

Safety Activity Checkpoint **Whitewater Rafting**

HIGH-ADVENTURE ACTIVITY: Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form Required
First-Aiders and Lifeguard/Swift Water Rescue Required

CAUTION: When planning your whitewater rafting activity, please make sure to check with vendors about the constantly changing water levels, especially in the spring and early summer as the rain season ends, and the snow caps begin to melt. Rapid classifications can change based on water levels, and what was originally considered a Class I Rapid at the end of the previous season, may be considered a Class III Rapid at the beginning of this new season. Council will work with troops to approve whitewater rafting activity on a case by case basis depending on the age level and experience of the Girl Scouts.

Council Approval: Required

Activity Permitted For: B (Class I-II rapids), J (Class I-III rapids), C S A (Class I-IV rapids)

Not Allowed For: Daisies



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 4 to 12 rafters. You will need to find a reputable outfitter to arrange the trip. Check GSNorCal's [Approved Vendor List](#) for 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

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 of the 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](#) and [Rafting Info](#)

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 Sports USA](#).

[Move United Sports USA](#) lists programs available nationwide, plus general information about adaptive rafting. In addition, the blog of the [National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability Endless CapABILITIES](#) offers encouragement for paddlers with disabilities and/or special needs.

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.

Safety Activity Checkpoint

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, girl or adult falling overboard, missing girl, or sudden illness.

Ensure participants are able to swim and are comfortable in the water. Success on the water depends on comfort and ability in the water. Consult with parents/guardians about girls' swim abilities before the event. See the [Swimming Safety Activity Checkpoint](#) for water-abilities testing samples, or ask your instructor for guidelines. Only strong swimmers are approved for whitewater canoeing. See Volunteer Essentials for information about first-aid standards and training. [[SAFETYWISE: First Aid & First Aiders](#)]

All rafters must wear a U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket. Type III life jackets are recommended. They 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.

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. See Volunteer Essentials for information about first-aid standards and training. [[SAFETYWISE: First Aid & First Aiders](#)]

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 communicate effective commands and instructions. Also important:

- An instructor must be able to 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 should have firsthand knowledge of the hazards and conditions of the location and type of boat being used.
- At least one guide must have documented training and experience guiding in the type of river being run and has run the river in advance.
- The guide must subscribe 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
- Aren't 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 [American Whitewater](#) and [Paddle.com](#).

File a float plan. If participating in a long-distance trip, file a float plan with your troop emergency contact person (who is not attending the trip and holds the emergency roster of all participants) 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 rafts safely. Use car-top racks or trailers specifically designed for the type of craft. Secure rafts 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 and GSNorCal. Fill out GSNorCal's [Accident-Injury Report](#).

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 throw-able 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-toed 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 (don't 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 you'll raft

Girl Scouts of Northern California's Approval Process for Whitewater Rafting

Whitewater Rafting 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.

Whitewater Rafting			
Whitewater rafting day trips Class I-II	B, J, C, S, A	6:1, or 12:1 with qualified assistant	American Canoe Association (ACA) Rafting Level 4 Instructor or higher; or International Rafting Federation (IRF) Guide Certification; or equivalent
Whitewater rafting day trips Class I-III	J, C, S, A	Varies; ask outfitter	Licensed professional river guide provided by an outfitter
Whitewater rafting day trips Class I-IV	C, S, A	Varies; ask outfitter	Licensed professional river guide provided by an outfitter. NOTE: Girls always wear helmets for Class IV
Whitewater trips Class I-IV	C, S, A	Varies; ask outfitter	Licensed professional river guide provided by an outfitter. NOTE: Girls always wear helmets for Class IV.