

Windsurfing: Safety Activity Checkpoints

High Risk



Windsurfing combines surfing and sailing, and is one of the fastest-growing water sports. Expert windsurfers (aka “boardheads”) seek out the challenges and freestyling opportunities that big waves provide, but beginners should windsurf on water with little to no waves. Windsurfing instructors usually begin the instructional process on land to guide students through a [startup sequence](#). The essence of windsurfing is to balance oneself on the sailboard while holding the sail and cruising with the wind. Learning how to turn is an advanced skill that takes some windsurfers years to master. Keeping in mind that people learn at different paces, with a good instructor, beginners are often able to learn how to windsurf in a single lesson. **Windsurfing is not recommended for Girl Scout Daisies and Brownies.**

Caution: Girls are not allowed to do aerial tricks on sailboards.

Know where to windsurf: Ocean, lakes, or even a large pond—in short, bodies of water that have enough wind to hoist the sail. Popular American windsurfing destinations include the Great Lakes and the east and west coasts of the United States. Connect with your Girl Scout council for site suggestions. Also, the International Sailing Federation provides information about windsurfing classes at sailing.org.

Include girls with disabilities. Communicate with girls with disabilities and/or their caregivers to assess any needs and accommodations. Learn more about the resources and information that the [Differing Abilities Program](#) and [Windsurfing for Life](#) provide to people with disabilities.

Required 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. Read about Coast Guard life jackets [here](#).
- Boat shoes, water socks or shoes, or other nonslip footwear (no flip-flops)

Recommended Gear

- One-piece bathing suit (less cumbersome in the waves than a two-piece).

- Waterproof sunscreen (SPF of at least 15), apply every two hours
- Goggles or glasses guards for girls who require prescriptive eyewear (available at sporting-goods stores)
- Beach towel
- Dry clothing and sunglasses to wear after windsurfing
- 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
- Sailboards

Prepare for Windsurfing

- 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 ratios.
- Verify instructor knowledge and experience.** Ensure that teacher holds a [Windsurfing Instructor Certification from U.S. Sailing Association](#), or has equivalent certification or documented experience according to your council's guidelines, as outlined in *Volunteer Essentials*. The instructor-to-girl ratio is 1 to 4.

NOTE: The instructor-to-participant ratio is NOT necessarily the same as the adult-to-girl ratio that is found in the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints. Both ratios MUST be complied with when girls are participating in windsurfing. For example, if there are 20 Juniors participating in a windsurfing activity, there must be 5 instructors, plus 3 adult Girl Scout volunteers (who are not instructors).

- Ensure participants are able to swim well.** 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.
- Compile key contacts.** See the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints.
- Size up sailboards.*** Communicate girls' ages, heights, and weights with windsurfing instructors to ensure the appropriate size equipment is available. Request that sails be the appropriate size (according to weight, height, and ability level) for windsurfers; the larger the sail, the more powerful the sailing capacity. Sailboard decks should be textured (not smooth) to provide traction.
- Select a safe location with a soft, sandy, or muddy bottom.** Choose a location that does not have a sharp-edged or rocky bottom, which can be dangerous and cut feet and limbs. The launching area should be easily accessible and clear of overhead power lines.
- Safeguard valuables.** Don't leave personal belongings and valuables unattended in a public place. If working with a windsurfing school or camp, call to inquire about the organization's storage amenities.
- Prepare for emergencies.** In addition to a lifeguard; at least one adult present has small craft safety certification or equivalent experience. Ensure the presence of a waterproof first-aid kit and a first-aiders 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 response time, ensure the presence of a first-aiders with Wilderness First Aid. See *Volunteer Essentials* for information about first-aid standards and training.

Prepare Girls for Windsurfing Day

- Stay with the board. If remaining in the water while taking a break from windsurfing, stay near the board. Lifeguards become concerned if they see a windsurf board “missing” a windsurfer.
- Troubleshoot exhaustion. In the case of fatigue while in the water (and in light winds), raise the sail down over the back of the board, position leg on top of the sail to prevent it from falling off the board, and paddle (or walk, if water is shallow enough) back to shore. [U.S. Sailing](#) provides instructions.
- A heads-up on head protection. In the instance of losing balance on the board, before falling into the water, push the sail away from your body, so that the sail doesn’t strike your head. If unable to push the sail away from the body, make a fist and use your arm as a shield to protect your head.

On the Day of Windsurfing

- **Get a weather and wind report.** Never windsurf on a stormy or extremely windy day. On the day of the windsurf trip or lesson, visit [weather.com](#) to determine if weather conditions are appropriate. Windsurfing should be taught in a light breeze (in general, winds should be between 1 to 6 knots, or 1 to 7 miles per hour). Do not windsurf in offshore winds because windsurfers will drift away, making it nearly impossible to steer back to shore; the wind direction should be onshore or sideshore. If weather conditions prevent the windsurfing trip, be prepared with a backup plan or alternative activity.
- **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.

Windsurfing Links

- International Sailing Federation: [www.sailing.org](#)
- U.S. Sailing Windsurfing Course, how-to information, and safety tips: [www.windsurfing.sailingcourse.com/safety.htm](#)
- U.S. Windsurfing Association: [www.uswindsurfing.org](#)
- U.S. Windsurfing directory of windsurfing schools: [www.uswindsurfing.org/shop_main.php](#)

Windsurfing Know-How for Girls

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