Are You Up to the Challenge?

The pole towers 30 feet in the air, but you're determined to climb it. Step by step, inch by inch, you climb higher and higher. The cheers of your friends on the ground drown out the voice inside saying you'll never make it all the way—although your knees still feel a little wobbly. It takes a long time, but eventually you reach the top. As you ring a bell hanging just above your head, you breathe deeply, knowing that you've met the challenge and are ready for more.

COPE—Challenging Outdoor Personal Experiences—is a Scouting program that includes group initiative games, trust events, and challenges that reach from the ground to the sky. This month's meetings and activities will let you climb, swing, balance, jump, rappel, problem-solve, and become stronger both as individuals and as a team. Are you ready? Then climb on!

Objectives

This month's activities should:

- Teach the goals and objectives of COPE.
- Introduce the Full Value Contract©* and the concept of Challenge by Choice*.
- Show Scouts and Venturers how to implement the principles of COPE in your unit.
- Teach Scouts and Venturers how to be effective spotters.
- Give Scouts and Venturers the chance to have fun playing initiative and trust games and participating in low and high COPE elements.

RELATED ADVANCEMENT AND AWARDS

- Climbing and Personal Fitness merit badges
- Ranger: Project COPE elective

*Used with permission of Project Adventure

Leadership Planning

As a leadership team, you may want to discuss the following items during your planning meetings when choosing COPE as your program feature.

1. Where can we find a BSA COPE instructor to help us?
2. What COPE facilities are available to us? Does our council have a course or a council COPE committee?
3. How do we schedule time on a COPE course?
4. How much will it cost to schedule time on the course?
5. How far in advance do we need to make a reservation?
6. How can we connect the lessons COPE teaches with any challenges our unit faces?
7. To meet our needs, what should we change in the sample meeting plans?

PARENTS CAN HELP WITH THE COPE PROGRAM FEATURE BY:

1. Providing materials for initiative games
2. Identifying COPE instructors
3. Researching COPE courses in the area, including those at camps, college campuses, and other facilities
4. Providing transportation
5. Serving as chaperones for outings
6. Maintaining current Youth Protection certification, which is required of all adults providing transportation for or participating in outings

COPE ACTIVITIES

A COPE experience can be composed of initiative games, trust events, low-course activities, and high-course activities.

Initiative Games

Initiative games can be used near the beginning of each COPE session to help participants learn to work together through communication and trust to achieve their goals.

Trust Events

Trust events are a series of activities designed to develop trust in the mind of the individual and with the group as a whole, as well as to develop spotting skills.

Low-Course Events

Low-course events do not require participants to be on belay (a rope that protects a participant if he or she falls). While individual coordination and strength are helpful, participants accomplish the low-course activities with the support and combined efforts of their group.

High-Course Events

A COPE activity is considered a high-course event if participants must be on belay. High-course events also tend to focus on individual initiative rather than group problem solving.

Eight Principles of COPE

The COPE program is designed to enhance the Scouting experience and to promote Scouting values and objectives among its participants with fun and challenging activities. **The events and activities of COPE are not designed to be competitive or a race against time, but rather are intended to encourage participants to do their best**. COPE emphasizes building self-esteem, developing leadership, and working as a team to accomplish tasks; and it provides opportunities for every participant to succeed as an individual and as a member of a group.

The COPE program emphasizes eight major goals:

1. **Communication:** COPE encourages real learning of critical listening and discussion skills important for any group attempting to accomplish difficult tasks.
2. **Planning:** COPE participants are encouraged to consider and/or develop goals for each activity and options for achieving those goals, utilizing the group's strengths to devise and carry out a course of action. Nontraditional solutions that are "outside the box" may be appropriate.
3. **Teamwork:** Teamwork is the key that allows a group to meet a COPE challenge successfully. The COPE experience makes it clear that each individual can accomplish more as a member of a team than by going it alone.
4. **Trust:** Participants completing difficult tasks on a COPE course develop trust in COPE staff members, the safety of the course, each other, and themselves.
5. **Leadership:** Leadership is given and assumed naturally, and it can be expressed in many ways. Team members attempting to solve problems on a COPE course have many opportunities to develop and exercise leadership skills.
6. **Decision Making:** COPE requires groups to make decisions by developing one or more solutions to a problem, considering the available resources and alternatives, and evaluating the probable results.
7. **Problem Solving:** COPE challenges groups and individuals to develop solutions to interesting problems. Participants can then test their solutions and evaluate the results.
8. **Self-Esteem:** Meeting the challenges of a COPE course allows individuals and groups to develop self-esteem and encourages them to adopt challenging, attainable goals.

Challenge by Choice*

"Challenge by Choice" is a key principle of COPE. Each person may choose which activities to participate in without being pressured or coerced by the group or without having to justify a choice that has been made. While no participant should be pressured or coerced, all should be encouraged to participate in the events. Facilitators must be aware of the fine line between encouragement and pressure. The group must accept each individual's choice.

Full Value Contract©*

The Full Value Contract is a personal and interpersonal agreement built on value for each person and for the group as a whole. It helps each participant feel comfortable with what he or she agrees to do or declines to do.

Three commitments form the Full Value Contract:

- Work together as a group and strive to achieve individual and group goals.
- Adhere to certain safety and group behavior guidelines.
- Give and receive feedback, both positive and negative, and strive to change behavior when it is appropriate.

** Used with permission of Project Adventure*

Spotting

One of the most important skills involved in COPE is spotting. Before your group participates in any low- or high-course activities, your COPE instructor will teach you spotting and give you plenty of opportunities to practice.

Here are the rules of spotting:

- Everyone must spot. If spotters need a rest, they must step away from the group so that they will not be mistaken for active spotters.
- Spotters must be placed in positions where they will be most effective in preventing injury.
- Spotters must maintain their attention on the person being spotted.
- Spotters should keep their eyes on the torso of the person they are spotting and try to anticipate that person's movements.
- Spotters may not applaud, as it is impossible to spot and clap at the same time. Hold applause for participants until they are off the COPE element and safely back on the ground.
- Spotting begins before a person starts to climb anything, and ends only after the person has both feet on the ground and is steady. Never assume that anyone is safe. Do not rely on statements like, "I've got it!" or "Don't worry!"
- Each spotter should spot as though there were no other spotters.
- Spotters must be ready at any time to break a fall.
- Helpers who are off the ground must also be spotted.
- Participants must not jump off any elements, regardless of the distance to the ground. Spotters should assist those who are dismounting to help prevent sprained ankles.
- There should be at least two spotters on the ground for each participant off the ground, though for some events even more spotters will be required.

SEVERAL PUBLICATIONS PROVIDE GUIDANCE FOR COPE PROGRAMS:

- *National Camp Standards,* No. 430-056, contains standards established through the National Camp Accreditation Program. All council and district challenge course activities must follow the appropriate standards.
- *Belay On,* No. 430-500, outlines practices and procedures for council and district challenge course activities. This guide also explains how to set up challenge courses and COPE elements.
- *The Guide to Safe Scouting* offers safety information pertaining to COPE activities.

COPE GAMES

Traffic Jam

Equipment: Enough cloth, plywood, or cardboard squares for each participant, plus one additional square

How to play: Place the squares an easy step from each other in a straight or slightly curved line. (A curved line lets participants better see what's happening.) One group stands on the squares to the left of the unoccupied center square; the other group stands to the right. Both groups face the middle. The challenge is for the groups to switch sides, obeying the following rules:
1) Individuals may move to an empty space in front of them; 2) individuals may move around one person who is facing them to an empty space; 3) backward moves are illegal; 4) any move around someone facing the same direction as the mover is illegal; 5) only one person at a time may move.

Scoring: None

Notes: Be sure to debrief the activity and explore better or different ways to meet the challenge.

Variations: 1) Conduct the activity in silence. 2) Set up a second game perpendicular to the first where both lines share the same empty space.

Willow in the Wind

Equipment: None

How to play: Have eight to 10 players stand shoulder to shoulder in a circle with one person (the "faller") standing rigid (arms crossed with elbows on chest and fingertips at shoulders) in the center. Remaining rigid, the faller falls slowly in any direction. Before the faller moves very far off center, the people in the circle redirect the faller's body to another arc of the circle. This fall-catch-push sequence continues in a gentle fashion until the faller is relaxed (but remaining rigid) and the people in the circle have gained confidence in their ability to work together toward handling the occasional weight shift of the faller. Change positions so that everyone who chooses can be the faller.

Scoring: None

Notes: Have participants use proper commands. Be sure to debrief the activity.

Cookie Factory

Equipment: None

How to play: With hands outstretched, a participant dives upward and forward, facedown, into the hands and arms of two lines of spotters. After the catch, the spotters juggle/roll the faller faceup and lower the person's feet to the ground, gently raising the faller to a standing position.

Scoring: None

Notes: Spotters should alternate the positioning of their hands with the hands of spotters facing them. Have participants use proper commands. Make sure the area is free of obstructions.

Variations: After rolling the faller onto to his or her back, spotters "conveyer belt" the faller down the spotting line, with spotters moving to the front of the line after the faller's feet have passed them.

Everybody Up

Equipment: None

How to play: Have two participants of approximately the same size sit on the ground facing each other so that the bottoms of their feet are touching, their knees are bent, and they are tightly grasping each other's hands. Challenge the pair to pull themselves into an upright standing position without touching the ground with their hands. If the pair succeeds (most will), ask the two to include another participant and try standing up with three people, then four, etc., until everyone in the group has been included in making an attempt.

Scoring: None

Notes: Be sure to debrief the activity and explore better or different ways to meet the challenge.

Variations: Try the same activity with participants sitting back to back with their arms linked.

E.D.G.E. Ideas

***E**xplain* how it is done—Tell them.
***D**emonstrate* the steps—Show them.
***G**uide* learners as they practice—Watch them do it.
***E**nable* them to succeed on their own—Have them practice/teach it.

EXPLAIN

- Explain the eight principles of COPE.
- Introduce the Full Value Contract and the concept of Challenge by Choice.
- Describe safety considerations related to COPE.
- Discuss how COPE principles can apply to all unit activities.
- Review the rules of spotting.

DEMONSTRATE

- Demonstrate spotting.
- Show internet videos of COPE elements.
- Have trained volunteers model proper technique.
- Do a show-and-tell of helmets and harnesses.

GUIDE

- Have Scouts practice correct spotting technique.
- Use older Scouts as guides during blindfold activities.
- Encourage Scouts to provide proper encouragement to each other.
- Lead reflections after the group completes challenges.
- Have Scouts research ropes courses in your area.

ENABLE

- Have Scouts teach each other spotting.
- Enable Scouts to plan and lead initiative and trust activities for their peers.
- Let youth leaders choose the course elements the group will tackle.
- Encourage interested Scouts to pursue further COPE activities, such as programs at BSA high-adventure bases.

MAIN EVENT SUMMARIES

ESSENTIAL	CHALLENGING	ADVANCED
Overnight Activity	Overnight Activity	Overnight Activity
COPE on the ground—On a unit outing, spend an afternoon playing a series of initiative games and working on the eight principles of COPE under the leadership of a COPE instructor.	Low ropes—Spend a day during a campout working through the low elements on a COPE course under the leadership of a COPE instructor. You will raise the stakes with added risk and more difficult challenges than you've faced at meetings.	High ropes—Spend a day during a campout working through the high elements on a COPE course under the leadership of a COPE instructor. This main event tests all the skills and self-esteem the Scouts or Venturers have been working on.

COPE
Meeting Plan: What Is COPE?

Week 1 Date_____

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	RUN BY	TIME*
Preopening 15 minutes before meeting	Run a slide show or video of high-course COPE elements.		6:45 p.m.
Opening Ceremony 10 minutes	Flag presentation Oath and Law Uniform inspection		7 p.m.
Group Instruction 10 minutes	Lead a discussion on what COPE is and what it is not. Include one or two simple warmup games as examples.		7:10 p.m.
Skills Instruction 30 minutes	Discuss the eight principles of COPE, the Full Value Contract, and Challenge by Choice.		7:20 p.m.
	• Review the above information. • Make a list of the principles your unit needs to improve on.		
	• Review the above information. • Set goals, pick games, and make a plan on how to improve on them.		
Breakout Groups 15 minutes	• Begin planning for participation in the main event. • Work on advancement requirements as needed.		7:50 p.m.
Game 20 minutes	Play Traffic Jam (described earlier).		8:05 p.m.
Closing 5 minutes	Announcements Leader's minute Closing		8:25 p.m.
Total 90 minutes of meeting			
After the Meeting 15 minutes	Leadership team reviews plans for the next meeting and for the main event.		

*All times are suggested.

COPE
Meeting Plan: Spotting

Week 2 Date_____

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	RUN BY	TIME*
Preopening 15 minutes before meeting	As participants arrive, play Moonball outside: The group stands in a circle and hits a beach ball in the air, keeping it aloft as long as possible before it hits the ground.		6:45 p.m.
Opening Ceremony 10 minutes	Flag presentation Oath and Law Uniform inspection		7 p.m.
Group Instruction 15 minutes	Use the EDGE method to teach spotting. Discuss how proper spotting is an essential part of COPE safety. Discuss potential risks for both the faller and spotters.		7:10 p.m.
Skills Instruction 35 minutes	• Practice commands and stances. • Practice spotting in groups of no less than four.		7:20 p.m.
	• Practice commands and stances. • Practice spotting in pairs and small groups.		
	Work with the Essential or Challenging group to practice spotting.		
Breakout Groups 15 minutes	Continue planning for the main event. Work on menus and equipment lists.		7:55 p.m.
Game 15 minutes	Play Willow in the Wind (described earlier).		8:10 p.m.
Closing 5 minutes	Announcements Leader's minute Closing		8:25 p.m.
Total 90 minutes of meeting			
After the Meeting 15 minutes	Leadership team reviews plans for the next meeting and for the main event.		

*All times are suggested.

COPE
Meeting Plan: Game Night

Week 3 Date_____

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	RUN BY	TIME*
Preopening 15 minutes before meeting	As participants arrive, play Cookie Factory (described earlier).		6:45 p.m.
Opening Ceremony 10 minutes	Flag presentation Oath and Law Uniform inspection		7 p.m.
Group Instruction 10 minutes	Discuss goalsetting and planning and how COPE activities can benefit the unit as a whole.		7:10 p.m.
Skills Instruction 5 minutes	Discuss how the Full Value Contract and Challenge by Choice apply in activities beyond COPE.		7:20 p.m.
Breakout Groups 15 minutes	Review print and online resources and plan one or more initiative or trust games to teach the entire unit.		7:25 p.m.
Game 45 minutes	Play the games the breakout groups planned.		7:40 p.m.
Closing 5 minutes	Announcements Leader's minute Closing		8:25 p.m.
Total 90 minutes of meeting			
After the Meeting 15 minutes	Leadership team reviews plans for the next meeting and for the main event.		

*All times are suggested.

COPE
Meeting Plan: Gearing Up

Week 4 Date_____

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	RUN BY	TIME*
Preopening 15 minutes before meeting	Set up a display of high-course gear. Invite a Climbing merit badge counselor to preview that badge.		6:45 p.m.
Opening Ceremony 10 minutes	Flag presentation Oath and Law Uniform inspection		7 p.m.
Group Instruction 15 minutes	• Demonstrate how to put on a harness and helmet. • Discuss belay commands.		7:10 p.m.
Skills Instruction 35 minutes	• Practice properly putting on a harness and helmet. • Review spotting and belay commands.		7:25 p.m.
	• Review the above information. • Learn how to size a harness and helmet.		
	• Review the above information. • Learn how to maintain high-course and climbing equipment.		
Breakout Groups 15 minutes	• Finalize plans for participation in the main event. • Work on advancement requirements as needed.		8 p.m.
Game 10 minutes	Play Everybody Up (described earlier).		8:15 p.m.
Closing 5 minutes	Announcements Leader's minute Closing		8:25 p.m.
Total 90 minutes of meeting			
After the Meeting 15 minutes	Leadership team reviews plans for the next meeting and for the main event.		

*All times are suggested.

COPE

Main Event: COPE on the Ground

Date_____

Logistics

Location: _____

_____

Departure time: _____

Return time: _____

Duration of activity: Overnight

Budget: Completed _____ Approved _____

Camping: Duty roster_____ Menu _____

Transportation: Group _____ Self_____

Essential (Tier I)

On a unit outing, spend an afternoon playing a series of initiative games and working on the eight principles of COPE under the leadership of a COPE instructor.

Equipment List	• Water bottles • Food • Comfortable clothing appropriate for the environment • Scout Basic Essentials (Review the list and take what you need.) • First-aid kit • Any camping or overnight gear required
Activity	• Meet for transportation. • Camp and do other activities as desired. • Have an orientation with the COPE instructor. • Work with the COPE instructor on initiative and trust games. • Pack up and go home.
Safety	• Listen to all instructions. • Wear any required safety attire. • Avoid horseplay. • Two-deep adult leadership is required for all activities.

Notes

Consider doing the activity with another unit for added challenge and team-building opportunities.

COPE
Main Event: Low Ropes

Date_____

Logistics

Location: _____

_____

Departure time: _____

Return time: _____

Duration of activity: Overnight

Budget: Completed _____ Approved _____

Camping: Duty roster_____ Menu _____

Transportation: Group _____ Self_____

Challenging (Tier II)

Spend a day during a campout working through the low elements on a COPE course under the leadership of a COPE instructor. You will raise the stakes with added risk and more difficult challenges than you've faced at meetings.

Equipment List	• Water bottles • Food • Comfortable clothing appropriate for the environment • Scout Basic Essentials (Review the list and take what you need.) • First-aid kit • Any camping or overnight gear required • Signed activity consent forms
Activity	• Meet for transportation. • Camp and do other activities as desired. • Have an orientation with the COPE instructor. • Work with the COPE instructor on low elements. • Debrief. • Pack up and go home.
Safety	• Listen to all instructions. • Wear any required safety attire. • Avoid horseplay. • Keep cellphones off the elements. • Two-deep adult leadership is required for all activities.

Notes

If your council doesn't have a COPE course, check with area colleges, church and private camps, YMCAs, and nearby councils.

COPE
Main Event: High Ropes

Date_____

Logistics

Location: _____

_____

Departure time: _____

Return time: _____

Duration of activity: Overnight

Budget: Completed _____ Approved _____

Camping: Duty roster_____ Menu _____

Transportation: Group _____ Self_____

Advanced (Tier III)

Spend a day during a campout working through the high elements on a COPE course under the leadership of a COPE instructor. This main event tests all the skills and self-confidence the Scouts or Venturers have been developing.

Equipment List	• Water bottles • Food • Comfortable clothing appropriate for the environment • Scout Basic Essentials (Review the list and take what you need.) • First-aid kit • Any camping or overnight gear required • Signed activity consent forms
Activity	• Meet for transportation. • Camp and do other activities as desired. • Have an orientation with the COPE instructor. • Work with the COPE instructor on high elements. • Debrief. • Pack up and go home.
Safety	• Listen to all instructions. • Wear any required safety attire. • Observe all spotting requirements. • Avoid horseplay. • Keep cellphones off the elements. • Two-deep adult leadership is required for all activities.

Notes

If your council doesn't have a COPE course, check with area colleges, church and private camps, YMCAs, and nearby councils..

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

Books

Climbing merit badge pamphlet

Belay On manual

Bordessa, Kris. *Team Challenges: 170+ Group Activities to Build Cooperation, Communication, and Creativity*. Chicago Review Press, 2005.

Fluegelman, Andrew, ed. *More New Games and Playful Ideas From the New Games Foundation*. Headlands Press, Dolphin Books/Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1981.

————. *The New Games Book*. Headlands Press, Dolphin Books/Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1976.

Orlick, Terry. *The Cooperative Sports and Games Book: Challenge Without Competition*. Pantheon Books, 1978.

Rohnke, Karl. *Cowstails and Cobras II: A Guide to Games, Initiatives, Ropes Courses, & Adventure Curriculum*. Kendall Hunt Publishing Co., 1980.

————. *Silver Bullets: A Revised Guide to Initiative Problems, Adventure Games, and Trust Activities*. Kendall Hunt Publishing Co., 2009.

Rohnke, Karl, Jim B. Wall, Catherine M. Tait, and Don Rogers. *The Complete Ropes Course Manual*, 4th ed. Kendall Hunt Publishing Co., 2007.

Websites

Project Adventure
Website: www.pa.org

Wilderdom Store Initiative Games
Website: www.wilderdom.com/games

Related Program Features

Climbing and Rappelling, Fitness and Nutrition

Photo and Illustration Credits

Pages 35-1 (*climbers,* BSA/Dan Bryant; *helmet and gear,* Shutterstock.com/©swinner), 35-2 (Shutterstock.com/©Andrey_Popov), and 35-3 (Shutterstock.com/©mirc3a)

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to Michele Crismore, Anchorage, Alaska, for her assistance with developing the COPE program feature.