

## Safety Activity Checkpoint

### Hiking

HIGH-ADVENTURE ACTIVITY: Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form Required  
**First-Aider Required**

Council Approval: Required

Activity Permitted For: D B J C S A



### 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 skills 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 for girls 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 the [Backpacking, Camping](#) and [Trips and Travel 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](#)

### Making Activities Accessible

In order to make your activity accessible to girls of all abilities, it's important to communicate with all girl attendees and their caregivers to learn about and accommodate their varied support needs. For resources and information on accessible sport and adventure activities, visit [Move United](#).

### Equity

In addition to physical and social-emotional disabilities, consider the history, culture, and past experiences of the girls in your troop that could affect a girl's ability to equally participate in an activity. Work with girls and families to understand how an activity is perceived. Ensure that all girls 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.

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**Standard Safety Guidelines.** Refer to the “Standard Safety Guidelines” in the [Introduction to 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 in the [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) under the “Standard Safety Guidelines” section and be certain to consult with [GSNorCal’s specific COVID-19 guidance](#). When applicable, 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 or adult, missing girl, or sudden illness.

**Girls should plan the activity.** Encourage girls to plan routes, activities, and guidelines for dealing with problems that may arise with other groups of hikers.

**Prompt girls to share resources.** Encourage girls to distribute a list of hiking gear and supplies, and to determine which resources can be shared. Be sure girls and adults have a good understanding of how to practice the Leave No Trace principles on the hike.

**Choose an appropriate hiking route.** The hikers should know terrain, mileage, and hiking time 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, indigenous or 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 that 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 girls, 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. Girls should 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). Girls must take proper precautions in areas where poisonous plants, snakes, or ticks are prevalent.

**Prepare for emergencies.** Ensure the presence of a waterproof first-aid kit and a first-aider with a current certificate in first aid (including adult and child CPR or CPR/AED), who is prepared to handle cases caused by extremes of temperature, such as heat exhaustion, heat stroke, frostbite, cold exposure, and hypothermia, as well as sprains, fractures, and altitude sickness. Ensure that emergency transportation is available, if any part of the activity is located 30 minutes or more from emergency medical services, ensure the presence of a first-aider with wilderness first-aid certification. See Volunteer Essentials for information about first-aid standards and training. The designated adult

should have a working cell phone for emergencies or walkie-talkies in areas where there is not consistent cell phone service. [[SAFETYWISE: First Aid & First Aiders](#)]

## 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 (Consider bringing walkie-talkies with you for areas that do not have cell phone service.)
- An emergency survival kit

## Girl Scouts of Northern California's Approval Process for Hiking

Hiking is considered a high-adventure activity and must be pre-approved by the council.

- **Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form:** Submit the online [Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form](#) to council at least 4-6 weeks prior to your activity. Gather the following information to complete this form:
  - Confirmation that your chaperones are registered members of Girl Scouts of Northern California, have a current background check, completed the troop chaperone course and troop driver course (if transporting girls), and completed the [California State Mandated Reporter Training](#). Troop Leaders can find this information in their [Volunteer Toolkit](#).
  - Name of First Aider and a copy of their current CPR/First Aid certification card. Certification needs to be renewed every two years. If you are hiking or backpacking farther than 30 minutes from a medical facility, please have the information of the member, who is certified in Wilderness First Aid, accompanying your troop.
  - Confirm that the necessary online and in-person courses have been completed for this trip. You can find more information or register for these courses in your [MyGS Account - GSLearn](#) in the section called Trip & Outdoor Advisor.
    - The **Trip & Outdoor Advisor Course** is required for all overnight and [high-adventure activities](#).
    - The **Camp Out course** is required for all camping trips that involve advanced outdoor cooking or camping trip with girls to a campground or other non-GSNorCal outdoor facility for longer than 1 night without indoor plumbing and electricity. Girls should have already had practice sleeping and cooking outdoors.
    - The **Extended Trips course** is required for troops traveling three (3) nights or more.
    - The **Girl Scout Small Craft Safety Training** is required before you take girls on a small craft water adventure.
- **High-Adventure Approved Vendor List:** GSNorCal troops/groups must select a high-adventure vendor from the [High-Adventure Approved Vendor List](#), which consists of organizations that meet Girl Scouts safety and insurance requirements for the activity. For the safety of our members, before a troop uses a high-adventure site/vendor for a troop or service unit event, the council must approve the high-adventure site/vendor. This process is designed to ensure a safe experience and protect the council's and volunteer's legal interests.
- **Adding high-adventure facilities to the Approved Vendor List:** If your preferred vendor is not listed on the High-Adventure Approved Vendor list, please follow the simple steps in the [Volunteer Essentials](#) for adding high-adventure vendors.