

Instructor & Leader Guidelines

By Seattle Climbing Committee, The Mountaineers

Behavior Guidelines

These guidelines are developed following SHSAP Committee Recommendations

1. Understanding Power Dynamics in Climbing Instruction

As an instructor, you are in a position of authority and influence over students. This dynamic requires careful attention to ensure ethical and professional behavior.

- Recognize that students may see you as a mentor, expert, or even gatekeeper to the climbing community.
- Be aware that your words and actions carry weight, and students may feel pressured to seek your approval.
- Avoid favoritism, which can create exclusivity or discomfort among students.
- Be mindful of how you give feedback—ensure it is constructive, encouraging, and fair across all students.

2. Maintaining Professional Boundaries

It is essential to maintain professional relationships with students to uphold a safe and equitable learning environment.

- **No Romantic or Sexual Relationships with Students:** Due to the inherent power imbalance, dating or pursuing romantic/sexual relationships with students is not acceptable. If an instructor and student develop a mutual interest, any relationship shall be disclosed to the course leader. Additionally, the instructor shall consider stepping away from their instructor role concerning that participant for the duration of the activity/course. Any relationship pursuit will need to be deferred until after the instructional relationship has fully ended. Any pre-existing relationships shall be disclosed to course leaders.
- **Keep Interactions Appropriate:** Conversations, jokes, and physical touch should always be professional and appropriate for a learning environment.
- **Avoid Overstepping the Instructor Role:** While building community is encouraged, maintain a professional distance during the course. Be friendly, but not overly familiar in a way that compromises the instructor-student dynamic.
- **Communicate Clearly:** If students overstep boundaries, address the issue respectfully and professionally, making it clear that the instructor-student relationship is focused on climbing education.

3. Creating an Inclusive and Safe Learning Environment

Climbing should be accessible and welcoming to all participants. As an instructor, you play a key role in fostering an environment where students feel safe and respected.

- **Respect All Backgrounds and Identities:** Avoid assumptions about a person's abilities, gender, experience level, or background. Use inclusive language and respect students' pronouns.

- **Encourage Participation from Everyone:** Be mindful of how attention is distributed among students—ensure that all voices are heard and that less experienced climbers or marginalized individuals are not overlooked.
- **Model Consent in Climbing Instruction:** Always ask before providing physical assistance with technique, gear adjustments or entering a personal space. Teach and encourage students to do the same.
- **Address Harmful Behavior:** If you witness or hear about discrimination, harassment, or inappropriate behavior, take action by addressing it directly (if safe and appropriate) or reporting it according to the Mountaineers' policies.
- **Be Trauma-Informed:** Understand that some students may have past experiences that affect their learning. Foster an environment where students feel comfortable setting their own boundaries.

4. Handling Conflicts and Difficult Situations

- If a student expresses discomfort, listen actively and take concerns seriously.
- Consider using bystander intervention strategies: Direct (address the behavior directly if appropriate and safe), Distract (create a diversion), Delegate (get help from others), Delay (check in with the affected person later) to help address the situation safely and effectively.
- Following [Prohibited Behavior Investigation Policy](#), if an issue arises escalate it promptly following this path: first, approach the leadership (the Course Leader & Committee Chair). If the issue involves the course leader / committee chair or remains unresolved, file a formal Behavior Complaint using [this link](#). The Mountaineers CEO and staff receive these behavior complaints as it gets filed.
- If you make a mistake, acknowledge it, apologize, and commit to doing better.

5. Commitment to Continuous Learning

As an instructor, your education does not stop at climbing techniques.

- Stay informed on best practices for equity, inclusion, and professional conduct in outdoor education.
- Attend relevant training sessions, workshops, or discussions on creating inclusive spaces offered by The Mountaineers or externally.
- Be open to feedback from students and fellow instructors.

By following these guidelines, instructors help create a climbing community that is safe, welcoming, and equitable for all participants. Thank you for your commitment to fostering a positive learning experience!

References

- [Sexual Harassment & Sexual Assault Prevention Committee Recommendations](#)
- [Prohibited Behavior Policy](#)
- [Prohibited Behavior Investigation Policy](#)

Instruction and Mentorship Guidelines

Adapted from Branch Best Practices (Kitsap, Everett, & Rob Busack)

Objective: To ensure a safe, inclusive, and effective learning environment by combining technical excellence with high-quality instruction and mentorship.

1. The Foundation: Professionalism & Respect We are the face of the Mountaineers. Our goal is to foster a "Beginner's Mind"—remaining humble, teachable, and committed to the students' success.

- **True Mastery:** Teaching requires a higher level of mastery than just doing. You must know the skill well enough to observe a student doing it *their* way and determine if it is safe, even if it differs from your preferred method.
- **Respect & Compassion:** Treat every student and fellow instructor with dignity. We are all volunteers with outside stressors; bring patience to every interaction.
- **Inclusive Environment:** Actively shut down any exclusion or condescension. Maintain a safe space for questions.
- **Code of Ethics:** Adhere strictly to the Mountaineers' code of conduct. We lead by example.

2. Communication & Teaching Etiquette Efficient delivery keeps students engaged and warm.

- **Show, Don't Just Tell:** Avoid confusion by using the Tell, Show, Do, Apply model. Briefly **explain** the concept, **Show** the move to set a visual baseline, then have them **Do** it in practice and **Apply** it on a real climb to ensure physical mastery.
- **Feedback - Less is More:** When correcting a student, wait until the student is receptive first before providing **one single point** of feedback at a time. Multiple critiques at once are overwhelming and often forgotten.
- **One Voice at a Time:** Let's give the presenter the floor! Please practice active listening and hold your thoughts until they've finished sharing so we can all enjoy the full flow of the presentation.
 - *If you hear unsafe information:* Interject immediately but respectfully.
 - *If you hear confusing/slightly incorrect information:* Ask a "clarifying question" to prompt the presenter to self-correct, or pull them aside privately later.
- **Stick to the Script:** Teach the **current** approved curriculum.
 - If you believe a curriculum change is necessary, contact the **Committee Chair** or **Course Leader** to discuss it *before* the activity.
 - Do not improvise changes on the fly. Avoid "back in my day" stories.

3. Student Interaction

- **Tailor Your Approach:**
 - *Beginners* need consistent repetition and simple rules (e.g., "Always do X"). Variations confuse them.
 - *Experienced students* who are solid on the basics are ready to discuss variations and exceptions.
- **Ask Where to Start:** Give students agency. Ask if they want to see a demo, walk through it with guidance, or try it while you watch quietly.
- **Patience & The Rule of 7:** Students are learning complex motor skills in high-stress environments. Give them time to process (wait 7 seconds before answering your own question).
- **Empowerment:** Encourage students to look after each other. We are building rope teams, not just individual climbers.