Planning for Adventures

Prior Council Approval

In the Activities at a Glance chart and in each activity's Safety Activity Checkpoints, you'll see whether council approval is required.

Some activities need extra preparation, such as certified instructors, safety gear, or facility vetting. In these cases, council approval promotes early coordination and clear expectations.

Council approval types:

- **Required:** You must get council approval before confirming your plans. Follow all council instructions.
- **Not Required:** No approval needed. Just follow the activity's checkpoints and any of your local council's general expectations or training.

Progressive Experiences

Guide your group to choose activities that match their readiness, considering emotional, physical, and developmental stages. Start with simple tasks and gradually progress to more challenging ones as skills grow.

EXAMPLES OF PROGRESSIVE EXPERIENCES FOLLOW CHECKPOINTS FOR EACH ACTIVITY

IF YOUR GIRL SCOUTS ARE INTERESTED IN…	Start with…	Then try…	If they love that…	Then…
AQUATICS	A pool party at a local municipal pool. (Lifeguards are provided!)	A canoe lesson on a lake. See if a GS camp near you has one.	Take a guided ocean kayak tour at a marine reserve.	Take SCUBA or sailing lessons, or a canoe trip down a river.
CLIMBING AND ADVENTURE	A low ropes and team-building day at a nearby camp.	Climbing and bouldering at an indoor gym.	Book a weekend at a retreat center featuring a high ropes course.	Zip line and canopy walk during a jungle trip in another country.
TARGET SPORTS	Slingshot target shooting at a local camp.	An archery lesson during your next campout.	Visit a BB/ air gun range or go hatchet throwing.	Take a knife-throwing lesson or take aim with a target shooting class.
TRAVEL	A field trip to a children's museum, with a walk to a nearby café for lunch.	A getaway to a nearby city for a weekend—see if there's a GS facility to stay in.	Take a train to another state for college visits and sightseeing fun.	Fly away to a WAGGGS World Centre; connect with sisters from around the globe.

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Notice how the above examples have layered activities, especially as you read to the right. Many adventurous activities happen during campouts or travel, which is wonderful! However, remember that overnights also follow a progression. Keep the big picture in mind and avoid introducing too many new experiences all at once.

Each activity section includes grade-level recommendations. These checkpoints serve as guidelines, not strict rules, though some activities follow industry standards. If your group feqels ready for activities designed for older grades, or if local circumstances make an activity suitable for younger participants than the checkpoints list, consult your council.

Our shared goal is to create safe, enjoyable, and empowering experiences for Girl Scouts.

Selecting a Qualified Vendor

Businesses and organizations providing facilities, equipment, activities, or instruction play a key role in safety and experience quality. Follow these steps:

- **Use trusted partners.** See if your council has a list of pre-approved activity partners, vendors, or locations. Whenever possible, start with one of these.
- **Verify qualifications.** If there's no suitable pre-approved activity partner:
    - **Verify that instructors are credible.** (See Identifying Qualified Experts, below.)
    - **Review the related Safety Activity Checkpoints chapter.** Confirm that the vendor's safety protocols are aligned.
    - **Check for inclusiveness.** When possible, choose vendors that demonstrate inclusive practices and can accommodate the needs of all participants.
    - **Review insurance coverage.** Vendors should carry general liability insurance (typically at least $1 million) and auto liability coverage if vehicles are used. Vendors should be willing to discuss and confirm liability insurance or provide a certificate of insurance (COI) if requested.
- **Handle contracts carefully.** Follow your council's guidelines for written contracts. This may include verifying insurance coverage and submitting contracts for council signature before they are finalized.

Identifying Qualified Experts

"Experts" refers to any adult with certification, training, and/or expertise in an activity. This includes instructors, facilitators, and individuals holding certifications, such as lifeguards.

Examples include:

- A horseback riding instructor with 15 years of documented experience teaching youth and leading trail rides
- A kayak guide who holds certification for Level 2 Essentials of Kayak Touring Instructor from the American Canoe Association
- A lifeguard with current American Red Cross lifeguard training certification
- A team-building facilitator who leads Girl Scouts in the council's weekend low ropes program activities

Experts gain experience in various ways, but the key is **hands-on knowledge** and a **proven ability** to guide others **safely and successfully**. Their expertise ensures you're in capable hands.

For each activity, we list certifications from reputable industry organizations when available. These certifying bodies provide added protections, including structured curricula, rescue training, and insurance coverage, benefiting Girl Scout members.

If certified instructors are not available in your area, consider other qualified community experts. To assess their suitability, ask about:

- **Training and certification.** How does their training compare to the certification in the checkpoints? Contact the certifying body if needed.
- **Experience.** Have they facilitated this activity in similar conditions? For how long?
- **Rescue procedures.** What are their qualifications and experience in rescue situations?

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- **Group management.** Do they have experience managing groups like yours?
- **Safety standards.** Do they follow instructor–participant ratios, equipment guidelines, and safety protocols? If not, will they comply with Girl Scout standards?
- **Liability insurance.** Do they have the minimum $1 million liability insurance to cover their operations? What coverage do they carry? See Selecting a Qualified Vendor.

By reviewing these factors, you can confidently determine if an instructor is the right fit for your Girl Scout activity. Contact your council office if any uncertainty remains.

Clothing, Equipment, and Gear

When specific items, such as non-cotton clothing or long sleeves, are recommended for safety, find them listed in the activity's Safety Activity Checkpoints (SACs). For general activities, use common sense when choosing what to wear or bring to an activity. These everyday items are not included in the Activity SACs.

Check the SACs to find out what safety gear is typically required for your activity. Discuss required equipment with your expert/instructor or the rental vendor to confirm that all necessary safety gear will be available. Inform families in advance about any items they must provide. Helmets and life jackets are critical safety gear for many activities.

Let's take a closer look at key considerations:

- **Clothing and footwear.** Tell families early what participants should wear or bring:
  - Check the SACs for required safety clothing or footwear, such as non-cotton layers, long pants, or hiking boots.
  - If clothing or footwear is not specified, use common sense.
  - Secure loose clothing and jewelry that could become entangled or caught.
  - Hair that could get caught should be tied back, braided, or tucked safely into a head covering.
- **Outdoor essentials.** Always remind participants of these necessities for outdoor adventures:
  - Use sun-protective clothing, hats, sunscreen (SPF 30+ with UVA/UVB protection), and lip balm with SPF. Reapply often and use waterproof products in wet conditions.
  - Always prioritize nutrition and hydration.
  - Apply insect repellent and/or wear protective clothing, when needed.
- **Safety gear and equipment.** Ensure you have done the following:
  - Review the SACs for required safety gear specific to your activity.
  - Discuss equipment needs with your expert, instructor, or rental vendor to ensure everything is available.
  - Inform families in advance about any items they need to provide.

Helmets and Life Jackets

Since helmets and life jackets are common essentials for many activities, let's take a closer look at key considerations.

Helmets

Helmets are required for activities that could involve falls or impacts. Examples include cycling, skateboarding, skiing, and sledding. Helmets also provide protection from falling objects during activities like rock climbing or spelunking.

Consult your expert or instructor to determine the appropriate type of helmet for your activity and whether helmets are provided. Most adventure venues supply proper safety gear, but for activities like biking or skateboarding, participants must bring their own helmets. Inform caregivers early and provide the following guidance:

- **Helmet type.** Specify the required helmet type and refer to the Consumer Product Safety Commission for a **chart on helmet standards.**
- **Proper fit.** A well-fitting helmet is essential. Use the Seattle Children's **video on correct fit**. It should cover most of the forehead and be snug enough not to slip or shift position. All clips must be fastened.

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- **Everyone helmets up!** All participants, including adults, must wear helmets if required in the Safety Activity Checkpoints.
- **Helmet replacement.** Follow manufacturer guidelines for replacement. Factors such as crashes, wear, age, and exposure to elements can affect helmet effectiveness.

Life Jackets

U.S. Coast Guard (USCG)–approved life jackets must be worn during many aquatic activities. They should be worn on larger vessels during dangerous conditions or whenever directed by crew. They can also be used to provide buoyancy for non-swimmers during snorkeling or swimming.

When the SACs list life jackets in the Safety Gear section, they are *required* for that activity. Note that life jackets are one type of personal flotation device (PFD). *Throwable* PFDs are cushions or ring buoys that can be thrown onto the water. A throwable PFD should never replace the proper use of a life jacket.

Confirm the availability of life jackets when making boating or instructional reservations. Most small craft rentals include life jackets, but in rare cases, you may need to provide your own. Every state has a **life jacket loaner program.**

When selecting a life jacket, consider the following:

- **Use only USCG-approved PFDs**. The label will clearly show if it is approved.
- **Choose the right life jacket for your activity**:
  - Most entry-level recreational users will use Type II or III life jackets. They are comfortable and easy to fit, and have sufficient buoyancy for most situations.
  - Inflatable PFDs are not meant for those under 16.
  - Ask your expert/instructor if you're unsure.
- **Choose the right size:**
  - Check the label. It should say whether it's for an adult, youth, child, or infant.
  - Check the label for the appropriate weight or chest size.

Preparing for the Unexpected

First Aid

Be Prepared with First Aid/CPR/AED training

- Girl Scouts recommends having a first aider at all gatherings.
- Some activities **require** a first aider, as specified in the activity chapter.
- A first aider is an adult with current certification, as outlined below.

What Type of First Aider Is Needed?

For troop or group meetings and most activities, a general first aider—with standard First Aid/CPR/AED training—is sufficient. For large groups or remote activities, the first aider should have additional, current training and/or experience.

SETTING	FIRST AIDER TRAINING OR CERTIFICATION
Groups of up to 200 people AND access to EMS is less than 30 minutes away	Standard First Aid/CPR/AED training as described in "What training is appropriate?" below.
Access to EMS is more than 30 minutes away	Wilderness First Responder (recommended) or Wilderness First Aider. These certifications include remote assessment and evacuation techniques to use when EMS is not readily available.
Groups of 200 or more people	An individual with advanced first aid training, certification, or experience* should be present for every 200 participants, with needs varying by circumstances.

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