



## Climbing and Rappelling: Safety Activity Checkpoints



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

Girls may participate in various types of climbing, keeping in mind that climbing and rappelling is not permitted for Girl Scouts Daisies, while Brownies are only allowed to participate in climbing activities.

- **Bouldering:** Climbing without a rope but at a height not greater than 6 feet off the ground. 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. Spotting is used on descending and ascending high elements or climbing routes and bouldering.
- **Top roping:** A climbing method in which the rope is anchored from the top of the climbing route, using belays (safety ropes to secure a person to an anchor point). The belayer (person who controls belay/safety line to prevent long and dangerous falls) is set up at the bottom of the route with the other end of the rope tied to the climber.
- **Multi-pitch climbing:** For experienced climbers only. A climb on a long route that requires several pitches the length of a rope or less (a “pitch” is the rope-length between belay stations). The climbing group climbs to the top of the first pitch. The lead climber climbs the next pitch, anchors in, and belays each remaining climber individually to the anchor.
- **Indoor or outdoor artificial climbing walls and auto belay or harnessed indoor ropes courses:** These activities do not incorporate an element of high risk and can be done by participants of various ages and abilities, keeping in mind that Daisies are not permitted to participate in climbing and rappelling.

**Know where to climb and rappel.** Climbing and rappelling may be done on indoor or outdoor artificial climbing walls, climbing/rappelling towers, indoor ropes courses and natural rock. Connect with your Girl Scout council for site suggestions.

**Include girls with disabilities.** Communicate with girls of all abilities 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.

## Climbing and Rappelling Gear\*

### Required Gear\*

- Climbing helmets that have the UIAA-approved label (Union of International Alpine Association) must be worn for all outdoor natural climbing situations where the participant is more than 6 feet off the ground or on belay. 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.
- A chest harness with seat harness or full-body harness may be required for specific climbing or ropes activities.
- Sturdy shoes
- Close-fitting clothing; avoid wearing loose clothing, especially around the head and neck
- Portable drinking water
- Raingear, as necessary

### Recommended Gear

- Long pants or bike pants are recommended for activities when skin abrasions on legs are possible
- All equipment used for belaying such as ropes, webbing, harnesses, hardware and helmets are designed, tested, and manufactured for the purpose of this type of activity and appropriate for the size of the user.\*
- Nonperishable, high-energy foods such as fruits and nuts, as necessary dependent on location, length of time and type of climbing
- Sunscreen (SPF of at least 15) and lip balm
- Sunglasses

## Prepare for Climbing and Rappelling

- 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.** See the [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) for the recommended adult-to-girl ratios, keeping in mind that Daisies do not participate in climbing and rappelling and Brownies participate in climbing only
- Verify instructor knowledge and experience.\***
  - For bouldering, top roping and multi-pitch climbing, an instructor with documented experience, indicating competence in equipment maintenance, safety and rescue techniques, proper use of the course and hands-on training (must provide certification) or documented experience according to your council's guidelines, as outlined in [Volunteer Essentials](#) directly supervises the group. . Ensure that there is a regular process of review and update for all instructors. A minimum of two instructors are present, and 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.
  - Indoor or outdoor artificial climbing walls and auto belay or harnessed indoor ropes courses facilitators have experience, indicating competence in equipment maintenance, safety and rescue techniques, proper use of the course and hands-on training. A minimum of one facilitator and an additional adult are present, and facilitators are skilled in selecting appropriate activities, teaching and supervising spotting and lowering techniques, and modifying tasks to provide an appropriate experience for the ages and skill levels in the group. Before use, facilitators inspect all equipment, course components, and landing areas in the activity area.
- The instructor-to-participant ratios are as follows:\***
  - Bouldering and top roping: 1 instructor to 10 participants
  - Multi-pitch climbing: 1 instructor (qualified lead climber) to 3 participants

- *NOTE: The instructor to participant ratio is NOT the same as the adult to girl ratio that is found in the Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints. Both ratios MUST be complied with when girls are participating in climbing or rappelling. For example, if there are 15 Cadettes participating in a multi-pitch climbing activity, there must be 5 instructors plus 2 adult Girl Scout volunteers (who are not instructors).*
- **Select a safe site.\*** Permits and permission requests are filed as required for outdoor natural climbing sites and facilities. All permanent structures and the belaying system are planned and constructed by experienced individuals. Plans and procedures are established to avoid unauthorized use of the site, structures, and equipment. The artificial climbing site must be posted to warn against unauthorized use.
- **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 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 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 Climbing or Rappelling

- **Get a weather report.** If climbing and rappelling outdoors, 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.
- **Participants learn about and prepare for climbing and rappelling.** Instructors teach a set of readiness and action commands to all participants for climbing, spotting, and belaying. All participants utilize 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.
- **Participants practice safe climbing and rappelling techniques.** Spotting techniques (if necessary) are taught, demonstrated, and practiced by participants prior to any climbing or rappelling 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 climbing sites and spotting on bouldering sites.

## Climbing and Rappelling Links

- International Mountaineering and Climbing Federation: [www.theuiaa.org](#)
- Rockclimbing.com: [www.rockclimbing.com](#)

## **Climbing and Rappelling Know-How for Girls**

- Leave No Trace. When climbing and rappelling in natural areas, it's important to respect rocks and the environment. Read tips from [Leave No Trace](#) and [U.S. National Park Service Web site](#).

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

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