

## Whitewater Rafting



### About Whitewater Rafting

Whitewater rafting is a thrilling experience for challenge-seeking Girl Scouts, as well as those who just love the outdoors. Rafts come in a variety of styles and lengths, usually 11 to 20 feet long, seating four to twelve rafters. You will need to find a reputable outfitter to arrange the trip. Ask your council about places and outfitters in your area. A river guide will come with you and provide instruction, steering, and coaching. They will know the river well and be able to perform rescues, if needed.

Rafting should only be done on rivers that have been run and rated, and only up to Class IV. It is important to understand the International Scale of River Difficulty or Whitewater Classification System. Be sure all participants have the training and experience to participate in the level expected. Be sure your guide has run the leg of the river before. See the Progression of Rafting Types with Guide Ratios chart for the types of whitewater Girl Scouts may run, by program level.

### The Whitewater Classification System:

**Class I (Easy):** Moving water with small disturbances on the surface and a few small waves; poses little to no danger to swimmers.

**Class II (Novice/Beginner):** Faster-moving water with easily avoided rocks, holes, and waves; danger to swimmers is still slight but care must be taken.

**Class III (Intermediate):** Fast-moving water containing various rocks, holes, currents, and waves that require skillful maneuvering to avoid; swimmers could be at risk and may require help.

**Council Approval:** Required  
**Activity Permitted For:** \* B (Class I-II rapids), J (Class I-III rapids), C S A (Class I-IV rapids).  
**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/resource/#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.

**Class IV (Advanced):** Strong rapids, large waves, big holes, unpredictable currents, and dangerous obstructions requiring multiple maneuvers to get through or around; swimmers at risk and will require help to be rescued.

**Class V (Expert):** All characteristics of Class IV with the added danger of being longer and containing more continuous features that may not be avoided; serious risk to swimmers, others may be of no help.

**Class VI (non-runnable):** Only a team of experts who carefully plan every aspect of this expedition would have hope of surviving these rivers and rapids.

### **Learn More:**

- Interactive map of places to go and a list of rivers: [American Whitewater](#)
- Tips for a first whitewater rafting trip: [The Clymb](#)
- Whitewater rafting terms: [Pinnacle Travel](#)

### **Include Girl Scout Members with Disabilities**

Talk to Girl Scout members with disabilities and their caregivers and ask about needs and accommodations. Contact the outfitter in advance to ask about accommodating people with disabilities.

[Disabled Sports USA](#) lists programs available nationwide, plus general information about adaptive rafting. And the blog of the [National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability Endless CapABILITIES](#) offers encouragement for paddlers 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**

**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, girl or adult falling overboard, 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 “Swimming” safety activity checkpoints for samples or ask your outfitter for guidelines.

**All rafters 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.

**All whitewater rafters must wear a helmet.**

**Ensure the skill level of the adults is higher than the difficulty of the intended activity.**

**Verify instructor knowledge and experience.** Make sure the instructor or guide has certification from a formal training program, such as the American Canoe Association’s rafting program or the International Rafting Federation. The guide needs to be able to effectively communicate commands and instructions. Also, important:

- An instructor can demonstrate self-recovery and righting techniques for the type of trip. (Girls should learn and practice these skills when possible.)
- A guide should review site-specific emergency techniques and help rafters learn how to float through rapids, how to breathe while swimming in rapids, and how to swim to shore.
- The lead instructor or guide has firsthand knowledge of the hazards and conditions of the location and type of boat being used.
- At least one guide has documented training and experience guiding in the type of river being run and has run the river in advance.
- The guide subscribes to the American Whitewater Safety Code.

**Select durable rafts.** Make sure the outfitter uses rafts that:

- Are of heavy-duty construction,
- Have at least four air compartments,
- Have an adequate number of large D-rings securely attached to the sides,
- Have snug hand lines along the sides,
- Are not loaded beyond capacity of participants or gear.

**Select a safe site:**

- Do not paddle in unknown areas.
- Only raft on water that has been run and rated and up to Class IV 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.

**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 Rafting:**

**Get a weather and wind report.** Check with your outfitter about expected weather and river flow. 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.

**Transport boats safely.** Use car-top racks or trailers specifically designed for the type of craft. 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.

**Safety Gear**

The gear you will need depends on the type of trip, water conditions, and weather expected. Check with your outfitter.

- U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket for each person (Type III life jackets recommended and should fit according to weight and height specifications)
- Raft sized appropriately for the participants and suitable for the type of rapids.
- Paddles of the style and size required for the activity and person using them.
- Emergency sound device, such as a whistle, compressed air horn, or VHF radio on navigable waters
- 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 (boats 16 feet or longer)

Rescue and emergency gear appropriate for boat type and conditions, such as:

- A throw bag or throw line.
- Raft repair kit
- Spare paddle, first aid 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 for each person with a strong, flexible plastic shell and chin strap, as well as openings for when rafting in waters that are Class II or higher
- Protective clothing (wet suit or dry suit) worn when rafting in water below 70 degrees Fahrenheit (when water is warmer, wear layered, non-cotton clothing; store any extra clothing in a waterproof bag)
- Bailer (a scoop for removing water from a boat) or foot pump if the boat is not self-bailing.
- Secure, closed-toe hiking/sport sandals or water shoes, or other non-slip footwear (old sneakers are fine), no flip flops or loose slip-on water moccasins)
- Eyeglass keepers or goggles for those who need them.
- Dry bags and/or waterproof containers to keep gear dry on extended trips; encourage girls to pack wisely (do not overload rafts)
- Compass, waterproof chart, and other essentials for extended trips
- Locking blade knife carried by river guide in their life jacket or other readily accessible place.
- Any other items required by the boating jurisdiction in which girls will raft.



**Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois**  
**Permission, Waiver and Release of Liability for Whitewater Rafting**

- *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** – Whitewater Rafting 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 do Whitewater Rafting 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 boat. 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 Whitewater Rafting 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 Whitewater Rafting activity. I acknowledge that this Permission, Waiver and Release of Liability for Whitewater Rafting 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 Whitewater Rafting 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; 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 Whitewater Rafting 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 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 \_\_\_\_\_