



**Council Approval:** Not Required

**Certificate of Insurance (COI):** Required from vendor providing this activity for Council Approval. Visit [GSNI's webpage](#) for information on requesting a COI from the venue.

**Activity Permitted for:** D B J C S A

Activity Waiver: Visit the [GSNI Animal Interaction SAC File](#) for the Animal Interaction Waiver.

**Includes:**

- All animal tourism and interaction
- Farm animals and home pets
- Equestrian activities, including horseback riding, trail rides, pony rides, and horse-drawn rides. See [Horseback Riding Safety Activity Checkpoints](#)
- Wild animals
- Rescue, shelter, and therapy animals

## About Animal Interaction

Planned interaction with animals is a popular and desired activity for many Girl Scouts, from petting zoos to therapy dogs and rescue animals. Through these activities they 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

- Child Safety Around Animals: [HealthyChildren.org](#)

### Animal Safety and Health Reminders

- **Partner with reputable organizations.** Ensuring they have liability insurance helps credibility.
- **Assess your group.** 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 pet zoo animals (per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).
- **Control their interaction.** Let everyone know that it is 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.
- **First Aid:** All troops should provide one adult volunteer certified in Adult and Pediatric First Aid/CPR/AED.

**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 instructors in advance to ensure they are able to accommodate those with disabilities.

**Equity.** 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. Recognize that Girl Scouts may have various levels of exposure to and experience with animals. They may also have different cultural or personal perspectives on the keeping of animals on farms, in zoos, or in other facilities. Remind your troop that there should be no judgment as everyone learns together. See the Equity section of the [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) for general advice about expense,

**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.

## Animal Interaction Checkpoints

### Review basic rules for animal interaction:

- 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. If an animal is with its owner, ask first before petting.
- Be cautious about touching young 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 dog. Running may make the dog anxious and aggressive. Instead, stay calm. Slowly back away, avoid sudden movements, and avoid direct eye contact, but keep the dog within view.

### Pets, Therapy Animals, and Rescue Shelters

- **Protect participants as well as hosts' house pets.** This should be taken into consideration during meetings, overnights, and activities. Secure all pets out of reach when Girl Scouts are present.
- **Trained service animals, such as guide or hearing dogs, must be welcomed.** When engaging with service animals, be welcoming and follow the handler's instructions regarding petting or engaging with them.
- **Follow the rules.** These are often provided by the animal rescue facility or shelter.
- **Supervise closely.** Watch the group and practice the buddy system.
- **Be clean.** Take care to wash hands and sanitize footwear to protect participants from disease and to prevent spreading disease from one animal to another.
- **Make it a learning experience.** Talk to the group and research the root causes that lead to animals being in shelters. Brainstorm Take Action projects the troop might be able to do 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 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 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 “Choosing a Partner Organization” section below.
- Review safety management with the organization before visiting the site.
- Make sure predators are secured or separated from the group.
- 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 [Swimming Safety Activity 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 [Horseback Riding Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) 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 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 night 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 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 bearproof canister is required for food.

## Choosing Partner Organizations

Select partner organizations 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 animals do not get overwhelmed.
- Keep the environment clean, especially manure pick-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 or force 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](#). Ethical tour operators can be found [here](#).*