



Belay Volunteer Guide (01162024)

Safety • Consistency • Professionalism

Thank you for Belaying at a USAC Youth Lead/TR Event. You are an invaluable asset to these competitions. Below is information to help you prepare. Please refer to the USA Climbing Competition Belaying Handbook for guidance and recommendations.

Per the host agreement, the host facility must designate a Head Belayer. Regional and Divisional Coordinators play an active role in identifying this person, though the selection of a Head Belayer is at the discretion of the host facility. The Head Belayer may be a gym staff member or an experienced volunteer in the region/division.

The Head Belayer must become familiar with the Head Belayer resources, including the USA Climbing Competition Belay Handbook, and work with various entities as described in the Handbook (host facility, JP, event organizers, belay team, etc).

The host facility and Head Belayer partner with the event organizers to recruit, organize and manage the belay team as well as, identify and publish required rope policies. The host facility is responsible for rope validation and management per the host agreement.

Contact belaying@usaclimbing.org to express interest in belaying at national events and becoming part of USAC's national belaying roster.

Pre-event action items:

- Check the Info Sheets on your region's web page for competition specific information.
- The Info Sheets will have a SignUp Genius link you can reference as well.
- Complete your gym WAIVER asap (also found on the Info Sheets).
- Sign up for a free [USAC Volunteer Membership](#)
 - It can be "non-covered" or "covered".
 - Covered has a background screen and Safe Sport.
- Watch the [USA Climbing Competition Belaying Video](#).
 - [2023 Belay Bulletin Lead Belay Video](#)
 - [2023 Belay Bulletin Top Rope Video](#)
 - [2023 Belay Bulletin Close Proximity Belaying](#)
- Review the [USA Climbing Competition Belaying Handbook](#).
- Get your facility belay test if needed.

Gear Required:

- Bring and wear your personal harness.
- Bring and use your belay device.
 - Refer to the competition Info Sheet for any restricted devices.
- Belay gloves are recommended and belay glasses are acceptable.
- Bring water/food.
- Belayers must wear close-toed shoes
- Please wear the branded belay shirt if provided

Check in:

- Check in at the front desk.
- Please arrive on time. See the Sign-Up Genius for arrival times.

Belayer Meetings:

- The Sign-Up Genius should indicate time and location of the belayer meeting.
- Please review the **Belay Meeting Notes** which follows on the next page.
 - The Head Belayer will topline items in the agenda and answer questions.
 - The remaining time will be spent getting familiar with your routes.

Assignments:

- You will be assigned your route(s) either the day of the event or the RC/Head Belayer may email you ahead of time. Assignments may change during the competition and/or be dismissed at the discretion of the Head Belayer.
- USA Climbing discourages belayers from belaying a family member. Likewise it is discouraged for a coach to belay a team member. If possible, a parent, family member, or coach should not belay their athlete's category. If this cannot be avoided, please inform the Head Belayer and Jury President.
- If a parent would like to pause to watch their competitor, please inform the Head Belayer and a RC so that a back-up can be secured.

Belay Meeting Notes *Excerpt from* [USA Climbing Competition Belaying Handbook](#)

- **All ropes should be prevalidated.**
- **The belayer should observe the rope before, during and after attempts and alert Head Belayer to any safety concerns.**
- **Review your route and identify possible belay falls or hazards.**
- **Lead climbers must tie in with a Figure 8 knot + safety knot.**

A belayer's top priority and responsibility is safety.

- No one is allowed to simultaneously belay and judge.
- A belayer must be focused on the safety of the competitor, along with providing consistent and fair belaying.
- Introduce yourself to the judge on your route. You are a team and need to be in sync.

A belayer should be impartial.

- Introduce yourself.
- Do not engage a climber in conversation, or joke around with the climber.
- Each climber should receive the same professional, but courteous, belay.
- Avoid conversations with competitors and spectators.
 - Spectators (including coaches) should never engage belayers in conversation.
- Avoid any action that hinders or helps the competitor, unless that action is for the safety of the competitor.
- Do not allow climbers to “weight” the rope (TR or Lead).
- Belayers must provide enough slack for a climber to rest, traverse, or downclimb without the aid of a taut rope. The rope should not assist them in climbing

A belayer must perform a FULL equipment check every climb.

- USA Climbing requires a Figure-8 follow-through knot, with a “safety knot.”
- Check the climber’s harness, climber’s knot and stopper knots (if any), your harness, your belay device, carabiners.
- The equipment check should be done verbally, showing the competitor what checks are being performed (belayers may add standard safety check hand signals)
- Along with showing the climber the belay device setup, the belayer should squeeze the locking carabiner to demonstrate that it is locked.

A belayer is strongly advised to avoid physically contacting a competitor.

- Avoid touching athletes, unless a safety issue dictates otherwise.
- The Belayer, while on one knee, may assist with untying of the knot, but only after requested by the climber or given permission by the climber, while in the presence of the route judge.
- The belayer should attach and detach carabiners on Top Rope routes.
- Do not spot the climber.

What if a belayer becomes physically or mentally tired and needs a rest?

- The belayer must inform the Head Belayer and their route judge immediately.
- In no case should a belayer continue to belay if they feel they cannot perform the belaying job appropriately and safely. This is not the time to “push through”.

Communication

- When the climber controls the top hold and makes the final (anchor) clip, do not take slack until after the judge has confirmed to you that the climber has “topped”.
- Belayers should communicate with other belayers and judges as needed by the logistics of their route relative to other routes on the wall.

Lowering

- Be aware of the landing zone and dynamics, especially if the climber is swinging excessively.
- Lower your climber while standing near the wall (not away from the wall) to prevent lowering the climber onto your rope, and to minimize kinking the rope.

- Identify potential fall-zone issues with neighboring climbs.
- On Lead, whenever possible, demonstrate a full stop before lowering climbers to the floor (SafeStop).

Protection Points

- On a Lead route, the Chief Routesetter may rule that a Protection Point must, for reasons of safety, be clipped from a particular hold (a “Safety Hold”) or earlier, in which case such hold(s) and the relevant Protection Point(s) shall be clearly marked with a **blue cross** and pointed out during the route observation.
- If the climber fails to use the protection point (“Safety Hold”) as instructed, the judge should call them down.

Lead only

Ropes

- The climbing rope must be flaked prior to the start of the competition, and between each climb that uses the rope.
- The Regional Coordinators will determine this responsibility in conjunction with the Head Belay for the competition. You may pull the rope for the climber after their climb, but they will be responsible for flaking it into their bag/basket to prepare for their next climb or a rope wrangler (puller/flaker) may do it.

Back clips

- Back clips are **not disallowed** by USA Climbing rules.
- The belayer should not point out back clips. [What is a back clip? Climbing.com](#)

Z-clips

- Z-clips are **disallowed** in USA Climbing Rules.
- Warn the climber if they have made a Z-clip: “[Climber’s name], correct your Z-clip!”
- If a climber makes a Z-clip, the Z-clip must be fixed before continuing.
- Either the belayer or the route judge can call the Z-clip. [What is a Z-clip? Climbing.com](#)

Skipping Clips (aka Protection Points) / Clipping out of sequence / Top rope open hooks

- As per the USA Climbing Rulebook, climbers must not skip clips, or are subject to being called off-route by the judge.
- The USA Climbing Rulebook states that “the Judge or Belay, shall notify the competitor to clip the quickdraw if it is apparent that a competitor is about to skip a clip AND the safety of the competitor is compromised.”
 - It is, however, the competitor's responsibility to know when/how to clip the protection points; the competitor may be allowed to climb past an unclipped clip -- the judge or belayer only gets involved if safety becomes a consideration.
- Do not tell the climber how to move, or how to clip, only that they must make the clip.
 - “[Climber’s name], make your clip!” Do this calmly so the climber does not panic.

- If the climber no longer is in a safe position to the next unclipped quickdraw, the judge will call the climber down.
 - Safety may dictate that the judge should wait until the climber makes the next clip, if possible.
- The belayer can make the notification (and must be consistent with all climbers), but shouldn't make the call to terminate an attempt - that's for the judge to do.
- If the climber can't hear the request to end an attempt, they should just continue belaying. The belayer should not stop belaying or pull the climber off the wall.
- If a climber clips draws out of sequence, the judge should call them down.
- If a Top rope route has an open hook from which the climber must unhook the rope, the same principles apply as for climbing past a unclipped clip on lead:
 - The climber should be warned if the climber is about to climb too far past the open hook with the rope still hooked AND the safety of the competitor is compromised.
 - If the climber is in an unsafe position having climbed past the open hook with the rope still hooked, their attempt may be terminated by the judge.
 - It is, however, the competitor's responsibility to know when/how to unhook the rope; the competitor may be allowed to climb past an unhooked rope - the judge or belayer only gets involved if safety becomes a consideration.

Slack, short rope

- There must never be enough slack in the system that would allow a ground fall.
- Try to limit climber-side slack and keep the slack on the belayer-side.
- Belayers should not help or hinder a climber and should provide enough slack for a climber to rest without the aid of a taut rope.
- Slack should not get in the way of the climber.
- If a competitor claims there was a **technical incident** due to a belayer action, hold off any discussion until the Jury President is called to discuss the situation, regardless whether you think there was a short-rope situation or not.

Resources:

[USAC Competition Belaying Handbook](#)

[Belay Interest Form](#)

[Belay Volunteer Guide](#)

[Belay Planner](#)

[Belay Evaluation Form](#)

[Belay Endorsement Levels](#)

[National Belay Roster](#)

[USAC Rulebook](#)