

Canoeing



About Canoeing

Canoeing is a great team-building exercise and a fun way to enjoy the outdoors. Whether you're playing games on a pond or taking a whitewater trip on a river, there's a canoeing option for everyone. Canoeists sit on a seat or kneel in the canoe and use a paddle to propel their boat. Most canoes are for two people, but some canoes can hold up to 12. Canoes that are 15 feet or shorter should hold no more than two paddlers with no passengers.

Currents, waves, rapids, and wind affect conditions. Those conditions and type of canoe will determine what is appropriate for your troop. See the Paddling and Rowing Sports—Master Progression Chart for details. Be sure all participants have the training and experience to participate in the level expected. Class III rapids require prior council approval. Participants may be Cadettes and older who have demonstrated and documented prior experience of progression.

Whitewater canoeing can only be done on water that has been run and rated, and only up to Class III difficulty, as defined by the American version of the [International Scale of River Difficulty](#).

Learn More:

- [American Canoe Association](#)
- [Canoe and Kayak magazine](#)
- Interactive maps of places to go: [Paddling.com](#) and [American Whitewater](#)

Council Approval: Required Activity

Permitted For: *D B J C S A

Not Recommended For: *Daisies, except with an experienced adult in each canoe and on flat water.

Training: One adult with small watercraft and basic water rescue required for activity.

Certificate of Insurance (COI) is required from vendor providing this activity if renting or using a guide. Visit <https://www.girlscoutsni.org/resources/#COI> to check list of the COIs on file or to request one.

Waiver required and attached to this Safety Activity Check point.

[Troop Trip Travel Form](#) may need to be completed.

- Instructional videos about canoeing strokes: [Paddling.com](https://www.paddling.com)

Include Girl Scout Members with Disabilities

Talk to Girl Scout members with disabilities and their caregivers and ask about needs and accommodations. Contact the canoeing instructor or boating facility in advance to ask about accommodating people with disabilities.

Equity

In addition to physical and social-emotional disabilities 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 that they have access to whatever is needed to fully participate such as the proper equipment, prior experiences and skills needed to enjoy the activity.

Additional Resources:

- See [Disabled Sports USA](https://www.disabledsportsusa.org) to find out about inclusion in canoeing.
- Check out [Paralympic.org](https://www.paralympic.org) for inspiring stories of paddlers with disabilities.

Safety Activity Checkpoints

Standard Safety Guidelines. Refer to the Standard Safety Guidelines at the beginning of Safety Activity Checkpoints which apply to all Girl Scout gatherings and activities. When the adult-to-girl ratio, or other safety parameters, are stricter for a specific activity than in the Standard Safety Guidelines always follow the stricter parameters in the activity chapter.

COVID-19 Guidelines. Review the Coronavirus Safety in Girl Scouts section under the Standard Safety Guidelines. Be certain to consult your council's specific COVID-19 guidance which can be accessed under the same section. Always call ahead to the vendor, property or facility involved to check for their COVID-19 safety requirements as you prepare to take girls for this activity.

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 canoer, a canoe capsizing, or sudden illness.

Confirm participants are proven swimmers. Success on the water depends on comfort and ability in the water. Conduct a swimming test in advance. See "Swimming" safety activity checkpoints for samples or ask your instructor for guidelines. If a swimming test is not possible,

presume all participants are non-swimmers. Only strong swimmers are approved for whitewater canoeing.

All participants must wear a U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket. Type III life jackets are recommended and should fit according to weight and height specifications. Inspect life jackets to ensure that they are in good condition and contain no tears.

Practice recovery procedures. The instructor demonstrates self-recovery and righting techniques. Girls learn and practice these skills. This will help prevent being disoriented or frightened if they end up in the water and provides important skills.

Verify instructor knowledge and experience. The skill level of the adults must be higher than the difficulty of the intended canoeing type.

At least one adult instructor or guide should be American Canoe Association (ACA) Canoe Level 1 Instructor or higher; or ACA Paddle Sports Safety Facilitator in canoeing; or Small Craft Safety Certified-Canoeing; or ARC Lifeguarding with Waterfront Module; – or have the *demonstrated equivalent experience* of such credentials.

The instructor or guide must be able to effectively communicate commands and instructions.

Ensure that the instructor or guide reviews site-specific emergency techniques. For example, whitewater canoeists are instructed in how to float through rapids, how to breathe while swimming in rapids, and how to swim to shore. The lead instructor or guide must have firsthand knowledge of the hazards and conditions of the location being used.

Check lifeguard qualifications. If using lifeguards to oversee canoeing, confirm that they have the proper training, experience, and rescue equipment for the body of water and the specific watercraft involved.

Be aware of the lifeguard’s position. A stationary lifeguard can only be used when canoeing is taking place on flat water close to shore. For large bodies of water or rivers, the lifeguard must be in a canoe and positioned with the group.

Arrange for watchers/helpers. An adult watcher or skilled helper is required for certain size groups. See the chart below. This person should have basic skills in the activity and supports the group by reinforcing instructions. They also watch for possible emergencies and help the instructor with rescues if needed. Basic water rescue, small craft safety, or similar training is the preferred preparation. Consult the instructor for specific watcher/helper qualifications.

Select a safe site. Don’t paddle in unknown areas. Know the locations of all shipping channels. Do not canoe more than one mile from the nearest shore. Make sure of the following:

Avoid busy channels when possible. If you must cross them, do so at a 90-degree angle to the channel traffic. Also avoid surf zones and areas with standing waves unless they are part of planned whitewater canoeing.

On long passages, boats should stay close enough together that a group decision can be made if wind and water conditions change.

Be aware of possible changes in water level, due to tides or dam releases, and how these affect water conditions.

Avoid hazards such as strainers, sieves, hydraulics, waterfalls, bridges, dams, fences, and low power lines. Rapids must be avoided unless part of a planned whitewater route.

Research water conditions and select the right boats for participant skill level. Consider weather and water conditions, weight of passengers, and equipment to be carried. Make sure:

- The craft weight and capacity are not exceeded. Many boats have a plate near the stern (back), showing these maximums.
- Canoes that are 15 feet or shorter hold no more than two people.
- You are aware of the type of canoe needed for the water to be used.
- Canoes are not overloaded with gear, and gear is distributed evenly among paddlers.

Know universal signals. Whistle and visual signals are used to pass messages or call for help. Learn them at [Paddle Education](#).

File a float plan. If participating in a long-distance trip, file a float plan with a reliable person who will notify authorities should your group not return on time.

Get a weather and wind report. Check [Weather.com](#) or other reliable weather sources, including the “boat and beach” forecast, which covers wind speed, water temperature, and wave height. Be prepared with a backup plan or postpone the activity if weather prevents the outing.

Review what to do in a storm. If thunder is heard or lightning seen, get everyone off the water immediately. Do not return until at least 30 minutes have passed since the last evidence of the storm. If you cannot get to shore, secure all loose gear, keep a sharp lookout for other boats and obstructions, head into the wind at a 45-degree angle, and stay low. If possible, do not touch metal or water, when lightning is possible.

Use the buddy system. Instruct girls to keep their boat within sight of at least one other boat. Use the buddy system on the water with boats the same as you would on land.

Transport boats safely. Use car-top racks or trailers specifically designed for canoes. Secure boats with two lines across the top (one at each end), and with lines at the bow and the stern. Drivers must have prior experience hauling trailers.

Report accidents. Notify marine law enforcement or your council as appropriate.

Privately-owned Canoes.

Ensure that the owner/operator:

- Is a knowledgeable adult with the understanding and ability to take the responsibility of Girl Scouts’ safety and well-being.
- Agrees to follow the Safety Activity Checkpoints relevant to the activity.
- Maintains the vessel in accordance with the Safety Activity Checkpoints.
- Coordinates with the activity leader to confirm the required safety gear is available for all participants, and that the gear meets the specifications of authorities for the local jurisdiction.

- Meets Coast Guard and/or local jurisdiction requirements.
- Maintains insurance and registration as required by law in their jurisdiction.

Safety Gear

- Canoes suitable for the type of water, with proper flotation, and air bag, if used, checked before use
- Paddles appropriate size and style for the canoeist and the type of canoeing
- Emergency sound device, such as a whistle, compressed air horn, or VHF radio on navigable waters
- U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket for each paddler. Type III life jackets are recommended and should fit according to weight and height specifications.
- Rescue gear appropriate for boat type and conditions (ask your instructor), such as:
 - Throw bag or throw line.
 - Waist-mounted tow system (lightweight rope which attaches to towing person and to towed boat)
 - Rescue sling to get participants back into a boat.
 - Designated rescue craft, such as a paddleboard or chase boat
 - Any other items required by the boating jurisdiction in which girls will paddle.
- Emergency gear appropriate for the canoeing type and distance from shore, such as:
 - Emergency repair kit: duct tape or electrical tape, screwdriver, pliers
 - Spare paddle, waterproof first aid kit, repair kit, and standard safety equipment, including signaling equipment.
- Emergency survival packet: raincoat, waterproof matches, lightweight/space blanket, hat, pocket-knife, 10-foot by 10-foot tarp, rope, food, and appropriate liquids. Food and water bottles should be secured in the boat.
- A safety helmet with a strong, flexible plastic shell and chin strap, as well as openings for drainage, worn when paddling in waters that are Class II or III
- Bailer (a scoop for removing water from a boat)
- A waterproof flashlight
- A painter (a strong line at the bow used for securing the canoe that is at least half the length of the boat)
- 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.
- Compass, waterproof chart, VHF marine radio, and other essentials for extended trips
- Locking blade knife carried by instructor/guide/qualified adult in their life jacket or other readily accessible place, and a line for towing or rescue.

Note that canoeing at night may require additional gear; consult your instructor.

**Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois
Permission, Waiver and Release of Liability for Canoeing
and/or Kayaking**

- This two page form is a waiver and release of liability contract between Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois and the participants. Please read it carefully.
- This two page form must be read and signed by the parent or legal guardian of the participant in order for the participant to participate in the activity listed. The form is to be turned in to the troop leader or he/her designee.
- Participants must be old enough to understand the safety procedures so as not to endanger themselves or others.

Participant Name _____ Age _____ GS Level _____

Address _____ Zip _____

Parent Name _____ Phone _____

Email Address _____

Emergency Contact _____ Phone _____

Participation Date(s) _____ Year _____

Please list any allergies the participant has (food, nature, medications, etc.). _____

Please list any restrictions of participant that we should be aware of as she participates in this activity. _____

Please list any medications the participant will have with her. _____

Activity - Canoeing/kayaking activities may take place on just about any body of water (lake, stream, or river) so long as proper equipment, instruction, safety precautions are used and *Girl Scout Safety Activity Checkpoints* are followed. Girl Scouts may canoe/kayak on water that has been rated up to Class III difficulty, depending on the age and ability of the participants. Participants must be able to work as a team to lift, carry and paddle the canoe/kayak. Participants are required to wear approved life jackets and safety gear for the type of tripped planned.



Clothing - Participants should be wearing clothing that is appropriate for the type of trip that is planned. Basic gear would include:

- Layered clothing that is easily changeable, depending on temperatures and that protects participant from the sun.
- Appropriate footwear, such as boat shoes, closed-toed and nonslip hiking/sport sandals with heel strap, or water shoes (no flip-flops).
- Waterproof sunscreen (SPF of at least 15).
- Hat and sunglasses.

Additional Activity Information, if any: _____

I acknowledge that canoeing and/or kayaking activity is a test of a person's physical and mental limits and carries with it the potential for death, serious injury and property loss. The risks include, but are not limited to, those caused by terrain, facilities, temperature, acts of God, weather, condition of participants, equipment, vehicular traffic, actions of other people including, but not limited to, participants, facilitators, volunteers and spectators. These risks are not only inherent to the participants, but also present for volunteers. I hereby assume all of the risks of participating and/or volunteering in this activity. I realize that liability may arise from negligence or carelessness on the part of the person or entities being release, from dangerous or defective equipment or property owned, maintained or controlled by them or because of their possible liability without fault.

I certify that I am physically and mentally fit to participate in this Canoeing and/or Kayaking activity. I acknowledge that this Permission, Waiver and Release of Liability for Canoeing and/or Kayaking will be used by Girl Scout staff, activity facilitators or their assignees of the activity and it will govern my daughter's actions and responsibilities at the activity. I acknowledge that I must follow the directions and safety rules of the activity and the activity may be cancelled if I do not follow the safety instructions and policies or if my behavior endangers myself or the group.

In consideration of my participation in this program, I hereby take action for myself, my executors, administrators, heirs, next of kin, successors, and assigns as follows: (A) Waive, Release and Discharge from any and all liability for my death, disability, personal injury, property damage, property theft or actions of any kind which may hereafter occur to me including my traveling to and from this program, THE FOLLOWING ENTITIES OR PERSONS: _____; their directors, officers, employees, volunteers, facilitators, representative, and agents. (B) Indemnify and Hold Harmless, and Agree Not To Sue the entities or persons mentioned in this paragraph from any and all liabilities or claims made as a result of participation in this program, whether caused by the negligence of releases or otherwise. I hereby consent to receive medical treatment that may be deemed advisable in the event of injury, accident and/or illness during this program.

The Permission, Waiver and Release of Liability for Canoeing and/or Kayaking shall be construed broadly to provide a release and waiver to the maximum extent permissible under applicable law. I acknowledge that this Accident Waiver and Release of Liability form will be used by the persons or entities being release in the activity listed above and that it will govern my actions and responsibilities in said activity.

I hereby certify that I have read this document; read the GSUSA Canoeing and/or Kayaking Safety Activity Checkpoint(s) and, I, understand its content. I am aware that this is a release of liability as well as a contract and I sign it of my own free will.

Print Participant's Name Age Signature (if under 18 years old,
Parent/Guardian must also sign) Date

Parent/Guardian Waiver for Minors (Under 18 years old)

I give permission for my daughter to participate in this Canoeing and/or Kayaking activity. I understand that there are inherent risks of injury or disability in this activity. I further understand that my daughter must follow the directions and safety rules of the activity. I have reviewed the GSUSA Canoeing and/or Kayaking Safety Activity Checkpoint(s). I also understand that the activity may be cancelled if my daughter does not follow safety instructions and policies and/or my daughter's behavior endangers herself or the group.

The undersigned parent and/or legal guardian does hereby represent that he/she is, in fact, acting in such capacity and is fully responsible and agrees to save and hold harmless and indemnify each and all of the parties referred to above from all liability, loss, cost, claim or damage whatsoever which may be imposed upon said parties because of any defect in or lack of such capacity to so act and release said parties on behalf of the minor and the parents or legal guardian.

Print Participant's Name Age Signature of Parent/Guardian Date

If you have any questions, please contact _____

For girls not currently registered as Girl Scouts: I understand my daughter is not covered by Girl Scouts of the USA Activity Insurance, but she has my permission to participate in this activity.

Yes _____ No _____ Date _____ Signature of Parent _____