



Volunteer Essentials 2011

CH 4: Safety-Wise

This document plus the Safety Activity Checkpoints supersede the retired Safety-Wise book. **This document is subject to change; rely on the online document for the most current details.*

www.sdgirlscouts.org/training

Chapter 4: Safety-Wise

In Girl Scouting, the emotional and physical safety and well-being of girls is always a top priority. Here's what you need to know.

Knowing Your Responsibilities

You, the parents/guardians of the girls in your group, and the girls themselves share the responsibility for staying safe. The next three sections flesh out who's responsible for what.

Responsibilities of the Volunteer: Girl Scout Safety Guidelines

Every adult in Girl Scouting is responsible for the physical and emotional safety of girls, and we all demonstrate that by agreeing to follow these guidelines at all times.

1. **Follow the Safety Activity Checkpoints.** Instructions for staying safe while participating in activities are detailed in the Safety Activity Checkpoints, available from your council. Read the checkpoints, follow them, and share them with other volunteers, parents, and girls before engaging in activities with girls.
2. **Arrange for proper adult supervision of girls.** Your group must have at least two unrelated, approved adult volunteers present at all times, plus additional adult volunteers as necessary, depending on the size of the group and the ages and abilities of girls. Adult volunteers must be at least 18 years old (or the age of majority defined by the state, if it is older than 18) and must be screened by your council before volunteering. One lead volunteer in every group must be female.
3. **Get parent/guardian permission.** When an activity takes place that is outside the normal time and place, advise each parent/guardian of the details of the activity and obtain permission for girls to participate.
4. **Report abuse.** Sexual advances, improper touching, and sexual activity of any kind with girl members are forbidden. Physical, verbal, and emotional abuse of girls is also forbidden. Follow your council's guidelines for reporting concerns about abuse or neglect that may be occurring inside or outside of Girl Scouting.
5. **Be prepared for emergencies.** Work with girls and other adults to establish and practice procedures for emergencies related to weather, fire, lost girls/adults, and site security. Always keep handy a well-stocked first-aid kit, girl health histories, and contact information for girls' families.
6. **Travel safely.** When transporting girls to planned Girl Scout field trips and other activities that are outside the normal time and place, every driver must be an approved adult volunteer and have a good driving record, a valid license, and a registered/insured vehicle. Insist that everyone is in a legal seat and wears her seat belt at all times, and adhere to state laws regarding booster seats and requirements for children in rear seats.
7. **Ensure safe overnight outings.** Prepare girls to be away from home by involving them in planning, so they know what to expect. Avoid having men sleep in the same space as girls and women. During family or parent-daughter overnights, one family unit may sleep in the same sleeping quarters in program areas. When parents are staffing events, daughters should remain in quarters with other girls rather than in staff areas.
8. **Role-model the right behavior.** Never use illegal drugs. Don't consume alcohol, smoke, 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 group marksmanship activities.

9. **Create an emotionally safe space.** Adults are responsible for making Girl Scouting a place where girls are as safe emotionally as they are physically. Protect the emotional safety of girls by creating a team agreement and coaching girls to honor it. Agreements typically encourage behaviors like respecting a diversity of feelings and opinions; resolving conflicts constructively; and avoiding physical and verbal bullying, clique behavior, and discrimination.
10. **Ensure that no girl is treated differently.** Girl Scouts welcomes all members, regardless of race, ethnicity, background, disability, family structure, religious beliefs, and socioeconomic status. When scheduling, helping plan, and carrying out activities, carefully consider the needs of all girls involved, including school schedules, family needs, financial constraints, religious holidays, and the accessibility of appropriate transportation and meeting places.
11. **Promote online safety.** Instruct girls never to put their full names or contact information online, engage in virtual conversation with strangers, or arrange in-person meetings with online contacts. On group web sites, publish girls' first names only and never divulge their contact information. Teach girls the [Girl Scout Online Safety Pledge](#) and have them commit to it.
12. **Keep girls safe during money-earning.** Girl Scout Cookies and other council-sponsored product sales are an integral part of the program. 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 be their labor force. When representing Girl Scouts, girls cannot participate in money-earning activities that represent partisan politics or that are not Girl Scout–approved product sales and efforts.
13. **Girl Scouts, San Diego-Imperial Council** requires you to adhere to local Volunteer Policies, Procedures and Standards (available at www.sdgirlscouts.org/policies).

Responsibilities of Parents and Guardians

You want to engage each parent or guardian to help you work toward ensuring the health, safety, and well-being of girls. Clearly communicate to parents and guardians that they are expected to:

- Provide permission for their daughters to participate in Girl Scouting as well as provide additional consent for activities that take place outside the scheduled meeting place, involve overnight travel, involve the use of special equipment, and/or cover sensitive issues. Permission forms are available at www.sdgirlscouts.org/permission.
- Make provisions for their daughters to get to and from meeting places or other designated sites in a safe and timely manner and inform you if someone other than the parent or guardian will drop off or pick up the child.
- Provide their daughters with appropriate clothing and equipment for activities, or contact you before the activity to find sources for the necessary clothing and equipment.
- Follow Girl Scout safety guidelines and encourage their children to do the same.
- Assist you in planning and carrying out program activities as safely as possible.
- Participate in parent/guardian meetings.
- Be aware of appropriate behavior expected of their daughters, as determined by the council and you.
- Assist volunteers if their daughters have special needs or abilities and their help is solicited.

Responsibilities of Girls

Girls who learn about and practice safe and healthy behaviors are likely to establish lifelong habits of safety consciousness. For that reason, each Girl Scout is expected to:

- Assist you and other volunteers in safety planning.
- Listen to and follow your instructions and suggestions.
- Learn and practice safety skills.
- Learn to “think safety” at all times and to be prepared.
- Identify and evaluate an unsafe situation.
- Know how, when, and where to get help when needed.

Knowing How Many Volunteers You Need

Girl Scouts adult-to-girl ratios show the *minimum* number of adults needed to supervise a specific number of girls. (Councils may also establish *maximums* due to size or cost restrictions.) These supervision ratios were devised to ensure the safety and health of girls—for example, if one adult has to respond to an emergency, a second adult is always on hand for the rest of the girls. It may take you a minute to get used to the layout of this chart, but once you start to use it, you’ll find the chart extremely helpful.

	Group Meetings		Events, Travel, and Camping	
	<i>Two</i> unrelated adults (at least one of whom is female) for this number of girls:	Plus <i>one</i> additional adult for each additional number of this many girls:	<i>Two</i> unrelated adults (at least one of whom is female) for this number of girls:	Plus <i>one</i> additional adult for each additional number of this many girls:
Girl Scout Daisies (K–grade 1)	12	6	6	4
Girl Scout Brownies (grades 2–3)	20	8	12	6
Girl Scout Juniors (grades 4–5)	25	10	16	8
Girl Scout Cadettes (grades 6–8)	25	12	20	10
Girl Scout Seniors (grades 9–10)	30	15	24	12
Girl Scout Ambassadors (grades 11–12)	30	15	24	12

Here are some examples: If you’re meeting with 17 Daisies, you’ll need three unrelated adults (in other words, not your sister, spouse, parent, or child), at least one of whom is female. (If this isn’t making sense to you, follow the chart: you need two adults for 12 Daisies and one more adult for up to six more girls. You have 17, so you need three adults.) If, however, you have 17 Cadettes attending a group meeting, you need only two unrelated adults, at least one of which is female (because, on the chart, two adults can manage up to 25 Cadettes).

In addition to the adult-to-girl ratios, please remember that adult volunteers must be at least 18 years old or at the age of majority defined by the state, if it is older than 18.

While not required, it can be helpful to add one adult to the minimum ratio when traveling or camping with Daisies, Brownies, Juniors, or girls with special needs. Some girls may also require one-on-one assistance.

Transporting Girls

How parents decide to transport girls between their homes and Girl Scout meeting places is each parent's individual decision and responsibility.

For planned Girl Scout field trips and other activities—outside the normal time and place—in which a group will be transported in private vehicles:

- Every driver must be an approved adult* volunteer and have a good driving record, a valid license, and a registered/insured vehicle. At Girl Scouts, San Diego-Imperial Council, only currently registered, background screened adult members are permitted to drive girls.
- Girls never drive other girls.
- If a group is traveling in one vehicle, there must be at least two unrelated, approved adult volunteers in the vehicle, one of whom is female, and the girl-volunteer ratios in *Volunteer Essentials* must be followed.
- If a group is traveling in more than one vehicle, the entire group must consist of at least two unrelated, approved adult volunteers, one of whom is female, and the girl-volunteer ratios in *Volunteer Essentials* must be followed. Care should be taken so that a single car (with a single adult driver) is not separated from the group for an extended length of time.
- Carry the health forms of the girls riding in your car for the duration of the ride. Health History forms are available at www.sdgirlscouts.org/health.

*“Adult” is defined by the age of majority in each state.

Approaching Activities

How can you, as a Girl Scout volunteer, determine whether an activity is safe and appropriate? Good judgment and common sense often dictate the answer. What's safe in one circumstance may not be safe in another. An incoming storm, for example, might force you to assess or discontinue an activity. If you are uncertain about the safety of an activity, call your council staff with full details and don't proceed without approval. Err on the side of caution and make the safety of girls your most important consideration. Prior to any activity, read the specific Safety Activity Checkpoints (available on your council's web site or from your support team in some other format) related to any activity you plan to do with girls.

When planning activities with girls, note the abilities of each girl and carefully consider the progression of skills from the easiest part to the most difficult. Make sure the complexity of the activity does not exceed girls' individual skills—bear in mind that skill levels decline when people are tired, hungry, or under stress. Also use activities as opportunities for building teamwork, which is one of the outcomes for the connect key in the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.

Health Histories (Including Examinations and Immunizations)

Each council handles health histories differently. At San Diego-Imperial Council, Health History Records (available at www.sdgirlscouts.org/health and www.sdgirlscouts.org/adulthealth) are completed and updated annually for both girls and adult members. Troop leaders collect and store the records. Health histories of participants are given to first aiders during Girl Scout events or activities, and then returned to troop leaders following the event.

A physician's examination is required for council-sponsored resident camp and may also be required for travel or extended camping trips. Other information, such as specific food allergies, or permission to dispense over-the-counter medicine may be collected for day-long or overnight trips. Keep in mind that information from a health examination is confidential and may be shared only with people who must know this information (such as the girl herself, her parent/guardian, and a health practitioner).

For various reasons, some parents/guardians may object to immunizations or medical examinations. Councils must attempt to make provisions for these girls to attend Girl Scout functions in a way that accommodates these concerns.

It is important for you to also be aware of any medications a girl may take or allergies she may have.

- Medication, including over-the-counter products, must never be dispensed without prior written permission from a girl's custodial parent or guardian. Permission forms are available at www.sdgirlscouts.org/permission. Some girls may need to carry and administer their own medications, such as bronchial inhalers, an EpiPen, or diabetes medication.
- Common food allergies include dairy products, eggs, soy, wheat, peanuts, tree nuts, and seafood. This means that, before serving any food (such as peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, cookies, or chips), *ask* whether anyone is allergic to peanuts, dairy products, or wheat! Even Girl Scout Daisies and Brownies should be aware of their allergies, but double-checking with their parents/guardians is always a good idea.

Girl Scout Activity Insurance

A portion of the individual annual membership dues pays for supplementary insurance for the member only. This insurance provides up to a specified maximum for medical expenses incurred as a result of an accident while a member is participating in an approved, supervised Girl Scout activity, after the individual's primary insurance pays out. This is one reason that all adults and girls should be registered members. Non-registered parents, tagalongs (brothers, sisters, friends), and other persons are not covered by basic coverage.

This insurance coverage is *not* intended to diminish the need for or replace family health insurance. And it does not duplicate medical-expense benefits collected under other programs, so after approximately \$100 in benefits have been paid under this plan, the family's medical insurance takes over. If there is no family insurance or healthcare program, a specified maximum of medical benefits is available.

An optional plan of activity insurance is available for Girl Scouts taking extended trips and for non-members who participate in Girl Scout activities. These plans are secondary insurance that individuals are entitled to receive while participating in any approved, supervised Girl Scout activity. Optional insurance coverage is available for any Girl Scout activity that involves non-Girl Scouts or lasts longer than three days and two nights. Contact your council to find out how to apply. Your council may make this mandatory, in some cases, particularly for overseas travel.

Obtaining additional insurance

Mutual of Omaha provides supplemental insurance for registered Girl Scouts attending day or overnight events, and for non-members who may be invited to certain events. To determine if additional insurance is needed for your event, please contact the activity consultant in your service unit, or the outdoor education specialist at (619) 610-0814 or (800) 643-4798. The outdoor education specialist will e-mail you the proper form according to the type of coverage you need. Forms may also be downloaded at www.sdgirlscouts.org/forms.

There is a minimum of \$5 to purchase additional insurance. You can mail the completed form and check (payable to Girl Scouts – San Diego Imperial Council) to:

Girl Scouts, San Diego-Imperial Council
Additional Insurance Request
1231 Upas St.
San Diego, CA 92103

Your form and check must be turned into council at least five (10) working days prior to your event. Forms not received in a timely manner will not be processed and the event will not be covered under Mutual of Omaha's additional insurance.

Insurance Claim Forms:

Mutual of Omaha is supplemental insurance. Leaders should have accident report forms with them at troop meetings and program events in case an accident occurs.

All registered Girl Scouts are covered under supplemental insurance for accidents occurring at troop meetings and activities. If an accident occurs at a troop meeting or event, an accident report form (available at www.sdgirlscouts.org/accident) should be filled out immediately and returned to the outdoor education specialist. Any accident that might require medical help or requires more than a band-aid must be reported on the first working day after the accident, by telephone or delivering the report form. Please remember to be objective and accurate with information on the form. The accident report might be involved in a legal action.

After an accident is reported, the outdoor education specialist will send a letter, instructions on how to file a claim and a claim form to the injured party. The injured girl or adult must fill out the claim form and return it to the outdoor education specialist. The outdoor education specialist will verify the report and submit it to Mutual of Omaha for processing.

Review the Girl Scouts insurance plan description at www.sdgirlscouts.org/gsus/insurance.

Providing Emergency Care

As you know, emergencies can happen. Girls need to receive proper instruction in how to care for themselves and others in emergencies. They also need to learn the importance of reporting to adults any accidents, illnesses, or unusual behaviors during Girl Scout activities. To this end, you can help girls:

- **Know what to report.** See the “Procedures for Accidents” section later in this chapter.
- **Establish and practice procedures for weather emergencies.** Certain extreme-weather conditions may occur in your area. Please consult with your council for the most relevant information for you to share with girls.
- **Establish and practice procedures for such circumstances as fire evacuation, lost persons, and building-security responses.** Every girl and adult must know how to act in these situations. For example, you and the girls, with the help of a fire department representative, should design a fire evacuation plan for meeting places used by the group.
- **Assemble a well-stocked first-aid kit that is always accessible.** First-aid administered in the first few minutes can mean the difference between life and death. In an emergency, secure professional medical assistance as soon as possible, normally by calling 911.

First-Aid/CPR

Emergencies require prompt action and quick judgment. For many activities, Girl Scouts recommends that at least one adult volunteer be first-aid/CPR-certified. For that reason, if you have the opportunity to get trained in council-approved first-aid/CPR, do it! You can take advantage of first-aid/CPR training offered by chapters of the American Red Cross, National Safety Council, EMP America, American Heart Association, or other sponsoring organizations approved by your council. Try to take age-specific CPR training, too—that is, take child CPR if you’re working with younger girls and adult CPR when working with older girls and adults.

Caution: First-aid/CPR training that is available entirely online does not satisfy Girl Scouts’ requirements. Such courses do not offer enough opportunities to practice and receive feedback on your technique. If you’re taking a course not offered by one of the organizations listed in the previous paragraph, or any course that has online components, get approval from your support team or council.

Girl Scouts, San Diego-Imperial Council offers First-Aid/CPR classes year-round. Visit the Adult Learning page at www.sdgirlscouts.org/training for details.

First-Aider

A first-aider is an adult volunteer who has taken Girl Scout–approved first-aid and CPR training that includes specific instructions for child CPR. If, through the American Red Cross, National Safety Council, EMP America, or American Heart Association, you have a chance to be fully trained in first-aid and CPR, doing so may make your activity-planning go a little more smoothly. The Safety Activity Checkpoints always tell you when a first-aider needs to be present.

There are two categories of first-aiders: (emergency list)-

- **First-aider (level 1):** The presence of a first-aider (level 1) is required many group activities. The course required to be a first-aider (level 1) is one that offers standard first-aid and CPR, preferably with a focus on children.
- **First-aider (level 2):** The presence of a first-aider (level 2) is required at resident camp, and at any camp activity with more than 200 participants. In addition, some activities require a first-aider (level 2); the Safety Activity Checkpoints state clearly whether a first-aider (level 2) is needed. First-aiders (level 2) pass the same course as first-aiders (level 1), and also have emergency response/first response, sports safety, wilderness first-aid, and/or advanced first-aid and CPR training. Each organization has a different name for its training, so be sure to ask before you take the course whether a training course fulfills the level-2 requirements.

Note: The following healthcare providers may also serve as first-aiders (level 1 or 2): physician, physician’s assistant, nurse practitioner, registered nurse, licensed practical nurse, paramedic, military medic, and emergency medical technician.

First-Aid Kit

Make sure a general first-aid kit is available at your group meeting place and accompanies girls on any activity (including transportation to and from the activity). Please be aware that you may need to provide this kit if one is not available at your meeting place. You can purchase a Girl Scout first-aid kit, you can buy a commercial kit, or you and the girls can assemble a kit yourselves. The Red Cross offers a list of potential items in its Anatomy of a First Aid Kit at www.sdgirlscouts.org/firstaidkit. (Note that the Red Cross’s suggested list includes aspirin, which you will not be at liberty to give to girls without direct parent/guardian permission.) You can also customize a kit to cover your specific needs, including flares, treatments for frostbite or snake bites, and the like.

In addition to standard materials, all kits should contain your council and emergency telephone numbers (www.sdgirlscouts.org/emergency). Girl Scout activity insurance forms (www.sdgirlscouts.org/permission), parent consent forms, and health histories (www.sdgirlscouts.org/health) may be included, as well.

Procedures for Accidents

Although you hope the worst never happens, you must observe council procedures for handling accidents and fatalities. When you received this orientation guide you were also given a Major Emergencies Wallet Card detailing the following information. Please carry it with you for easy referral.

- You must always have on hand the names and telephone numbers of council staff, parents/guardians, and local emergency services such as the police, fire department, or hospital emergency technicians.
- **Call this number for all emergencies: (800) 643-4798. After hours please call (866) 361-2327.**

Your adherence to these procedures is critical, especially when notifying parents or guardians.

At the scene of the accident:

- If a child needs emergency medical care as the result of an accident or injury, first contact emergency medical services, and then follow council procedures.
- Administer first aid.
- Call for appropriate help (police, fire department or medical). Always notify police about motor vehicle accidents, serious accidents or fatalities.
- Call the council office at (619)298-8391 or (800)643-4798. After hours call (866) 361-2327.
- Council staff will immediately arrange for additional assistance at the scene, if needed, and will notify parents/guardians as appropriate. After hours and on weekends, a phone message will provide clear instructions on how to reach emergency phone service with an on-call staff member.
- Move non-injured persons away from the scene as appropriate.
- Assign a responsible adult to remain at the scene.
- Permit no one to disturb victim or surroundings until appropriate authority assumes responsibility.
- Do not share information about the accident with anyone but the police, your council, and authorities.
- Refer any media inquires to the director of communications. See “Handling Media” below.
- Submit an accident report form (available at www.sdgirlscouts.org/accident and resource centers) to council within 24 hours.

Minor Accidents or Illness

In the event of a minor accident or illness, the first-aider should provide first-aid attention. If the adult in charge and the first-aider decide that further medical attention is necessary, they should call the parents/guardians. Most parents prefer to take the child for medical treatment themselves. If you must take a child to a medical facility, be sure that the remaining girls have adequate supervision. Report all animal bites to your county health department.

Handling Media

Reporters will often contact Girl Scout personnel directly regarding controversial or catastrophic situations. It is very important that only officially designated spokespersons respond. When questioned by media representatives:

1. Indicate as pleasantly as possible that you are only acquainted with one facet of the problem and would prefer that the reporter speak to the council spokesperson that can provide more complete and accurate information.
2. Never speak “off the record” or speculate.
3. Refer the reporter to the director of communications at the Girl Scout council office.
4. Report your conversation with the reporter to the director of communications as soon as possible.

Using Activity Checkpoints

When preparing for any activity with girls, always begin with the Girl Scout Safety Activity Checkpoints written about that particular activity, available at www.sdgirlscouts.org/safety or by request from your membership staff. Safety Activity Checkpoints will also be available in resource centers by request. Each Safety Activity Checkpoint includes the same format:

- Title of the checkpoint, a photo, and introductory text
- Information on where to do this activity and how to include girls with disabilities
- Basic and specialized gear required for the activity
- How you and the girls need to prepare yourselves in advance of the activity
- What specific steps to follow on the day of the activity
- Web links to help you and the girls learn more, plus ways to increase your know-how
- Activity-specific jargon

In addition to reading these checkpoints yourself, you can also e-mail or print them for co-volunteers, parents/guardians, and the girls themselves. The checkpoints are formatted as checklists, so that you, your co-volunteers, and the girls can go through and check off that each step has been followed.

In keeping with the three processes of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience, be sure that all activities are girl-led, taking into account the age and abilities of the girls. Older girls can take the bulk of the responsibility for carefully planning and executing activities, while younger girls will require more of your guidance but should still be deeply involved in making decisions about their activities.

Also give the girls the chance to learn cooperatively, by having girls teach each other new skills they may need for activities, rather than hearing all that from you. And let girls learn by doing: If research or special equipment is needed, they'll learn better doing that research themselves than by having you do the legwork and report back to them. Even Daisies can do basic research and give reports or do show-and-tell for each other. And Ambassadors may need you only for moral support as they research, teach each other, and plan every detail of their excursions.

If Safety Activity Checkpoints do not exist for an activity you and the girls are interested in, be sure to check with your council *before* making any definite plans with the girls in your group. A few activities are allowed only with written council pre-approval and only for girls 12 and over, while some are off-limits completely:

- **Caution:** You must get **written pre-approval** from your council for girls ages 12 and older who will operate motorized vehicles, such as go-carts and personal watercraft (driving or riding all-terrain vehicles and motor bikes is never allowed); take trips on waterways that are highly changeable or uncontrollable (Class V and higher watercraft trips are never allowed); or fly in noncommercial aircraft, such as small private planes, helicopters, sailplanes, untethered hot-air balloons, and blimps (hang gliding, parachuting, and parasailing are never allowed). Girls climbing to altitudes of over 10,000 feet require special permission and appropriate council-approved training.
- **Warning:** The following activities are **never allowed** for any girl: shooting a projectile at another person (such as paintball), potentially uncontrolled free-falling (bungee jumping, hang gliding, parachuting, parasailing, indoor skydiving, and trampolining), creating extreme variations of approved activities (such as high-altitude climbing and aerial tricks on bicycles, skis, snowboards, skateboards, water-skis, and wakeboards), hunting, riding all-terrain vehicles and motor bikes, and taking watercraft trips in Class V or higher whitewater. Girl Scouts, San Diego-Imperial Council does not allow the use of any firearms.

See sample of Activity Checkpoints: *Swimming



Swimming: Safety Activity Checkpoints

A longtime Girl Scout tradition, swimming is one of the many ways that girls develop athleticism, leadership, and team-building skills. Whether swimming outdoors at camps and competitive events or in indoor pools, safety is one of the keys to having fun in the water. Girls and adults adhere to council requirements for swimming levels—in addition to the requirements of the organization you are working with—to participate in water activities. Consult a local organization such as your local parks and recreation department, YMCA, or [American Red Cross](#) for swimming lessons, or locate a swimming instructor in your area at [swim.com](#).

Know where to go swimming. Girl Scout camps, lakes, rivers, pools, and other camping facilities. Connect with your Girl Scout council for site suggestions.

Include girls with disabilities. Communicate with girls with disabilities and/or their caregivers to assess any needs and accommodations. Learn more about the resources and information that [USA Swimming Disability Committee](#) and [International Federation of Adapted Physical Activity](#) provide to people with disabilities.

Swimming Gear

Basic Gear

- Bathing suit (a one-piece is usually less cumbersome than a two-piece)
- Waterproof sunscreen (SPF of at least 15)
- Sunglasses
- Beach towel
- Dry clothing and sunglasses to wear after swimming
- Goggles, swim cap, and/or nose and ear plugs for girls who need them

Specialized/Rescue Gear

- Participants who are weak swimmers wear a U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket (Type III recommended) that fits according to weight and height specifications. Inspect life jackets to ensure that they are in good condition and contain no tears. Read about Coast Guard life jackets [here](#).
- Reaching pole
- Ring buoy or throw bag with firmly attached line approximately 30 feet long
- Rescue tube
- Backboard
- At least one graspable and throwable personal flotation device (Type IV buoyant cushion or ring buoy or equivalent) is immediately available for each group on the water

Prepare for Swimming

- Communicate with council and parents.** Inform your Girl Scout council and girls' parents/guardians about the activity, including details about safety precautions and any clothing or supplies that may be necessary. Follow council procedures for activity approval, certificates of insurance, and council guidelines about girls' general health examinations. Make arrangements in advance for all transportation and confirm plans before departure.

- **Girls plan the activity.** Keeping their grade-level abilities in mind, encourage girls to take proactive leadership roles in organizing details of the activity.

- **Arrange for transportation and adult supervision.** The recommended adult-to-girl ratios are two non-related adults (at least one of whom is female) to every:
 - 6 Girl Scout Daisies
 - 12 Girl Scout Brownies
 - 16 Girl Scout Juniors
 - 20 Girl Scout Cadettes
 - 24 Girl Scout Seniors
 - 24 Girl Scout Ambassadors

Plus one adult to each additional:

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

- **Ensure the presence of watchers.** A watcher is a person trained in the use of basic water-rescue equipment and procedures who works under the direction of the lifeguard. American Red Cross Basic Water Rescue certification or equivalent is appropriate. Lifeguards and watchers are stationed at separate posts and stay out of the water, except in emergencies. An American Red Cross Lifeguarding Instructor or American Red Cross Water Safety Instructor (WSI) can provide training in Basic Water Rescue.

Swimming Lifeguards and Watchers Ratios

Number of Swimmers	Lifeguards	Watchers
1–10	1 adult	1*
11–25	1 adult	2*
26–35	2 persons, at least 1 is an adult; others may be 16 years of age or older.	3*
36–50	2 persons, at least 1 is an adult; others may be 16 years of age or older.	4*

*Some states allow watchers to be under the age of 18, but in all states, they must be at least 16 years of age.

These numbers are a minimum. The ratio of lifeguards and watchers to swimmers may need to be increased depending on the number of girls in one area, swimming level and ability, girls with disabilities, age level and ability to follow instructions, type of swimming activity (instruction, recreation), type of swimming area, weather and water conditions, and rescue equipment available. If you are unsure whether your swimming lifeguards and watchers ratios are sufficient, be sure to contact your council.

- **Ensure participants are able to swim.** Participants’ swimming abilities are classified and clearly identified (for instance, with colored headbands to signify beginners, advanced swimmers, etc.) at council-approved sites, or participants provide proof of swimming-test certification. In the absence of swimming-test certification, a swim test is conducted on the day of the activity. Consult with your Girl Scout council for additional guidance.

- **Ensure the presence of lifeguards.** For swimming activities in public pools, hotel and cruise-ship pools, and backyard pools, the lifeguards are at least 16 years old and have American Red Cross Lifeguard Training certification or the equivalent. For swimming activities in lakes, slow-moving streams, and rivers, one adult lifeguard (certified in American Red Cross Lifeguard Training plus Waterfront Lifeguard course or the equivalent) is present for every 10 swimmers, plus one watcher. When girls are wading in water more than knee-deep, an adult with American Red Cross Basic Water Rescue certification or with documented experience in basic water rescue skills is present. For swimming and wading activities, consult the “Swimming Lifeguards and Watchers Ratios” chart for standards.

- **Assess safety of swimming site.** Whether using council-owned or -operated swimming sites or using public, loaned, or donated facilities, the swimming site posts that its water quality passes the local [health-department tests](#) and sanitation regulations. In addition:
 - For pools:
 - Pool water depths are clearly marked, and shallow areas are marked “no diving.” Diving areas are separate from other swimming areas.
 - The facility makes periodic maintenance checks. Maintenance requests and repairs are documented, and records are retained.
 - Water pH and chlorine are tested and maintained at safe levels. Tests are documented, and records are retained.
 - The decks around the pool are kept clean and clutter-free.
 - The surrounding fence and gate or doors are locked when the pool is unsupervised.

 - For beach and other waterfront areas:
 - Hazards are eliminated or clearly marked.
 - Girls are instructed to avoid strong currents, sharp drop-offs, quicksand bottoms, rough surf, and other potentially dangerous conditions.
 - As best as can be determined, the water is free of dangerous marine life.
 - The bottom is relatively free of debris, sharp stones, and shells.
 - Swimming, diving, and small-craft areas are separate. They are clearly marked or roped off or both.

- **Follow sliding safety standards.** The following rules are respected for activities that include slides:
 - A watcher signals that the next person may slide when the landing area is clear.
 - Only one person may be on the slide at a time.
 - Girls slide in a sitting position, never headfirst.
 - The landing area is off-limits to other swimmers.
 - The water in the slide landing area is at least 4 feet deep.

- ❑ **Follow diving-area safety standards.** The following rules are respected for activities that include diving:
 - The diving area is divided from the swimming area by a buoyed line.
 - The water in the landing area is a minimum of 10 feet deep for recreational diving boards. The boards are usually 12 to 14 feet long and less than 3 feet above the water’s surface.
 - The water in the landing area is a minimum of 12 feet deep for competitive diving boards. The boards are usually 16 feet long and 3 to 10 feet above the water’s surface.
 - Diving is restricted to water of sufficient depth and checked in advance for submerged obstructions. Diving is prohibited in waters of unknown depth and conditions.
 - Recreational divers do not manipulate the adjustable fulcrum on the springboards. During recreational swimming periods, the adjustable fulcrum is locked in a fixed position, preferably in its most forward position, to reduce the spring of the board.
 - The maximum water depth extends 10 feet on each side of the center line of the board. If tides, drought, and similar forces affect the water depth, it is checked each time before diving is permitted.
 - Girls do not dive off the side of the board.
- ❑ **Follow water-park safety standards.** When participating in water activities at water parks, adults and girls must:
 - Read and follow all park rules and the instructions of lifeguards.
 - Know their physical limits. Observe a water ride before going on.
 - Not dive. Always know the depth of the water before wading in.
 - Not run. Most minor injuries at water parks are caused by slips and falls.
 - Use extra care on water slides. They cause a significant number of injuries. See “Follow sliding safety standards.”
 - In wave pools, stay away from the walls.
- ❑ **Prepare for emergencies.** Ensure the presence of a waterproof first-aid kit and a first-aider, who is prepared to handle cases of near-drowning and immersion hypothermia. See *Volunteer Essentials* for information about first-aid standards and training.
- ❑ **Compile key contacts.** Give an itinerary to a contact person at home; call the contact person upon departure and return. Create a list of girls’ parents/guardian contact information, telephone numbers for emergency services and police, and council contacts—keep on hand or post in an easily accessible location.

On the Day of Swimming

- ❑ **Get a weather report.** If swimming outdoors, never swim on a stormy day. On the day of the activity, consult weather.com or other reliable sources to assess temperature and weather and water conditions. If weather conditions prevent the trip, be prepared with a backup plan or alternative activity.
- ❑ **Safeguard valuables.** Don’t leave personal belongings and valuables unattended in a public place.
- ❑ **Use the buddy system.** Girls are divided into teams of two. Each person chooses a buddy and is responsible for staying with her buddy at all times, warning her buddy of danger, giving her buddy immediate assistance if safe to do so, and seeking help when the situation warrants it.
- ❑ **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 heads between them. During storms, if shore cannot be reached, keep a sharp lookout for boats and other obstructions.

- ❑ **Keep track of girls' whereabouts.** In a controlled waterfront, a checkboard system is used to indicate which girls are in the water and in which swimming area. In crowded areas, a color system is used for identification (for example, non-swimmers, novice swimmers, and skilled swimmers each have a wristband, hair band, or other marker of a different color).
- ❑ **Monitor time in water.** The length of a swimming period is determined by the swimmer's condition and comfort, weather conditions, and water temperature. Generally, 30-minute swimming periods are sufficient.
- ❑ **Respect basic swimming rules and safety precautions.**
 - Girls do not dive into above-ground pools, shallow areas, etc.
 - Girls swim in supervised areas only.
 - Girls swim only during daylight hours or in a well-lit pool at night.
 - Girls do not swim immediately after eating, when overheated, or when tired.
 - Girls swim at a safe distance from any diving board.
 - Electrical appliances are not used in or near swimming areas.
 - Bottles, glass, and sharp objects are not allowed in swimming area.
 - An emergency telephone is available, whenever possible.
 - Drink water to avoid dehydration.

Swimming Links

- **American Red Cross Swimming and Water Safety program:** www.redcross.org/portal ⇒ Preparing and Getting Trained ⇒ Get Trained ⇒ Swimming and Water Safety ⇒ Learn to Swim
- **Swim America:** www.swimamerica.org
- **USA Swimming:** www.usaswimming.org
- **YMCA Programs for Aquatics:** www.ymca.net/programs/programs_for_aquatics.html
- **State and national parks and forests (may certify swimmers):**
www.ilbean.com/parksearch/us_search.html

Swimming Know-How for Girls

- **Learn swimming strokes.** Before you hit the water, read up about the [five basic strokes](#): freestyle, backstroke, breast-stroke, butterfly, and sidestroke.
- **Create swimming games.** Marco Polo and Find the Penny are popular swimming games. What games can you create?

Swimming Jargon

- **Flip turn:** A tumbling turn in which the swimmer somersaults and twists her body as she approaches the pool wall, and then pushes off the wall with her feet
- **Leg:** One-fourth of a relay swim by four swimmers

Safety Activity Check points available online <http://www.sdgirlscouts.org/safety>

**These Safety Activity Checkpoints supersede the checkpoints found in the retired Safety-wise book.*

- Archery
- Arts and Crafts
- Backpacking
- Bicycling
- Canoeing
- Caving
- Challenge Courses
- Climbing and Rappelling
- Computer/Online Use
- Cross-Country Skiing
- Downhill Skiing and Snowboarding
- Fencing
- Fishing
- Geocaching
- Girl Scout Cookies/Council-Sponsored Product Sale
- Group Camping
- Hayrides
- Hiking
- Horseback Riding
- Ice Fishing
- Ice Skating
- In-Line Skating and Roller Skating
- Kayaking
- Orienteering
- Other Land Sports
- Outdoor Cooking
- Parades and Other Large Group Gatherings
- Rowboating
- Sailing
- Scuba Diving
- Segway
- Skateboarding
- Sledding, Tobogganing, and Snow Tubing
- Snorkeling
- Snowshoeing
- STEM (Science, Engineering, Technology, and Math)
- Surfing
- Swimming
- Theme Parks
- Trip/Travel Camping
- Tubing
- Waterskiing and Wakeboarding
- White-Water Rafting
- Windsurfing



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