



## 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 a common sport and lifestyle in Hawaii, which is not surprising because the sport originated in ancient Polynesia. Surfing is one of the most challenging water sports; however, 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 can 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 surfboards, 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. Refer to the [Swim Test](#) in [Swimming Safety Activity Checkpoints](#).

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

During lessons, even before going in the water, Girl Scouts 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 to cut through the waves, and not getting positioned sideways (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 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 is dangerous to other surfers and swimmers when surfers let go of surfboards).

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

### Learn More

- [Surfline](#)
- [Surfing Handbook](#)
- [International Surfing Association](#)



**Include Girl Scout Members with Disabilities.** Talk to Girl Scout members with disabilities and their caregivers. Ask about needs and accommodations. 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 to ensure they are able to accommodate those with disabilities. Learn about adaptive surfing at [High Fives](#).

**Equity.** Consider the history, culture, and past experiences of the Girl Scout members in your troop that could affect their ability to equally participate in an activity. Work with members and families to understand how an activity is perceived. Ensure that all Girl Scout members and their families feel comfortable and have access to whatever is needed to fully participate, such as proper equipment, prior experiences, and the skills needed to enjoy the activity. See the [Equity section of the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) for general advice about expense.

**Emergency Action Plan (EAP).** Review and document your Emergency Action Plan (EAP) before starting any activity and review it so all are prepared. Think through scenarios of what can go wrong such as an accident, physical injury, missing person, sudden illness, or sudden weather or water emergencies.

### Surfing Checkpoints

**Check swimming ability.** Participants must be strong swimmers. A swim assessment should be conducted before or on the day of the activity. Consult with your Girl Scout council for additional guidance.

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

***Note:** The instructor-to-participant ratio is different from the adult-to-youth ratio found in [Introduction: Standard Safety Guidelines](#). Both ratios must be complied with when 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' abilities and 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 participants.

**Select a safe location.** A location with a soft, sandy, or muddy bottom is best. Choose a location that does not have a sharp-edged or rocky bottom, which can be dangerous. Also, inquire about potential dangerous marine life and rip tides. Keep 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 options.

**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 for 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 certification.

**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](http://SurfLine.com), [17ft.com](http://17ft.com), and [Weather.com](http://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 participants' skill level. Wave heights rely heavily on wind strengths; 2- to 3-foot waves are recommended for beginners. When waves surpass 5 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 members with glasses
- Waterproof sunscreen and lip balm with SPF

### **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. This cord (usually included with a surfboard rental) attaches the surfboard to the surfer's ankle, so that they do not have to swim too far to catch up to the board after a wipeout.

**Recommended Gear**

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

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