



Recreational Tree Climbing: Safety Activity Checkpoints



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

Explore the beauty and life of trees through recreational tree-climbing. Girl Scouts of all ages may participate in Recreational Tree Climbing. Recreational Tree Climbing uses ropes, saddles, and techniques proven safe for both climber and tree, to ascend into the crowns of trees and the canopies of forests for recreation, exploration, exhilaration, education, research, exercise and fun!

Know where to climb. Climbing may be done on any branch that has at least 6 inches of living tissue with a full inspection of the health of the tree and surrounding area. Connect with your Girl Scout council or local Tree Climbing facilitator for site suggestions.

Include girls with disabilities. Communicate with girls of different abilities and/or their caregivers to assess any needs and accommodations. Learn more about the resources and information that [Goodleaf Tree Climbing UK](#) provides to people with disabilities.

Tree Climbing Gear

Required Gear*

- Sturdy shoes
- All equipment used for climbing—ropes, webbing, harnesses, hardware and helmets—is designed, tested, and manufactured for the purpose of this type of activity and appropriate for the size of the user.
- Climbing helmets that have the UIAA-approved label (Union of International Alpine Association) must be worn for all 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.

Recommended Gear

- Long pants or blue jeans are recommended for activities where skin abrasions on legs are possible
- Close-fitting clothing; avoid wearing loose clothing, especially around the head and neck
- Potable drinking water
- Sunscreen of at least SPF 15 and lip balm
- Raingear
- Sunglasses
- Nonperishable, high-energy foods such as fruits and nuts

Prepare for Tree Climbing

- 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 ratio, see the [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints](#).* In addition, the instructor to participant ratio shall not exceed 1 instructor for every 6 girls.

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 tree climbing. For example, if there are 16 Juniors participating in a tree climbing activity, there must be 3 instructors plus 2 adult Girl Scout volunteers (who are not instructors).

- Verify instructor knowledge and experience.*** An instructor with documented experience, indicating competence in equipment maintenance, safety and rescue techniques, proper use of the equipment and hands-on training or documented experience according to your council's guidelines, as outlined in *Volunteer Essentials* directly supervises the group. The instructor has provided written documentation of the completed training. Ensure that there is a regular process of review and update for all instructors. Instructors are skilled in selecting appropriate activities, teaching and supervising climbing and decent techniques, and modifying tasks to provide an appropriate experience for the ages and skill levels in the group. Before use, instructors inspect all equipment, climb all ropes, and clearly designate a helmet-only area for safety.
- Select a safe site.*** Permits and permission requests are filed as required for climbing trees. All trees are inspected and pre-climbed before the event to ensure participant safety. Plans and procedures are established to avoid unauthorized use of the site. Climbing areas are clearly marked so passersby will not be in danger of coming in contact with falling debris.
- 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 injuries from falls as well as abrasions and sunburn. A sharp knife, hardware, and extra rope of appropriate length are available at the site for rescue, and, 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 certification. Specialized safety and rescue procedures need to be planned and practiced to ensure the ability to remove a participant from a 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

Get a weather report. On the morning of the activity, check noaa.gov 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 equipment and trees 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*. Instructors teach a set of readiness and action commands to all participants for climbing and decent. 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 decent techniques. All activities are appropriately supervised. Instructors are the only ones to clip participants in and out of their tie-in systems.

Recreational Tree Climbing Links

- Global Organization of Tree Climbers: <http://www.gotreeclimbing.org>
- Tree Climbers International: <http://www.treeclimbing.com>

Recreational Tree Climbing Know-How for Girls

- **Leave No Trace.** While climbing in natural areas, it's important to respect the trees and the environment. Read tips from the [U.S. National Park Service Web site](#) or the [Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics](#).

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