

## Waterskiing and Wakeboarding: Safety Activity Checkpoints

### High Risk



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. 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. To prevent injuries, water skiers must learn (contrary to instinct) to release the towline as soon as they begin to lose their balance. Skiers either wear one board (called slalom) or two skis (called combo); [barefoot waterskiing](#) is an advanced skill. **Wakeboarding is not allowed for Girl Scout Daisies and Brownies.**

**Caution:** Girls are not allowed to operate motorized boats without council permission; girls are not allowed to do aerial tricks on water skis or wakeboards.

**Know where to waterski and wakeboard.** Wide-open bodies of water such as a lake are ideal. Connect with your Girl Scout council for site suggestions.

**Include girls with disabilities.** Communicate with girls with disabilities and/or their caregivers to assess any needs and accommodations. Visit [USA Water Ski](#) for information about amenities for water skiers with disabilities.

### Waterskiing and Wakeboarding Gear

#### Required Gear

- Participants wear a 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. Read about U.S.Coast Guard-approved life jackets [here](#).
- Ski lines (tow lines) are 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
- Foot bindings appropriate for skier's weight and skiing speed

- At least one graspable and throwable personal flotation device (Type IV buoyant cushion or ring buoy or equivalent) is immediately available for each group on the water
- Lifeboat and/or towing boat

### Recommended Gear

- One-piece bathing suit (less cumbersome than a two-piece)
- Waterproof sunscreen (SPF of at least 15), apply 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 surfing
- Wetsuit is recommended for warmth and skin protection, especially when water temperature is below 70 degrees Fahrenheit

### Prepare for Waterskiing or Wakeboarding

- Communicate with council and parents.** See the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints.
- Girls plan the activity.** Keeping their grade-level abilities in mind, encourage girls to take proactive leadership roles in organizing details of the activity.
- Arrange for transportation and adult supervision.** See the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints for the recommended adult-to-girl ratio, keeping in mind that Daisies and Brownies do not participate in waterskiing or wakeboarding. Further, in addition to the boat driver, ensure that a boat has at least one more adult observing the skier(s), and that another adult is on shore to help supervise girls waiting to ski.
- Verify instructor and boat-driver knowledge and experience.** Ensure that the adult or instructor is certified by [USA Water Ski](#), or possesses equivalent certification or documented experience according to your council's guidelines, as outlined in Volunteer Essentials. Confirm that the boat driver has an appropriate license, and is skilled in operating the craft.
- Ensure participants are able to swim.** Participants' swimming abilities are classified and clearly identified (for instance, with colored headbands to signify beginners, advanced swimmers, etc.) at council-approved sites, or participants provide proof of swimming-test certification. In the absence of swimming-test certification, a swim test is conducted before or on the day of the activity. Consult with your Girl Scout council for additional guidance.
- 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 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.
- Compile key contacts.** See the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints.

### On the Day of Waterskiing or Wakeboarding

- Get weather and wind report.** Never waterski on a stormy, foggy, or excessively windy day. In addition, see the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints.
- 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.
- **Use the buddy system.** See the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints.
- **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.

### Waterskiing and Wakeboarding Links

- **USA Water Ski:** [www.usawaterski.org](http://www.usawaterski.org)
- **U.S. Coast Guard's Boating Safety Division:** [www.uscgboating.org](http://www.uscgboating.org)

### Waterskiing and Wakeboarding Know-How for Girls

- **Start the learning process on land.** Before entering the water, simulate the waterskiing process on a sandy beach. Wearing the skis and holding onto a water-ski handle, ask a partner to pull you around.
- **Stay behind the boat.** It's dangerous to curve around to the side of the boat. Also, skiing outside the wake is an advanced technique.
- **Communicate with hand signals.** Learn how to communicate while waterskiing on [adventure.howstuffworks.com](http://adventure.howstuffworks.com).
- **Learn by watching.** Videotape other Girl Scouts who are learning how to waterski, and watch the footage to learn how to improve performance.
- **Prevent hand blisters.** Some water skiers get blisters from the pressure of holding onto the rope handle; wearing gloves or taping hands can help. Learn how on [waterskimag.com](http://waterskimag.com).

\*These checkpoints must be reviewed with the vendor and/or facility, when appropriate.