



Vaulting on Horseback: Safety Activity Checkpoints



Vaulting is gymnastics in harmony with the moving horse and its history dates back to Roman times. It provides opportunities for team building and channels girls' energy into a positive learning experience. Vaulting teaches balance and confidence, which makes riders more successful in their arena and trial lessons. One of the most important aspects of vaulting on horseback is showing respect for horses. Before riding, inspect horses to ensure that they have no cuts, injuries, or rocks in their feet.

The purpose of these checkpoints is to provide tips for vaulting on horseback which requires special equipment, as well as horses and instructors with specialized training. Vaulting on horseback is not permitted for Girl Scout Daisies.

Know where to vault. Locations with firm grounding that are designated for vaulting on horseback. Vaulting is done during daylight hours; vaulting at night is in an enclosed, well-lit area. Avoid vaulting when it is raining, in wet areas, mud, and on streets and parking lots. Connect with your Girl Scout council for site suggestions.

Include girls with of all abilities. Communicate with girls of all abilities and/or their caregivers to assess any needs and accommodations. Learn more about the resources and information that [Saddle Up!](#) provides to people with disabilities.

Vaulting Riding Gear

Required Gear

- Long pants and appropriate protective clothing (clothing that is stretchable and allows movement is encouraged).
- Closed-toe canvas shoes with a smooth flexible sole (no steel-toe shoes or heels, which can injure the horse during the activity)
- No jewelry
- Protective headgear with properly fitting safety harness that meets the American Society for Testing and Materials ([ASTM](#)) F1163-88 requirements, displaying the Safety Equipment Institute (SEI) seal

Recommended Gear

- Snaffle Bridle
- Side Reins
- Vaulting Surcingle
- Horse Pad
- A Lunge Line & Lunge Whip
- Vaulting Barrel
- Mats for practicing
- Sunscreen (SPF of at least 15) and lip balm
- Sunglasses

Prepare for Vaulting on Horseback

- Communicate with council and parents.** See the *Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints*.
- Girls plan the activity.** Keeping their grade-level abilities in mind, encourage girls to take proactive leadership roles in organizing details of the activity.
- Organize groups and arrange for adult supervision.** For the recommended adult-to-girl ratios see the *Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints*.
- Verify instructor knowledge and experience*.** Vaulting instructors are adults (at least 18 years old) who have current Vaulting Coach certification from an accredited horsemanship instructor training organization, such as the [Certified Horsemanship Association](#), or documented proof of a minimum of three years' experience successfully instructing vaulting in a riding program. Assistant Vaulting Coaches are at least 16 years old and are certified by an accredited horsemanship instructor training organization or have documented proof of at least one year's experience successfully instructing in a general horseback riding program. Riders are supervised by instructors or assistant instructors at all times when in the proximity of horses, whether mounted or not. For vaulting, at least one instructor and one assistant instructor (who serves as a spotter) supervise a group of 8 or fewer riders. One additional instructor is required for every five additional riders. For beginners and younger girls, or for difficult trails, in trail riding, increased instructors may be needed.
- Compile key contacts.** See the *Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints*.
- Assess participants' maturity level.** Girls must possess sufficient physical coordination and balance to participate in riding. They are old enough to understand and practice safety procedures, to use good judgment in reacting to situations, and to take responsibility for themselves and their horses. (Some stables have weight limits for rider eligibility. Check when making reservations.)
- Dress appropriately for the activity.** Make sure girls and adults avoid wearing jewelry. Riders may not ride barefoot, in sandals, or in hiking boots with lug soles. Riders do not wear backpacks, day packs, or fanny packs.
- Take safety precautions.** An emergency vehicle is readily available. Plans for communication with emergency services and fire officials are arranged in advance and known by each instructor. Plans for response in an emergency—such as a fire, severe weather, an injured rider, or an injured or loose horse—are known by all participants and instructors. At Girl Scout facilities, communication between the riding area and the site director or healthcare personnel is possible. In stable and ring areas, telephone numbers for the fire department, local hospital or emergency ambulance service, and veterinarian are conspicuously posted, and the location of the fire alarm is known to all girls and adults.
- 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 of injury from falls as well as abrasions 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. See *Volunteer Essentials* for information about first-aid standards and training.

Selecting a Site

- **Select a safe site.** Check with council staff to see if an approved vendor list is offered.
- **If the council does not have an approved vendor list, complete the following steps to select a safe site*:**
 - Before the activity, call the facility to determine the following safety information:
 - How is First Aid handled?
 - How far away is the facility from Emergency Services?
 - What forms of emergency communication are available?
 - The stable operator provides evidence of \$1,000,000 liability insurance and instructor certifications. References from other youth-group users of the stable are recommended.

Note: Girl Scouts are not allowed to use facilities that do not have a minimum of \$1,000,000 liability insurance coverage.

- **Check condition of the facility*:** For both Girl Scout council–owned and non–Girl Scout riding facilities, the riding area is away from outside distractions and free of debris; the barn and riding areas do not have exposed barbed wire fencing; the instructional rings, corrals, paddocks, and stables have clearly posted rules and regulations; the horses are properly cared for, and the stables, corrals, and barns are clean and uncluttered. Tack (saddles, bridles, and so on) is clean and in good condition. Communicate with the horseback-riding organization about any rider weight limitations; in some cases, heavier riders can cause a horse pain, which, in turn, may cause horses to exhibit dangerous behavior.

On the Day of Horseback Riding

- **Get a weather report.** On the morning of horseback riding, check weather.com or other reliable weather sources to determine if conditions are appropriate. If severe weather conditions prevent the activity, be prepared with a backup plan or alternate activity, or postpone the activity. Write, review, and practice evacuation and emergency plans for severe weather with girls. In the event of a storm, 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.
- **Use the buddy system.** See *the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints*.
- **Safeguard valuables.** See *the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints*.
- **Girls learn about safe horseback riding*.** A pre-ride demonstration is given to first-time riders, including mounting, dismounting, starting, stopping, steering, safety rolls, maintaining a balanced body position, and landing technique for vaulting. Avoid changing clothing while mounted on the horse, because it may scare the horse; instead, dismount for clothing changes or adjustments.
- **Test and classify riders according to riding ability*.** The horse and the riding area are assigned according to the rider's ability. Beginning riders attend an introductory safety lesson, including information on horse psychology and behavior and approaching, handling, and leading a horse. Before vaulting, all riders warm up with ground exercises to help prevent injuries and soreness. Ensure that riders feel confident and demonstrate basic skills in controlling the horse (stop, start, and steer) and maintaining proper distance.
- **Follow basic horseback safety standards*.** To ensure that equipment fits properly and/or is properly adjusted, an instructor makes a safety check of each rider's clothing, footwear, helmet, and saddle. The instructor also checks the safety of the riding area before each session. Only one rider is allowed on a horse at any time, and there is no eating or drinking while riding. Riders should dismount before going through small gates. Riders should learn to vault on, vault off and master the basic level compulsories on the barrel before executing them on the horse.
- **Respect ring- or corral-riding standards.** Each horse and rider is under the observation of an instructor at all times, and the riding ring has good footing for the horses and is free of dangerous

obstructions. The fencing is at least 42 inches high, visible, and well maintained. Gates to the ring are shut.

- **Inspect and don't spook horses.** Horses displaying uncomfortable or abnormal behaviors should be dismounted and checked for injuries and poor equipment fitting, and may need to be walked back to the stable on foot. If a horse gets loose, do not chase it; instead, one person calmly attempts to retrieve the horse.

Horseback Riding Links

- American Vaulting Association: www.americanvaulting.org
- Certified Horsemanship Association: www.cha-ahse.org
- International Federation for Equestrian Sports: www.fei.org
- United States Pony Clubs: www.ponyclub.org

Horseback Riding Know-How for Girls

- Get to know your horse. Did you know there are more than 50 colors of horses? Thoroughbreds are identified by their colors, which include bay, black, chestnut, dark bay or brown, gray, and roan. Visit www.thinklikeahorse.org to learn more about horses.
- Hold your horses. Before horseback riding, learn how to mount, dismount, rein, and other horseback riding procedures at www.mahalo.com/how-to-ride-a-horse.
- Respect the horse. Did you know that horses feel less comfortable when they can't see the rider's eyes? For that reason, avoid wearing sunglasses.

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