



Challenge Courses: Safety Activity Checkpoints



Approval: Girl Scouts San Diego requires leaders to obtain advance approval before participating in challenge courses, except when enjoying a council-sponsored challenge course experience. Send an [Activity Approval Form](#) to your service unit activity consultant.

A challenge course is a set of structures that provide a setting for physical challenges designed to increase participant self-confidence and physical coordination, increase group cooperation, and have 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 6 feet or more off the ground. A safety belay (rope to secure a person to an anchor point) is used with a harness, and participants wear a helmet. 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 must understand the safety procedures and consequences of her actions. Girl Scout Daisies and Brownies may participate only in activities that have been designed for their age and that have equipment that suit the size and ability of the girl.

Know where to find challenge courses. Connect with your Girl Scout council for site suggestions and approval. Also, the Association for Challenge Course Technology provides a list of companies that have completed its Professional Vendor Member accreditation processes. The Professional Ropes course Association is another ANSI approved accredited association. Find its list of accredited vendors at: http://www.prcainfo.org/Course_Vendors

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 the [National Center on Health, Physical Activities and Disabilities](#) provides to people with disabilities.

Challenge Courses Gear

Required Gear:

- Sturdy shoes

Required For High Elements:*

- Climbing helmets (with Union of International Alpine Association (UIAA)-approved label must be worn for all climbing activities in which the participant is more than 6 feet off the ground and/or on belay. In addition, participants standing in the “fall zone” beneath a climbing element wear helmets. It is recommended that a disposable liner, such as a shower cap or surgical cap, be worn underneath the helmet to protect against the spread of head lice.
- Belaying equipment – ropes, webbing, harnesses, hardware, and helmets – must be designed, tested, and manufactured for the purpose of this type of activity and appropriate for the size of the user.

Recommended Gear

- Long pants or bike pants for activities when skin abrasions on legs are possible
- Sunscreen and (SPF of at least 15) and lip balm
- Sunglasses
- 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.

Prepare for Challenge Courses

- Communicate with council and parents.** See the [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints](#).
- Girls plan the activity.** See the [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints](#).
- Arrange for transportation and adult supervision.** For the recommended adult-to-girl ratios please see the [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints](#).
- Verify instructor knowledge and experience*.** High ropes courses require a trained and certified instructor 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 and [Volunteer Essentials](#). Training includes competence in equipment maintenance, safety techniques, proper use of the course and hands-on training. Ensure that the instructor-to-participant ratio meets or exceeds minimum standards, as identified by the original manufacturer or installer of the challenge course and/or is in compliance with current industry standards. Ensure that the instructor has provided written documentation of the completed training, there is a regular process of review and update for all instructors, and a minimum of two instructors are present. Instructors are 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 inspect all equipment, course components, and landing areas in the activity area.
- Compile key contacts.** See the [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints](#).
- 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. A sharp knife, hardware, and extra rope of appropriate length for rescue are available at the site. Emergency transportation is available; 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. Specialized safety and rescue procedures are planned and practiced to ensure the ability to remove a participant from a high-ropes, rappelling, or climbing situation. See [Volunteer Essentials](#) for information about first-aid standards and training.
- Dress appropriately for the activity.** Sharp objects, jewelry, and watches are removed and pockets emptied. Long hair is pulled back from the face and fastened under the helmet to prevent tangling.

On the Day of the Challenge Course Activity

- Get a weather report.** On the morning of the activity, check [weather.com](#) or other reliable weather sources to determine if conditions are appropriate. Be prepared to alter the activity plan or have an alternate activity prepared if weather conditions change. 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.
- **Ensure that equipment is well-maintained*.** There is 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 is kept on all equipment subject to stress, wear, and deterioration. A written equipment monitoring and retirement process is established and followed.
- **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 utilize gentle muscle warm-up and stretching activities before beginning physical activities. Instructors 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 match participants according to size and skill level, if appropriate. Instructors supervise all tie-ins, belays, and climbs on high ropes courses and spotting on low elements courses. Participants are not stacked more than three levels high vertically (in a pyramid, for example) on each other at any time. No one should stand on the middle of someone else's back.

Challenge Courses Links

- Association for Experiential Education: www.aee.org
- Association for Challenge Course Technology: www.acctinfo.org
- Professional Ropes Course Association : <http://www.prcainfo.org/>

Challenge Courses Know-How for Girls

- Focus on team-building. Challenge courses rely on strong communication and trust. Is your team ready for the challenge?

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