

**CLIMBING CALLS**

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**INTRODUCTION**

You need to communicate effectively with your climbing partner. When you are both on the ground, several feet apart, this is fairly easy. When you (the belayer) are on the ground and your climber is 150' above you, it is much harder, and it may become almost impossible under windy or bad weather conditions. It is easiest to understand specific, commonly used climbing calls instead of sentences. These calls are almost universally recognized, so you can climb with new acquaintances more quickly than if you have to develop a new system.

**CAUTIONS ABOUT CLIMBING CALLS**

- **Keep the calls loud and clear.** Stick to the established calls and avoid sentences. When calling to someone above you, tilt your head back and yell upwards. If you are talking to someone below, yell down. If a rock wall is across the canyon, there is an echo effect that can garble your calls. In such an area, space your words.
- **Use your partner's name as part of the climbing call (e.g., "Tom, climbing" or "Susan, climb").** When you are in a school situation, or a crowded climbing area, there will be several climbers and belayers in close proximity, yelling similar calls. Call your partner by name first to get his/her attention.
- **Buy and carry a whistle.** If you know you will not be able to hear each other on a particular climb, take a whistle. Buy the flat, orange, underwater type that is small and less than 3/8 inch in thickness. Carry it on a keeper string on your harness. These are designed for rescue and emergency work, and are incredibly loud for their size. Agree with your partner beforehand what each signal means. Two blasts is "Ready," three is "Climb on," etc. (or whatever you decide, since there is no established standard as with calls). Some people have had luck with a system of tugs on the rope, but that is not always reliable, as drag can prevent one partner from feeling the tugs.
- **Yell "Rock!" as loudly as you can when something is falling.** Although covered in detail below, this is an emergency call that deserves special attention. It doesn't matter how big the object is. A tiny object can put out an eye, and a small object falling from a great height can injure or kill you. When you hear the call "Rock!":
  - **Do not** look up to see the rock, exposing your face and eyes.
  - **Do not** put your arms over your head to protect it, exposing your arms. That is why you have a helmet.
  - **Do not** look straight down, exposing your neck.
  - **Do** move close to the rock (usually) as rocks (usually) bounce outward, or move to the side.
  - **Do** try to let your helmet absorb the shock, not your body parts.

**PRE-CLIMBING CALLS**

"Ready" ..... (climber to belayer): "I am tied in to the rope." If the belayer is at the top of the climb, the climber should step up to the rock face immediately after giving the call, and should realize that there is sometimes a lag between saying ready and feeling the belayer haul up the rope. Once the belayer has hauled up the slack rope, the climber yells . . .

"That's me" ..... (climber to belayer): "You have pulled up all the slack rope. You are now tugging on me."

"On belay" ..... Before the belayer says "On belay," the climber should always check four things: that the belayer's harness is doubled back, the belay biner holding the belay device is locked and correctly oriented, the belay device setup is correct, and the belay anchor is good if a belay anchor is being used. The belayer should always check three things: that the climber's harness is doubled back (sometimes in

three places), the rope has been threaded through the waist loop and the leg loop connector, and the tie-in knot is correct. These may be difficult to check if the belayer and climber are at opposite ends of the climb; if this is the case, then each should double-check himself or herself. Then, the belayer should say “On belay,” which means:

..... (belayer to climber): “I am anchored, my position is set, I have checked my belay setup and I am ready to belay you.”

“Climbing” ..... (climber to belayer): “I am getting ready to move.” The climber does not proceed until getting a reply.

“Climb” ..... (belayer to climber): “You may climb. I am pulling in the slack rope as needed.” The belayer should keep up with the climber by continually pulling in slack. If the climber is moving too fast, the belayer should tell the climber to slow down until the belayer catches up.

### **CALLS WHILE CLIMBING**

“Up rope” ..... (climber to belayer): “There is slack in the rope. Pull it up.”

“Slack” ..... (climber to belayer): “I need a little slack in the rope (to downclimb, traverse, unhook the rope from an obstacle).” Note: the climber should not say “Up slack” when he/she means “Up rope.” What the belayer hears is: “\_\_\_ slack.” The resulting extra one or two feet of slack will come at a very bad time. Keep these two calls straight.

“Watch me” ..... (climber to belayer): “I am close to coming off. I am making a difficult move which may cause me to fall.”

“Falling” ..... (climber to belayer): “I am falling. Lock me off.” The belayer locks off and does not need to reply, but “Gotcha!” or something similar is reassuring to the climber.

“Take” ..... (climber to belayer): “Pull out all the slack in the rope. I am going to hang and don’t want to lose ground.” This is used widely when someone is working on a climb at or above the limit of his/her ability. It allows the climber to practice the hard moves without having to re-do earlier moves.

### **CALLS AFTER FINISHING THE CLIMB**

“Off belay” ..... (climber to belayer): “I have finished my climb and am safely tied in to the anchor. You may take me off belay.”

“Belay off” ..... Before you say “Belay off,” verify if possible with the climber that the climber is either safely anchored, safely away from the edge or safely down from a slingshot climb; and that the climber really wants to be taken off belay. Then, say “Belay off,” which means:

..... (belayer to climber): “I have taken you off belay and taken the rope out of my belay device. You may pull up the rope when you are ready.”

“Ready to Lower” (climber to belayer): “I am ready to be lowered back down.” Used on a redirected belay (slingshot).

“Lowering” ..... (belayer to climber): “I am now lowering you to the ground.” Used on a redirected belay (slingshot).

### **RAPPEL CALLS**

“On rappel” (rappeller to people below): “I am starting my rappel. There may be rocks or other items knocked off.” It should be thought of as the precursor to “Rock!” Allow sufficient time for people below to respond and take cover. The rappeller should always yell “On Rappel!” whether or not anyone can be seen below.

“Off rappel” ..... (rappeller to people above): “I have finished my rappel and disconnected everything from the rope. The rope is free to be used again.” Step away from the rock and look up to do this yell.

### **SAFETY CALLS**

“Rock” ..... (to everyone): “Danger!! There is something coming down the rock face.” Anyone and everyone yells this upon hearing, seeing or feeling a rock break loose, or anything else that may be falling—pieces of vegetation, climbing gear, or personal gear. The bigger the rock, the louder the call, and the more people yelling the better the chance everyone will hear. Everyone at the base should either duck under an overhang, hug the cliff as close as possible or run to the side if in a chute. Rocks tend to fall outward from the cliff.

“Rope” ..... (to everyone below): “Danger!! I am throwing a rope down. It may knock off rocks or other items on the way down. Watch out for the rope and/or rocks.” The thrower should allow sufficient time for people down below to respond and get under cover. Just to be sure, he/she should yell “Rope!” again just before tossing it.

**BELAY LEDGE ETIQUETTE**

It is common for a group of friends to sit around the base of a climb and chatter on about this and that and laugh and have a good time. This is fine, and part of the normal social scene. But for a belayer to do a good job belaying, he/she must be able to hear his/her climber. So please, keep it as quiet as possible around the belayer.

Camaraderie is prevalent among groups of climbers. When you are on the rock and want some help, feel free to ask for it. If you find coaching to be distracting, tell people to cease the chatter or coaching.