

Animal Interaction



Includes:

- All animal tourism and interaction
- Farm animals and home pets
- Wild animals (e.g., dolphin rides)
- Rescue, shelter, and therapy animals

Council Approval: Not Required

Activity Permitted For: D B J C S A

Certificate of Insurance (COI): Required from vendor providing this activity. Visit

<https://www.girlscoutsni.org/resources#COI> to check list of the COIs on file or to request one.

Waiver: Required. Attached to Safety Activity Checkpoint

About Animal Interaction

Planned interaction with animals is a popular and desired activity for many Girl Scouts, from petting zoos to therapy dogs to rescue animals. Through these activities, girls can learn about animals and have memorable experiences.

Unplanned interaction with animals can occur during other activities, such as hiking. Prepare for those ahead so girls know that not interacting with an animal will provide both safety and a valuable learning opportunity.

This activity primarily focuses on planned animal interaction under a controlled environment, including all educational programs, wildlife tourism, and farm animals.

Learn More:

- [International Union for the Conservation of Nature](#)
- Benefits of interacting with animals: [UVA School of Medicine study](#)
- Child safety around animals: [HealthyChildren.org](#)

Animal Safety and Health Reminders

Partner with reputable organizations. Ensuring they have liability insurance helps credibility.

Assess your girls. Ensure they are mature enough to follow rules and exercise self-control. Do not allow children under age five to interact with reptiles, amphibians, baby chicks, ducklings, or petting zoo animals (per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

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 or adult, missing girl, or sudden illness.

Control their interaction. Let girls know that it's not okay to tease, hurt, or play roughly with any animal.

Keep it clean. Make sure hands are washed before and after contact with animals, animal bedding, or waste.

Be vigilant. Treat bites or scratches according to the first-aider's training to avoid infection. Report animal aggression, bites, or other concerns to the authorities and to your council.

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 in advance to confirm that they can accommodate those 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.

Safety Activity Checkpoints

Review some basic animal interaction rules:

- Do not pet or otherwise disturb an animal that is sleeping or eating.
- Stay away from an animal's food.
- Do not tease or abuse an animal.
- Watch for warning signs like growling or hissing.
- Never pet an unfamiliar dog, cat, or other animal.
- Be cautious about touching animals, such as puppies and kittens, within view of their mother.

In addition, in the case of dogs for example, do not run when approached by an unfamiliar one. Running may make the dog aggressive. Instead, slowly back away, avoid sudden movements, and avoid direct eye contact, but keep the dog within view.

Pets, Therapy Animals, and Rescue Shelters

Protect girls as well as hosts' house pets. This should be taken into consideration during meetings, overnights, and activities. Secure all pets out of reach when girls are present.

Certified, trained service animals like guide or hearing dogs must be welcomed. Please be welcoming and follow their handler's instruction regarding petting or engaging with them.

Follow rules. These are often provided by animal rescue facilities and shelters.

Supervise girls closely. Watch the girls and practice the buddy system.

Be clean. Take care to wash hands and sanitize footwear to protect girls from disease and to prevent spreading disease from one animal to another.

Make it a learning experience. Talk to girls and research the root causes that lead to animals being in shelters. Brainstorm Take Action projects the troop might plan to help.

Avoid these activities while at the rescue or shelter:

- Eating or drinking
- Sitting or playing on the ground
- Feeding the animals, unless supervised by shelter’s personnel and animal contact is controlled with barriers.
- Contact with animals if you or the animal has an open wound.
- Contact with animal waste.

Petting Zoos and Animal Ambassadors

- Follow rules provided by the zoo.
- Take care to wash hands and sanitize footwear, as directed.
- Do not handle bedding, food, water, or manure unless trained to do so.

Drive-Through Zoos and Parks

- Drive vehicles with secure roofs and with doors and windows that fully close.
- Keep windows rolled up.
- Do not get out of the vehicle.

Swimming with Dolphins and Other Interactive Experiences

- Choose a safe and responsible animal organization. See the “Selecting a Partner Organization” section below.
- Review safety management with the organization before visiting the site.
- Make sure predators are secured or separated from girls.
- Contact your council for specific approval and guidance for wolf, big cat, shark, or similar interactions.
- Follow any related safety activity checkpoints. For example, follow the swimming checkpoints when swimming with dolphins.

Farm Animals and Husbandry

- Ask permission before entering a farm or barnyard.
- Ask if there are areas to avoid.
- Get an orientation from an on-site expert. Learn and follow their safety rules.
- See the safety activity checkpoints for horseback riding if you will work with or ride horses.

Wild Animals

- Learn about the animals that live in the area you frequent or will visit.
- Never approach wild animals. Generally, animals will not attack or bite if left alone.
- Back away if you come across baby animals and assume that there is a protective mother nearby. Backing away protects you and the babies.
- Report animals that appear sick or that behave strangely to the authorities.
- Take special care in snake country:
 - Do not stick your hand or foot in places you can’t see.
 - Wear closed-toed shoes.

- Use a flashlight when walking at nights to avoid stepping on a snake.
- Do not handle snakes, even if you think they are dead.
- Back away slowly if you encounter a snake.
- Never feed wild animals.
- Store food well away from tents or cabins and out of the reach of animals. If the site is in bear country, check with local authorities on precautions to take, and ask if a bear-proof canister is required for food.

Choosing Partner Organizations

Select those that have visitor safety and animal well-being as top priorities.

For visitor safety, look for organizations that:

- Provide handwashing stations,
- Provide an orientation or training on safety rules,
- Supervise visitors,
- Limit visits so that animals do not get overwhelmed,
- Keep the environment clean, especially with manure picked up,
- Have food stations for visitors that are separate from animal enclosures.

For animal well-being, look for organizations that:

- Keep animals healthy and cared for with food, clean water, and a sheltered place to rest,
- Do not have animals that sway or pace in their enclosures, as these behaviors can be signs of stress.
- Keep exotic or wild animals only while they recover or because they can't be reintroduced into the wild
- Do not engage in the commercial trade of animals or animal parts,
- Do not breed animals and have measures in place to prevent breeding, unless the animals are part of an authorized release program,
- Do not take in more animals than they can humanely handle,
- Do not use animals for entertainment, forcing animals to perform acts such as rides, shows, or tricks,
- Operate in the best interest of the animals, rather than for profit,
- Do not allow venomous animals to be handled.

Note: Be wary of places that claim to be sanctuaries, especially those overseas. They often operate for profit and are likely to exploit animals. Wildlife tourism sites, including those that offer elephant rides, the opportunity to hold newborn cubs, or the chance to pet tigers, are also potentially exploitive and dangerous. Investigate these beforehand at the [Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries](#) or [WASP](#). Ethical tour operators can be found [here](#).

Help girls learn about animal exploitation in the cub petting or elephant riding industries. Share [this National Geographic article](#) that explains why girls may want to forgo activities that include wild animal interaction.

- *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.*
- *Animal Interaction is permitted for all levels of Girl Scouts.*

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 (animal, 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. _____

NAME OF FACILITY FOR ANIMAL INTERACTION _____

Activity: These facilities may or MAY NOT owned or operated by Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois.

Note:

- **Wash your hands well before and after touching animals.**
- **Do not pet or otherwise disturb an animal that is sleeping or eating.**
- **Stay away from an animals food.**
- **Do not tease or abuse an animal.**
- **Watch for warning signs the animal is agitated.**
- **Never pet an unfamiliar dog, cat or other animal.**
- **Be cautious about touching animals such as puppies and kittens within view of their mothers.**



Additional Activity Information, if any: _____

I acknowledge that this Animal interaction 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. I understand that, as with most animals, they may react in an unpredictable way to sounds, sudden movements, people, or other animals that could result in injuries to people 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 Animal Interaction activity. I acknowledge that this Permission, Waiver and Release of Liability for Animal Interaction Activities 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: _____ Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois ; 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 Animal Interaction Activities 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; the GSUSA Animal Interaction Safety Activity Checkpoint; 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 Animal Interaction 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 Animal Interaction Safety Activity Checkpoint. 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 _____