



Hiking: Safety Activity Checkpoints

Unlike short walks, hiking involves lengthy, cross-country walking trips and often requires sturdy boots to provide traction on rocks and unruly earth floors. With respect to the [Leave No Trace](#) philosophy, it's important for hikers to leave trails as (or better than) they found them. Although the action of one hiker may not strongly affect the environment, the effects of large groups of hikers can degrade trails.

Caution: Girls 12 years old and older must follow the Shooting Sports Safety Activity Checkpoints in order to use firearms, and must have both council and parent/guardian permission. Girls are never allowed to hunt, go on high-altitude climbs or to ride all-terrain vehicles or motor bikes.

Note: For overnight hiking experiences, follow the guidance in the Backpacking Safety Activity Checkpoints.

Know where to hike. Connect with your Girl Scout council for site suggestions. Also, to locate hiking areas near U.S. metropolitan areas, visit localhikes.com or alltrails.com.

Include girls with disabilities. Communicate with girls of all abilities and/or their caregivers to assess any needs and accommodations. Contact national parks to inquire about their accommodations for people with disabilities. To learn more about adapting hiking activities visit [Disabled Sports USA](http://DisabledSportsUSA.com).

Hiking Gear

Required Gear

- Lightweight, layered clothing and outerwear appropriate for weather conditions
- Water bottle or hydration pack (each girl carries at least one quart)

- Nonperishable, high-energy foods such as fruits and nuts
- Hiking/trail boots or footwear
- Map and compass or map and global positioning system (GPS)
- Flashlight
- Whistle

Recommended Gear

- Rain jacket or poncho
- Insect repellent
- Waterproof sunscreen (SPF of at least 15) and lip balm
- Hat or bandana
- Day pack
- Sunglasses
- Pocket knife

Prepare for Hiking

- Communicate with council and parents.** *See the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints.*
- Girls plan the activity.** *See the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints.* In addition, encourage girls to plan routes, activities, rules for group living and guidelines for dealing with problems that may arise with other groups of hikers.
- Arrange for transportation and adult supervision.** *For adult-to-girl ratios see the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints.* In addition, ensure that the hiking adult or instructor has experience in teaching hiking techniques and trip planning. Ensure that one adult is in front of the group of hikers, and the other is in the rear of each group, and that both are familiar with the area.
- Compile key contacts.** *See the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints.*
- Girls share resources.** Encourage girls to distribute a list of hiking gear and supplies, and to determine which resources can be shared.
- Choose an appropriate hiking route.** Terrain, mileage, and hiking time are known to the hikers in advance. Hikes are restricted to a reasonable length as determined by age, level of experience, nature of the terrain, physical condition of the hikers, disabilities, weather conditions and time of day. The hiking pace always accommodates the slowest hiker.
- Assess safety of hiking routes.** The route is known to at least one of the adults or a report is obtained in advance to assess potential hazards such as poisonous plants, dangerous animals, unsafe drinking water, cliffs and drop-offs. Ensure that a land-management or similar agency is contacted during the trip planning stage to determine available routes and campsites, recommended group size, water quantity and quality, and permits needed.
- Ensure that hikers have a comprehensive understanding of the trip.** Group members are trained to be observant of the route, surroundings, and fatigue of individuals. Instruction is given on the safety rules for hiking, such as staying together in a group, recognizing poisonous plants and biting or stinging insects and ticks, respecting wild animals and behaving effectively in emergencies. Ensure that girls, based on their level, know how to read maps, use a compass, navigate a route, and estimate distance.
- Take safety precautions.** Search-and-rescue procedures for missing persons are written out in advance, reviewed, and practiced by girls and adults. Methods of communication with sources of emergency care, such as hospitals, and park and fire officials, are known and arranged in advance.
- Prepare for emergencies.** 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, who is prepared to handle cases from extremes of temperature, such as heat exhaustion, heat stroke, frostbite, cold exposure, hypothermia, as well as sprains, fractures, insect stings, tick bites, snake bites, sunburn, and altitude sickness, as necessary. 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. If feasible, a vehicle is available to transport an injured or sick person. See Volunteer Essentials for information about first-aid standards and training.

On the Day of Hiking

- **Get a weather report.** On the morning of the activity, check weather.com or other reliable weather sources to determine if weather conditions are appropriate, and make sure that the ground is free of ice. If severe weather conditions prevent the activity, be prepared with a backup plan, alternative activity, or postpone the activity. Write, review, and practice evacuation and emergency plans for severe weather with girls. In the event of a storm with lightning, 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 heads between them.
- **Use the buddy system.** See *the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints*.
- **Respect the environment and keep trails clean.** Use the principles of minimal-impact camping. Store garbage in insect- and animal-proof containers with plastic inner linings, and cover it securely when there is a campsite garbage-pickup service. When there is no garbage-pickup service, remove garbage from campsite in plastic bags and discard, as appropriate. Recycle whenever possible. Do not bury food; carry out grease and fuel canisters. Do not remove natural materials such as leaves or branches. In addition, avoid eating wild foods, walking on or uprooting plants, interfering with or feeding wild animals, and littering.
- **Practice safe hiking.** Instructions are given on the safety rules for hiking, which include forbidding hiking off-trail and after dusk. Girls stay on the pathway to avoid trampling trailside plants and causing erosion. In addition, take adequate rest periods, with time to replenish fluids and eat high-energy food (such as fruits and nuts).

Hiking Links

- American Hiking Society: www.americanhiking.org
- Appalachian Mountain Club: www.outdoors.org
- Appalachian Trail Conference: www.atconf.org
- Leave No Trace: www.lnt.org

Hiking Know-How for Girls

- **Practice with maps and a compass.** Before heading out on a lengthy hike, learn how to read a map and use a compass. Look at a map to understand where you started, and where you plan to finish. What do you anticipate you'll see during your hike?
- **Learn about regional nature.** What flowers, trees, insects are unique to the area you're hiking in?