

Safety Activity Checkpoint Recreational Tree Climbing

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



Council Approval: Required
Activity Permitted For: J C S A

About Recreational Tree Climbing

In recreational tree climbing, girls explore the beauty of living trees with guided facilitator support. Recreational tree climbers use ropes, harnesses, saddles, and climbing techniques to ascend into the crowns of trees and the canopies of forests. Care should be taken to keep climbers and trees safe.

Climbing may be done on branches that have at least 6 inches of living tissue. A full inspection of the health of the tree and surrounding area must be made.

Leave No Trace

While climbing in natural areas, it's important to respect the environment. Read tips from the [Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics](#).

The Global Organization of Tree Climbers has an [interactive map](#) to help you find tree-climbing programs.

Learn More:

- [Leave No Trace](#)
- [Tree Climbing International](#)

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.

- **Choose a certified instructor.** The facilitator needs to have documented experience in leading and teaching tree climbing.
- **File required permits.** Climbing is also forbidden on any trees in the U.S. National Parks; State parks however, may differ- check with your local parks service. And of course, ask for property owners' permission before scaling any trees on private land.
- **Inspect equipment.** The instructor will inspect all equipment before each use. Equipment will be well maintained. A use log will track wear, stress, and deterioration of gear. Outside professionals should periodically inspect all trees and equipment. A written equipment monitoring and retirement process needs to be followed.
- **Ensure the instructor climbs all routes before participants begin.**
- **Ensure only instructors clip participants in and out of the tie-in system.**
- **Ensure a process for managing safety and performing rescues** is in place.
- **Ensure helmet-only areas are clearly designated** in order to protect participants and passersby from falling debris.
- **Get a weather report.** On the morning of the activity, check a reliable weather source to determine if conditions are appropriate. Be prepared to alter the activity plan if weather conditions change. Participants must not climb when trees or gear are wet. In the event of a storm, take shelter away from all trees and other tall objects. Find the lowest point in an open flat area. Squat low to the ground on the balls of the feet, and place hands on knees with head between them.
- **Participants should receive instruction.** Instructors must describe the climb's objectives, safety procedures, and hazards to the participants. Climbers learn:
 - Readiness and action commands
 - Muscle warmup and stretching techniques
 - Safety procedures and site-specific hazards

Safety Gear

- **Climbing equipment**—such as ropes, webbing, harnesses, hardware, and helmets—designed for this purpose and appropriate for the size of the user
- **Climbing helmets** worn by all participants who will be more than 6 feet off the ground or on belay; helmets must be approved by the International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation (UIAA)
- **Sturdy shoes**

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

Girl Scouts of Northern California’s Approval Process for Recreational Tree Climbing

Recreational Tree Climbing 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 [Volunteer Learning Portal](#) 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.