

Kayaking



Council Approval: Required

Activity Permitted For: B J C S A

Not Recommended For: Daisies

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 Checkpoints.

[Troop Trip Travel](#) Form may need to be completed. See form for details.

Reference Progression Chart for ratios and other details.

About Kayaking

Virtually any body of water is suitable for certain types of kayaking. Start with flat water with little or no current, and progress to more advanced conditions. Kayaks come in a variety of shapes and sizes, designed for different types of water and paddler skill levels. “Sit on top” kayaks are simple, stable boats that are great for beginners. “Decked” or “sit inside” kayaks are covered by a deck and spray skirt; the paddler sits inside with legs extended. All involve moving a kayak across water using a double-bladed paddle, and combine exercise, transportation, and fun!

Your troop can kayak on bays, rivers, lakes, and oceans. Currents, waves, rapids, and wind affect conditions. Those conditions and type of boat will determine what is appropriate for your troop. Be sure all participants have the training and experience to participate in the level expected.

Learn More:

- Interactive maps of places to go: [Paddling.com](#) and [American Whitewater](#)
- [International Scale of River Difficulty](#)
- Basic interpretation of rapids and river difficulty: [ThoughtCo.com](#)
- About canoeing, kayaking, and standup paddle boarding: [American Canoe Association](#)
- Info on gear selection and how-to: [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 kayaking instructor 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](#) to find out about inclusion in kayaking.

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 girl, missing girl, or sudden illness.

Ensure participants are strong swimmers. Success on the water depends on comfort and ability in the water. Conduct a swimming test in advance. See the "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.

Ensure all paddlers 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 should demonstrate self-recovery and righting techniques, and girls should learn and practice these skills. This will help prevent their becoming disoriented or frightened if they end up in the water.

Paddlers must be trained on how to perform wet exits and must be able to execute one successfully before being allowed to use a decked kayak. If spray skirts are used, wet exits must be performed before the outing can begin.

Practices appropriate self-rescue and reentry techniques. If kayaking in cold water, paddlers should learn cold water survival techniques and treatment for hypothermia.

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

Ensure the instructor/guide will review site-specific emergency techniques for the type of craft used. For example, whitewater kayakers are instructed in how to float through rapids, how to breathe while swimming in rapids, and how to swim to shore.

Ensure the lead instructor/guide has firsthand knowledge of the hazards and conditions of the location and type of boat being used.

You'll want to verify that at least one adult instructor/guide is certified by the American Canoe Association, or other sponsoring organization approved by your council. Certifications must be appropriate for the activity.

Verify lifeguard qualifications and experience. Ensure lifeguards have current certification in American Red Cross (ARC) Lifeguarding with Waterfront Module, or its equivalent.

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 canoeing skills. They support 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.

Keep weight evenly distributed. Keeping gear and fellow paddlers evenly distributed makes the boat safer and easier to paddle.

Select a safe site. Do not paddle in unknown areas. Know the locations of all shipping channels. Do not kayak farther than one mile from the nearest shore.

Avoid busy channels when possible. If you must cross them, do so at a 90-degree angle to the channel traffic.

Avoid surf zones and areas with standing waves unless they're part of planned whitewater kayaking.

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

Only perform this activity on water that has been run and rated and up to Class III difficulty, as defined by the American version of the [International Scale of River Difficulty](#).

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 that:

Watch that kayak weight and capacity are not exceeded. Many boats have a plate near the stern (back), showing these maximums.

Use the type of kayak needed for the water conditions present, and ensure the kayak is sized for the person(s) using it.

Ensure kayaks are not overloaded with gear. Gear should be distributed evenly with 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.

On the Day of Paddling or Rowing:

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.

Review self-rescue techniques. See above.

Use the buddy system. Instruct girls to keep sight of at least one other boat at all times.

Transport boats safely. Use car-top racks or trailers specifically designed for kayaks. 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, if appropriate.

Safety Gear

Some gear will depend on the type of kayaking, or on water conditions. Check with your instructor.

- U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket (Type III life jackets recommended and should fit according to weight and height specifications)
- Kayak sized appropriately for the participants and suitable for the type of water.
- Kayaks with proper flotation and any air bags checked before use (if float bags are used, make sure they are secured to kayak)
- Double-bladed paddle in the appropriate size and style for the activity and person using them (ask instructor about proper fit)
- Emergency sound device, such as a whistle, compressed air horn, or VHF radio
- Rescue gear appropriate for kayak type and conditions (ask your instructor), such as:

- At least one graspable and throw able Coast Guard approved personal flotation device, throw bag, or throw line.
- Waist-mounted tow system (lightweight rope which attaches to towing person and to towed boat); should be one tow system for every three to four kayaks.
- Emergency gear appropriate for the kayaking type and distance from shore, such as:
 - Emergency repair kit: duct tape or electrical tape, screwdriver, pliers, spare plugs
 - Spare paddle, first aid kit, repair kit, and standard safety equipment, like 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 strong, flexible plastic shell and chin strap, as well as openings for drainage should be worn when:
 - Paddling in waters that are Class II or III
 - Paddling in or near sea caves
 - Bailer (a scoop or sponge for removing water from a boat) secured to the kayak.

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 _____