Safety Activity Checkpoints (SACs)

Whitewater Rafting

ACTIVITY	DAISY	BROWNIE	JUNIOR	CADETTE	SENIOR	AMBASSADOR	Is Prior Council Approval Required?	Is Activity Training, Certification, or Verified Experience Required?
Whitewater Rafting		River Class I–II	River Class I–III	River Class I–IV	River Class I–IV	River Class I–IV	Yes	Yes

Feel the rush of the river and take in breathtaking scenery while whitewater rafting. Challenge yourself, work as a team, and navigate the rapids with the help of a trained guide for an unforgettable adventure!

General Checkpoints

Refer to the Safety Standards for essential supervision, transportation, first aid, and emergency plans, as well as inclusion and accessibility considerations.

Activity-Specific Checkpoints for Whitewater Rafting

Follow these basic reminders for each phase of planning. Check off items as you complete them, making sure to consider each sub-bullet.

Decision-Making Phase

☐ **Find a safe place to go whitewater rafting.**

- Refer to the program grade level chart (above) for acceptable whitewater classes for your group.
- Match skill levels with river conditions by understanding the American version of the **International Scale of River Difficulty**.
- **American Whitewater** has an interactive map of rated rivers. Raft only on rivers that have been run and rated.

Learn More:

- Urge all participants to take ACA's free **online paddlesports safety course.**
- Learn how to read whitewater in Boreal River's fascinating **Hydrology 101 video**.

☐ **Identify a professional guide.**

- Ensure instruction is provided by a qualified adult with experience teaching and supervising rafting for the ages involved, and who subscribes to the **American Whitewater Safety Code.**
- Confirm that the guide's training matches the location and conditions. Certifications may include:
  - **American Canoe Association** (ACA)—Rafting Level 4 or higher
  - International Rafting Federation (IRF) Guide certification
  - Swiftwater Rescue Training
  - Documented experience per your council's guidelines
- Whitewater rafting outfitters will supply trained guides for the trip.
- Maintain proper instructor–student ratio, per the guide's certification, with a maximum of 6 learners per instructor. An ACA instructor with a qualified assistant may supervise up to 12 learners.
- Ensure guides have firsthand knowledge of the hazards and conditions at the packrafting location.

©2009-2026 Girl Scouts of the USA. All Rights Reserved.

Safety Activity Checkpoints (SACs)

Planning and Preparation Phase

☐ **Be clear on gear.**
- Review Gear for Whitewater Rafting at the end of this section.
- Ask your instructor or outfitter what items are provided.
- Communicate early with participants and families about what the group leader or outfitter will provide and what individuals need to bring themselves.

☐ **Line up first aid.**
- Ensure that at least one adult has First Aid/CPR/AED training.
- For locations more than 30 minutes from emergency medical services, recruit a Wilderness First Aider or Wilderness First Responder. Identify the closest emergency transport and facilities.
- Ensure that a first aid kit in a waterproof container will be on hand.

☐ **Assess swimming ability.**
- Strong swimming skills are important for paddlers' safety and confidence. A swim assessment is highly recommended to evaluate participant readiness.
- Advance swim assessments are recommended to avoid disappointment.
- Same-day assessments may be conducted if necessary.
- If swim assessments are not feasible, assume all participants are non-swimmers.

Day of the Activity

☐ **Check the weather.**
- Consult your instructor; postpone or cancel if conditions are unsuitable for your group's skill level.
- Review what to do in a sudden storm.
- Monitor river conditions and dam releases. Check with the outfitter and/or local water authority about the dam(s) on your route.

☐ **Check boats for condition.** Make sure air chambers appear secure and gear appears complete and well-maintained.

☐ **Check the site.** Ask the guide about avoiding hazards such as strainers, sieves, hydraulics, waterfalls, bridges, dams, fences, and low power lines.

☐ **Ensure everyone learns and practices the basics.**
- Proper body position and balance
- Launching, entering the raft, and landing techniques
- Guide's commands for body movement and paddle strokes
- Maneuvering through waves and wakes
- What to do in case of capsizing or falling overboard:
  - How to float through the rapids
  - How to breathe while in rapids
  - How to swim to safety
  - Staying away from strainers, downed trees, holes, and other dangers
- Not attempting to stand in fast-moving water—if your foot wedges on the bottom, fast water can push you under and keep you there
- Signaling for help
- Any site-specific instructions

☐ **Prepare for emergencies.**
- Discuss emergency action plans with your instructor.
- Know who to contact and how to call for help.
- Be aware of your location to communicate effectively with authorities.

Whitewater Rafting Trips: Additional Considerations

Whitewater rafting trips are longer excursions. Plan trips only after progressive skill-building experiences. Follow these additional tips for a safe and satisfying experience.

☐ **Ensure basic skills.**
- Participants must have the skill and stamina to finish the trip, even if headwinds or other challenges arise.
- Participants must learn **universal signals.**

©2009-2026 Girl Scouts of the USA. All Rights Reserved.

Safety Activity Checkpoints (SACs)

- ☐ **File a float plan for any trip.**
  - Provide a reliable adult with information about your boat(s) and the people aboard.
  - This fillable **float plan from the Coast Guard** includes steps for your contact to take if they are concerned about your safety.

- ☐ **Use a professional guide with the additional training needed** for the trip type. Guiding on river, whitewater, coastal, touring, and open water (ocean) trips are advanced certifications.

- ☐ **Do not exceed capacity or overload boats with gear.**

- ☐ **Keep boats close enough together** so that a group decision can be made if wind or water conditions change.

- ☐ **Be aware of possible changes in water level** due to tides or dam releases, and how these may impact your route.

- ☐ **See the additional gear needed for trips** under Gear for Whitewater Rafting. Consult your guide about what else may be needed.

Gear for Whitewater Rafting

Make sure Girl Scouts have everything they need for a safe and successful whitewater rafting experience.

Individual and group essentials

Essential equipment

- Raft, suited to group size and water conditions, that meets the following criteria:
  - Is constructed of durable material with at least four air compartments
  - Has an adequate number of large D-rings securely attached to the sides
  - Has snug hand lines along the sides
  - Does not exceed the capacity of people or gear
- Properly sized paddles (including spares)
- Bailing scoop or foot pump to remove water from hull (not needed for self-bailing boats)

Safety gear

- Coast Guard–approved life jackets, properly sized and fitted for each person (required)
- Helmet, properly fitted, when rafting in Class II or higher conditions
- Rescue whistle
- Throwable personal flotation device (Type IV cushion, ring buoy, or equivalent) available for each group on the water
- Tow line, throw bag, and/or other rescue gear (carried by the guide)
- Hull repair kit and air pump

Clothing and footwear

- Layered, non-cotton clothing; rash guards and board shorts are ideal when air and water are warm.
- Water shoes, neoprene booties, or non-slip sport sandals with a heel strap (no flip-flops or loose water shoes)
- Wetsuit or drysuit if the water temperature is below 70°F
- Paddling gloves for comfort and grip
- Eyeglass keepers or goggles for those who need them

Gear for trips

Consult your expert about what to bring in addition to the gear listed above and how to secure it in the boat. They may recommend items such as:

- Navigation items, such as GPS or a compass
- Communication devices, such as two-way, satellite, or weather/VHF radios
- Dry bags (and a way to secure them) to carry food, extra clothing, first aid kit, etc.
- Tool/repair kit: duct tape, tools, spare rope, etc.
- Emergency equipment, such as a signaling mirror, tarp, space blanket, extra clothing and food, matches, flashlight, etc.

©2009-2026 Girl Scouts of the USA. All Rights Reserved.