

# What to Expect in a Ropes Course Day

## Introduction

Covenant Harbor's *Snake Road Adventure Center* has been challenging individuals and groups to grow and develop physically, mentally, emotionally, and relationally since 1986. The Challenge Course impacts participants in a number of positive ways, but it most notably increases individual and group self-worth. The *Snake Road Adventure Center* serves corporations, schools, universities, church groups, service clubs and athletic teams.

The facilitator's ultimate goal is to assist participants in learning from their experiences. Participants reflect on and discuss the day's experiences discussing how they can apply the skills, concepts and attitudes they have learned to future life situations. This process is called the learning transfer process.

Reflection or processing occurs throughout the day helping participants gain meaning from their experience. Processing is a vital piece of the learning transfer process where participants reflect on experiences and develop specific action plans for personal and group changes. The facilitator's role in this process is observing individuals and the group, making assessments about what is happening and asking appropriate questions. The questions provide a forum for participants to verbalize feelings, thoughts and ideas regarding the activity, event or day. Facilitators can improve their effectiveness when they are clear about the group's objectives. Clear group goals help them plan specific strategies, activities and questions to meet expected and desired outcomes.

Our desire is to meet your goals and needs as best as we can. To do this we need details about your group, their purpose for participating and desired outcomes. We will contact you prior to your Challenge Course experience to discuss these items. This information helps us plan, staff and design your experience so that it will be more of a lasting success for the individuals as well as your group. It also helps our staff relate the Challenge Course experience directly back to the participant's responsibilities in and out of their environment, situation and/or life.

## Experience Components

Challenge Course programs typically involve graduated and sequential experiences, where each activity/initiative builds upon the learning and experience of the previous activity. The Snake Road Adventure Center facilitators use the activities to help gauge the abilities and level of each group and making adjustments along the way that are appropriate to the physical, emotional and relational needs and safety of the participants. Each of the following components could be a stand-alone experience or set of experiences, with the exception of the high ropes course.

- **Ice Breakers & Games** (5 – 10 minutes/activity)—Ice breakers and games are designed to get participants warmed up and “loose” for the day's activities. These activities may be used as a transition from one activity to another, introduce a concept or just for fun!
- **Initiatives** (10-20 minutes/initiative)—Initiatives consist of simple to moderate group problem-solving activities. The activities range from sit-down pencil and paper type to outdoor, physical and problem-solving events. The facilitators will present the initiative to the group and allow them to plan and implement solutions to them. Initiatives serve a very important role in helping the facilitator determine the capabilities of the group. The initiatives are a fun way to loosen up

and warm up for the rest of the day's activities. They also help establish a framework for reflecting on group experiences and process as a team. Following each activity, a short debriefing session is often facilitated to discuss what happened, why, and how their response could be improved.

- **Low Elements** (35-55 minutes/element)—Low elements are group problem solving challenges that involve fixed apparatus of cable, rope, boards, logs, or stumps. Each element is chosen by the Snake Road Adventure Center staff. We have over 20 different low challenges spaced throughout our wooded property. The facilitators direct the group toward realizing the proposed goals by structuring these elements. The elements offer greater physical challenges and/or problem solving tasks for the group, but typically do not exceed eight feet in height. Facilitators lead a short debriefing session periodically to discuss what happened, why, and how they could improve.
- **High Elements** (at least 1 ½ hours per group of 15-20)—These elements are more of an individual challenge. The elements range from 25 feet to 40 feet in height. We have a total of 23 high elements including a Giant Swing and a Pamper Pole. No one is coerced to participate but individuals are encouraged to take risks and challenge themselves to their greatest potential. Elements are chosen according to time available, to the overall goals of the group, and according to the group's physical, emotional and relational abilities. A debriefing session is facilitated following the experience to discuss the high ropes course and how the experience could transfer in to other settings.
- **Climbing Tower** (at least 1 ½ hours per group of 10-20)—The tower has three simulated rock-climbing surfaces and one vertical ropes course side. There is also "*The Screamer*", a 300-foot zip line off the top of the tower. The tower is facilitated in a similar fashion to that of the High Ropes Course. This event has the potential to be a big hit for any group. It can also be programmed for instructional climbing programs or opened just for special events. A debriefing session is also facilitated following the experience.
- **Indoor Climbing Wall** (1 or more hours, numbers depend on focus)—The indoor climbing wall has seven auto belays and a bouldering wall. There are two climbing walls 28 and 34 feet tall. The indoor wall can be programmed for instructional climbing, used as part of a teambuilding program or open for recreational climbing.
- **Giant Swing** (1 or more hours per 24 participants)—The giant swing is a two person swing and is primarily a recreational activity but can be incorporated into a teambuilding day.

## **Things you should know about booking a day.**

Our facilitators desire to provide the best experience for your group. However, there are many perspectives on how to do this. In general, we will spend at least 45 minutes doing ice breakers and initiatives with a group prior to moving on to low elements. The ice breakers and initiatives help us assess what the appropriate next activity should be and to set-up and introduce concepts related to your goals, safety and teambuilding. Finally, the initiatives provide an adequate warm-up (physically, mentally and relationally) so that groups progress and transition well into the rest of their activities.

High ropes can involve many different things. We work hard to provide adequate time for safety briefing, outfitting climbers, participation in set activities and time for some level of processing the experience. The size of the group, goals, physical ability, time available, number of staff, weather/environmental conditions, and other groups scheduled all impact how the high ropes course is scheduled and facilitated. In general, we strive to have your high ropes course/climbing tower experience scheduled at the end of your day. This is not always possible or best. The high ropes course can be run with dynamic belay or static belay. Static belay is done for groups who are in high school or older and if the group size is 30 or less.

A super day will generally require more time to allow adequate opportunity for participants to get the best experience. You should also try your best to plan enough time to allow for adequate processing time.

Deposits are necessary to hold your date. If you do not have a deposit in within two weeks of booking, you run the risk of having other groups take your spot. ***Priority will be given to those having a deposit.*** If this is difficult for you, please let us know and we will try to work something out.

The bottom line is that we work hard to provide a safe, fun and powerful learning experience for your group. We strive to provide activities and schedule that fits your group's size, ability, timeframe and goals. We are intentional about speaking to you prior to your arrival to be clear on all these details. Also, please do not hesitate to contact us with questions or concerns.

## **How will the day progress?**

The day will begin with a meeting with your facilitator(s) to confirm/discuss group goals for the day. At this time we will also discuss logistical details regarding your stay (i.e. restroom breaks and locations, lunch, departure time, etc.) and go through your Acknowledgement of Risk, Assumption of Responsibility and Medical Information forms.

The first part of the day will include an introduction, discussion about the day's activities and goals, roles of participants, facilitators and chaperones, and ice breaker and initiative activities. These beginning activities help the facilitator gauge the group's abilities and level of togetherness, enabling them to determine what activities would be best to progress toward achieving group goals. This time is vital for setting the tone and for the success of the day and it is important that the group leaders and chaperones stay in the background.<sup>†</sup> We all desire and want the group to succeed, however your direct input and suggestions may undermine the group process and development toward a sense of ownership in their success. You may participate, but is usually best to be a silent/passive participant, unless you are participating with your peers and you have not seen or taken part in the activities before.

The day's activities will progress in a sequential and graduated fashion. This is done to challenge the group and encourage them to build on their successes and to allow for opportunities to learn from and act on their failures or successes. The day ends with a wrap-up of the group's experience. Times of processing and reflection will take place throughout the day. Facilitators will lead these discussions following most activities and will end the day with an overall debriefing.

†**Special note to youth group leaders:** *We ask that you assert yourself when it comes to handling any disciplinary situation that might arise. Our number one concern is for each person's safety. It is difficult to monitor the group's safety while giving our attention to an individual or individuals regarding their inappropriate behavior.*

### **How can a group leader prepare for your visit?**

Be careful to not mislead the members of your group. The participants will be asked to take physical and emotional risks. This could be stressful, but is part of the experiential learning process. There will be many opportunities throughout the day to release frustrations and stress (many times in the form of laughter, cheering, hugging, etc.). The experiential process is beneficial and enjoyable, but not in the same way as going to an amusement park. Groups who are led to believe that they are going out for a day of "fun and games" may be disappointed. Unfortunately, some leaders take this approach in an attempt to get all members of their group to attend. However, you know your group the best, how much and what you tell them is your decision. One thing that you might mention is that at the end of the day groups feel very positive about their experience. You might mention that the group will be faced with an interesting variety of challenges or problems, which they will have to solve. You could add that people have fun and often end the day feeling good about themselves.

If you elect to make use of any of the high elements and wish to tell your group about them, be discreet. Telling a person that they will be asked to jump from a 35-foot high platform for a trapeze could have them thinking twice about coming. We encourage participation without coercion. Participants set their level of personal challenge; we simply encourage them to expand their "comfort zone". The best approach is to be positive and honest.

Groups of twenty or more should be divided into smaller groups of ten to fifteen if possible. This allows for greater interaction and participation for the participants. If this is the case, please think about how you would like the group divided prior to your arrival. Generally, a heterogeneous, non-cliquish group works best. We will contact you prior to your arrival to discuss what is feasible.

Throughout the day we expect participants to respect the feelings of others, be honest and try everything to the best of their ability. Prior to your arrival it may be good to discuss what the group's expectations are and some positive ways of interacting. You may want to do this in the form of a behavior contract, having each person write specifically what they will and will not do or say. These contracts could be a good way of holding students accountable and as a source of debriefing at a later date. Your involvement in the carry-over of the day's experience in this manner helps add closure and solidify the learning transfer in each participant's life.

## What are some examples of group goals?

- ↳ Strengthen faith in God
- ↳ Help leaders become more aware of group dynamics
- ↳ Develop an increased sense of personal responsibility
- ↳ Strengthen faith in self or faith in others
- ↳ Develop an increased self-esteem
- ↳ Learn how to deal with failure
- ↳ Enhance leadership skills
- ↳ Build communication skills
- ↳ Develop problem-solving skills
- ↳ Learn how to take risks
- ↳ Learn how to accept feedback
- ↳ Learn how to give feedback
- ↳ Learn how to deal with self-limiting doubts and fears
- ↳ Reinforce honesty, integrity and personal accountability
- ↳ Establish positive levels of team and individual success
- ↳ Assist participants to get better acquainted

## How should we dress for the course?

Wisconsin weather is notorious for rapid changes in the weather. Environments vary between the woods, the open field and the lakefront. You should be prepared for all types of weather and environmental conditions (i.e. insects, hills, rain, etc.). Most activities take place rain or shine, warm or cold. Only in extremes do we take activities indoors, postpone or cancel them.

Appropriate clothing and footwear can mean the difference between a successful, positive experience to one that would rather be forgotten. Specifically, you should wear shoes that cover the toes and heel and wear loose (not overly baggy) fitting, older clothing. Clothing should be modest and practical (i.e. tops that can be tucked in and shorts with inseams of at least six inches). We have specific guidelines for extreme cold and severe thunder and lightning storms. Activities may be cancelled due to severe weather. If this happens while you are here, we do our best to complete as much of the expected activities or reschedule the activities to take place in a timely manner. There are no refunds for weather related cancellations the day of the event.

## Is the course safe?

Years of course facilitation and operation throughout the country have shown that a properly designed, maintained and operated course is safer than a school's physical education program. In over 23 years of operation, the Snake Road Adventure Center has had few significant injuries. The course is a safer place to explore and be challenged in the experiential learning process because of the facilitator's abilities, training and group spotting.

## Can other people come to observe?

Yes. However, group participants often feel less threatened when they are in familiar surroundings. To have them take part in initiatives, knowing that others are watching can greatly detract from their experience and hamper group growth. Fewer risks may be taken, less disclosure and less self-expression may occur.

## Can we bring cameras?

Yes! We encourage you to capture the group's experience on film. This often enables sharing the experience with others and helps bring the experience and learning home.

## How much does a program cost?

Our Non-for-profit rates\* are:

\$28.00 per person for a half day of low element team building challenges

\$34.00 per person for a full day of low element team building challenges

\$41.50 per person for a full day of low and high element challenges

\$44.00 per person for a super day of low, high element and climbing tower challenges

### Climbing Tower only

\$16.50 per person

Maximum climbers per hour is 15

Indoor Climbing Wall & Giant Swing

Call for information and pricing.

*\*These rates do not include meals or overnight lodging. Ask us about discounts for groups staying in Covenant Harbor housing.*

## Conclusion

The Snake Road Adventure Center is designed to obtain positive results through experiential methodologies and process. The entire Snake Road Adventure Center staff are trained, experienced, and dedicated to satisfying the needs and goals of the group in a positive, safe and transferable manner. We also offer quality custom and open enrollment wilderness experiences and Outdoor Education Programming both in school and overnight at Covenant Harbor. Please keep in mind that it is our mission to be a resource for you in any way we are able. For more information or to schedule an experience, please call the Snake Road Adventure Center Director or Camp Registrar.

*Thank You!*

*The Snake Road Adventure Center is a member of Facilitators and Instructors Together in Him (F.A.I.T.H.). The climbing tower, high and low ropes course is inspected and certified annually by Signature Research, Inc. of Douglasville, Georgia. Covenant Harbor is also accredited through the American Camping Association and is a member of Christian Camp and Conference Association (CCCA).*