



Swimming

Council Approval: Required

Activity Permitted for: D B J C S A

About Swimming

Swimming is a Girl Scout tradition that builds fitness, leadership, and team-building skills. Your troop can swim in pools, water parks, or natural bodies of water such as oceans, rivers, or lakes. Safety is one of the keys to having fun in the water, and so it's important to confirm each swimmer's ability to swim ahead of time, whenever possible. Consult a local parks and recreation department, YMCA, or American Red Cross for swimming lessons. There is also a sample swim assessment provided at the end of this activity checkpoint to document completion of the swim assessment and to categorize swimming ability level.

Learn More

- [YMCA Safety Around Water](#)
- [American Red Cross Water Safety](#)
- [American Red Cross Lifeguard & Water Safety Training](#)
- [American Red Cross Water Safety for Parents and Caregivers](#) (a free, 30-minute online course)
- [USA Swimming](#)
- Marco Polo and Find the Penny are popular swimming games, but you can make up your own, or try these [24 Fun Swimming Pool Games](#)

Include Girl Scout Members with Disabilities. Talk to Girl Scout members with disabilities and their caregivers. Ask about needs and accommodations. Always be sure to contact the location and/or the instructor in advance to ensure they are able to accommodate those with disabilities. For more information, visit [Move United](#) to find out about swimming inclusion and [World Para Swimming](#) to learn about inspiring swimmers of all abilities and learn about water safety for children with special needs.

Equity. Contact your local YMCA or public pool about lessons. 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.



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.

Swimming Checkpoints

Identify lifeguard(s). When using a staffed public facility, lifeguards will be provided. At beaches or waterfronts, make sure a lifeguard will be on duty. For swimming on your own, you will need to recruit a lifeguard. Ask your Girl Scout council for suggestions. At least one lifeguard, certified in American Red Cross Lifeguard Training, YMCA Lifeguard, or with equivalent experience, and one watcher should be present.

Additional lifeguards and watchers may be needed depending on the size of the group; see the Swimming Lifeguard and Watcher Ratios table below.

Identify watchers. One watcher (or “lookout”) is needed for every ten swimmers. Watchers can be 16 years or older. This person assists the group by watching for possible emergencies. Lifeguards and watchers are stationed at separate posts. They stay out of the water, except in emergencies. American Red Cross [Water Safety for Parents and Caregivers](#) (a free, 20-minute online course), YMCA Aquatics Safety Assistant, or similar training is the preferred preparation. Alternatively, the lifeguard may be able to give watchers an orientation. Again, check with your Girl Scout council in advance.

The ratio of lifeguards and watchers to swimmers may need to be increased depending on the number of swimmers in one area, swimming level and ability, Girl Scout members with disabilities, age level and ability to follow instructions, type of swimming activity (instruction, recreation), type of swimming area, weather/water conditions, and rescue equipment available.

Swimming Lifeguard and Watcher Ratios		
Number of Swimmers	Lifeguards	Watchers 1:10 Ratio
1–10	One adult; see more on pools below	1
11–25	One adult; see more on pools below	2–3
26–35	Two lifeguards, at least one is an adult; additional lifeguards may be 16 years of age or older	3–4
36–50	Two lifeguards, at least one is an adult; additional lifeguards may be 16 years of age or older	4–5



- **Pools.** Lifeguards who are 16 years old or older can be used for swimming activities in back yards, hotels, cruise ships, or public pools.
- **Lakes, rivers, streams.** A lifeguard certified in American Red Cross Waterfront Lifeguard course or the equivalent is present for every 25 swimmers, plus one watcher for every 10 swimmers.
- **Ocean beaches.** Youth members swim at open beaches only when lifeguards are on duty. Lifeguards are certified in accordance with local and state norms and standards.
- **Shallow water.** No lifeguard is necessary for wading in calm, shallow water. **Note:** *If water level is typical participants' knee deep or higher, the adult(s) overseeing youth should complete the American Red Cross [Water Safety for Parents and Caregivers](#) training or equivalent experience.*

Clearly identify swimming abilities. These could be indicated, for example, with different colored wristbands to signify beginner, intermediate, and advanced swimmers. Swim assessments can be conducted in advance, or on the day of swimming. The pool operator or lifeguard may determine the type of assessment, based on the skills needed for the conditions at hand. A sample form follows these checkpoints. If swim assessments are not required at the staffed facility you're using, you may defer to the pool operator. Some examples of swim assessments for different conditions:

- In pools, the lifeguard might ask each participant to enter the water slowly, stay close to the edge of the pool, swim from one end to the other, and then float for 30 seconds.
- In lakes, the lifeguard might ask each participant to jump into the water, swim for 50 yards, then float or tread water for one minute.
- In surf, the swimming assessment should be held in advance. The lifeguard might ask each participant to jump into water over their head, swim 100 yards using a combination of freestyle and elementary backstroke, and then tread water for two minutes.

Ensure swimming site safety. Check for the following:

- A posting indicates water quality passes health department tests and sanitation standards.
- Shallow areas are marked "No Diving."
- Diving areas are separate from other swim areas.
- Chlorine levels are tested and maintained daily. Water should be clear.
- The area around the pool is free of clutter.
- No electrical appliances are anywhere near the pool.
- The swimming area should be free of dangerous marine life and clearly marked.
- No sharp, rocky, or heavily shelled beach waters should be chosen, if possible.
- At water parks, do not dive or run. Most water park injuries are from slips and falls.
- Participants should know their physical limits. Observe a water ride before going on. Use extra care on water slides.
- Monitor time in the water. How long should participants swim? Swimmers' ability, weather conditions, and water temperature should be considered. Often, 30-minute time periods are enough.



- Swim only during daylight or in well-lit pools.
- Diving is prohibited in waters of unknown depth or conditions. For all diving, the required water depth extends 10 feet on each side of the board or jumping point. If tides, drought, or other forces affect the water depth, it is checked each time before diving is permitted. Never dive off the side of the diving board.

Safety Gear

For Swimming Pools, ask the pool operator or lifeguard what's available:

- Reaching pole
- Rescue tube
- Backboard
- Ring buoy
- Throw bag with line (typically 30 feet)

For Open Water:

- Paddleboard
- Rescue can
- Kayak
- Rescue gear

Additional Gear:

- Goggles
- Swim cap
- Nose and ear plugs, for those who need them
- Waterproof sunscreen and lip balm



Sample Swim Assessment—Documented Verification of Completion

Swim tests are recommended every year for Girl Scouts participating in any type of aquatic activities including but not limited to pool activity, canoeing, stand-up paddleboarding, etc. Defer to the aquatic facility, instructor, or activity provider; some may not require an assessment, while others may require a more rigorous evaluation.

During sleepaway camp, swim tests are often conducted at the beginning of each week to assess a camper's swimming ability even if they have participated and completed a swim test previously in the year. Please note that sleepaway campers generally need to complete a swim test upon arrival.

This sample assessment may be used when completing any paperwork asking for confirmation of swim level and ability. It documents that a participant has demonstrated the swimming skills listed below. It may be customized by an expert in the conditions or activity type (swimming, canoeing, etc.). Swimmers should swim only up to their ability, as certified by an adult lifeguard or swim instructor.

Participants complete the following requirements to the best of their ability. Instructors, please check the appropriate level and complete the information below:

- Tread water for two minutes while keeping their head above water.
- Swim a minimum of 20 yards in one direction without stopping. Using front crawl (freestyle) while keeping their face in the water and without touching the ground or holding onto the wall.
- ☐ **Beginner/Non-Swimmer.** This swimmer cannot successfully demonstrate or complete the above requirements. A beginner swimmer is only permitted in shallow water or where they can stand comfortably. Non-swimmers must wear a Coast Guard–approved personal flotation device (PFD/lifejacket), always. Consult the facility or lifeguard about whether they should be considered a beginner or non-swimmer.
- ☐ **Intermediate Swimmer.** This swimmer can successfully demonstrate the above requirements in shallow or calm deep water but is considered a cautious swimmer or a swimmer who is not strong. Coast Guard–approved flotation devices (PFD/lifejacket) are optional (unless required by activity), but it is not recommended that anyone at this level participate in high-risk swimming/aquatic activities, such as surfing.
- ☐ **Proficient Swimmer.** This swimmer can successfully demonstrate the above requirements in shallow or deep water; they display strong swimming skills and may participate in most high-risk swimming/aquatic activities. Coast Guard–approved flotation devices (PFD/lifejacket) are not required (unless required by activity).

Please note that some activities may require a more advanced assessment.

On (today's date) _____, (participant's name) _____

has earned the above checked swim level. This test is valid for one year from the date of this test.

Instructor's Printed Name: _____ Instructor's Signature: _____

Instructor's Title: _____