.

Enjoy It

Climbing is meant to be fun at all levels, from recreational climbing to competition climbing. It is important to keep climbing in perspective and help your child do the same. The outcome of an event shouldn’t crush your child’s dreams.

Learn how to belay! This will give you the option to climb with your child and to talk with them about the sport.

Make the Experience Memorable

The climbing experience can create memories that last a life time.

Here are some ideas:
• Turn trips to competitions into family vacations! Spend time exploring the city and the area around it.
• Make a scrapbook! This can be a great way to catalogue your child’s climbing experience.
• Host a team get together! This can be a great opportunity for your child to get to know their teammates better and for you to get to know their parents.

You will be the most influential person in your child’s climbing experience!

Remember To:
• Be encouraging. Your child will likely face adversity starting out.
• Manage your emotions. Setting a good example will teach your child to do the same.
• Be constructive, not destructive. Direct your comments at the action, not the person.
• Be respectful, especially in situations of disagreement and conflict.
• Do not bully or harass. If you see someone being bullied or harassed, speak out.
• Most importantly, have fun!
Gear
The proper gear is important in climbing.

Gear varies depending on which type of climbing your child is interested in. For bouldering, all you need is some climbing shoes and a chalk bag.

If your child is going to do any form of roped climbing, you will need to pick up a harness and a belay device as well.

Gyms will have all of this gear available to rent but eventually you will want to purchase your own.

Gear can be expensive but there are many ways to save money. Some teams have deals on gear which allow you to purchase these items at a discount. Check with your child’s coach to see if they offer any.

If your child’s team doesn’t have any deals available, you can also find used gear online or through your local gyms.

Don’t Break the Bank
If you aren’t careful, climbing related expenses can quickly build up. Planning ahead and budgeting can considerably reduce your costs. Reach out to your team manager and other parents when starting out for advice.

Costs to be aware of:
- Membership Fees
- Event registration fees
- Training costs (team dues, gym memberships)
- Competition travel costs (driving/ flying, hotel, etc.)
- Equipment

Talk to your coach, team manager, and other parents should you have any questions! They are there for you and most likely already have the knowledge and experience to help you keep your expenses down.

Climbing shoes

Climbing Harness

Chalk Bags

Belay Devices

GriGri

ATC
Routesetting

What is Routesetting?
Routesetting is the process of creating the route or path your child will be climbing on.

Routesetting is handled by a staff of routesetters. In your local climbing gym and in competition, there is a team of routesetters that are responsible for putting up all the climbs you see on the wall.

The turnover for routes and boulders varies from one gym to another but usually happens between 6 and 8 weeks.

Competition Routesetting
The number of times new routes/problems are put up at a competition depends on what level of competition it is. For Local competitions and Regional Championships, routesetters only have to set the wall once.

At multi-round competitions like Divisional Championships and National Championships, the wall will feature new routes/problems for each round. The routesetters will take all the holds off the wall at the conclusion of a round. They will then start to put up the new routes/problems for the next round of competition.
Codes of Conduct

Athlete’s Code of Conduct:

• Adhere to all USA Climbing rules and procedures. Cheating will not be tolerated.
• Respect your coaches, teammates, opponents, other parents, volunteers, host facilities, and judges.
• If you feel you’ve been given an incorrect score, file an appeal. Don’t act out.
• Work hard.
• Be a team player. Encourage your teammates to do well.
• Practice good sportsmanship.

Parent’s Code of Conduct:

• Make it fun.
• Show a positive attitude.
• Be constructive, not destructive.
• Display good sportsmanship and encourage your child to do the same.
• Respect the other athletes, coaches, judges, volunteers, parents.
• Know and study the rules. Support the judge’s decision. Do not act out of emotion. If you feel your child was given an incorrect score, understand the appeal process.

Coach’s Code of Conduct:

Coaches are expected to adhere to the full Coaches Code of Conduct. The Code includes obligations such as:
• Know and follow USA Climbing Rulebook
• Ensure the safety of athletes, with whom they work, and athletes around them.
• Treat all athletes, parents, coaches, volunteers, judges/officials, and USA Climbing associates fairly.
• Direct comments or criticism at the performance rather than the athlete.
• Set an example for your players to follow.
• Maintain an open line of communication with your players’ parents.
• Adhere to USA Climbing’s SafeSport Policies, protecting athletes from abuse and molestation, including acting in accordance with SafeSport Policies and operational obligations.

Spectator’s Code of Conduct:

• Act appropriately
• Display good sportsmanship
• Cheer on all competitors
• Foul and abusive language will not be tolerated
• Observe and obey all the rules of the competition
Additional Resources

About USA Climbing
USA Climbing Rulebook
SafeSport Policies
Interactive Region Map
Bouldering Home Page
Sport Home Page
Speed Home Page
Coaches Home Page
Routesetter Home Page