



Kayaking

Council Approval: Required – High Risk

Tier 2

Activity Permitted For: B J C S A

Not Recommended For: Daisies

About Kayaking

Virtually any body of water is suitable for some kind of kayaking. Start with flat water with little or no current, and progress to more advanced conditions. Kayaks come in a variety of shapes and sizes, designed for different types of water and paddler skill levels. “Sit on top” kayaks are simple, stable boats that are great for beginners. “Decked” or “sit inside” kayaks are covered by a deck and spray skirt; the paddler sits inside with legs extended. All involve moving a kayak across water using a double-bladed paddle, and combine exercise, transportation, and fun!

Your troop can kayak on bays, rivers, lakes, and oceans. Currents, waves, rapids, and wind affect conditions. Those conditions and type of boat will determine what is appropriate for your troop. Be sure all participants have the training and experience to participate in the level expected.

Learn More:

- Interactive maps of places to go: Paddling.com and [American Whitewater](http://AmericanWhitewater)
- [International Scale of River Difficulty](http://InternationalScaleofRiverDifficulty)
- Basic interpretation of rapids and river difficulty: ThoughtCo.com
- About canoeing, kayaking, and standup paddle boarding: [American Canoe Association](http://AmericanCanoeAssociation)
- Info on gear selection and how-to's: Paddling.com

Include Girls with Disabilities

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

Additional Resources:

See [Disabled Sports USA](http://DisabledSportsUSA) to find out about inclusion in kayaking.

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 the “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.

Ensure all paddlers 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 should demonstrate self-recovery and righting techniques, and girls should learn and practice these skills. This will help prevent their becoming disoriented or frightened if they end up in the water.

Paddlers must be trained on how to perform wet exits and must be able to execute one successfully before being allowed to use a decked kayak. If spray skirts are used, wet exits must be performed before the outing can begin.

Practices appropriate self-rescue and reentry techniques. If kayaking in cold water, paddlers should learn cold water survival techniques and treatment for hypothermia.

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

Ensure the instructor/guide will review site-specific emergency techniques for the type of craft used. For example, whitewater kayakers are instructed in how to float through rapids, how to breathe while swimming in rapids, and how to swim to shore.

Ensure the lead instructor/guide has firsthand knowledge of the hazards and conditions of the location and type of boat being used.

You'll want to verify that at least one adult instructor/guide is certified by the American Canoe Association, the American Red Cross, or other sponsoring organization approved by your council. Certifications must be appropriate for the activity.

Verify lifeguard qualifications and experience. Ensure lifeguards have current certification in American Red Cross (ARC) Lifeguarding with Waterfront Module, or its equivalent.

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 canoeing skills. They support 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.

Keep weight evenly distributed. Keeping gear and fellow paddlers evenly distributed makes the boat safer and easier to paddle.

Select a safe site. Don't paddle in unknown areas. Know the locations of all shipping channels. Do not kayak farther than one mile from the nearest shore.

Avoid busy channels when possible. If you must cross them, do so at a 90-degree angle to the channel traffic.

Avoid surf zones and areas with standing waves unless they're part of planned whitewater kayaking.

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

Only perform this activity on water that has been run and rated and up to Class III difficulty, as defined by the American version of the [International Scale of River Difficulty](#).

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 that:

Watch that kayak weight and capacity are not exceeded. Many boats have a plate near the stern (back), showing these maximums.

Use the type of kayak needed for the water conditions present, and ensure the kayak is sized for the person(s) using it.

Ensure kayaks are not overloaded with gear. Gear should be distributed evenly with 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.

On the Day of Paddling or Rowing:

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.

Review self-rescue techniques. See above.

Use the buddy system. Instruct girls to keep their boat within sight of at least one other boat at all times.

Transport boats safely. Use car-top racks or trailers specifically designed for kayaks. 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, if appropriate.

Safety Gear

Some gear will depend on the type of kayaking, or on water conditions. Check with your instructor.

- U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket (Type III life jackets recommended and should fit according to weight and height specifications)
- Kayak sized appropriately for the participants and suitable for the type of water
- Kayaks with proper flotation and any air bags checked before use (if float bags are used, make sure they're secured to kayak)
- Double-bladed paddle in the appropriate size and style for the activity and person using them (ask instructor about proper fit)
- Emergency sound device, such as a whistle, compressed air horn, or VHF radio
- Rescue gear appropriate for kayak type and conditions (ask your instructor), such as:
 - At least one graspable and throw able personal flotation device, throw bag, or throw line
 - Waist-mounted tow system (lightweight rope which attaches to towing person and to towed boat); should be one tow system for every three to four kayaks
- Emergency gear appropriate for the kayaking type and distance from shore, such as:
 - Emergency repair kit: duct tape or electrical tape, screwdriver, pliers, spare plugs
 - Spare paddle, first-aid kit, repair kit, and standard safety equipment, like 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 strong, flexible plastic shell and chin strap, as well as openings for drainage should be worn when:
 - Paddling in waters that are Class II or III
 - Paddling in or near sea caves
- Bailer (a scoop or sponge for removing water from a boat) secured to the kayak

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