

**Council Approval:** Required

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

**Not Allowed For:** Daisies and Brownies



### About Waterskiing and Wakeboarding

Similar to surfing, learning to stand up on water skis or a wakeboard (a single board resembling a snowboard) is one of the sport's primary challenges, especially for beginners. Waterskiing requires thorough instruction and practice; key elements of successful waterskiing include balance, a strong grip, and proper-fitting skis/board and bindings. Skiers wear either one board (called slalom) or two skis (called combo); barefoot waterskiing is an advanced skill.

Beginners must learn the waterski position: knees bent and together, leaning back with weight on the balls of the feet, head up, arms straight, and skis pointing forward. Girls will learn technique and safety to prevent injuries, such as, water skiers must learn (contrary to instinct) to release the towline as soon as they begin to lose their balance.

Girls can start the learning process on land. Before entering the water, it is helpful to simulate the waterskiing process on a sandy beach and learn how to wear the skis and hold onto a water-ski handle properly. They can and should learn to communicate with the spotter (the person on the back of the boat watching the skier) with specific and agreed-upon hand signals. This way the spotter can then shout out to the driver when necessary.

Another fun technique is to learn by watching others—videotape other Girl Scouts who are learning to waterski and have girls watch it to find out how to improve their performance.

Open bodies of water, such as, lakes and bays, are ideal.

**Learn More:**

- [USA Water Ski](#)
- [U.S. Coast Guard's Boating Safety Division](#)

## 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](#). For more information visit [USA Water Ski](#) for information on amenities for water skiers with disabilities.

## 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.

## Safety Gear

- U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket (Type III recommended) that fits according to weight and height specifications. Inspect life jackets to ensure that they are in good condition and contain no tears.
- 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
- Life raft and/or towing boat
- Ski lines (tow lines) at least 75 feet long; a single handle is used on the ski line
- Wakeboard or rounded (not pointed) skis that are appropriate to the skill and size of the skier
- Water skis
- Foot bindings appropriate for skier's weight and skiing speed
- Waterproof sunscreen (SPF of at least 15), applied every two hours, and lip balm
- Goggles for girls who require glasses or contact lenses (available at sporting-goods stores; if prescription goggles are too expensive for girls to purchase, make sure girls test non-prescription goggles to assure proper fit over prescriptive eyewear)

- Beach towel
- Dry clothing and sunglasses to wear after the activity
- Wet suit if water temperatures are cold, below 70 degrees Fahrenheit

## Safety Activity Checkpoints

**Ensure that girls do not operate motorized boats.**

**Ensure no tricks.** Girls are not permitted to attempt aerial tricks on water skis or wakeboards.

**Protect hands.** Water skiers can get blisters from the pressure of holding onto the rope handle; wearing gloves or taping hands can help. [Waterski Magazine](#)

**No ocean skiing.** Skiers stay in bays, inlets, lakes, and gulfs and do not ski in the ocean.

**Learn skiing safety.** Girls will learn basics like staying behind the boat, as it is dangerous to curve around the boat. In addition, skiing outside the wake is an advanced technique for experienced skiers only.

**Verify instructor and boat driver knowledge and experience.** Ensure that the adult or instructor is certified by [USA Water Ski](#), possesses equivalent certification, or has documented experience. Confirm that the boat driver is an adult, at least 21 years of age and has an appropriate license, and is skilled in operating the watercraft.

**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 parents/guardians about girls' swim abilities before event. See the [Swimming Safety Activity Checkpoint](#) for guidelines.

**Check the boat safety features.** Make sure the boat has sufficient power to tow the skier(s) and is equipped with a side-angle rearview mirror, fire extinguisher, flags, paddle, horn, bailing device, two gas tanks (for outboard motors), mooring ropes (extra line), boarding ladder, and throw bag.

**Prepare for emergencies.** If a lifeguard is not on duty, an adult with rescue and resuscitation experience and/or certification is present. 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, and who is prepared to handle cases of near drowning, immersion hypothermia, and sunburn. 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. See [Volunteer Essentials](#) for information about first-aid standards and training.

**Be prepared in the event of a storm with lightning.** Exit water immediately, and take shelter away from tall objects (including trees, buildings, and electrical poles). 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. During storms, if shore cannot be reached, keep a sharp lookout for other boats and obstructions.

**Review rescue tips.** [Paddling.net](#) has instructions on small boat capsize recovery.

**Keep track of water skiers.** Use a list or checkboard system to stay aware of water skiers' whereabouts.

**Privately-Owned Towing Boats.** If using a boat that is privately owned, ensure that the owner/operator:

- Is a knowledgeable adult with the understanding and ability of their responsibility for Girl Scouts' safety and well-being.
- Agrees to follow the Safety Activity Checkpoints relevant to the activity.
- Maintains the vessel in accordance with the Safety Activity Checkpoints.
- Coordinates with the activity leader to confirm the required safety gear is available for all participants, and that the gear meets the specifications of authorities for the local jurisdiction.
- Meets Coast Guard and/or local jurisdictional requirements.
- Maintains insurance and registration as required by law in their jurisdiction.

For privately-owned vessels over 30 feet, also see [Offshore Water Vessels Safety Activity Checkpoints](#).

**Carbon Monoxide warning.** Never allow "teak surfing," swim platform dragging, or bodysurfing behind any vessel. Do not operate a motor or generator while anyone is on or holding onto a swim platform, swim deck, swim step, or swim ladder, except for a very brief time when docking, or entering/exiting the vessel. Carbon monoxide emitted at the stern (back) of the boat can cause death in these situations.

## Girl Scouts of Northern California's Approval Process for waterskiing and wakeboarding

Waterskiing and wakeboarding are considered high-adventure activities 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.