



Rowboating: Safety Activity Checkpoints



One of the most historic means of transportation, row boating has evolved to become a leisurely activity and competitive sport. [Ocean rowing](#), competitive rowing and Venetian are just a handful of rowing styles available. In rowboat racing, an eight-oared shell can hit speeds of up to 16 miles per hour.

An excellent form of relaxation and exercise as a group or individual activity, beginners should be careful of overexertion. If girls aren't accustomed to using oars, they may experience strained arm muscles.

Know where to rowboat. Lakes, rivers, and ponds are most common for rowing, but the ocean can be suitable as long as waves are manageable. Connect with your Girl Scout council for site suggestions.

Include girls with disabilities. Communicate with girls with disabilities and/or their caregivers to assess any needs and accommodations. Learn more about the resources and information that [Disabled Sports USA](#) provides to people with disabilities.

Rowboating Gear

Required 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. Read about Coast Guard life jackets [here](#).
- Emergency sound-producing device, such as a horn or whistle
- Oars

Recommended Gear

- Layered clothing that's easily changeable depending on temperatures (waterproof jacket recommended)
- Boat shoes, closed-toe and nonslip hiking/sport sandals with heel strap, or water socks or shoes (no flip-flops)
- Waterproof sunscreen (SPF of at least 15) and lip balm
- Sunglasses or sunhat
- Insect repellent

- Emergency repair kit containing quick-repair items such as duct tape, rope, aluminum or fiberglass repair shields
- Waterproof flashlight
- [Bow and stern lines](#) to secure each end of the boat to the pier or dock
- Anchor that is appropriate for the water bottom (if necessary)
- Bailer (a bucket used to remove water from a boat)
- At least one graspable and throwable personal flotation device (Type IV buoyant cushion or ring buoy or equivalent) is immediately available for each group on the water.

Prepare for Rowboating

- Communicate with council and parents.** *See the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints.*
- Girls plan the activity.** *See the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints.*
- Ensure participants are able to swim.** Participants' swimming abilities are classified and clearly identified (for instance, with colored headbands to signify beginners, advanced swimmers, etc.) at council-approved sites, or participants provide proof of swimming-test certification. In the absence of swimming-test certification, a swim test is conducted before or on the day of the activity. Consult with your Girl Scout council for additional guidance.
- Arrange for transportation and adult supervision.** *See the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints for the recommended adult-to-girl ratios.*
- Verify instructor knowledge and experience.** Ensure that the adult or rowboating instructor holds an American Red Cross Small Craft Safety certification, or possesses equivalent certification or documented experience according to your council's guidelines, as outlined in [Volunteer Essentials](#).
- Compile key contacts.** *See the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints.*
- Select appropriate boats for water and passengers*.** Make sure craft weight and capacity are not exceeded (some crafts clearly display maximum capacity). Consider weather and water conditions, weight of passengers, and equipment.
- File a float plan.** If participating in a long-distance rowboating trip, it is recommended that a float plan be completed and filed (left) with a person knowledgeable about the trip and when to expect the party back. Float plans cannot be filed with the U.S. Coast Guard. The USCG float plan is available [here](#) and should be used for all float plans.
- Prepare for emergencies.** If a lifeguard is not on duty, an adult with rescue and resuscitation experience and/or certification is present; at least one adult present has small craft safety certification or equivalent experience. (Both of these qualifications can be held by one person.) 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 of near-drowning, immersion hypothermia, and sunburn. If any part of the activity is located 30 minutes or more from Emergency Medical Services response time, ensure the presence of a first-aider with Wilderness First Aid. See [Volunteer Essentials](#) for information about first-aid standards and training.

On the Day of Rowboating

- Get a weather and wind report.** Never rowboat on a stormy or extremely windy day. On the day of the rowboating trip or lesson, visit [weather.com](#) or other reliable sources to determine if conditions are appropriate. If weather conditions prevent the rowboat trip, be prepared with a backup plan or alternate activity.
- Use the buddy system.** *See the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints.*
- Be prepared in the event of a storm with lightning.** Exit 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, 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.

Rowboating Links

- Boatsafe.com (safety tips, online courses, boating tips, etc.): www.boatsafe.com
- U.S. Coast Guard's Boating Safety Division: www.uscgboating.org
- U.S. Power Squadrons: www.usps.org
- U.S. Rowing Association: www.usrowing.org

Rowboating Know-How for Girls

- Know the currents. On rivers, row upstream to avoid any uncomfortable rapids or waterfalls.
- Keep weight evenly distributed. Never stand in a boat as the shift in weight can cause the boat to overturn. Never sit on the side of a rowboat, always sit on the boat floor or seat. If places need to be changed while rowing, be sure the boat is stable enough. Try to keep weight low and centered in the boat as much as possible.
- Host a rowing event. In sculls, each rower uses two oars—one in each hand. In sweeps, each rower uses only one oar, extending out one side of the boat.

***These checkpoints must be reviewed with the vendor and/or facility, when appropriate.**