



Surfing

Council Approval: [Required](#)

Activity permitted for: J C S A

Not permitted for: Daisies, Brownies and non-swimmers

About Surfing

Surfing (also referred to as “surfboarding”) is one of the most challenging water sports, but if a new surfer is well prepared, it can be a safe, rewarding experience that develops balance, agility, strength, and confidence. With proper instruction from an experienced surfing instructor, many first-timers are able to stand up on their boards during the initial two- to four-hour session. Brownies can learn with boogie boards (much smaller boards) as opposed to surf boards which is a good progression step to surfing. However, all Girl Scouts participating in surfing of any kind must test as proficient swimmers before they try surfing. See the [swim test](#) in the Swimming chapter.

While people learn at different paces, three to four lessons are recommended for beginners. Enrolling girls in a surf camp or daylong surfboarding lesson is highly recommended for beginners. Be sure to inform the surf school of girls’ ages, heights, and sizes to reserve appropriate surfboards and wet suits.

During lessons, even before going in the water, girls can learn the basics of surfing, such as:

- Finding the best position for the body on the board; steering out from the shore; keeping the nose of the surfboard pointed toward the surf in order to cut through the waves; and not getting positioned sideways (in order to avoid getting caught by a wave and tumbled around)
- Going around the break line (the point at which waves begin to break) when paddling out from the shore and not through it in order to allow other surfers plenty of space
- Sharing the waves, staying out of the way of other surfers, and never taking off on a wave in front of another surfer (called “snaking”)
- Keeping the board by always using the ankle leash (it’s dangerous to other surfers and swimmers when surfers let go of surfboards)

The ocean is best to surf, but some rivers and regions along the Great Lakes also can be suitable for surfing as long as the weather is warm.

Learn More:

- [Surfline glossary](#)
- Tips for beginners and intermediate surfers, plus overviews on ocean safety and gear: [Surfing Handbook](#)
- [International Surfing Association](#)

Include Girls with Disabilities

Talk to girls with disabilities and their caregivers. Ask about needs and accommodations with respect to water sports.

When planning to visit a waterfront at a park, contact the park office in advance. Also contact the instructor or facility teaching or hosting the surfing event. Ask about accommodating people with disabilities and make any possible accommodations to include girls with disabilities.

Safety Activity Checkpoints

Check swimming ability. Participants' swimming abilities should be classified and clearly identified (for instance, with colored wristbands to signify beginners, advanced swimmers, and so on) at council-approved sites, or participants can provide proof of swimming-test certification. In the absence of swimming-test certification, a [swim test](#) should be conducted before or on the day of the activity. Consult with your Girl Scout council for additional guidance.

Emergency Action Plan (EAP). Review and document your Emergency Action Plan (EAP) ahead of time before taking girls out for this activity. Think through scenarios of what can go wrong such as an accident, physical injury to a girl or adult, missing girl, or sudden illness.

Verify instructor knowledge and experience. Instructors should hold a certification from the National Surf Schools and Instructors Association, the International Surfing Association, or similar certification. Ocean lifeguard certifications are required. The instructor-to-girl ratio should be one to four.

Note: The instructor-to-participant ratio is not the same as the adult-to-girl ratio found in "Introduction to *Safety Activity Checkpoints 2020*." Both ratios must be complied with when girls are participating in surfing. For example, if 15 Juniors are participating in surfing, there must be four instructors plus two adult Girl Scout volunteers who are not instructors.

Pick an ability-appropriate site. Make sure the surfing location complements the surfers' ability levels. Some beaches designate areas for beginners, intermediate surfers, and higher-level surfers. If the surfing location does not designate areas by skill level, verify with the surfing instructor that the location is appropriate for the girls.

Select a safe location. A location with a soft, sandy, or muddy bottom is best. Scout out a location that does not have a sharp-edged or rocky bottom, which can be dangerous and can cut feet and limbs. Also, inquire about potential dangerous marine life and rip tides. Keep girls away from these hazards when they become evident.

Safeguard valuables. Don't leave personal belongings and valuables unattended in a public place. If working with a surfboarding school or camp, call ahead to inquire about the company's storage amenities.

Prepare for emergencies. Ensure the presence of a waterproof first aid kit and a first-aider with a current certificate in first aid, including adult and child CPR or CPR/AED, who is prepared to handle cases of near-drowning, immersion hypothermia, and sunburn. If any part of the activity is located 30 minutes or more from emergency medical services, ensure the presence of a first-aider with wilderness first aid.

Get a weather and tide report. Never surf on a stormy day. Following rainy weather, check the water quality before surfing. On the morning of the surf trip, determine whether conditions will be appropriate for surfing by searching for regional surf reports on [SurfLine.com](#), [FreeTideTables.com](#), [17ft.com](#), and [Weather.com](#). If weather conditions prevent the surf trip, be prepared with a backup plan or alternative activity.

Assess wave heights. Call the surf instructor on the day of the trip to confirm that wave heights are appropriate for girls. Wave heights rely heavily on wind strengths; two- to three-foot waves are recommended for beginners. When waves surpass five feet, it can be difficult to paddle out from the shore.

Be prepared in the event of a storm with lightning. Exit water immediately and take shelter away from tall objects (including trees, buildings, and electrical poles). Find the lowest point in an open flat area. Squat low to the ground on the balls of the feet and place hands on knees with head between them.

Required Gear

- Surfboard (soft-deck long boards are generally recommended for beginners)
- Bathing suit
- Rash guard
- Wet suit (recommended for warmth and skin protection, especially when water temperature is below 70 degrees Fahrenheit; most surf schools rent full-body or partial suits, but they may not be “required” depending on the temperatures)
- Rocky bottom surf shoes
- Goggles for girls with glasses

Safety Gear

- At least one graspable and throwable Coast-Guard approved personal flotation device (Type IV buoyant cushion or ring buoy or equivalent) immediately available for each group on the water (check with lifeguards at the waterfront)
- Leash, also referred to as a leg rope—cord that attaches the surfboard to the surfer’s ankle, so that she doesn’t have to swim too far to catch up to the board after a wipeout (usually included with a surfboard rental)

Recommended Gear

- Beach towel
- Dry clothing and sunglasses to wear after surfing