



### About Hiking

Unlike short walks, hiking may involve lengthy, back-country walking trips and often requires sturdy boots to provide traction on rocks and uneven trail beds. When practicing Leave No Trace while hiking, it is important for hikers to leave trails as—or better than—they found them. Although the action of one hiker may not strongly affect the environment, the effects of large groups of hikers can degrade trails.

Hiking is the ideal opportunity to learn and practice map and compass skills. Before heading out on a lengthy hike, learn how to read a map and use a compass. Look at a map to understand where you started and where you plan to finish. You can always check with your local, state, or national park for interesting and exciting trail ideas.

*Note:* For overnight hiking experiences, follow the guidance in [Backpacking Safety Activity Checkpoints](#), [Travel/Trips Safety Activity Checkpoint](#), and [Camping Safety Activity Checkpoints](#).

### Learn More

- Make an emergency survival kit: [REI—The Ten Essentials](#)
- Locate hiking areas near U.S. metropolitan areas: [All Trails](#)
- [American Hiking Society](#)
- [Leave No Trace](#)

**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. For more information, visit [Move United](#) to find out more about hiking for people of all abilities.

**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. 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. All Troops must provide one adult certified in Adult and Pediatric CPR/First Aid/AED. If planning to hike 30 minutes away from EMS, one adult volunteer must be trained in Wilderness and Remote First Aid or Wilderness First Responder.

## Hiking Checkpoints

**Keep it Girl Scout-led: youth should plan the activity.** Encourage them to plan routes, activities, and guidelines for dealing with problems that may arise with other groups of hikers.

**Prompt Girl Scouts to share resources.** Encourage hikers to distribute a list of hiking gear and supplies, and to determine which resources can be shared. Gear does not need to be high-tech. Safety and comfort are the most important considerations. Be sure all participants have a good understanding of how to practice the Leave No Trace principles on the hike.

**Choose an appropriate hiking route.** Terrain, mileage, and hiking time should be known to the hikers in advance. Hikes are restricted to a reasonable length as determined by age, level of experience, nature of the terrain, physical condition of the hikers, disabilities, weather conditions, and time of day. The hiking pace must always accommodate the slowest hiker.

**Assess safety of hiking routes.** The route needs to be known to at least one of the adults or a report is obtained in advance to assess potential hazards, such as poisonous plants, dangerous animals, unsafe drinking water, cliffs, and drop-offs. Ensure that a land management or similar agency is contacted during the trip planning stage to determine available routes, recommended group size, water quantity and quality, and which permits are needed.

**Ensure hikers have a comprehensive understanding of the trip.** Group members are trained to be observant of the route, surroundings, and fatigue of individuals. Instruction is given on the safety rules for hiking, such as staying together in a group, recognizing poisonous plants and biting or stinging insects and ticks, respecting wild animals, practicing Leave No Trace, and behaving effectively in emergencies. Ensure that Girl Scouts, based on their level, know how to read maps, use a compass, navigate a route, and estimate distance.

**Respect the environment and keep trails clean.** Use the principles of Leave No Trace. Carry out food and all trash. Hike on established trails. Do not remove natural materials, such as leaves or branches. In addition, avoid eating wild foods, walking on or uprooting plants, interfering with or feeding wild animals, and littering.

**Practice safe hiking.** Instructions should be given on the safety rules for hiking, which include forbidding hiking off the trail and after dusk. Stay on the pathway to avoid trampling trailside plants and causing erosion. In addition, be sure to take adequate rest periods with time to replenish fluids and eat high-energy food (such as fruits and nuts). Take proper precautions in areas where poisonous plants, snakes, or ticks are prevalent.

**Safety Gear.** The gear you will need will depend on the length of your trip, the location, and weather.

- A water bottle or hydration pack with enough water for each girl for the length of the hike
- Sturdy footwear based on the type of trails and length of the hike
- Map and compass or GPS device
- Flashlight, whistle, pocket knife
- A working cell phone held by designated adult for emergencies
- An emergency survival kit