

## Safety Activity Checkpoint

### Row Boating

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



**Council Approval:** Required

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

**Not Recommended For:**

\*Daisies, except with an experienced adult in each rowboat.

### About Row Boating

Rowing uses oars to propel a boat across the water, and is one of the earliest forms of transportation. It is a great way to build teamwork and skill. Beginners can start rowing in a stable boat on flat water. Daisies may use basic rowboats only if they have an adult in the boat with them. Interested rowers can progress to competitive “crew” racing, or specialized rowing, like Venetian gondolas. Currents, waves, rapids, and wind affect conditions. Those conditions and type of boat will determine what is appropriate for your troop. See the [Paddling and Rowing Sports--Master Progression Chart](#) in *Safety Activity Checkpoints 2023-2024*.

Most rowing is done on flat water with little or no current, like a lake, calm river, or pond. Oceans and rivers can be suitable if rowers have advanced instruction and skills. Consult local experts or GSNorCal for suggestions.

You can learn a lot about rowing online. You should learn basic skills from an expert, but it is fun to discover gear options, places to go, and cool tips. Check out the basics at [U.S. Rowing](#).

Also, find out about collegiate and Olympic rowing. Some colleges and universities have women’s rowing teams, which race streamlined boats called “sculls” and “shells” in races called “regattas.”

#### Learn More:

- [Rowing vocabulary](#)
- [U.S. Rowing Association](#)
- General boating safety: [Boat Safe](#), [Boat-Ed](#), [U.S. Coast Guard](#)

### 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, capsizing, or sudden illness.

**Ensure participants are wearing PFDs.** ([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.

Exception for competitive racing sculls and shells: because they can be caught on oars in fast-paced team rowing, it is acceptable to carry life jackets in a chase boat. All competitive rowers must be strong swimmers.

**Check swimming ability.** Parents/Guardians should be consulted prior to swimming events to verify girls’ abilities. Only strong swimmers may row in sculls and shells.

**Practice recovery procedures.** The instructor should demonstrate self-recovery and righting techniques for the type of boat being used. Girls can then learn and practice these skills, as appropriate for the trip. This will help prevent them from becoming disoriented or frightened if they end up in the water.

**Verify instructor knowledge and experience.** The skill level of the adults must be higher than the difficulty of the intended activity.

**Ensure the instructor will review site-specific emergency techniques** for the type of craft used.

**Ensure the lead instructor has firsthand knowledge of the hazards** and conditions of the location and type of boat being used.

**Ensure adult certifications are appropriate for the activity.**

**Check lifeguard qualifications.** Ensure lifeguards overseeing rowing have the proper training, experience, and rescue equipment for the body of water and the specific watercraft involved.

**Arrange for watchers/helpers.** An adult watcher or skilled helper is required to assist the instructor. This person should have basic skills in rowing and be able to support the group by reinforcing instructions and watching for

possible emergencies. Basic water rescue, small craft safety, or similar training is the preferred preparation. Consult the instructor for specific watcher/helper qualifications and/or the [Swimming Safety Activity Checkpoint](#).

**Select a safe site.** Do not row in unknown areas; know the locations of all shipping channels. Rowing is not permitted farther than one mile from the nearest shore. Make sure of the following:

- Busy channels are avoided when possible and crossed carefully when necessary, at a 90-degree angle to the channel traffic
- Surf zones and areas with standing waves are avoided
- On long passages, boats are close enough together so that a group decision can be made if wind and water conditions change
- You're aware of possible changes in water level, due to tides or dam releases, and how these affect water conditions

**Avoid hazards.** These include strainers, sieves, hydraulics, waterfalls, bridges, dams, fences, and low power lines. Rapids must be avoided.

**Do not exceed boat weight and capacity.** Many boats have a plate near the stern (back) showing these maximums.

**Ensure boats are not overloaded with gear.** Gear should be distributed evenly among rowers.

**Know universal signals.** Whistle and visual signals should be used to pass messages or call for help. Learn them at [Paddling.com](#).

**Prepare for emergencies.** Pack a waterproof first-aid kit if taking a rowing trip, and follow other guidelines in [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints 2023-2024](#). See [Volunteer Essentials](#) for information about first-aid standards and training.

**File a float plan.** If participating in a long-distance trip, file a float plan with a reliable person who will notify authorities should your group not return on time.

## On the Day of Paddling or Rowing

**Get a weather and wind report.** Check [Weather.com](#) or other reliable weather sources, including the “boat and beach” forecast, which covers wind speed, water temperature, and wave height. 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. If you cannot get to shore, secure all loose gear, keep a sharp lookout for other boats and obstructions, head into the wind at a 45-degree angle, and stay low. If possible, do not touch metal or water when lightning is possible.

**Report accidents.** Notify marine law enforcement and GSNorCal. Fill out GSNorCal's [Accident-Injury Report](#).

## Safety and Required Gear

- U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket (Type III life jackets recommended and should fit according to weight and height specifications)
- Rowboat, scull, or shell, sized appropriately for the participants and suitable for the type of water
- Oars that are the right size and style for the boat type 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 (for boats 16 feet or longer)
- Rescue gear appropriate for boat type and conditions
- Emergency gear appropriate for the activity type and distance from shore, such as:
  - Bailer (a scoop for removing water from a boat) or foot pump
  - Emergency repair kit: duct tape or electrical tape, screwdriver, pliers, spare plugs

- A spare oar or paddle, first-aid kit, repair 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)
- All other items required by the boating jurisdiction in which you will be rowing.

## Girl Scouts of Northern California's Approval Process for Row Boating

Row Boating 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 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 GSNorCal's and volunteer's legal interests.