girl scouts

Horseback Riding: Safety Activity Checkpoints

One of the most important aspects of horseback riding 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 trail riding and ring or corral riding. Some activities, such as vaulting, pack trips, driving, and games, may require special equipment, as well as horses and instructors with specialized training. Horseback riding is not recommended for Girl Scout Daisies, but Daisies may participate in pony rides when the horses are led by persons on foot.

Know where to ride. Locations with firm grounding that are designated for horseback riding. Riding is done during daylight hours; riding at night is in an enclosed, well-lit area. Avoid horseback riding in wet areas, mud, and on streets and parking lots. 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 Saddle Up! provides to people with disabilities.

Horseback Riding Gear

Basic Gear

- ☐ Long pants and appropriate protective clothing (clothing is snug to prevent tangling with saddle)
- ☐ Boots or closed-toe shoes with a smooth sole and at least a half-inch heel to prevent feet from sliding through stirrups (no steel-toe shoes, which could bend in stirrups)
- ☐ Well-fitting gloves to protect hands from blisters, rope burns, and cuts

Specialized Horseback Riding Gear

- ☐ 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
- ☐ Saddle (size is appropriate for each rider) with tapaderos (pieces of heavy leather around the front of the stirrup of a stock or range saddle to protect the rider's foot and to keep the foot from sliding through the stirrup); if the saddle does not have tapaderos, the rider should have riding boots with at least a 1-inch heel to prevent the foot from slipping

- ☐ Saddlebag

Specialized Trail Riding Gear

- ☐ Rain gear
- ☐ Halters
- ☐ Lead ropes

Prepare for Horseback Riding

- ☐ **Communicate with council and parents.** Inform your Girl Scout council and girls' parents/guardians about the activity, including details about safety precautions and any appropriate clothing or supplies that may be necessary. Follow council procedures for activity approval, certificates of insurance, and council guidelines about girls' general health examinations. Make arrangements in advance for all transportation and confirm plans before departure.
- ☐ **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.** The recommended adult-to-girl ratios are two non-related adults (at least one of whom is female) to every:
  - 6 Girl Scout Daisies (pony rides only—when the ponies are led by persons on foot)
  - 12 Girl Scout Brownies
  - 16 Girl Scout Juniors
  - 20 Girl Scout Cadettes
  - 24 Girl Scout Seniors
  - 24 Girl Scout Ambassadors

  Plus one adult to each additional:

  - 4 Girl Scout Daisies (pony rides only—when the ponies are led by persons on foot)
  - 6 Girl Scout Brownies
  - 8 Girl Scout Juniors
  - 10 Girl Scout Cadettes
  - 12 Girl Scout Seniors
  - 12 Girl Scout Ambassadors
- ☐ **Verify instructor knowledge and experience.** Riding instructors are adults (at least 18 years old) who have current certification from an accredited horsemanship instructor training organization, such as the Certified Horsemanship Association and American Association for Horsemanship Safety, or documented proof of a minimum of three years' experience successfully instructing in a general horseback riding program. Assistant riding instructors 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 ring or corral riding and trail riding, at least one instructor and one assistant instructor supervise a group of 10 or fewer riders. For ring and corral riding, 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.** Give an itinerary to a contact person at home; call the contact person upon departure and return. Create a list of girls' parents/guardian contact information, telephone numbers for emergency services and police, and council contacts—keep on hand or post in an easily accessible location.
- ☐ **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.)
- ☐ **Select a safe site.** Obtain permission and any necessary permits before riding on public or private lands; records of maintenance checks, requests, and repairs must be kept. The stable operator provides evidence of liability

insurance and instructor certification and references from other youth-group users of the stable. 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.

- ☐ **Dress appropriately for the activity.** Make sure girls and adults avoid wearing dangling earrings, bracelets, and necklaces. 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 60 minutes or more from emergency medical services, ensure the presence of a first-aider (level 2) with Wilderness and Remote First Aid. See *Volunteer Essentials* for information about first-aid standards and training.

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.** Girls are divided into teams of two. Each girl chooses a buddy and is responsible for staying with her buddy at all times, warning her buddy of danger, giving her buddy immediate assistance if safe to do so, and seeking help when the situation warrants it. If someone in the group is injured, one person cares for the patient while two others seek help.
- ☐ **Safeguard valuables.** Secure equipment in a dry, locked storage area.
- ☐ **Girls learn about safe horseback riding.** A pre-ride demonstration is given to first-time riders, including mounting, dismounting, starting, stopping, steering, and maintaining a balanced body position. Avoid changing clothing, such as putting on raingear, 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 trail riding, all riders warm up in a ring or corral to ensure that they are well suited to their horses and can control all the gaits and functions required during the trail ride. 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. He or she checks stirrup length by ensuring that riders are able to raise their behinds off the saddle about one hand's depth. Front and rear cinches are checked for tightness, twigs, folds, and bends. 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.

- ☐ **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.
- ☐ **Respect trail-riding standards.** The length of the trail ride and the gait of the horses are geared to the ability of the least experienced rider. Riding trails have good footing and are free of dangerous obstructions such as low-hanging branches. Trails are marked, mapped, regularly inspected, and maintained. The participants ride single file, one full horse length apart, with an instructor at the head and at the rear of the group. Riders have control of horses, maintain the spacing between horses, and increase distances between horses when the horses' speed increases. Horses are walked (not ridden) up and down hills, and are walked for the final 10 minutes of any riding period in order to cool down.
- ☐ **Avoid public roads and highways whenever possible.** If a group must cross a road, the instructor first halts the group in a line well before the road, checks for traffic, and then signals the group to cross. At the signal, all horses are turned to face the highway and all cross at the same time.

Horseback Riding Links

- **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.horseguide.com and 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.

Horseback Riding Jargon

- **Breaking (or breaking in):** The education of the young horse, in which it is taught the skills necessary for its future as a riding or driving horse
- **Nearside:** The left-hand side of the horse; offside is the right-hand side of the horse
- **Leg up:** Method of mounting in which an assistant stands behind the rider, supports the lower part of his left leg, and gives a boost as necessary as the rider springs up off the ground