

Safety Activity Checkpoint **Climbing and Rappelling**

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 Climbing and Rappelling

Girls may participate in various types of climbing, rappelling, and rope adventures.

Note:

- Daisies and Brownies can do bouldering, slacklining and low-challenge elements—check the [Climbing and Adventure Sports Master Progression Chart](#).
- Daisies and Brownies may participate only in activities that are designed for their ages, with equipment suitable to the size and ability of each girl.
- Outdoor high ropes, high elements, and rappelling are only permitted for Girl Scout Juniors and older.

Bouldering. This sport involves climbing without a rope but at a height not greater than 6 feet off the ground. 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. Spotting is used when descending and ascending high elements or climbing routes.

Top Roping. In this climbing method, the rope is anchored from the top of the climbing route, using belays (safety ropes to secure a person to an anchor point). The belayer (person who controls the belay/safety line to prevent long and dangerous falls) is set up at the bottom of the route with the other end of the rope tied to the climber.

Multi-Pitch Climbing is for experienced climbers only. This climb on a long route requires several pitches the length of a rope or less. (A “pitch” is the rope-length between belay stations). The group climbs to the top of

the first pitch; the lead climber climbs the next pitch, anchors in, and belays each remaining climber individually to the anchor.

Free Climbing. *This method, which involves climbing on rocks or walls without a belay system in place, is not approved.*

Slacklining: A sport and an art that can involve balance training, recreation, and moving meditation. It is similar, at first glance, to tightrope walking and is accomplished by stretching and tensioning a 1-inch to 2-inch length of nylon/polyester webbing between two anchor points, most often trees. It is a way of passing time while maintaining concentration, fitness, core strength, and balance. It can be used as a team-building activity in which spotters safeguard the movements of each member of the group.

Artificial climbing walls and harnessed indoor ropes are great learning options, too.

Learn More:

- [International Mountaineering and Climbing Federation \(UIAA\)](#)
- [Mountain Know How: The Art of Belaying](#)
- Indoor climbing advice: [REI](#)
- All about rock climbing: [Mpora.com](#)
- [How to Safely Take Bouldering Falls](#)

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.

Safety Activity Checkpoints

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, missing girl, or sudden illness.

Verify instructor knowledge and experience. For bouldering, top roping, and multi-pitch climbing, an instructor with documented experience—indicating competence in equipment maintenance, safety and rescue techniques, proper use of the course, and hands-on training (must provide certification) or documented

experience according to GSNorCal's guidelines as outlined in [Volunteer Essentials](#)—directly supervises the group. Ensure that there is a regular process of review and update for all instructors. A minimum of two instructors need to be present, and instructors should 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 must inspect all equipment, course components, and landing areas.

Facilitators of indoor or outdoor artificial climbing walls and auto belay or harnessed indoor ropes courses should have experience, indicating competence in equipment maintenance, safety and rescue techniques, proper use of the course, and hands-on training. A minimum of one facilitator and an additional adult must be present, and facilitators need to be skilled in selecting appropriate activities, teaching and supervising spotting and lowering techniques, and modifying tasks to provide an appropriate experience for the ages and skill levels in the group. Before use, facilitators should inspect all equipment, course components, and landing areas.

Indoor or outdoor artificial climbing walls and auto belay or harnessed indoor ropes courses are activities that do not incorporate an element of high risk and can be done by Brownies through Ambassadors. However, all ages must have appropriately sized harnesses. If no harness properly fits a child, that child cannot participate in climbing and/or rappelling. ***Daisies are not permitted to participate in climbing and rappelling.***

The instructor-to-participant ratios are:

- **Bouldering and top roping:** one instructor to ten participants
- **Multi-pitch climbing:** one instructor (qualified lead climber) to three participants

Select a safe site. Permits and permission requests are filed as required for outdoor natural climbing sites and facilities. All permanent structures and the belaying system are planned and constructed by experienced individuals. Plans and procedures are established to avoid unauthorized use of the site, structures, and equipment. The artificial climbing site must be posted to warn against unauthorized use.

Participants learn about and prepare for climbing and rappelling. Instructors teach a set of readiness and action commands to all participants for climbing, spotting, and belaying. All participants take part in muscle warm-up and stretching activities before beginning physical activities. Instructors describe the objectives, safety procedures, and hazards to the participants before beginning an activity.

Participants practice safe climbing and rappelling techniques. Spotting techniques (if necessary) are taught, demonstrated, and practiced by participants prior to any climbing or rappelling activity. All activities should be appropriately spotted. For activities where partners are needed, instructors must match participants according to size and skill level, if appropriate. Instructors should supervise all tie-ins, belays, and climbs on climbing sites and spotting on bouldering sites.

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. Consider bringing walkie-talkies with you for areas that do not have cell phone service.

[\[SAFETYWISE: First Aid & First Aiders\]](#)

Girl Scouts of Northern California's Approval Process for Climbing and Rappelling
Climbing and Rappelling 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 and have a current background check. 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 the courses below on [GSNorCal's Training Section](#) of the website.
 - 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 **Backpacking course** is required before you take girls on an overnight backpacking 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.

Safety Gear

- Climbing helmets with the UIAA-approved label—worn for all outdoor natural climbing situations where 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.
- A disposable liner, such as a shower cap or surgical cap, to wear underneath the helmet to protect against the spread of head lice
- A chest harness with a seat harness or a full-body harness, required for specific climbing or ropes activities
- Sturdy shoes
- Close-fitting clothing—loose clothing and jewelry should be avoided, especially around the head, neck and ears
- Portable drinking water
- Raingear, as necessary
- Long pants or bike pants, recommended for activities involving potential skin abrasions on legs

All equipment used for belaying, such as ropes, webbing, harnesses, hardware, and helmets, should be designed and tested for the purpose of this type of activity and appropriate for the size of the user.