

Climbing!



Enjoy climbing trees? Then how about taking it a step further and trying wall or rock climbing? I went to see the Geckos Climbing Club at The Castle Climbing Centre in North London to find out more. . . .

The basics

Climbing is an exciting sport that anyone can do. To get started you'll need to find a local club or climbing centre with an instructor who can help you learn the ropes . . . literally! You can learn to climb on an indoor climbing wall (if you're lucky, your local leisure centre might have one) or if you live near a good crag, there might be an outdoor climbing club in your area. Your instructor will be able to introduce you to the basic techniques and equipment that you'll need.

Indoor climbing walls

Climbing walls are covered in hand and foot holds of different shapes, sizes and colours, some more difficult to use than others. Climbers try to find a route up the wall using holds of just one colour. This can be a bit like solving a puzzle, giving your brain a stretch as well as your muscles! If the wall is high, climbers wear a harness attached to a rope to keep them safe. They also work with a partner who stays on the ground to keep the rope taught. Holding the rope for a climbing partner like this is called belaying.

Bouldering

If heights aren't for you, bouldering can be another way to enjoy climbing. This involves climbing up, across, or around smaller walls and rocks without ropes. The same strength, balance and problem-solving skills are needed to find a good route without touching the ground.

Outdoor climbing

Climbing outside on a rock involves similar techniques and equipment but climbers use the natural foot and hand holds on the rock itself, finding a route up towards the top. Sometimes you are fortunate enough to have spectacular scenery when climbing outside – especially when you reach the top - but try not to be distracted, safe climbing requires all your concentration.

Some climbing terms

- Bouldering:** climbing a low wall or rock without ropes, sometimes horizontally from one end to the other, rather than from bottom to top
- Belaying:** holding the rope for a climbing partner while they go up the wall or rock
- Figure-of-eight:** the knot commonly used to tie the rope on to the harness – it's strong, simple to learn, and easy to spot if it's not tied correctly

- Smearing:** holding on to a hold with your hands and walking your feet up the wall or rock
- Matching:** when you have both feet or both hands on the same hold
- Bridging:** when you have your feet on different walls, 'bridging' the gap between the two

Equipment

- Clothes:** you don't need special clothes to climb, as long as they're comfy and easy to move in – shorts and a t-shirt are fine
- Shoes:** special flexible, light-weight climbing shoes will help you to grip your foot-holds
- Helmet:** a helmet will protect your head from any knocks or bumps
- Harness:** a climbing harness goes around your waist, legs and bottom
- Ropes:** a rope is fixed to your harness and to the wall or rock, keeping you tied on so that you won't fall if you slip or lose your grip!
- Chalk:** climbers sometimes use chalk on their hands to give them the best possible grip on the holds



I met Tristan who has been climbing with Geckos for three years.

Tristan, 11 years old

"I like climbing because it's an unusual sport. My Dad climbed when he was young and suggested that I try it, so I did and I really liked it. You can challenge yourself and have competitions with other people. I like bouldering best as you can climb across or around a wall, as well as up it."



Find out more

The British Mountaineering Council website has lots of useful information about climbing and a directory that can help you to find a wall or club in your local area: www.thebmc.co.uk

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