

Girl Scout Activity Safety Standards & Guidelines

Safety Activity Checkpoints (SAC) is a resource that provides safety standards and guidelines for Girl Scouts of the United States of America (GSUSA) approved activities.

GSUSA, local councils, and other units holding a credential – including USA Girl Scouts Overseas (USAGSO) – shall be responsible for seeing that all activities are planned and carried out in a manner that considers the health, safety, and general well-being of all participants in accordance with these guidelines.

This section provides general safety standards & guidelines by topic that will apply to all activities. Please read and become familiar with all topics in this section. These standards and guidelines are to be used together with the specific safety checkpoints for an individual activity.

Throughout *Safety Activity Checkpoints*, several individual activities, such as Paddling and Rowing, Climbing and Adventure, and Target Sports, are categorized under related sections to provide continuity as well as the grade level and skill progression.

Adult Supervision. There are different adult supervision requirements for Girl Scout troop meetings as compared to events outside of the regular Girl Scout troop meeting such as outings, activities, camping and travel. Activities and travel outside of the regular troop meeting space require more adult supervision.

For Troop Meetings

The adult-to-girl ratio is two unrelated volunteers, including one female, for up to this number of girls:

- 12 Girl Scout Daisies
- 20 Girl Scout Brownies
- 25 Girl Scout Juniors
- 25 Girl Scout Cadettes
- 30 Girl Scout Seniors
- 30 Girl Scout Ambassadors

There should be one extra adult for every additional:

- 1–6 Girl Scout Daisies
- 1–8 Girl Scout Brownies
- 1–10 Girl Scout Juniors
- 1–12 Girl Scout Cadettes
- 1–15 Girl Scout Seniors
- 1–15 Girl Scout Ambassadors

For Outings, Activities, Travel and Camping

The adult-to-girl ratio is two unrelated volunteers, including one female, for up to this number of girls:

- 6 Girl Scout Daisies
- 12 Girl Scout Brownies
- 16 Girl Scout Juniors
- 20 Girl Scout Cadettes
- 24 Girl Scout Seniors
- 24 Girl Scout Ambassadors

There should be one extra adult for every additional:

- 1–4 Girl Scout Daisies
- 1–6 Girl Scout Brownies
- 1–8 Girl Scout Juniors
- 1–10 Girl Scout Cadettes
- 1–12 Girl Scout Seniors
- 1–12 Girl Scout Ambassadors

Some high-adventure activities may require more adult-to-girl supervision than stated above. For those activities, the safety checkpoints will provide specific adult-to-girl supervision ratios. Remember, some activities are less safe for younger girls, particularly Daisies and Brownies. Younger girls may not be permitted to participate based on their age, as appropriate, and this will be specified on the individual activity. In cases where younger-girl participation is an option but only under certain conditions, this is indicated toward the top (on some occasions, with an asterisk that's followed by explanation further into the write-up).

Note: For mixed-grade level troops, use the ratio for the lowest grade level in the troop. For example, if the troop consists of Daisies and Brownies, the Daisy ratio should be followed.

Council Approval Requirement. At the top of each activity page you will see a field indicating whether your council's prior approval is required to perform the activity.

- **Required.** You must check in with your council for prior approval before taking girls.
- **Not Required. You** do not need to check in with your council for prior approval.
- **May Be Required.** Your council will determine if prior approval is required.

Activities Not Listed in *Safety Activity Checkpoints*. In a challenging, learn-by-doing environment like Girl Scouts, it's only natural that girls will sometimes want to take part in activities that are not specifically addressed in *Safety Activity Checkpoints*.

Remember to have a plan or process in place for addressing and handling requests for activities that are not specifically listed in *Safety Activity Checkpoints*.

- First, investigate whether the activity is similar to another activity and if the safety checkpoints can easily translate and apply to a covered activity.

- Consider whether the proposed activity requires any additional expert supervision or special certification for the instructor.
- Consult your council for clarification when needed and for approval before taking girls.

Activity Preparation. Communicate with your Girl Scout council and girls' parents/guardians about the activity, including details about safety precautions and any appropriate clothing or supplies that may be necessary. Follow council procedures for activity approval, certificates of insurance, and guidelines about girls' general health examinations. Girls are key to activity planning. Keeping their grade level abilities in mind, encourage girls to take proactive leadership roles in organizing details of the activity.

Review Safety Checkpoints with Instructors. These checkpoints should be reviewed with the vendor, facility, camp or your council as appropriate to determine if the safety checkpoints can be complied with. Take any questions or issues with safety compliance to your council for guidance and next steps.

Itinerary and Key Contacts. Give an itinerary to a contact person at home. Call the contact person upon departure and return. Create a list that includes girls' parent/guardian contact information, council contacts, and emergency services contacts. Keep this list on hand or post in an easily accessible location. Emergency and parent contact information should be saved to an adult's mobile phone on the trip and be provided to the contact person at home.

Safety Gear. Safety gear includes clothing and equipment girls will need to safely take part in the activity. These items are necessary to ensure safety. Always opt to take the safety equipment offered by an organization or facility, even if it is not specifically listed here. If the facility offers helmets, always accept the use of helmets for girls.

Required Gear. Required gear simply means the activity-specific gear that girls must have to participate in the activity. For example, skiing – a girl will need to bring or rent skis and poles.

Additional Gear. Additional gear may include items that support a safe and healthy outdoor learning experience. These are items that often make the experience with girls more comfortable. Recommended items, based on Girl Scout experience, include:

- Layers of clothing for wintertime or for activities on or by the water or mountains, where temperatures or wind can change dramatically within a short period of time
- Sunglasses, sunscreen, hat, sun visor, lip balm
- Change of clothes for water-related activities or those involving dirt or mud, such as spelunking
- Comfortable shoes and socks if hiking or spending long days outside, in order to prevent ticks and blisters
- Watch, compass, maps
- Insect repellent
- Towels for waterfront, pool, and paddling activities
- Bottle of drinking water, healthy snacks
- Backpacks—girls carry their own gear and supplies!

Always take additional gear into consideration when planning an outdoor activity or trip in addition to the safety gear required for the specific activity.

Instructor Credibility. Verify instructor knowledge, experience, and maturity. Ensure the volunteers or on-site instructors possess the proper skill set, knowledge, training and certification, or documented experience required to meet your council's guidelines and as outlined in the specific approved activity.

With respect to instructing and safeguarding children, maturity level and years of experience can positively impact the support needed for volunteers to safeguard girls. For example, while the legal definition of an adult lifeguard is 18, qualified lifeguards of 21 years of age are preferred whenever possible.

General Insurance. Commercial general liability insurance protects the Girl Scout organization. The facility or vendor that hosts your troop event (for example, a riding stable, a hotel, or a bus company) should carry general liability insurance, and auto liability when motor vehicles are involved. A facility that carries valid general liability insurance has almost always been examined for risk by its insurance carrier. If a place does not carry general liability insurance, it's a red flag. It may not be safe, so it would be best to select another place.

When your council requires you to provide documented evidence of insurance, ask the facility for a certificate of insurance for your records. But be aware that some places do not provide documented evidence of insurance to all customers, or only provide a certificate of insurance when a group is large or if the group plans to pay a certain amount.

If you plan to enter into a written contract with a facility or are considering a new vendor, remember to consult your council for the proper insurance requirements and see if they use an approved vendor list. Check to be sure the certificate of insurance you will be obtaining validates the insurance limits outlined in your contract or agreement.

Activity Accident Insurance. Activity accident insurance is a supplemental health insurance that protects registered Girl Scout members. Registered members are automatically covered under activity accident insurance when participating in all Girl Scout events and activities including trips that involve two (or less) overnight stays. The Basic Plan does not cover trips of more than two overnight stays.

Important! Trips that are three overnights or more are not covered under automatic activity accident insurance. Also, non-members are not automatically covered and international trips are not automatically covered. Activity accident insurance must be individually purchased for coverage under these scenarios.

So, you will *need to purchase extra activity accident insurance* for outings and events that:

- Involve three or more overnight stays
- Take place outside U.S. territory
- Include non-members, such as siblings and friends

When planning trips, always consult your council to see if extra activity accident insurance is needed.

Leave No Trace. Search the web for tips on environmental responsibility, and remember our principle of [Leave no trace](#) (scroll down to the "How to Leave No Trace Outdoors" video)—and, in fact, Girl Scouts have a long tradition of leaving an area better than we found it. Doing so will

teach girls responsibility and also safeguard your troop and local council from complications or issues involving the use of public property.

Emergency Preparation. Familiarize yourself with basic first aid, emergency response requirements, and other precautions. Know how far away and where emergency medical and law enforcement services are located. Understand your surroundings in relation to the closest medical facility or hospital. Also, familiarize yourself with the forms of emergency communication and emergency transportation options that are available.

Weather Conditions. Always monitor the weather in the days preceding an activity or trip. Check the local weather report on the day of the trip. For circumstances in which forecasted weather could be a risk to safety, consider scheduling alternatives. In the case of severe wind, lightning, hail, ice, snow storm, flood warnings due to heavy rain, or a hurricane or tropical storm, make contingency plans for itineraries and transportation. Reschedule the event if the weather report is severe. Adhere to public safety announcements concerning staying indoors or evacuating the area. In extremely hot weather, girls should do outdoor activities in the morning and late afternoon hours, and during the hottest time of day stay in a shaded area or inside with air conditioning. It is important on extremely hot days to plan for easy access to plenty of drinking water to prevent heat exhaustion or dehydration.

If extreme weather or temperature conditions prevent a trip, be prepared with a backup plan or alternative activity.

Buddy System. Always use the buddy system with all ages of girls, which means pairing girls up as partners. Each girl is responsible for staying with her buddy throughout a trip or activity. A buddy can warn her partner of danger, give a helping hand, or get immediate assistance when the situation warrants it. All girls are encouraged to stay near the group so that if someone is injured or not feeling well, there are others, including an adult, close by to seek help.

Permission Slips. It is imperative to secure a signed permission slip from a girl's parent or guardian for any trip or special activity outside the troop meeting space. This applies to all girls under the age of 18. In most cases, one parental consent is legally acceptable. However, there may be circumstances regarding a custody situation or a particular standard in your council where dual parental consent is required. For international trips, both parents / guardians written consent is generally required. If there is a question about single versus dual parental consent, please consult your council and they can consult local or state laws for specific legal guidance.

Transportation. Keep in mind that 15-passenger model vans have historically been flagged as a safety concern by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and are therefore not recommended to transport girls. There are state specific laws which may regulate the use of 15 passenger vans for public transport. Prior council level approval is required to determine if the vehicle is statutorily permitted and meets safety criteria. Always consult your council for prior approval before opting to rent or lease these vehicles to transport girls. Commercially operated shuttles (as with an airport service) are permitted.

For chartered buses and vehicles, always verify safety credentials, commercial driving licenses, and the use of seatbelts. Make certain proper insurance is in place by requesting a certificate of insurance with a minimum of \$1 million in auto liability coverage.

Overnight Trips. Prepare girls to be away from home by involving them in the planning so they know what to expect. On trips where male volunteers are part of the group, it is not appropriate

for them to sleep in the same space as girl members. Always support and maintain an all-girl atmosphere for sleeping quarters. Men may participate only when separate sleeping quarters and bathrooms are available for their use. Men should not be in situation to walk through girls' sleeping quarters for entrance, exit or to access restrooms. In some circumstances, such as a museum or mall overnight with hundreds of girls, this type of accommodation may not be possible. If this is the case, men do not supervise girls in the sleeping area of the event and the adult volunteer-to-girl ratio is adjusted accordingly.

An exception is made for family members during events such as parent-daughter or family overnights where one family may sleep together in an area specifically designated to accommodate families. Also please make note of the following:

- Each participant has her own bed.
- Parent/guardian permission must be obtained if girls are to share a bed.
- Girls and adults do not share a bed; however, some councils make exceptions for mothers and daughters.
- It is not mandatory that an adult sleep in the sleeping area (tent, cabin, or designated area) with the girls, but if an adult female does share the sleeping area, there should always be *two unrelated adult females* present.

Airbnb, VRBO and HomeAway. See the [Travel/Trip](#) chapter for specific safety checkpoints when utilizing Airbnb, VRBO and HomeAway. There are specific steps that must be followed when utilizing these privately owned property rentals, steps that are not necessarily taken with every traditional commercially owned and operated property such as hotels.

Modeling the Right Behavior. Never use illegal drugs. Do not consume alcohol, smoke, vape or use foul language in the presence of girls. Do not carry ammunition or firearms in the presence of girls, unless given special permission by your council for target sport activities. Always obey the law, for example, by not talking on a phone or texting while driving.

Online Safety. Instruct girls never to put their full names, location or contact information online, engage in virtual conversation with strangers, or arrange in-person meetings with online contacts. On group websites, publish girls' first names only and never divulge their location or contact information. Teach girls the Girl Scout Internet Safety Pledge and ask them to read, understand, discuss and commit to following it.

Money-Earning Activities. Safety is an important consideration throughout money-earning activities, including Girl Scout Cookie sales and other council-sponsored product sales. During Girl Scout product sales, you are responsible for the safety of girls, money, and products. In addition, a wide variety of organizations, causes, and fundraisers may appeal to Girl Scouts to serve as their labor force. When representing Girl Scouts, girls cannot raise money for other organizations, participate in money-earning activities that represent partisan politics or are not Girl Scout-approved product sales and efforts. It is imperative that Girl Scouts do not partake in anything that can be construed as unrelated business income, in order to protect our organization's 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. If there is a questionable circumstance, consult your council.

Volunteer Essentials. A key resource for Volunteers in Girl Scouting is Volunteer Essentials. While Safety Activity Checkpoints focuses on safety guidance and parameters, Volunteer Essentials will address an array of topics such as Engaging Girls and Families, Troop Management, Product Program, Troop Finances, and Leader's Guide to Success. All Girl Scout

Volunteers are instructed to review, understand and practice the principles and standards in both Volunteer Essentials and Safety Activity Checkpoints.