



## Challenge Courses

**Activity Permitted for:** D B J C S A

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

**Vendor Approval:** Required

**Required Training:** 281 GS 201 Trips & Overnights  
(gsLearn)

### About Challenge Courses

A challenge course is a set of structures that provide a setting for physical challenges designed to increase participants' self-confidence and physical coordination, to increase group cooperation, and to be fun.

Initiative games and low elements require the group to work together to accomplish mental or physical challenges; spotters safeguard the movements of each member of the group. High ropes challenge courses involve components for individual or group challenges that are six feet or more off the ground. A safety belay (a rope to secure a person to an anchor point) is used with a harness and participants wear helmets unless the hosting facility or instructor indicates the use of helmets is hazardous for belay. Spotters (participants who safeguard the movements of a member of the group) provide support and protect the head and upper body of a climber in case of a fall.

Each participant must possess the physical strength and technical skills to use the equipment and understand the safety procedures and consequences of their actions. Connect with your council for suggestions and site approval.

**Note:** that Daisies and Brownies may participate only in activities designed for their ages, with equipment suitable to the size and ability of each girl. Outdoor high ropes and high elements are only permitted for Juniors and older.

### Learn More

- [Association for Experiential Education](#)
- [Association for Challenge Course Technology](#)
- List of accredited vendors: [Professional Ropes Course Association](#)

### 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. Learn more about the resources and information that the [National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability](#) provides for people 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.

### Challenge Course Checkpoints

**Vendor Approval Required for Challenge Course.** 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 owned businesses, 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 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.

**Verify instructor knowledge and experience.** High ropes courses require an instructor trained and certified by a verified agency. The instructor must demonstrate competence in equipment maintenance, safety and rescue techniques, proper use of the course, and hands-on training. Initiative games and low ropes courses require a trained and certified instructor or an instructor with training and documented experience, according to your council guidelines. Ensure the instructor has provided written documentation of the completed training as well as proof of participation in routine instructor review and updates. Instructors need to be skilled in selecting appropriate activities, teaching, and supervising spotting and belaying techniques, and modifying tasks to provide an appropriate experience for the ages and skill levels in the group. Before use, instructors should inspect all equipment, course components, and landing areas. A minimum of two instructors must be present. Instructor-to-participant ratios must meet the standard as identified by the course manufacturer or installer and need to comply with industry best practice standards.

**Ensure equipment is well-maintained.** There needs to be a documented maintenance schedule and periodic inspection by instructors and outside professionals of all artificial structures and equipment used in the activities. A Use Log should be kept on all equipment that is subject to stress, wear, and deterioration. A written process for equipment monitoring and retirement should be established and followed by the facility.

**Girls learn about and prepare for challenge courses.** Instructors teach a set of readiness and action commands to all participants for climbing, spotting, and belaying. All participants should use gentle muscle warm-up and stretching activities before beginning physical activities. Instructors must describe the objectives, safety procedures, and hazards to the participants before beginning an activity.

**Girls practice safe challenge course techniques.** Spotting techniques are taught, demonstrated, and practiced by participants prior to any challenge course activity. All activities are appropriately spotted. For activities where partners are needed, instructors should match participants according to size and skill level, if appropriate. Instructors must supervise all tie-ins, belays, and climbs on high ropes courses and spotting on low elements courses. Participants must not be stacked more than three levels high vertically (e.g., in a pyramid) at any time. No one should stand on the middle of someone else's back.

### **Safety Gear**

- Sturdy shoes.
- Climbing helmets (with Union of International Alpine Association approved label) must be worn for all climbing activities in which the participant is more than six feet off the ground and by participants standing in the “fall zone” beneath a climbing element. Helmets are also required for belay, unless the hosting facility or instructor indicates the use of helmets is hazardous for belay.
- Disposable shower cap liner, for use with public rental helmets.
- Belaying equipment—including ropes, webbing, harnesses, hardware, and helmets—designed and tested for this type of activity and appropriate for the size of the user.
- Long pants or bike pants for activities that may lead to skin abrasions on legs.
- Close-fitting clothing (avoid wearing loose clothing, especially around the head and neck).
- A chest harness with seat harness or full-body harness for small -framed girls when climbing.