



Horseback Riding

Council Approval: Required – High Risk

Tier 1

Activity Permitted For: D B J C S A

About Horseback Riding

Horseback riding teaches girls responsibility, patience, discipline, understanding, empathy, compassion, problem solving, and self-control. It allows girls to see the world from a different perspective (on top of a horse!) and can build their confidence and self-esteem. One of the most important aspects of horseback riding is showing respect for horses.

The purpose of these checkpoints is to provide tips for trail riding and ring or corral riding. Some activities, such as vaulting, pack trips, driving, and games, may require special equipment, as well as horses and instructors with specialized training (for vaulting, see the “Vaulting” safety activity checkpoints).

Learn More:

- [American Camp Association](#)
- [Certified Horsemanship Association](#)
- [United States Pony Clubs](#)
- [Horse Channel](#)
- [Think Like a Horse](#)

Include Girls with Disabilities

Talk to girls with disabilities and their caregivers, and ask about needs and accommodations. See [Disabled Sports USA](#) to learn more about equipment, adaptations, and finding a program near you.

Safety Activity Checkpoints

Verify instructor knowledge and experience. Riding instructors are adults (at least 18 years old) who have current certification from an accredited horsemanship instructor training organization, such as the Certified Horsemanship Association and American Association for Horsemanship Safety, or documented proof of a minimum of three years' experience successfully instructing in a general horseback riding program. Assistant riding instructors are at least 16 years old and are certified by an accredited horsemanship instructor training

organization or have documented proof of at least one year experience successfully instructing in a general horseback riding program.

Riders are supervised by instructors or assistant instructors when in the proximity of horses, whether mounted or not. For ring or corral riding and trail riding, at least one instructor and one assistant instructor supervise a group of ten or fewer riders. For ring and corral riding, one additional instructor is required for every five additional riders. For beginners and younger girls or for difficult trails more instructors may be needed.

Connect with your Girl Scout council for approved sites or site suggestions. The stable operator should be able to provide evidence of \$1 million liability insurance and instructor certifications upon request.

Assess participants' maturity level. Girls must possess sufficient physical coordination and balance to participate in riding. They need to be old enough to understand and practice safety procedures, to use good judgment in reacting to situations, and to take responsibility for themselves and their horses. Some stables have weight limits for rider eligibility, so check with the stable when making reservations.

Select a safe site. Check with council staff to see if an approved vendor list is offered. If the council does not have an approved vendor list, call the facility to determine the following safety information in order to select a safe site.

Check the condition of the facility. For both Girl Scout council–owned and non–Girl Scout riding facilities, the riding area is away from outside distractions and free of debris; the barn and riding areas do not have exposed barbed wire fencing; the instructional rings, corrals, paddocks, and stables have clearly posted rules and regulations; the horses are properly cared for, and the stables, corrals, and barns are clean and uncluttered. Tack (saddles, bridles, etc.) is clean and in good condition.

Talk to the staff. Communicate with the horseback-riding organization about any rider weight limitations; in some cases, heavier riders can cause a horse pain, which, in turn, may cause horses to exhibit dangerous behavior.

Dress appropriately for the activity. Make sure girls and adults avoid wearing dangling earrings, bracelets, and necklaces. Riders may not ride barefoot, in sandals, or in hiking boots with lug soles. Riders should not wear backpacks, day packs, or fanny packs.

Ensure girls learn about safe horseback riding. A pre-ride demonstration should be given to first-time riders, including mounting, dismounting, starting, stopping, steering, and maintaining a balanced body position. Avoid changing clothing, such as putting on raingear, while mounted on the horse, because it may scare the horse; instead, dismount for clothing changes or adjustments.

Test and classify riders according to riding ability. The horse and the riding area are assigned according to the rider's ability. Beginning riders should attend an introductory safety lesson, including information on horse psychology and behavior and approaching, handling, and leading a horse. Before trail riding, all riders should warm up in a ring or corral to ensure that they are well suited to their horses and can control the gait and function required during the trail ride. Ensure that riders feel confident and demonstrate basic skills in controlling the horse (stop, start, steer) and maintaining proper distance.

Follow basic horseback safety standards. To ensure gear fits properly and/or is properly adjusted, an instructor should make a safety check of each rider's clothing, footwear, helmet, and saddle. He or she needs to check stirrup length to ensure that riders are able to raise their behinds off the saddle about one hand's depth. Front and rear cinches are checked for tightness, twigs, folds, and bends. The instructor should also check the safety of the riding area before each session. Only one rider is allowed on a horse at any time, and there should be no eating or drinking while riding. Riders should dismount before going through small gates.

Respect ring- or corral-riding standards. Each horse and rider should be under the observation of an instructor at all times, and the riding ring has good footing for the horses and is free of dangerous obstructions. The fencing must be at least 42 inches high, visible, and well maintained. Gates to the ring should remain shut.

Inspect and don't spook horses. Horses displaying uncomfortable or abnormal behaviors should be dismounted and checked for injuries and poor equipment fitting, and may need to be walked back to the stable on foot. If a horse gets loose, do not chase it; instead, have an adult calmly attempt to retrieve the horse.

Respect trail-riding standards. The length of the trail ride and the gait of the horses should be geared to the ability of the least experienced rider. Riding trails should have good footing and be free of dangerous obstructions, such as low hanging branches. Trails are marked, mapped, regularly inspected, and maintained. The participants should ride single file, one full-horse length apart, with an instructor at the head and at the rear of the group. Riders must have control of horses, maintain the spacing between horses, and increase distances between horses when the horses' speed increases. Horses are to be walked (not ridden) up and down hills, and should be walked for the final ten minutes of any riding period in order to cool down.

Avoid public roads and highways whenever possible. If a group must cross a road, the instructor should first halt the group in a line well before the road, check for traffic, and then signal the group to cross. At the signal, all horses are to be turned to face the highway and all cross at the same time.

Safety Gear

- Protective headgear with a properly fitting safety harness that meets the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) F1163-88 requirements, displaying the Safety Equipment Institute (SEI) seal
- Long pants and appropriate protective clothing that's snug to prevent tangling with the saddle
- Boots or closed-toe shoes with a smooth sole and at least a half-inch heel to prevent feet from sliding through stirrups (no steel-toe shoes, which could bend in stirrups).
- A saddle (sized appropriately for each rider), which the facility will provide
- Extra halter/lead ropes carried by instructor, which the facility will provide
- Cell phone or walkie-talkies to communicate need for emergency services
- Tapaderos (pieces of heavy leather around the front of the stirrup of a stock or range saddle to protect the rider's foot and to keep the foot

from sliding through the stirrup). If the saddle does not have tapaderos, the rider should have riding boots with at least a 1-inch heel to prevent the foot from slipping.

- Well-fitting gloves to protect hands from blisters, rope burns, and cuts
- Saddlebag for lengthy trail rides, to carry items such as a water bottle, clothing layers, and lunch

These checkpoints should be reviewed with the vendor, facility, or your council as appropriate.