



Waterskiing and Wakeboarding

Activity Permitted for: J C S A

Council Approval: Required as per Council Policy P1; [Activity/Trip Permission \(2129\)](#)

Vendor Approval: Required for waterskiing and wakeboarding instructor/operator (vendor)

Required Training: 281 GS 201 Trips & Overnights (gsLearn); [American Red Cross Basic Water Rescue](#) online course. *See below for training prerequisites*

Girl Scouts may not go waterskiing and wakeboarding without properly certified lifeguards, who have current American Red Cross (ARC) Lifeguarding with Waterfront Module certification or equivalent and have the proper training, experience, and rescue equipment appropriate to the body of waterway/venue.

About Waterskiing and Wakeboarding

As with surfing, learning to stand up on water skis or a wakeboard (a single board resembling a snowboard) is one of the sport's primary challenges, especially for beginners. Waterskiing requires thorough instruction and practice. Key elements of successful waterskiing include balance, a strong grip, and proper-fitting skis/board and bindings. Skiers either wear one board (called slalom) or two skis (called combo); barefoot waterskiing is an advanced skill.

Beginners must learn the waterski position: knees bent and together, leaning back with weight on the balls of the feet, head up, arms straight, and skis pointing forward. Girls will learn technique and safety to prevent injuries such as water skiers must learn (contrary to instinct) to release the towline as soon as they begin to lose their balance.

Girls can start the learning process on land. Before entering the water, it is helpful to simulate the waterskiing process on a sandy beach and learn how to wear the skis and hold onto a water-ski handle properly. They can and should also learn to communicate with the spotter (the person on the back of the boat watching the skier) with specific and agreed-upon hand signals. This way the spotter can then shout out to the driver when necessary.

Another fun technique is to learn by watching others—videotape other Girl Scouts who are learning to waterski and watch it together to find out how to improve performance.

Open bodies of water, such as lakes and bays, are ideal. Connect with your Girl Scout council for site suggestions and search online for lakes nearby.

Learn More

- [USA Water Ski](#)

- [U.S. Coast Guard's Boating Safety Division](#)

Include Girl Scout Members with Disabilities

Talk to Girl Scout members with disabilities and their caregivers. Ask about needs and accommodations. Always be sure to contact the location and/or the instructor in advance to ensure they are able to accommodate those with disabilities. For more information visit [USA Water Ski](#) for information on amenities for water skiers with disabilities.

Equity. In addition to physical and social-emotional disabilities, consider the history, culture, and past experiences of the Girl Scout members in your troop that could affect their ability to equally participate in an activity. Work with members and families to understand how an activity is perceived. Ensure that all Girl Scout members and their families feel comfortable and have access to whatever is needed to fully participate, such as proper equipment, prior experiences, and the skills needed to enjoy the activity.

Infectious Disease Guidelines. Girl Scouts use a commonsense approach to health and safety. Before participating in Girl Scouting activities, members are to undergo health checks at home for any symptoms such as fever of 100.4 (or need for fever-reducing medications) chills, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, stomach aches, nausea, or vomiting. Members with any of these symptoms or in need of fever-reducing medication **MUST** stay home until fully recovered.

Emergency Action Plan (EAP). Review and document your Emergency Action Plan (EAP) before taking girls out for any activity and review it with the girls so they too are prepared. Think through scenarios of what can go wrong such as an accident, physical injury to a girl, missing girl, sudden illness, or sudden weather or water emergencies.

Waterskiing and Wake Boarding Checkpoints

Vendor Approval Required for waterskiing and wake boarding instructors and/or boat operators. Review Vendor Approval section under the *Standard Safety Guidelines for vendor approval timelines*. Connect with your Girl Scout council for approved vendor suggestions to ensure they are properly insured. If it is not, allow enough time to have the vendor approved. The owner operator should be able to confirm one million dollars General Liability insurance upon request. For privately/locally owner operator, the council will request a certificate of insurance to document evidence of the insurance coverage and name the council as additional insured. Most facilities will accommodate this request if they are able to administratively. [See High Adventure Approved Vendors List \(#2127\)](#).

Required Prerequisite Training: Troop/Group Program leaders must complete GSUSA's online leadership courses and GSVSC's 281 GS 201 Trips & Overnights course in gsLearn. Adult volunteer chaperones must complete GSVSC's 281 GS 104 Orientation for Support Volunteers online course in gsLearn.

Required Training: Adult volunteers are to [complete American Red Cross Basic Water Rescue](#) online course and upload certificates of completion in gsLearn. Links to courses can be found in gsLearn Content Library.

No areal or acrobatics or tricks on skis. Girls are not permitted to attempt aerial tricks on water skis or wakeboards.

Protect hands. Water skiers can get blisters from the pressure of holding onto the rope handle; wearing gloves or taping hands can help. Learn how at [Boating Magazine](#).

No ocean skiing. Skiers stay in bays, inlets, lakes, and gulfs and do not ski in the ocean without explicit council approval.

Learn skiing safety. Girls will learn basics like staying behind the boat, as it is dangerous to curve around the boat. Also, skiing outside the wake is an advanced technique for experienced skiers only.

Verify instructor and boat driver knowledge and experience. Ensure that the adult or instructor is certified by USA Water Ski or possesses equivalent certification or documented experience according to your council's guidelines. Confirm that the boat driver is an adult of at least 21 years of age and has an appropriate license and is skilled in operating the watercraft.

Ensure participants are strong swimmers. Participants' swimming abilities are confirmed and should be clearly identified (for instance, with colored headbands to signify beginning and advanced swimmers) at council approved sites, or participants provide proof of [swim test](#) certification. In the absence of a swim test certification, a swim test should be conducted before or on the day of the activity. Consult with your Girl Scout council for additional guidance. *Activity not recommended for beginner swimmers.*

Check the boat safety features. Make sure the boat has sufficient power to tow the skier(s) and is equipped with a side-angle rearview mirror, fire extinguisher, flags, paddle, horn, bailing device, two gas tanks (for outboard motors), mooring ropes (extra line), boarding ladder, and throw bag.

Prepare for emergencies. If a lifeguard is not on duty, an adult with rescue and resuscitation experience and/or certification is present. Ensure the presence of a waterproof first aid kit and a first aider with a current certificate in first aid, including adult and child CPR or CPR/AED, and who 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, ensure the presence of a first aider with Wilderness First Aid certification.

Be prepared in the event of a storm with lightning. Exit the 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. During storms, if shore cannot be reached, keep a sharp lookout for other boats and obstructions.

Keep track of water skiers. Use a list or checkboard system to stay aware of water skiers' whereabouts.

Privately-Owned Towing Boats. If using a boat that is privately owned, ensure that the owner/operator:

- Is a knowledgeable adult with the understanding and ability of their responsibility for Girl Scouts' safety and well-being.
- Agrees to follow the Safety Activity Checkpoints relevant to the activity.
- Maintains the vessel in accordance with the Safety Activity Checkpoints.
- Coordinates with the activity leader to confirm the required safety gear is available for all participants, and that the gear meets the specifications of authorities for the local jurisdiction.
- Meets Coast Guard and/or local jurisdictional requirements.
- Maintains insurance and registration as required by law in their jurisdiction.

For privately-owned vessels over 30 feet, also see [Offshore Water Vessels Safety Activity Checkpoints](#).

Carbon Monoxide warning. Never allow "teak surfing," swim platform dragging, or bodysurfing behind any vessel. Do not operate a motor or generator while anyone is on or holding onto a swim platform, swim deck, swim step, or swim ladder, except for a very brief time when docking, or entering/exiting the vessel. Carbon monoxide emitted at the stern (back) of the boat can cause death in these situations.

Safety 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.
- At least one graspable and throwable Coast Guard approved personal flotation device (Type IV buoyant cushion or ring buoy or equivalent) immediately available for each group on the water.
- Life raft and/or towing boat.
- Ski lines (tow lines) at least 75 feet long; a single handle is used on the ski line.
- Wakeboard or rounded (not pointed) skis that are appropriate to the skill and size of the skier.
- Water skis.
- Foot bindings appropriate for skier's weight and skiing speed.
- Waterproof sunscreen (SPF of at least 15), applied every two hours, and lip balm.
- Beach towel.
- Dry clothing and sunglasses to wear after surfing.
- Wet suit if water temperatures are cold, below 70 degrees Fahrenheit.