

Grief with gri-gris

November 2009

Issue

A wrongly-threaded Gri-Gri, on a bottom-roped belay system for a climb on an artificial climbing wall, resulted in the adult climber falling from the top of the climb and injuring his back.

Outcome

Manufacturers' instructions recommend that correct operation of the device should be checked, after setting up, by pulling sharply on the live end of the rope. If the device is correctly threaded, this should prevent the device from pulling through it, towards the climber. The Gri-Gri was not checked when the equipment was set up.

The instructor was supervising another climb at the time the mistake may have been spotted, i.e. when the students (all ten years old) began belaying their adult leader. The students were using the 'bell ringing' system of belaying, and as the adult climbed quickly, slack was created in the rope on the live side of the Gri-Gri. This allowed the students to pull the rope through the device slowly, against the braking system, without causing it to jam. The mistake became apparent when the instructor began lowering the adult to the ground, at the end of the climb, as the rope slid quickly through the Gri-Gri, and the adult fell to the ground.

Although the instructor had received formal and appropriate training and assessment at the start of the season, no further monitoring by a technically competent person had taken place. Good checking, supervision and further monitoring of this activity may have prevented the accident. HSE and AALS also recommend that adventure activity providers review their risk assessment, use of self-braking belay devices, and belaying techniques for this type of activity. Manufacturers' user instructions, for the use of these devices, and safe belaying practices, should normally be followed.