



Standup Paddle Boarding

Council Approval: Required

High Risk

Tier 2

Activity Permitted For: J C S A

Not Recommended For: Daisies and Brownies

About Standup Paddle Boarding

While standing, paddlers propel standup paddleboards (SUPs) across the water with long-handled paddles. Paddling is a full-body sport which uses core muscles and develops excellent balance and coordination. With instruction, beginners can quickly learn to paddle on flat water lakes and bays. Experienced paddlers can tackle ocean surf or rivers with a certified instructor's guidance.

With the right instruction, equipment, and preparation, almost any body of water is suitable for SUP. Start with flat water with little or no current, and progress to more advanced conditions like rivers or oceans.

The U.S. Coast Guard considers SUPs as vessels when they are used outside of designated swim areas or ocean surfing zones. Therefore, federal regulations about life jackets, sound devices, and lights apply.

Learn More:

- Interactive maps of places to go: Paddling.com and [American Whitewater](http://AmericanWhitewater.com)
- For river paddling: [International Scale of River Difficulty](http://InternationalScaleofRiverDifficulty.com)
- About canoeing, kayaking, and SUP: [American Canoe Association](http://AmericanCanoeAssociation.org)
- [Stand Up Paddle World magazine](http://StandUpPaddleWorld.com)

Include Girls with Disabilities

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

Additional Resources:

- See Abilities.com and [Dream Adaptive](http://DreamAdaptive.com) to find out about inclusion and adaptive equipment for paddlers.

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. SUP paddlers must be strong 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 demonstrates self-recovery and righting techniques. Girls learn and practice these skills. This will help prevent them from becoming disoriented or frightened if they end up in the water (likely with SUP).

Verifying instructor knowledge and experience:

- The skill level of the adults must be higher than the difficulty of the intended activity.
- The instructor or guide must be able to effectively communicate commands and instructions.
- The instructor or guide needs to review site-specific emergency techniques. For example, when paddling in shallow water, the instructor should remind girls how to fall from their boards.
- The lead instructor or guide needs to have firsthand knowledge of the hazards and conditions of the location being used.
- At least one adult instructor or guide should be currently 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.

Check lifeguard qualifications. For lifeguards overseeing SUP, ensure they have the proper training, experience, and rescue equipment for the body of water being used.

Arrange for watchers/helpers. An adult watcher or skilled helper is required for some group sizes. See the Paddling and Rowing Sports—Master Progression Chart. This person should have basic skills in the activity, and support the group by reinforcing instructions, watching for possible emergencies, and helping 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. Paddling is not permitted farther than one mile from the nearest shore. Make sure of the following:

- The launching area is free of glass and debris and has a gentle slope and good footing. Rocks should be avoided.
- Busy channels are avoided when possible and crossed carefully, when necessary, at a 90-degree angle to the channel traffic.
- Surf zones and areas with standing waves are avoided, except as part of planned ocean/surf or whitewater paddling.
- On long passages, boards are close enough together so that a group decision can be made if wind and water conditions change.
- You're 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. Select the right boards for participant skill level and conditions.

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

Prepare for emergencies. Pack a waterproof first-aid kit if you'll be away from shore. Follow other guidelines in "Introduction to *Safety Activity Checkpoints 2019*."

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, keep a sharp lookout for other boats and obstructions, head into the wind at a 45-degree angle, and stay low.

Review self-rescue techniques. Ensure each person can get back on their board. When paddling in cold water, also review cold-water survival techniques and treatment for hypothermia.

Use the buddy system. Instruct girls to stay within sight of at least one other board.

Transport boats safely. Use car-top racks or trailers specifically designed for paddle boards. Secure them 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

Some of the gear you'll need depends on the type of paddling or on the water conditions. Check with your instructor.

- A U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket worn at all times while paddling (Type III life jackets recommended and should fit according to weight and height specifications)
- Paddle board sized appropriately for the participants and suitable for the type of water
- Paddles the appropriate size and style for the activity and person using them (a good rule of thumb is 10 inches higher than the paddler's height; keep extras on hand)
- Emergency sound device, such as a whistle
- Rescue gear appropriate for conditions, such as throw bag or throw line or waist-mounted tow system
- Leash to keep board close in case paddler falls off (no leashes in rivers, to avoid entrapment)
- Helmet, chest protector, arm and leg protection for whitewater standup paddle boarding (inflatable board recommended)
- Any other items required by the boating jurisdiction in which you'll paddle.