

## Hiking: Safety Activity Checkpoint

**HIGH-ADVENTURE ACTIVITY:** [Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form Required](#)

**Council Approval:** Required

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



### About Hiking

Unlike short walks, hiking may involve lengthy, cross-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 [Camping](#) and [Trips and Travel Safety Activity Checkpoints](#).

### Learn More:

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

## Include Girls with Disabilities

Talk to girls with disabilities and their caregivers, and ask about needs and accommodations. If visiting a national park, contact the park in advance to ask about accommodating people with disabilities.

See [Disabled Sports USA](#) to find out about hiking for people of all abilities.

## Safety Activity Checkpoint

**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, 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.

## 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

## 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.
- **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.