



**Council Approval:** 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

For slacklining, see [Climbing and Rappelling](#) checkpoints.

If visiting a vendor providing challenge courses, staff facilitating the activity must be certified in challenge courses through Professional Rope Course Association, ACCT, [Experiential Systems](#), or a GSUSA approved organization.

### Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois' Property Specifications:

**New Horizons High Ropes Course:** For participation on Camp McCormick's high ropes course, climbers must be Girl Scout Juniors (4<sup>th</sup> grade) and older. Climbers must weigh between 45-250 pounds and height between 42" and 5'9". Camp McCormick's New Horizons High Ropes Course is geared for youth participants only.

Troops must hire a GSNI trained facilitator for high ropes activities at GSNI camp properties.

### About Challenge Courses

A challenge course is a set of structures that provide a setting for physical challenges designed to increase participants' self-confidence and physical coordination, to increase group cooperation, and to be fun.

Initiative games and low elements require the group to work together to accomplish mental or physical challenges; spotters safeguard the movements of each member of the group. High ropes challenge courses involve components for individual or group challenges that are 6 feet or more off the ground. A safety belay (a rope to secure a person to an anchor point) is used with a harness and participants wear helmets unless the hosting facility or instructor indicates the use of helmets is hazardous for belay. Spotters (participants who safeguard the movements of a member of the group) provide support and protect the head and upper body of a climber in case of a fall.

Each participant must possess the physical strength and technical skills to use the equipment and understand the safety procedures and consequences of their actions. Connect with your council for suggestions and site approval.

**Note:** *Daisies and Brownies may participate only in activities designed for their ages, with equipment suitable to the size and ability of each girl. Outdoor high ropes and high elements are only permitted for Juniors and older.*

### Learn More

- [Association for Experiential Education](#)
- [Association for Challenge Course Technology](#) (ACCT)

**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 instructor in advance to ensure they are able to accommodate those with disabilities. Learn more about the resources and information that the [National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability](#) provides for people 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. Contact the course staff to discuss how to include all members, considering differences in physical ability, body size, height, etc. 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. One adult with the group must be certified in Adult and Pediatric CPR/First Aid/AED.

### Challenge Course Checkpoints

Here are components to consider and evaluate before selecting a challenge course:

- **It is critical to verify instructor knowledge, experience, and participation according to all of the following criteria.**
- High ropes courses require a facilitator/instructor trained and certified by a verified agency, such as Professional Rope Course Association, ACCT, or [Experiential Systems](#), which includes demonstrated competence in equipment maintenance, safety and rescue techniques, proper use of the course, and hands-on training.
- Initiative games and low ropes courses require a trained and certified instructor or an instructor with training and documented experience through an approved verified agency listed above, according to your council guidelines.
- Written documentation of the completed training as well as proof of participation in routine instructor review and updates should be provided to GSNI.
- All instructors need to be skilled in selecting appropriate activities, teaching, and supervising spotting and belaying techniques, and modifying tasks to provide an appropriate experience for the ages and skill levels in the group.
- Before use, instructors should inspect all equipment, course components, and landing areas.
- A minimum of two instructors must be present.
- Instructor-to-participant ratios must meet the standard as identified by the course manufacturer or installer and need to comply with industry best practice standards.

Climbing Type	Grade Levels	Safety Standards and Gear	Additional Information
Initiatives and Low Rope Elements <i>Any element that has a fall distance of 6 feet or less.</i>	D, B, J, C, S, A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sneakers</li> <li>• Comfortable clothing appropriate for weather</li> <li>• Activity elements and supplies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor must have certification from verified organizations such as Professional Rope Course Association or <a href="#">Experiential Systems</a>.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Ultimate Camp Resource Team Building</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Team Building and Low Challenge Elements</a></li> </ul>
High Elements <i>Any element that has a fall distance of 6 feet or more.</i>	B, J, C, S, A  Brownies can participate only with indoor high elements specifically designed for small children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climbing helmets (Union of International Alpine Association approved)</li> <li>• Belaying equipment: ropes, webbing, harnesses, hardware, and helmets that are designed, tested, and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor must have certification from verified organizations such as Professional Rope Course Association or <a href="#">Experiential Systems</a>.</li> </ul> <p><b>Notes:</b></p>

		<p>manufactured for the purpose of climbing and size appropriate for user</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>If the hosting facility or instructor indicates the use of helmets is hazardous for belay, follow those instructions. They may not offer helmets for this reason.</i></li> <li>• <i>When the hosting facility or instructor indicates a helmet is required, always opt for the helmet.</i></li> </ul>
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**Ensure equipment is well-maintained.** There needs to be a documented maintenance schedule and periodic inspection by instructors and outside professionals of all artificial structures and equipment used in the activities. A Use Log should be kept on all equipment that is subject to stress, wear, and deterioration. A written process for equipment monitoring and retirement should be established and followed by the facility.

**Participants learn about and prepare for challenge courses.** Instructors teach a set of readiness and action commands to all participants for climbing, spotting, and belaying. All participants should use gentle muscle warm-up and stretching activities before beginning physical activities. Instructors must describe the objectives, safety procedures, and hazards to the participants before beginning an activity.

**Participants practice safe challenge course techniques.** Spotting techniques are taught, demonstrated, and practiced by participants prior to any challenge course activity. All activities are appropriately spotted. For activities where partners are needed, instructors should match participants according to size and skill level, if appropriate. Instructors must supervise all tie-ins, belays, and climbs on high ropes courses and spotting on low elements courses. Participants must not be stacked more than three levels high vertically (e.g., in a pyramid) at any time. No one should stand on the middle of someone else’s back.

**Safety Gear**

Girl Scouts will need their own:

- Sturdy shoes
- Long pants or athletic leggings for activities that may lead to skin abrasions on legs
- Close-fitting clothing (avoid wearing loose clothing, especially around the head and neck)

Course must provide:

- Climbing helmets (with Union of International Alpine Association approved label) must be worn for all climbing activities in which the participant is more than 6 feet off the ground and by participants standing in the “fall zone” beneath a climbing element. Helmets are also required for belay, unless the hosting facility or instructor indicates the use of helmets is hazardous for belay.
- Belaying equipment—including ropes, webbing, harnesses, hardware, and helmets—designed and tested for this type of activity and appropriate for the size of the user
- A chest harness with seat harness or full-body harness for small-framed climbers