



January 12, 2021

### To Our Boulders Community:

Thanks again to posting your comments to our [three online comment boxes](#), our two physical comment boxes (one in each location), and for reaching out via email and social media. As you know, we respond to your feedback regularly, Like NOW...

We can't thank you enough for contributing to improvement at Boulders. We really appreciate the comments. We're happy and privileged to serve each and every one of you.

Sincerely,

**Boulders Climbing Gym**

### General Feedback:

**Two Comments That Came In Separately, Addressed Together:** #1 - *Evening slots 4-7 appear to be fully unavailable multiple days through the rest of the month, no option for member booking or hold requests, especially bad since Boulders appears to be running kids classes regardless of the mandates.*

#2 - *Can we please have better and more open communication about the scheduling policies especially at the Eastside gym? There are a number of evening "regulars" who are suddenly unable to schedule their accustomed time slots because those times have simply disappeared. I fully understand the unprecedented challenges the pandemic has caused as well as the need for all of us to be flexible, but some advance notice of policy changes would definitely be welcome.*

**Response:** First, we regret not communicating more openly and quickly about these changes as they were happening. In our rush to respond to the rapidly evolving COVID situation in November and December, we did not take the time to fully explain our decisions in real time. We should have communicated with the Boulders community as this was happening, and we are sorry that we didn't.

Second, thanks for reaching out. We want to assure you that we share your concerns about COVID in our community. After Order #10 was released, we spent several days examining the order, talking with county health officials, networking with peer and related organizations and businesses in our community, and talking to parents who have kids in our programs. We realize that we could have communicated this more quickly, but we don't want to leave you with the impression that we were brushing this order under the rug.

What we found was that three of our programs weren't impacted by the order at all, because of the age of the participants or because they are tutoring programs. However, two of our programs - Team and Club specifically - in our view as to how these are typically run - qualified as a "group exercise program," or "sports practice."

The kids in our youth programs, along with their families, are important members of our community, and - not only that - they are also full members. We wanted to ensure that they had continued access to our gyms, while still complying with the new health order. Due to their ages, the majority of our Team and Club kids are reliant on their parents' schedules for transportation and on our extra staff to allow them to be unsupervised by their parents in the gym. So while we had canceled the Team and Club programs we wanted to provide our youth members with COVID-safe, legitimate access to Boulders given the constraints of Order #10.

Our solution was to offer exclusive hours for our youth members and their families, during the late afternoon time slot when we would typically have Club and Team. We understand that blocking off these hours for youth climbers was a inconvenience to other members who normally slotted in at that time. Our decision was driven by the desire to accommodate some of our most vulnerable climbers who are being the most impacted by COVID restrictions and have the least agency over their own schedules.

Our intent in finding ways for youth members to come to the gyms was not to operate within loopholes, but instead to offer a creative solution that works within both the letter and the intent of Order #10. We believe we accomplished this, and we continue to feel confident in our COVID mitigation strategies.

Order #10 was supplanted with Order #11 not long after we instituted our new structure (and Order #12 was released today), and we are now allowed to continue our normal programming for Team and Club, along with many other programs, so for the most part the matter is now moot.

**Comment:** *COVID Mask issues - It makes me really uncomfortable to see people taking off their masks to exhale or wearing them below their nose. It's making me really nervous especially right now since the numbers are so high. I'm surprised to see climbers with untucked bandanas, thin single layer neck gaiters, and masks with valves. These simply aren't as effective as tight-fitting cloth masks. Additionally, there is almost constantly someone either wearing theirs below their nose or pulling it off their face to breathe. Is there anything the staff can do to ensure people are wearing their masks correctly?*

**Response:** Yes, we're completely on board with lifting the standards on mask use. We believe it's the reason why we've had ZERO reported cases of transmission from our own tracking procedures or the state contact tracers - though the numbers have been high. Our air systems at both locations help a lot, but we know that mask use is KEY.

Our goal has been to create a culture of voluntary compliance that assumes our members have the best intentions but to respond to them on a case-by-case basis with reminders and corrections. Additionally, we post frequently on social media about masks and have also changed our signage, which now says: "Buffs and valved masks don't give

adequate protection.” We have redoubled our efforts to ask people to put masks on, and/or to wear them correctly, and all desk staff have been instructed to offer single use masks to those who come in wearing a Buff or bandana. Overwhelmingly, when we’ve seen someone not complying it’s been a simple mistake (coming in from outside, for example.) We’ve also asked a few stubbornly non-compliant guests to leave. We will continue with all of this, for as long as it takes.

We hope that you see these changes positively impacting mask culture within the gym. If this comes up again in either gym, please do not hesitate to reach out to one of the staff on duty, this is a community safety issue and we take those very seriously. Our staff don’t just work here, we climb here with our friends and families. If everyone isn’t safe, everyone isn’t safe. That’s our point-of-view on this, and will be for at least as it takes for the country to manage the virus.

If you see someone wearing their mask incorrectly, please let a staff person know and we will be sure to approach the individual right away.

**Comment:** *On the inclusivity/diversity survey [Boulders’ Quarterly Community & Culture Survey, that is...]: I thought there should be a comment space. Data is important but I think a space to share experiences would be great too. My significant other awhile back was made to feel uncomfortable by some stronger female climbers and almost quit climbing a few months back because of it. They made comments about her, laughed when she fell on an easy climb and did not make space for her to work on her project while they climbed near her (blocked her). I think the survey I was just sent should have a space for people to share experiences like this and ones that are potentially more important.*

**Response:** First, we’re sorry to hear about the experience that your partner had in the gyms. Elitism is as pervasive as sexism and racism in the climbing community, and there’s no place for any of it. It’s the main reason why we’re taking these steps to address “otherness” in all of its forms at Boulders. These feedback loops and the survey you mention are part of this initiative.

While we understand your suggestion, we’ve found it much easier to keep our qualitative and quantitative data separate. Qualitative data, such as the story you are sharing here, often needs a very different and more immediate response than the quantitative data we gather in the Community and Culture survey. For this reason, we’ve left the Community and Culture survey as quantitative only, and developed the feedback loop you’re using here for qualitative responses. We funnel all qualitative feedback into one of our three general feedback forms, one each for [general comments](#), [route-setting](#), and about how Boulders is functioning as [a safe and inclusive space](#). These feedback buckets get daily attention, as they are forwarded to the relevant staff for immediate review and response. A story like the one you shared is something we need to know about quickly in order to respond appropriately. We hope that in the future you’ll feel comfortable alerting us to these incidents right away, so we can act in the moment.

We would like to repeat that what happened to your significant other is not okay. We want to set a standard here in our response that underscores this. Every person in our gyms, regardless of experience or ability deserves respect and decency. We apologize for not

facilitating a space in which your significant other felt safe, and that neither of you felt you had an appropriate route for bringing this to our attention sooner. We hope that this response and clarification give you both a clear path to report this behavior in the future, and that the other changes we have been making around the gym help ensure these incidents don't happen in the first place. Please reach out with any further clarifying questions, or if either of you have follow up ideas about how we can support you more completely. Thank you again for your suggestion.

**Comment:** *Please, it's [cold out now], less air conditioning ....*

**Response:** Funny story - we don't actually have control over our HVAC unit temperature at the Downtown gym; it's linked with the general building controls, managed by our landlord. We're in conversations with them to set up a micro-zone in the gym, so we can manage our own heat and cooling. We expect that this will be sorted out soon. Thanks for commenting!

**Comment:** *I follow Boulders on social media and know Boulders cares about their members safety but recently you had a post of an employee in a penguin costume not wearing a mask while coaching kids. I clicked on the picture and one of the kids was tagged on this person's personal social media, linking their profile to the post. Neither of these things seem entirely appropriate.*

**Response:** Thanks for bringing these two issues up - COVID mitigation as well as Safe Sport Guidelines - as these are both important issues for us.

First, regarding the maskless penguin costume: That particular costume is an air-tight and pressurized suit, which in itself functions very well as PPE for COVID. It's essentially one large pressurized mask. The employee was also wearing a personal face-mask during the event, but as it was causing the plastic to fog up, he removed it for the photos. Generally, we prefer to show best-practices in regard to COVID, and while the intention was to get the "best shot," the reality should've been that he kept the mask on. We've discussed this internally, and while we believe that there was no risk of transmission in either direction while taking these photos, your question is a legitimate one and we should've anticipated the negative impact of appearing as if we weren't managing the virus as we should. Please accept our apologies, as we'll err on the side of maintaining all appearances even during those times when we might be able to make exceptions.

Second, for clarification it's important to note that the social media account you reference is NOT the employee's personal account. Rather, it's the official account of the employee's role at Boulders. We maintain the log-in credentials and audit this account frequently. We do not tag kids, but do allow kids to tag themselves. As we're less able to foster a sense of belonging and community during this time of semi-quarantine, social media serves a purpose in creating connections for our Team kids with each other, and within their own friend groups. For this reason, if parents allow their kids to tag themselves (it's a setting in each SM account preferences), we allow it as well.

We realize that we could have communicated this more clearly, and if you have further concerns about the training our coaches receive or the practices they are expected to

follow, don't hesitate to reach out. Our instructors who work with youth are required to be Safe Sport certified at a minimum, with many having First Aid/CPR/AED certifications and background check vetting, as well. We are proud of our coaches and happy to speak on the expectations they are held to.

Thanks for the opportunity to address both of these concerns. Please know that we take community safety from the virus and individual safety from all manners of risks very seriously.

### **Safe Space Feedback:**

**Comment:** *I just filled out the quantitative survey and wanted to add some comments to the numbers. Thank you for inviting this sort of feedback and for caring about this sort of thing. I feel very loyal to Boulders and this culture setting is a big part of that. I see work to do though. I was at the gym last week and the setters were testing new routes. There was a general vibe of machismo that was off-putting: Aggressive psyching each other up and a lot of angry yells of disappointment from one guy when he was not able to solve the problem. The group of white men (further privileged by their setter status) shouting aggressively was a little daunting. I have been in the gym during route setting before and this has not been the vibe, but just wanted to mention it. There was also another time a long time ago when I heard a staff person at the front desk talking to another staff person about homeless folks on the Capitol square in a way that was pretty disrespectful and came from a lot of white privilege. I had just joined the gym so didn't feel great hearing that. The vast vast majority of my interactions with staff are wonderful. I just wanted to point out some areas of improvement.*

**Response:** Thanks for bringing this to our attention, it helps to hold us accountable for our language and for the culture that we set. You are not alone in noting room for improvement within our setting team, and we are currently in the process of responding to this feedback. We recently met with a focus group regarding the setters amongst other gym culture issues, and then had a follow up meeting with our head setter. He is committed to creating a "cultural reset" within the team, and since the time of your comment there have already been some personnel changes we hope will help address this issue. In terms of our staff's language regarding those experiencing homelessness, we expect our staff to treat everyone in the Madison community with respect and thank you for bringing this to our attention. Speaking about community members in a disparaging way is inappropriate and unacceptable, and we hope that changes we have made since the time of that incident have improved our staff's language and understanding. With the new downtown location, staff have been exposed to challenges they didn't previously face. We are currently working with community leaders to create socially conscious training surrounding these new interactions to ensure everyone is safe and treated with respect. Again, thank you for noting these two points and please do not hesitate to reach back out if you do not see improvement.

## Route-Setting Feedback:

**Comment:** *What is the point of these feedback forms if you don't reply to the critical feedback? Leaving only the positive statements, or things that are not directly related to the setting makes it seem like nobody cares what I/we have to say.*

**Response:** Thanks for the question, as this is an important one, which applies to ALL of our feedback, too.

The bottom line here is that you are right. If we only posted positive feedback or refused to respond to certain types of feedback, these surveys would be useless both to our own functioning and as a route for members to express their frustration. We certainly have nothing to gain by ignoring critical feedback which will lead to member dissatisfaction.

We get a lot of comments each month. The approach we've taken thus far is to sort these by type, and then respond to them here in this monthly feedback response on a "letters to the editor" basis. Generally, rather than responding to everything we pick a few representative comments, and respond to those. In this "lumping" we are not attempting to ignore anyone's commentary or skate over critical issues, but rather to collect those issues which seem to be shared by multiple comments and respond to them together. We feel that is a better use of everyone's time on all sides of the feedback loop than responding to each similar comment separately.

Comments that are especially specific ("Please add a foothold on this route I'm projecting...") or very general ("You suck!") are difficult to respond to in a public manner. However, all feedback is looped through to appropriate channels in the moment. For example, route-setting feedback goes to the management team, as well as to our Head Setter. If you've seen our [route-setting video online](#), you'll know that before every work session the setting team sets their intentions for the day, and this intention-setting is re-visited before the fore-running process begins. All route-setting feedback we receive is read aloud during this time, as we receive it. The comments are an important part of our route-setting process, so whether someone gets a specific response or not, please know that it makes a difference.

Later - our goal is monthly - feedback also addressed generally.

If anyone wants a specific and individual response to a comment, it's important that they leave their name and contact information. The vast majority of the comments we receive are anonymous. All comments are used and discussed, but not every anonymous comment will be responded to publicly.

**Comment:** *"I don't like the color system downtown. It's confusing to say 'the green red one,' I like that it encourages me to try problems that are harder but if there was just a numerical range that would make it much easier to understand. The ranges are also too wide and sometimes I can do a green but can't do a red. Plus, every other gym uses the number system so I can't communicate with friends in other areas about the climbs I'm doing and have lost an awareness for my skill level. There are a lot of people that use the gym to train and measure their progress, and with the current state of the grading system, this is borderline impossible."*

**Response:** We asked Kevin Baker, our head route-setter to respond to this one as well as several other comments that came in at the exact same time. Here's what he had to say:

*"Thank you for your feedback about our Routesetting. My name is Kevin Baker and I am the Head Routesetter here at Boulders Climbing Gym and I will help address your comments and concerns."*

*Ratings/Grades are a challenge across the board, and we know that they can be frustrating at times. We have an entire community with different strengths and weaknesses that we set for. We try to make things as fair, functional and fun as possible and sometimes the mark may be missed. We understand this and work to get better every day as a team to bring you the best product possible.*

*We implemented the circuits for COVID mitigation, and grade overlap is intended. Higher circuits will, and should, have some easier climbs in them than lower circuits. We know that the grade ranges in some circuits are quite large and we are scaling back slightly so circuits will have less overlap and less range. But still expect that circuits will have some climbs in both the lower and higher range of the circuit. We have received a lot of feedback against the circuits and a lot that are in strong support of them. We will be keeping them for the foreseeable future.*

*If you're looking for benchmarks to compare with friends and other climbers we suggest using the Kilter and Tension boards downtown, and the Moonboard at our eastside location. Those boards never change and have thousands of problems on them that you can keep returning to to check progress.*

*That being said, we are partnering with and launching an App today called [KAYA](#). KAYA will allow you to see all the grades we, as routesetters, give climbs in the gym if you want to. You will also be able to leave feedback, follow other climbers in your community, provide your own suggested grade and give quality ratings. You will also be able to filter specific aspects of the climbs and grades so when you come to the gym you will be able to climb what you want very easily. Check it out the next time you are in the gym and keep an eye out for challenges that we will run for opportunities to get yourself some SWAG.*

*Thanks again for our feedback, we really value you as a member and a part of this wonderful community."*

**Comment:** *The route setting lately has been super fun and interesting however it seems leading in the gym is maybe getting overlooked. There are several routes on clip lines right now that do not seem to be set with good clipping positions in mind making them feel unsafe or at the very least, they take several extra moves to clip and do not flow well as a result. It would be really great if more attention is paid to this as many people assume things are leadable when they are set on clip lines and this will make for a better experience for those of us who enjoy leading in the gym. Thanks for all you do!!*

**Response:** Noted! Yes, lead-climbing was the last thing to come back with COVID, and is getting a bit of a short-shrift lately. You're not the only one who's noticed, so we'll work to do better. Safety is our top priority, and if you don't notice changes soon, please feel free to reach out again.

**Comment:** *I would prefer if more 5.9s and easier 5.10s were set on the Cathedral, there was one a while back that I really enjoyed but I haven't found one that I can do since.*

**Response:** We'll work on this! We are currently in talks with our setting team on how to make both gyms more accessible, and your suggestion will be taken into consideration, thank you.

**Comment:** *Would love to see a permanent / semi-permanent set of V4/5+ that people can project for longer periods of time and reference their progress.*

**Response:** This is a good idea, but the best way to accomplish this in our opinion is to pick several problems in the grade of your choice on the Kilter and Tension boards Downtown, and/or the Moon Board at the Eastside, and use these as a benchmarking tool. These problems will literally be there forever, so that's way better than anything that we could ever provide.

**Comment:** *The routes themselves are great, but I do miss the old system of having the routes on different cycles and giving heads up when they would be taken down..*

**Response:** The high route rotation you're seeing is part of our COVID mitigation strategy. We're leaving routes and problems up for just three weeks instead of five, and have about 30% fewer routes and problems overall. However, the routes are still reset on a consistent schedule. Specific circuits are changed each week, and desk staff can clue you in on where we are in that cycle at any given time so you have a heads up before your project is taken down. The intent here is to keep people moving through the gyms, provide our members reasons to come back more frequently to get on fresh stuff, and also to allow us to wash the holds more often. We can reassess this system when COVID allows us to, but for now think of our gyms as spaces to train for onsight climbing, or for short, intense efforts at projects that capture your attention. You know, like you do when you go to a new bouldering area for the first time. That's the vibe we're currently going for.



**Comment:** *You're doing god's work here. I have no issues with the setting. I wanted to see if we could get some crack volumes. Crack climbing and crack moves are such a huge part of outdoor climbing but not many gyms can imitate it. It'd be an awesome way to set the gym apart as a real doorway to outdoor climbing.*

**Response:** Good idea! We'll look into it! Thanks!