



Canoeing

Council Approval: Required – High Risk

Tier 2

Activity Permitted For: *D B J C S A

Not Recommended For: Daisies, except with an experienced adult in each canoe and on flat water.

Camps with current ACA accreditation are expected to adhere to the current ACA standards for canoeing with Girl Scout Daisies.

About Canoeing

Canoeing is a great team-building exercise and a fun way to enjoy the outdoors. Whether you're playing games on a pond or taking a whitewater trip on a river, there's a canoeing option for everyone. Canoeists sit on a seat or kneel in the canoe, and use a paddle to propel their boat. Most canoes are for two people, but some canoes can hold up to 12.

Currents, waves, rapids, and wind affect conditions. Those conditions and type of canoe will determine what is appropriate for your troop. See the Paddling and Rowing Sports—Master Progression Chart for details. Be sure all participants have the training and experience to participate in the level expected. Class III rapids require prior council approval. Participants may be Cadettes and older who have demonstrated and documented prior experience of progression.

Whitewater canoeing can only be done on water that has been run and rated, and only up to Class III difficulty, as defined by the American version of the [International Scale of River Difficulty](#).

Learn More:

- [American Canoe Association](#)
- [Canoe and Kayak magazine](#)
- Interactive maps of places to go: [Paddling.com](#) and [American Whitewater](#)
- Instructional videos about canoeing strokes: [Paddling.com](#)

Include Girls with Disabilities

Talk to girls with disabilities and their caregivers, and ask about needs and accommodations. Contact the canoeing instructor or boating facility in advance to ask about accommodating people with disabilities.

Additional Resources:

- See [Disabled Sports USA](#) to find out about inclusion in canoeing.
- Check out [Paralympic.org](#) for inspiring stories of paddlers with disabilities.

Safety Activity Checkpoints

Ensure participants are able to swim. Success on the water depends on comfort and ability in the water. Conduct a swimming test in advance. See “Swimming” safety activity checkpoints for samples, or ask your instructor for guidelines. If a swimming test is not possible, presume all participants are non-swimmers. Only strong swimmers are approved for whitewater canoeing.

All paddlers must wear a U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket. Type III life jackets are recommended and should fit according to weight and height specifications. Inspect life jackets to ensure that they are in good condition and contain no tears.

Practice recovery procedures. The instructor demonstrates self-recovery and righting techniques. Girls learn and practice these skills. This will help prevent being disoriented or frightened if they end up in the water, and provides important skills.

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

The instructor or guide must be able to effectively communicate commands and instructions.

Ensure that the instructor or guide reviews site-specific emergency techniques. For example, whitewater canoeists are instructed in how to float through rapids, how to breathe while swimming in rapids, and how to swim to shore. The lead instructor or guide must have firsthand knowledge of the hazards and conditions of the location being used.

At least one adult instructor or guide should be certified by the American Canoe Association, the American Red Cross, other sponsoring organization approved by your council or have demonstrated equitable experience. Certifications must be appropriate for the activity.

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

Be aware of the lifeguard’s position. A stationary lifeguard can only be used when canoeing is taking place on flat water close to shore. For large bodies of water or rivers, the lifeguard must be in a canoe and positioned with the group.

Arrange for watchers/helpers. An adult watcher or skilled helper is required for certain size groups. See the chart below. This person should have basic skills in the activity and supports the group by reinforcing instructions. They also watch for possible emergencies and help the instructor with rescues if needed. Basic water rescue, small craft safety, or similar training is the preferred preparation. Consult the instructor for specific watcher/helper qualifications.

Select a safe site. Don’t paddle in unknown areas. Know the locations of all shipping channels. Do not canoe more than one mile from the nearest shore. Make sure of the following:

Avoid busy channels when possible. If you must cross them, do so at a 90-degree angle to the channel traffic. Also avoid surf zones and areas with standing waves, unless they’re part of planned whitewater canoeing.

On long passages, boats should stay close enough together that a group decision can be made if wind and water conditions change.

Be aware of possible changes in water level, due to tides or dam releases, and how these affect water conditions

Avoid hazards such as strainers, sieves, hydraulics, waterfalls, bridges, dams, fences, and low power lines. Rapids must be avoided unless part of a planned whitewater route.

Research water conditions and select the right boats for participant skill level. Consider weather and water conditions, weight of passengers, and equipment to be carried. Make sure:

- The craft weight and capacity are not exceeded. Many boats have a plate near the stern (back), showing these maximums.
- Canoes that are 15 feet or shorter hold no more than two people.
- You are aware of the type of canoe needed for the water to be used.
- Canoes are not overloaded with gear, and gear is distributed evenly among paddlers.

Know universal signals. Whistle and visual signals are used to pass messages or call for help. Learn them at [Paddle Education](#).

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.

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.

Use the buddy system. Instruct girls to keep their boat within sight of at least one other boat. Use the buddy system on the water with boats the same as you would on land.

Transport boats safely. Use car-top racks or trailers specifically designed for canoes. Secure boats with two lines across the top (one at each end), and with lines at the bow and the stern. Drivers must have prior experience hauling trailers.

Report accidents. Notify marine law enforcement or your council as appropriate.

Safety Gear

- Canoes suitable for the type of water, with proper flotation, and air bag, if used, checked before use
- Paddles appropriate size and style for the canoeist and the type of canoeing
- Emergency sound device, such as a whistle, compressed air horn, or VHF radio on navigable waters

- U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket for each paddler. Type III life jackets are recommended and should fit according to weight and height specifications.
- Rescue gear appropriate for boat type and conditions (ask your instructor), such as:
 - Throw bag or throw line
 - Waist-mounted tow system (lightweight rope which attaches to towing person and to towed boat)
 - Rescue sling to get participants back into a boat
 - Designated rescue craft, such as a paddleboard or chase boat
 - Any other items required by the boating jurisdiction in which you'll paddle
- Emergency gear appropriate for the canoeing type and distance from shore, such as:
 - Emergency repair kit: duct tape or electrical tape, screwdriver, pliers
 - Spare paddle, waterproof 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
- A safety helmet with a strong, flexible plastic shell and chin strap, as well as openings for drainage, worn when paddling in waters that are Class II or III
- Bailer (a scoop for removing water from a boat)
- A waterproof flashlight
- A painter (a strong line at the bow used for securing the canoe that's at least half the length of the boat)
- At least one graspable and throwable personal flotation device (Type IV buoyant cushion or ring buoy or equivalent) immediately available for each group on the water
- Compass, waterproof chart, VHF marine radio, and other essentials for extended trips
- Locking blade knife carried by instructor/guide/qualified adult in their life jacket or other readily accessible place, and a line for towing or rescue

Note that canoeing at night may require additional gear; consult your instructor.

These checkpoints should be reviewed with the instructor, guide, or your council as appropriate.