



Safeguarding Youth Participation

Hillwalking, Climbing & Mountaineering

A Parents' and Guardians' Guide

The purpose of this booklet

This booklet sets out what climbing, hill walking and mountaineering involve, in order to help parents gain a better understanding of these activities.

Benefits

Climbing, hill walking and mountaineering are activities that are physically and mentally demanding as well as incredibly fulfilling. They can also lead to lifelong participation. This helps individuals keep fit throughout their lives and provides opportunities for long-term friendships to develop. People of all ages and abilities, from all backgrounds, cultures, races, orientations and religions can enjoy these activities. Disability should not be seen as a barrier to participation. Additionally, those keen to learn often acquire a host of new life skills and quickly develop a sense of personal responsibility that can stand them in good stead throughout their lives. These benefits need to be balanced against the risks involved. There is no getting away from the fact that climbing, hill walking and mountaineering involve a level of risk. Many people welcome this, feeling it adds a vital element to their lives.

Climbing is a good activity we can do as a family

Natalie, aged 9

Risks

Mountaineering Ireland Participation Statement is very clear and needs to be read carefully. It states:

Parents and young participants should be aware that hill walking, climbing, and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Parents and participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement.

Injuries are possible in hill walking, climbing, and mountaineering, as in all sporting activities. These might be sustained during a slip or fall, or if something or someone falls on a person and also as a result of poor technique, over-training or inappropriate training regimes.

Risks need to be put in context. Mountaineering is often perceived as a high-risk activity, but a responsible approach can greatly reduce the risks involved. In some activities, such as summer hill-walking, risk management might be relatively straightforward and would involve good preparation, knowing the weather forecast, packing adequate equipment and having a map and compass (and the ability to use them) as well as selecting a route that will be well within your child's capabilities. Remember that young children will find it more difficult to cope with wet, windy and cold environments, they will find it more difficult to regulate their body temperature and may not have the stamina for long, arduous walks.

Parents who are not confident in your own navigation skills or in their ability to judge terrain and weather conditions might wish to supplement their skills by taking a course with an instructor or employing an instructor to accompany them and their child (see www.mountaineering.ie)

In the same way that summer hillwalking can be a good introduction to the mountains; rock climbing can be introduced to children in a progressive, responsible way, by parents or through another suitably experienced person.

Child Protection

Mountaineering Ireland Children's Policy is available on Mountaineering Ireland web site. Parents or children with concerns about inappropriate or abusive behavior should contact Mountaineering Ireland Youth Officer by telephoning Mountaineering Ireland office as set out in Mountaineering Ireland Children's Policy. Contact details for relevant organisations are given at the end of this leaflet.

Climbing allows me to share a common interest with my sons, that will give us years of trips and experiences together long after many other interests fade away

David, a parent

Main Activities

There are many different activities described as hill walking, climbing or mountaineering . Many are outdoor activities whilst others take place on indoor climbing walls. Some activities are usually carried out with ropes to help manage the risks; while others, such as bouldering and hill walking, are invariably undertaken without ropes. Specialist rock shoes are an advantage. The main activities are:

Bouldering is a form of climbing usually practised on small rocks and boulders (hence the name), or at indoor walls. As the climber doesn't go very high it is often possible to jump back down. Some people carry padded mats to jump down onto in order to help reduce impact on landing.

Rock climbing with ropes can be done indoors or outdoors and usually involves two people (but it can be a group). The person climbing is tied to a rope that is controlled by another person. The aim of controlling the rope is to prevent injury should the climber fall. Controlling the rope is called belaying and the person doing this is called the belayer. Climbing harnesses and ropes are needed as well as other equipment.

There are two main forms of roped climbing:

Top-roping – this is where the climber is secured with a rope from above, so that if he or she falls it won't be far. This can also be called seconding or bottom-roping depending on the position of the belayer.

Leading – this is where the rope is not secured above the climber, but instead is trailed by the climber and controlled entirely from below. Various sophisticated systems, depending on the type of climb, are used to protect the climber should they fall. This requires higher levels of skill and judgment and so is not usually attempted until a person has gained experience and feels ready to do this.

All of the above activities can take place both outdoors and on an indoor climbing wall.

Competition climbing is a competitive form of climbing usually done on artificial structures and climbing walls. Most competitions in this country are indoor forms of bouldering or rock climbing; however, ice climbing competitions are also popular abroad.

Every year the UK's mountaineering Councils, (BMC, MCoFS and Mountaineering Ireland) run the 'Youth Climbing Series'. This is a series of fun climbing competitions specifically for young people with the emphasis on enjoyment. It is open to all young people, aged 7 - 16. See Mountaineering Ireland web site for further details about these competitions.

As in all types of competition, young people can be particularly susceptible to peer pressure and can be injured by inappropriate training. Parents need to be aware of the possibility of young competitors over-training or under-eating (in order to lose weight) in the mistaken belief that these will improve their performance. Over-enthusiastic children who have unsupervised access to training facilities (including training boards in garages, cellars and bedrooms) can develop overuse injuries. Parents need to be aware if their children are using such facilities and act accordingly to prevent injuries. Any parent who has concerns about their child's training, or would like further advice, should contact Mountaineering Ireland.

Ice climbing involves climbing snow or ice. It is most often done outdoors using ropes and protection systems similar to rock climbing. However, there are now some specialist indoor venues for this form of climbing. Specialist equipment required includes boots, warm clothing, ice axes, crampons, harness and rope.

Hill walking involves walking over mountainous terrain and venturing through exhilarating landscape with fabulous views. Aerobic fitness is improved, so it is very good for keeping fit. Specialist skills needed include map reading, terrain judgement and navigation. Boots, warm and waterproof clothing are required as the weather in hills and mountains can be inclement and sometimes difficult to predict accurately.

Scrambling involves elements of both hill walking and rock climbing. Some scrambles up steep ridges can be very exposed. The steeper the rock, the harder the scramble and obviously the more skills and equipment required.

Mountaineering involves walking, scrambling as well as rock and ice climbing up big mountains. The BMC (British Mountaineering Council) produce a range of good practice DVDs. Hill Walking Essentials, Winter Essentials, Alpine Essentials and Off Piste Essentials cover the essential skills and techniques for a range of mountain activities. These can be purchased from online from Mountaineering Ireland web site.

Climbing keeps me fit!

Mark, age 11

Indoor Climbing

Many people's first experience of climbing is at an indoor climbing wall. This is because:

- There are more than 30 climbing walls in Ireland and the number is growing
- They are usually easily accessible
- Instruction is often available
- Shoes and other essential equipment can often be hired
- Some have children's and young people's clubs
- It's a great way to meet people
- Some hold fun competitions
- It's warm and dry indoors when it might be wet and windy outside
- Some Scout and youth groups take young people indoor climbing as part of their activities

It is worth stressing that even though some risks are more easily managed at an indoor climbing wall, they are still present, and serious accidents do occasionally occur.

www.mountaineering.ie includes a 'climbing wall directory'. This will help you locate climbing walls in your area.

The Great Outdoors

Many young people also want to take on the greater challenges that are available outdoors. Outdoor activities range from bouldering on small rocks and boulders, to rock climbing on cliffs and crags, to hill walking, scrambling, ice climbing, and mountaineering. As there is a greater variety of hazards outdoors, and conditions can quickly change, there are more risks associated with such activities. These obviously vary depending on the particular activity being undertaken, the weather, time of year and so on. There is much published material that can inform a parent's decision about whether to consent to their child participating in an outdoor activity and the reading list at the back of this document should be studied carefully, especially the BMC's free publications such as Climbing Outside.

Some climbing walls and many professional instructors offer instruction for those who want to make the transition from indoors to outdoors. Also some clubs are well equipped to support people in this direction. It is worth checking all these avenues. There are sections on Clubs and on Instruction later in this document.

Equipment

As equipment can be expensive to buy, it is perhaps worth considering hiring any specialist equipment when children start on any of the activities described in this booklet. Most climbing walls and course providers usually have facilities for doing this. However, when the time comes to have one's own equipment, it is important to look after it correctly, especially ropes and harnesses. The BMC has published a useful booklet entitled 'Care and Maintenance' that gives excellent guidance on these issues.

An issue for parents to consider is the wearing of climbing helmets. For many people this is an issue about freedom, choice and personal responsibility. Some people choose to wear them, others choose not to. That is their choice. As a parent, you will need to decide whether you want your child to wear one or not. If you wish further guidance and direction on equipment please contact us.

Parental Responsibility

Parents of under 18's (including those with parental responsibility) need to give their consent for their child to go climbing with someone else. Often this is achieved by asking you to complete a Parental Consent Form. Any parent giving their consent should take this responsibility very seriously and find out precisely what their child will be doing. This publication is a first step in that process. Additionally, you should talk to the people taking your child hill walking, climbing or mountaineering, and satisfy yourself that you are happy with the situation. Ask as many questions as come to mind. There is a list of useful questions at the end of this booklet. It would also be useful to attend a similar event prior to the one your child will be attending. In this way you can see what sort of activities are undertaken and decide whether you are happy for your child to participate.

A trip to a local climbing wall is possibly the most convenient way to gain an understanding of the activities that take place there. Talking to other parents, as well as reading magazines and books about these activities is also useful in this process.

Another way for you to gain knowledge and understanding of what is involved is by doing some hill walking, climbing or mountaineering yourself. Not only will this give you greater insight, it will also open up the possibility of you being able to support your own child's participation in a practical way once you feel able and confident to do so. This will also give you greater control and responsibility over the activities your children do. Generally, the better informed a parent is the more likely they will be able to make decisions in the best interest of their child.

Anyone taking another person's child hill walking, climbing or mountaineering with the parent's consent will be 'in loco parentis'. This is a Latin term meaning that they will be acting 'in place of a parent'. This requires them to exercise a duty of care that would be provided by a reasonably prudent parent.

The nature of Mountaineering Ireland clubs

Climbing, hill walking and mountaineering clubs have evolved from groups of people with common interests in these activities getting together and simply going out and doing them. Therefore, when club members go out together there is very often no defined leader or person in charge. As a general rule, there is no formal instruction but there will probably be some very experienced and knowledgeable climbers or mountaineers present, with a wide range of skills. Accordingly, it is often said that club members share their knowledge with each other – and that is the way many people learn and gain experience. As such, each individual has to be responsible for themselves. This is not as difficult as it sounds, but it does require that one is constantly aware of the need to think for oneself and consider things very carefully, especially one's own safety needs.

Climbing has made me feel I can do anything when I try

Mehreen, age 10 (A blind climber)

Some clubs will only allow under 18's to go on their meets and / or become members if they are accompanied by a parent or a specified adult in loco parentis who remains responsible for the child.

However, there are also some clubs that do allow under 18's to go on their meets and/or become members when not accompanied by a parent or a specified adult who is in loco parentis. Clubs that admit under 18's unaccompanied by their parents are required to have a designated Children's Officer who is responsible for making club members aware of the Mountaineering Ireland Children's Policy, its requirements, and ensuring that the policy and its procedures are implemented within the club, as well as liaising with Mountaineering Ireland on youth related matters.

There are over 130 clubs in Ireland listed by county on the club finder on www.mountaineering.ie, a small number of which are specifically open to youth members.

Just as it is reasonable for a parent to treat their children differently as they get older or gain experience, so it will be for a child in a club situation. As they get older and gain more experience, they will be expected to take on more responsibility for their own activities and safety.

Managing risks effectively involves having the right level of knowledge, skills and experience for the situations encountered. Additionally, knowing that one is fully responsible for one's own actions and any consequences that might follow from them makes most people realistic in their decision making where hazards and risks are concerned.

In the case of children, through increasing participation, they begin to understand their own skill levels and their limitations. With guidance they become more able to manage some of the associated risks. Many respond well to this sort of structure. However, there are obviously individual differences between children and some may not be mature enough, or have sufficient understanding or powers of thought, to appreciate fully the hazards to which they are exposed. Parents are best placed to know whether their own children are ready and mature enough to take on more responsibilities or not. Consequently, you will have to decide whether you are going to consent to your child participating. Clubs taking under 18s when not accompanied by a parent or a specified adult in loco parentis, on the other hand, will be able to inform parents about the nature of the activities they intend to do. It is worth attending a club meet to decide whether you would be happy to allow your child to participate in the club's activities.

Friends and Relatives

Ever since the beginning of mountaineering, people have been introduced to the sport in many different ways. Some have simply gone out on their own, or with other novices, perhaps after reading books or seeing others do the activities, and by a long process of trial and error have gained experience. Others have gone with more experienced friends or relatives who have generously taken them in an informal way and passed on their knowledge. This has been a useful way for beginners to gain an introduction to the activities and build up valuable experience. If you wish to explore this

avenue for your child, make sure this person explains the activities fully to you and you are happy for them to take your child to do those things. Also, you will need to satisfy yourself that you trust the person to look after your child in the way you would want them to. The information contained in this booklet will go some way to helping you to do that, but ultimately the decision will be your own.

Climbing enables me to meet new people and make new friends

Tim, age 13

Instruction

Many parents use the services of professional instructors to help them and/or their children learn and gain experience. Lists of qualified freelance instructors are available on the www.mountaineering.ie Instructors working professionally should have Professional Indemnity Insurance and will often hold a leadership qualification for the activities which they provide (though this is not a legal requirement).

There are several organisations and institutions that offer climbing, hill walking and mountaineering courses specifically for young people. Scouts, Girl Guiding, Gaisce – The President’s Award, The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award and Outward Bound offer elements of climbing or mountaineering within their activities.

There are also numerous commercial organisations that offer climbing and outdoor pursuits courses for both adults and children. Some have websites that can be found by doing an internet search in the usual way. Many also advertise in the *Irish Mountain Log* and other specialist climbing and hill walking magazines. These can be purchased at most major outdoor shops, newsagents.

www.adventureforall.org.uk has links to centres that provide outdoor opportunities for people with disabilities.

Climbing is challenging and fun

Joshua, age 8

Awards and Qualifications

Climbing, hill walking and mountaineering leadership and training awards are administered by MLTNI (Mountain Leader Training Northern Ireland) and BOS (Bord Oiliúint Sléibhe) in the Republic of Ireland who closely together and with Mountaineering Ireland. These 2 bodies administer a range of nationally recognized qualifications for those wanting to lead and instruct climbing, hill walking and mountaineering. The awards include the Climbing Wall Award (CWA), the Single Pitch Award (SPA), the Walking Group Leader (WGL) and the Mountain Leader Award (ML). Visit www.mountaineering.ie for more details.

NICAS

The National Indoor Climbing Achievement Scheme (NICAS) is a five level scheme for young people from age 7 upwards to recognise climbing achievement on artificial climbing walls. Full details are available on the youth pages of Mountaineering Ireland web site www.mountaineering.ie/youth

The role of the Mountaineering Ireland

Mountaineering Ireland is the representative body for climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers in Ireland. Amongst other things Mountaineering Ireland:

- Promotes the interests, and protects the freedom of climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers to enjoy their activities;
- Relies on a network of dedicated volunteers and employs 7 full and part-time staff to implement work programmes including: Membership Development, Youth, Access and Conservation, Performance Development, Training and Safety, Communication and Services, and Resource Utilisation, Good Practice, Climbing Walls, Climbing Competitions, and Guidebook publication.
- Provides information through seminars and lecture series, as well as producing a range of posters, booklets, and other publications aimed

at increasing people's awareness of all climbing, hill walking and mountaineering related activities and issues, including good practice, training, access and conservation;

- Advises on all aspects of climbing wall activities
- Runs regional and national climbing competitions
- Has an important role within the international mountaineering and climbing federations, the UIAA and IFSC in setting international standards for climbing and mountaineering equipment and promoting competitive climbing.

Mountaineering Ireland is a democratic organisation that encourages members to contribute to its ongoing work. Many contribute easily and simply by joining Mountaineering Ireland. This can be done quickly on line, or by phone. Some people contribute by attending Members Forums or volunteering to help at various events. All our members are encouraged to attend Regional Members Forums. These are regional forums and the democratic grassroots of Mountaineering Ireland. Full details can be found on www.mountaineering.ie

There are also substantial personal benefits to joining. For instance: All Individual, Club, and Family Members receive £10m Civil Liability Insurance. The policy provides cover for any civil liability claim arising in connection with hill walking, climbing and mountaineering. It is recommended that all participants join Mountaineering Ireland, or an affiliated Club, to be covered by this important insurance. Members also receive 4 copies of the *Irish Mountain Log* magazine per year.

Additionally, Mountaineering Ireland members can avail of the highly regarded BMC Travel and Activity Insurance. This specialist insurance is only available to members and is specifically designed for climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers. A full list of membership benefits appears on Mountaineering Ireland website.

Useful questions

This is a list of questions you might wish to ask anyone you are considering approaching about taking your child hill walking, climbing or mountaineering. Having carefully read this publication you should now be in a better position to judge whether you find the answers given satisfactory or not.

- Can you explain the sorts of activities you are able to offer?
- Are they suitable for my child(ren)?
- Do you have any information I can read (leaflet, website, etc)?
- Is it a requirement that I accompany my child?
- May I accompany my child if I wish?
- Are the people taking my child on activities competent to do so?
- What child protection procedures are in place?
- What sorts of insurance do you have?
- Do you have any alternative activities (a plan B) if you need to change your original plans?
- What if I am late? Or what if you are late back?
- How do I maintain contact with you? (phone, email, etc)
- Do you have emergency procedures? – What are they?

Useful Contacts

Mountaineering Ireland

T + 353 1 625 1115

W www.mountaineering.ie

Tollymore Mountain Centre

N I National Mountain Centre

T 028 4372 2158

W www.tollymore.com

NICAS National Indoor Climbing Achievement Scheme

T (+44 116) 233 3123

W www.nicas.co.uk

AMI - The Association of Mountaineering Instructors

T: (+44 16) 9072 0314 W

www.ami.org.uk

NSPCC Child Protection Helpline

Free 24hr Phone: 0808 800 5000

Email: help@nspcc.org.uk

Free Textphone: 0800 056 0566

Childline (Free Confidential helpline) T:

0800 1111

Useful Publications

BMC MLTUK and Mountaineering Ireland publications are available from Mountaineering Ireland online shop: www.mountaineering.ie/shop and from www.bmcshop.co.uk

Climbing Outside (BMC publication) Also available from the BMC

Climbing Wall Directory

Mountaineering Ireland Club Guidance Notes

Mountaineering Ireland Children's Policy

Winter Essentials: Skills & Techniques for the Winter Mountains, BMC (2005) a DVD film

Alpine Essentials: Skills & Techniques for Alpine Mountaineering and Via Ferrata, BMC (2006) a DVD film

Hill Walking Essentials, BMC (2008) a DVD film

Off Piste Essentials, BMC (2008) a DVD film

Climb when ready: a Course in Rock Climbing UIAA (2005) a DVD film

Care and Maintenance: equipment standards – equipment wear and failure – routine checks and care BMC (2001)

Abseiling: get it right! / Belaying: get it right! A leaflet from BMC & MLTE

Mountaineering Ireland Access and Conservation Policy (2008)

Safety on Mountains: clothing, equipment, navigation, hazards, camping, environment, first aid BMC (2000)

Hill walking – The Official Handbook of The Mountain Leader and Walking Group Leader Schemes. MLTUK

Rock Climbing – Essential Skills & Techniques, The Official Handbook of the MIA and SPA schemes. MLTUK