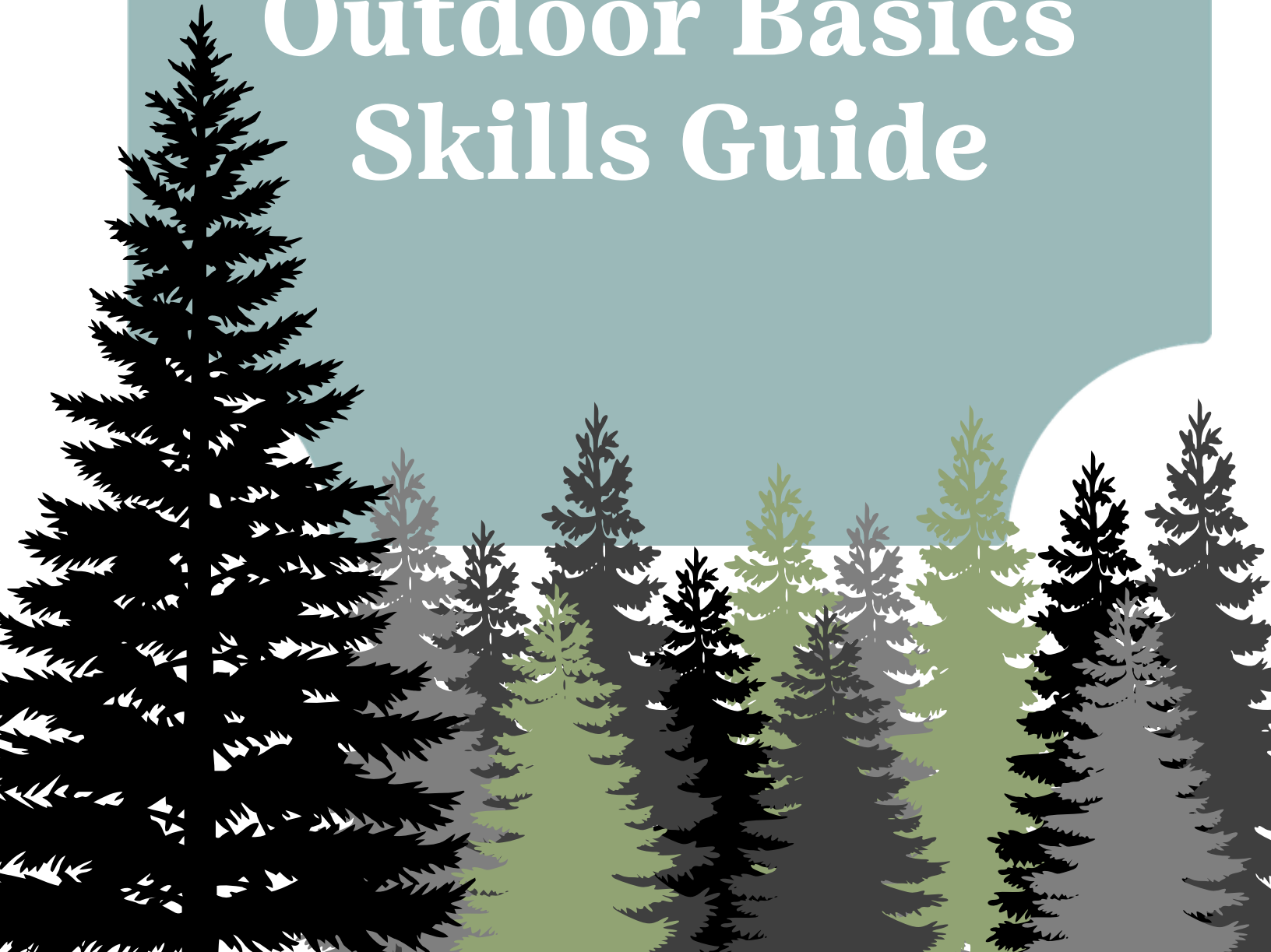




**gsmw**

# Outdoor Basics Skills Guide



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# Welcome to the GSMW Outdoor Basics Skills Guide

In this guide, you will learn about The 10 Outdoor Basics Skills and how to execute them safely during an outdoor adventure with your troop. Getting your troop outdoors supports the Girl Scout Leadership Experience. Outdoor adventures encourage girls to be comfortable in new environments, connect with nature, learn the importance of conservation and the 7 Leave No Trace Principles. The outdoors present new challenges and experiences that can't be taught indoors.

## What is the purpose of the Outdoor Basics Skills Guide?

The Outdoor Basics Skills Guide gives you, the Troop Leader or volunteer, the opportunity to get familiar with the highlighted 10 Outdoor Basics Skills, and prepares you to take your troop on an outdoor adventure. Keep in mind that an outdoor adventure can begin in your the schoolyard, a playground, or a nearby state park.

## Supplemental Materials

This Outdoor Basics Skills Guide is aimed at teaching troop volunteers the outdoor skills needed to lead a safe and fun outdoor adventure. GSMW has also created guides for you to utilize during your outdoor adventure:

1. The **Outdoor Activities Guide for volunteers** provides activities and tips for teaching the 10 Outdoor Basics Skills to your Girl Scouts.
2. The **Outdoor Basics Troop Activity Booklet** is a handout for Girl Scouts to use during your troop's outdoor adventure. The booklet emphasizes and reinforces The 10 Outdoor Basics Skills.
3. The **GSMW Outdoor Training Manual** is a comprehensive manual outlining safety and activity details for volunteers and troops who are ready to take their outdoor adventures to the ultimate level. All volunteers should familiarize themselves with the manual to be sure they follow all safety standards.



## Where to Begin

Planning an outdoor adventure with your troop might sound like a big undertaking, but remember, every great journey starts with a single step!

Not sure where to begin? Start by asking your Girl Scouts what they love most about the outdoors. Build on their natural strengths and interests to spark ideas for your next adventure.

Use the Outdoor Progression chart on the next page to see where your troop currently shines and where they can grow. Once you have a sense of their comfort level, involve them in the planning process because the best adventures are always girl led!

## Outdoor Progression

Progression allows girls to learn the skills they need to become competent in the outdoors, including how to plan and organize outdoor activities. Acknowledge a girl's mastery of an outdoor skill and invite her to challenge herself further by taking that next step up and out! Outdoor fun can be endless when girls lead.

### Look Out

Share past experiences in the outdoors.

Talk about favorite outdoor places and why they're special.

Wonder what else can be seen in the outdoors.

### Meet Out

Step outside to look, listen, feel and smell.

Share what was observed.

Learn more about what was discovered.

### Move Out

Plan and take a short walk outside.

Discuss being prepared for the weather.

Do activities to explore nature.

Plan and carry out an indoor sleepover.

### Explore Out

Plan and take a short and easy hike.

Discuss what to take in a day pack.

Dress for the weather.

Plan a healthy snack or lunch.

Learn how to stay safe in the outdoors.

### Cook Out

Plan and cook a simple meal outdoors.

Make a list of gear and food supplies needed.

Learn and practice skills needed to cook a meal.

Review outdoor cooking safety.

Practice hand and dish sanitation.

Create a Kaper Chart for the cookout.

### Sleep Out

Plan and carry out an overnight in a cabin or backyard.

Discuss what to pack for the sleep out.

Learn to use and care for camping gear.

Learn and practice new outdoor skills.

Plan a menu with a new cooking skill.

Discuss campsite organization.

Plan time for fun activities.

### Camp Out

Plan and take a 1-2 night camping trip.

Take more responsibility for planning.

Learn and practice a new outdoor skill.

Learn a new outdoor cooking skill.

Plan a food budget, then buy and pack food.

Practice campsite set up.

Plan an agenda that includes fun activities.

Explore/protect the surrounding environment.

### Adventure Out

Plan and take an outdoor trip for several days.

Learn and practice a new outdoor skill.

Learn a new outdoor cooking skill.

Develop first aid skills and use safety check points.

Budget, schedule, and make arrangements.

Participate in an environmental service project.

Teach and inspire others about the outdoors.

Imagine new experiences to be had outdoors.

Practice all Leave No Trace principles.



# Preparing Your Troop for Outdoor Adventures

The best way to get your troop prepared for an outdoor adventure is to practice your own outdoor skills. This guide is meant to teach you the 10 Outdoor Basics Skills and how they apply to Girl Scouts of Montana and Wyoming. Before we get into the skills, there are a few things to know before you embark on your troop's first hike, camp out, or other outdoor adventure.

**Policy:** GSMW troop volunteers leading outdoor activities must first complete the online portion of the gsLearn GSMW Outdoor Training. This required online training prepares you to lead a group of girls on a non-overnight outdoor adventure that does not include campfires or outdoor cooking. For example, a day hike, bird watching, nature walk, etc.

To take your troop camping or to have a campfire or cookout, a volunteer must complete the in-person Outdoor Cookout Training and enter their completion dates into gsLearn. Learn more at [www.gsmw.org](http://www.gsmw.org)'s Outdoor Resources page.

**Safety:** Safety Activity Checkpoints (SACs) set standards for adult-to-girl ratios when camping and traveling. You can view the ratios in the table below. Adults who participate in and chaperone outdoor adventures, travel, and camping trips must all be registered member volunteers with a cleared criminal background check.

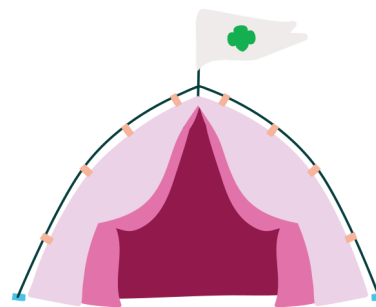
Grade Level	Number of Girl Scouts	1 Extra Adult Needed for Number of Additional Girl Scouts
Daisies (K-5)	6	1-4
Brownies (2-3)	12	1-6
Juniors (4-5)	16	1-8
Cadettes (6-8)	20	1-10
Seniors/Ambassadors (9-12)	24	1-12

When fathers or male volunteers are part of the group, separate sleeping quarters and bathrooms must be available at the site and utilized.

## Getting Organized:

As you plan your troop's outdoor adventure, you will need to keep the following organizational steps in-mind:

- Prepare a packing list for all your participants.
- Collect a health history card for every participant.
- Submit a Troop Trip Request Form at least two weeks before your campout.
- With your troop, plan the trip menu.
- Have an emergency action plan.



For details on getting organized and more, reference **GSMW's Outdoor Training Manual**.

## The 10 Outdoor Basics Skills

- Leave No Trace – The twine that holds everything together, just like caring for nature connects all we do outdoors.
- Weather – Blue for the open sky and being ready for all conditions.
- Animal Aware – Purple for respect and awareness of wildlife.
- Water & Nutrition – Tan for bread and the energy that fuels our adventures.
- Knife Safety – Yellow for caution and safe tool use.
- Basic First Aid – White for clean bandages and caring for others.
- Managing Fire – Orange for bright flames that warm and help us cook.
- Cooking Outdoors – Red for apples, representing good food and nourishment.
- Setting up Camp – Green for setting up tents responsibly off the grass.
- Knots – The knots on each end remind us to secure our skills and work together.



In the **Troop Outdoor Basics Skills Activities booklet**, we highlight the pin or keychain making activity, pictured to the right.

## 7 Principles of Leave No Trace

### Plan ahead and prepare



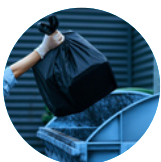
The first LNT principle guides us to think-through a trip before departure so you can enjoy the outdoors safely while protecting nature. Bring what you need, know the rules, check the weather, and choose routes and campsites that match your group's skills. Good planning prevents damage to the land and keeps everyone safe and happy outdoors. We will discuss more about planning and preparing in the Weather, Water & Nutrition, and Animal Aware skills sections.

### Travel and camp on durable surfaces



Stick to established trails and campsites so you don't harm plants or soil. Walk on rock, gravel, dry grass, or snow—places that can handle impact—and set up camp where others have already camped or on durable ground. We will refer to this LNT principle in the Setting up Camp section of this guide.

### Dispose of waste properly



This principle means taking all your trash, leftover food, and litter with you. Use bathrooms or dig a small hole for human waste, and keep water sources clean. Leave the outdoors cleaner than you found it!



## Leave what you find

Enjoy nature without taking or changing it. Don't pick plants, move rocks, or take souvenirs. Leave everything as you found it so others can discover its beauty too.



## Minimize campfire impacts

Girl Scouts should use campfires carefully or skip them when possible. Use a camp stove for cooking, and if you build a fire, keep it small and in an existing fire ring. Always burn wood to ash, then scatter the cool ashes. Learn more in the managing fire section of this guide.



## Be considerate of other visitors

Thoughtfulness and respect helps everyone enjoy the outdoors. Keep noise levels low, yield to others on trails, and avoid blocking paths or viewpoints. Be courteous when passing, and give space to those seeking quiet. Please learn more in the Animal Aware section of this guide.



## Respect wildlife

Observe animals from a distance and never feed any of them. Keep campsites and trails clean, storing food securely, and keeping pets under control. Remember, you are a guest in their home. Learn more in the Animal Aware section.

Girl Scouts of  
Montana and  
Wyoming is a proud  
partner of Leave  
No Trace.



Get outdoors and practice  
the principles with your  
troop using [these fun](#)  
activities.

## Preparing for Weather

Understanding weather safety is the first step in preparing for any Girl Scout outdoor adventure. Leaders and Girl Scouts can check reliable websites such as the National Weather Service at [noaa.gov](http://noaa.gov). Check the weather regularly, multiple times a day on the days leading up to and during the trip. Be on the lookout for alerts, hourly updates, and information about the probability of storms, wind, or rapid temperature changes.

Across the regions you will find that there are weather patterns that repeat each season, such as afternoon thunderstorms in the mountains or strong valley winds in the spring. Learning to read forecasts and talk through what different alerts mean helps Girl Scouts make safe choices and understand when to adjust a plan. Mountain environments especially require attention because weather changes faster and more dramatically than it does at lower elevations.

Weather awareness matters just as much as the clothing Girl Scouts bring. In the mountains a sunny trailhead can hide incoming clouds that may drop rain or snow on higher ridges only an hour later. Valleys often hold warmth while shaded forests stay cold and damp. Even deserts can bring big temperature swings between morning and evening. When adventurers know how these ecosystems behave they are better able to bring the right gear and understand why leaders choose certain routes, packing lists, and agendas. Your group can check the forecast together before leaving home and again at the trailhead to remain informed and reinforce the habit of preparing for changes.

### Weather and Children

Children often seem to tolerate heat or cold with surprising stamina during the excitement of an adventure, but they usually tire faster than adults once conditions begin to challenge their bodies. They lose heat more quickly in cold weather and become dehydrated more quickly in hot weather. Because of this they need regular breaks, steady hydration, and clear reminders to add or remove layers. By combining smart use of forecasting tools with thoughtful pacing and guidance, Girl Scouts can enjoy the outdoors safely while building real knowledge and confidence in all types of weather.



### Dressing for the Weather

Girl Scouts dress for comfort and practicality, not for fashion. It is important to dress appropriately for the weather. Spending time outdoors means preparing for sun, wind, rain, snow, and changing temperatures. Encourage your troop to think ahead about what they wear and pack for camp or a day outside. Use the following tips to help them make smart choices and plan for a safe and comfortable adventure.

## Outdoor Clothing Tips

- Long pants and sleeves are better than shorts and short sleeves in the woods. They protect the arms and legs against scratches insect bites, poison ivy, and sunburn.
- Choose the right fabrics. Synthetics like capilene and polyester blends and wool are the best choices for outdoor wear. Both stay warmer when wet with sweat or precipitation. Wool is less stinky, but synthetics dry faster.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing. Loose-fitting clothes allow better movement. Tight pants can restrict motion on long hikes and may lead to muscle strain or chafing.
- Select sturdy footwear. Shoes or boots should be comfortable and built for walking on uneven ground. Avoid open-toed shoes at any Girl Scout activity. Dress shoes, fashion boots, high heels, and thick-soled shoes are unsafe and not suitable for outdoor adventures.
- Bring rain gear. Always pack a poncho or raincoat. Depending on the length of your adventure, the terrain and the weather forecast, rain pants are an asset.



- Be mindful of wind. Wind lowers the temperature you feel (wind chill factor). Add a wind resistant layer when winds begin because once you get chilled, it can take a long time to warm up again.
- Expect cooler temperatures in the woods. It can be many degrees colder than in town. Always pack a rain jacket, even if you think you will not need it. It can help you stay warm, too.
- Keep your core warm. Staying warm around your trunk and rear-end areas helps maintain overall comfort. Choose fleece and jackets long enough to cover below your waist.

## Cold Weather Tips

- Remind girls to wear several light layers so they can easily adjust as temperatures change. Overheating leads to sweating, which can cause chills later. Wool provides the best insulation for warmth and comfort.
- When activity slows, remind girls to close openings at the neck, wrists, ankles, and waist to help retain body heat.
- Always wear a hat. A significant amount of body heat escapes through the head.



## Camping in the Cold

- When camping in a tent, show girls how to insulate under their sleeping area to prevent heat loss to the ground. Campers should always use a sleeping pad under their sleeping bag.
- Prepare for sleeping warmth. Suggest long underwear or warm sleep layers such as flannel pajama bottoms or fleece pants. These help maintain warmth through the night.
- Encourage girls to go to bed before they get cold and to change into clean, dry socks and underwear. A hat or hooded sweatshirt adds extra warmth.

**GSMW's Outdoor Training Manual provides more information about all types of weather including thunderstorms. The more you venture outdoors, the more your group will understand how to prepare for and stay comfortable in all sorts of weather.**

# Managing Fire

Build your wood or charcoal fire only in the designated fire ring. The fire ring is the area meant for burning, located within the larger fire circle, which includes the benches or seating area around it.

Before lighting any fire, make sure:

- Hair is tied back and loose clothing is secured.
- A shovel and bucket of water are ready and nearby.

## Fire Safety Guidelines

1. Never leave a fire unattended. Always ensure a responsible adult is present and alert when a fire is burning.
2. Do not use liquid accelerants. Start fires with twisted paper, tinder, or safe fire starters. You can also create homemade fire starters with your troop. See the GSMW Outdoor Training Manual for homemade fire starter ideas.
3. Stay out of the fire ring once the fire is lit. Only those actively cooking or tending the fire should be inside the ring, and always under adult supervision.
4. Use appropriate firewood. Collect only dry wood from the forest or camp area where you are staying. Use wood from designated camp sources, dry ground, or fallen dead branches. Avoid green or rotten wood, and never cut down living plants or trees.
5. Use fires only for appropriate purposes. Fires should be used for cooking, warmth, or campfire programs. Never burn aerosol cans, plastics, or other hazardous materials.

Volunteer training requirements. Volunteers leading campouts must complete the Outdoor Training in gsLearn, as well as the in person Cookout Training, which focuses on fire and outdoor cooking safety.

**Refer to GSMW's Outdoor Training Manual for additional guidance on fire safety, fire starting, and cooking over a fire.**



## Before Building Any Fire:

- Check local fire ordinances - Is a burning ban in effect?
- Check local weather conditions - Is it too dry or windy for a safe fire?
- Consider need - Is a campfire necessary?
- Consider the environment - Are there air pollution regulations?

## Checking Fire Restrictions and Weather Conditions

Before building a fire, Girl Scout volunteers should verify local fire restrictions and review weather conditions. Fire danger can change quickly depending on temperature, wind, humidity, and dry conditions. Checking ahead helps keep everyone safe, protects the environment, and ensures your campfire is permitted.

## How to Check Fire Restrictions and Weather Updates

- Official state websites:
  - Montana: [DNRC Current Fire Information](#)
  - [Montana Fire Info Restrictions Map](#)
  - Wyoming: [Wyoming State Forestry Fire Restrictions](#)
  - [BLM Wyoming Fire Restrictions](#)
- Weather and fire conditions:
  - Check [NOAA.gov](#) for accurate forecasts, including wind, humidity, and fire danger ratings. NOAA also provide air quality ratings that usually relate to fire activity.
- Mobile apps for real-time information:
  - [Watch Duty](#) for live wildfire tracking and alerts
  - [Frontline Wildfire Defense](#) for interactive fire maps and notifications
- Check posted notices: Trailheads, campgrounds, and park entrances often post signs with current restrictions or fire danger levels.
- Use common sense: Review the conditions at your site. Avoid lighting a fire near dry grasses, overhanging branches, tents, or other flammable materials.
- When in doubt, skip the fire: If fire restrictions are unclear or conditions seem risky, consider alternative cooking methods such as propane stoves or enclosed charcoal grills.



## Preparing Your Fire Site

- Prepare a fire ring that is 3 to 4 feet in diameter, cleared down to bare ground.
- Remove all flammable materials such as leaves, sticks, grass, and pine needles from within and around the fire ring for at least 10 feet in every direction.
- Keep fire control tools nearby, including a shovel and full bucket of water.
- If not using an established fire circle, first ask if a fire is necessary and permitted. Choose a safe location away from trails, tents, and overhanging branches. Avoid areas with rotting logs, stumps, or thick ground cover. Consider whether a fire might damage the ground cover, harm the natural beauty of the area, or leave a lasting mark.



## Preparing and Building a Charcoal Fire

Girl Scouts can use charcoal fires to cook simple outdoor meals, practice outdoor cooking skills, and build confidence in fire safety while camping. Charcoal fires are often used for foil packet meals, Dutch oven recipes, or roasting treats like marshmallows. Because charcoal fires burn differently than wood fires, it is important that Girl Scouts and follow safety rules and local regulations when using them.

Equipment to start the fire:

- Charcoal
- Charcoal chimney
- Tinder (i.e. newspaper)
- Matches or a lighter

Equipment to put out the fire:

- Bucket of water (filled before lighting the fire)
- Shovel

Starting the fire:

1. Place fire starters inside the fire ring.
2. Set the charcoal chimney on top of the fire starters.
3. Fill the chimney with charcoal.
4. Light the fire starters through the holes in the bottom of the can.
5. Wait until the top layer of charcoal turns gray before spreading it out for cooking.
  - Do not spread the charcoal too soon. It lights faster when the pieces stay together.



Extinguishing the fire:

- Soak all charcoal pieces thoroughly with water.
- Crush the pieces to ensure they are fully out.
- When completely cool, place in the trash. Never leave or bury charcoal in the woods.

## Preparing and Building a Wood Fire

### Equipment Needed to Start a Fire

- Wood
- Matches or lighter
- Tinder and kindling and optional fire starters

### Equipment Needed to Extinguish a Fire

- Bucket of water (filled before lighting the fire)
- Shovel

### Starting a Wood Fire

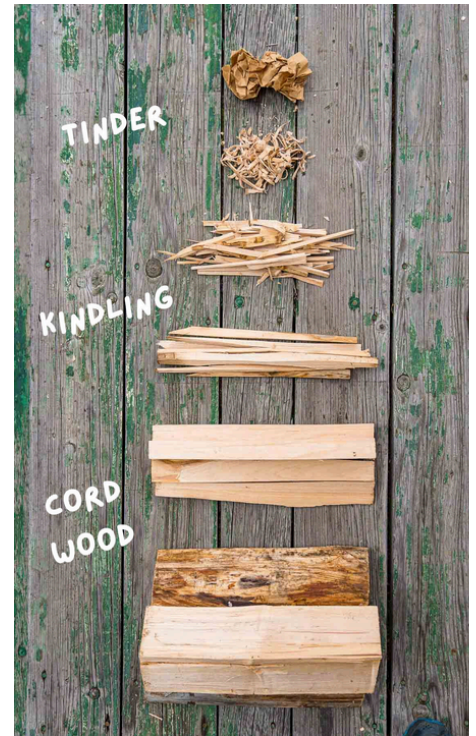
1. Collect wood: To build a successful fire, gather three types of wood of different sizes:

- **Tinder:** Very thin, about matchstick thickness and pencil length.
- **Kindling:** Pencil to thumb thickness.
- **Fuel or cord wood:** Largest pieces, for sustaining the fire. Arm thickness, dried for many months.

2. Wood collecting tips:

- Use only the amount needed for your fire.
- Collect dead, fallen branches or twigs.
- In wet conditions, look for dead branches still on trees; they dry faster because air circulates around them.
- Consider purchasing firewood from a provider in the same forest.
- **DO NOT** transport firewood from different forests. This spreads disease and can lead to widespread forest destruction.

3. Structure the fire: There are several ways to arrange wood, including the log cabin, teepee, or lean-to. Each fire structure has a unique purpose depending on your campsite's environmental conditions. In the images below, you'll see the basic structures for fire building. To learn more about fire structuring, reference GSMW's Outdoor Training Manual.



LOG CABIN



LEAN-TO



A-FRAME

## Extinguishing a Wood Fire

1. Let the fire burn down to ash.
2. Stir the ashes.
3. Sprinkle with water.
4. Repeat stirring and sprinkling until all ash turns dark and damp.
5. Hold your hand several inches above the ashes — if it still feels warm, continue cooling.
6. Sprinkle again as needed.
7. When you can hold your hand above the ashes for 10 seconds with no heat, the fire is completely out.

## Edible Campfires

Edible campfires are a fun way to talk about fire safety before your camp out.

### Suggested supplies:

- Paper Napkin or cracker = Clear Space
- Jelly Beans or M&M's = Fire Ring
- Coconut = Tinder
- Pretzel Sticks = Kindling
- Potato Sticks = Matches
- Red Hots or Candy Corn = Fire
- Pretzel Logs, Licorice, Twizzlers, or Tootsie Rolls = Fuel
- Mini Marshmallows = Fire Starters
- Cup of Juice, Water = Fire Bucket
- Spoon = Shovel
- Coffee Stirrer or Popsicle Stick = Critter Stick

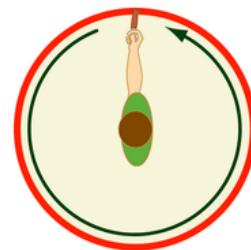
### Edible Campfire Directions:

1. Clear an area ten feet around your fire ring. Make sure there are no overhanging branches. Open up and spread out the napkin. Move any clutter back. Discuss safe places to make a fire.
2. Construct your fire ring. Arrange M&Ms on the napkin in a wide circle at least 5" in diameter.
3. Fill your bucket with water and place a critter stick in it. The stick will allow a "critter" who accidentally falls into the bucket to climb out. Put water or juice in the cup.
4. Put your shovel nearby. Put the spoon nearby.
5. Lay the A-frame using kindling. The opening (the bottom of the A) needs to be facing you and your back needs to be to the wind so that the fire can get oxygen. Lay down three pretzel sticks so that they form a capital "A" with the cross-piece on top of the two legs.
6. Place the fire starters in the center of the A-frame, with two or three under the crosspiece. Distribute a few mini-marshmallows in the A-frame.
7. Now add tinder. Sprinkle coconut throughout the center of the A-frame.
8. Hold a match under the crosspiece of the A-frame and light the fire starters. If the fire is built correctly, the instructor can add Red Hots or Candy Corn to show that the fire is lit.
9. Add kindling. Add more pretzel sticks.
10. When the kindling is burning well, add fuel. Add pretzel logs, Twizzlers, or Tootsie Rolls.
11. After the leader approves each fire, girls can eat their campfire, leaving a clean campsite!



# Handling and Caring for Knives

Each pocket knife has different opening and closing mechanisms. Research your specific knives before demonstrating and practicing. Then, ensure girls have adequate space. Have each person slowly extend their arms to create a half circle in front and to the sides. If no one comes into contact with another person or object, the area is considered safe. This space is called the safety circle.



## Opening your Knife:

Put your thumbnail in the slot of the blade. Keep your fingers away from the cutting edge. Pull the blade out all the way.



## Using a Pocket Knife:

Hold the handle with your whole hand, as shown in the image on the right. Always cut away from you. Always keep the knife at least an arm's length away from anyone else. Use your knife only to cut wood, rope, food, and soap. You will damage the blade when you use it on hard objects. If you stick it into the ground or use it to pry something open, the blade will break.



## Cleaning your Knife:

Keep your knife clean and dry. Hold the cleaning cloth at the back of the cutting edge. Wipe carefully across the whole blade. Remove rust with steel wool. Keep the joints oiled so they do not become stiff. Never clean the blade by rubbing it in dirt or sand. Doing so will dull the blade and make the knife difficult to open and close.

## Closing your Knife:

Most knives close in two steps. Hold the handle firmly with one hand, push the blade, then push the blade again. The knife will snap shut. Always be sure your fingers are away from the cutting edge of the blade. Close your knife when you finish using it so another person will not step, fall, or sit on an open blade. Close your knife when you walk around so that if you trip, you will not cut yourself or someone else.



## Passing a Knife:

If you must pass a knife, first, if it is a folding knife, close the knife securely before handing it off. If you are passing a fixed blade knife, setting the knife onto the cutting surface is preferable. If you must, however, the person passing the knife should hold the blade, offering the handle to the intended recipient. The cutting edge should be facing up. The recipient should acknowledge that she has received it and has a grip on it by saying "thank you". Then, the knife is not prone to fall and injure someone or be damaged.



**For additional tips on knife safety and using a paper jackknife for practice, along with tips to use axes and hatchets, check out GSMW's Outdoor Training Manual**

# Cooking Outdoors

As your troop begins planning their cookout, guide them through age-appropriate options. First-time campers should start with easier forms of preparing meals, like “no-cook” meals or pre-cooked one-pot meals, before trying more advanced forms of cooking. As leaders and campers gain experience, try more complex techniques and recipes. Consider the following order of progression with your troop:

1. No-cook meals
2. Propane cook stove (One-pot meals)
3. Foil packets over charcoal
4. Stick cooking
5. Dutch oven dishes

Additional methods of cooking include:

1. Solar oven
2. Vagabond stove
3. Buddy burners
4. Pie irons

**GSMW’s Outdoor Training Manual provides detailed instruction for many of these cooking techniques along with many fun recipes!**



## Outdoor Cooking Safety Tips:

- Closely supervise girls in the camp kitchen.
- Only one girl should manage the stove or fire at a given time.
- Pull hair back and refrain from wearing dangling clothing or accessories around the camp stove or fire.
- Under close supervision, girls trained in knife safety may cut food at designated stations, one per cutting board.
- Designate a 5-foot diameter safe area around the kitchen where only cooks are allowed.
- In the safe area, clear all sticks and rocks or anything that creates a tripping hazard.
- When lighting a stove, do not let the gas run too long. Let the gas dissipate before trying to light it again. Do not light it with your head over the burner.
- Always pour hot liquids away from yourself.
- Camp outs can end quickly due to stomach issues. Be sure everyone follows proper food storage, hand-washing, dish washing, and sanitation protocol.

**For detailed safety and sanitation tips, including proper dish washing protocol, download and review GSMW’s Outdoor Training Manual.**

## Water & Nutrition

Hydration and nutrition are the foundation of a safe and successful Girl Scout outdoor adventure. Whether Girl Scouts are hiking, camping, rafting, horseback riding, cooking outdoors, enjoying a campfire, or settling in for a full week at camp, their bodies work harder than usual. That extra effort means they need steady energy and plenty of fluid to stay alert, active, and confident.

A good balance between the foods kids enjoy and the foods their bodies need helps them stay fueled for fun. This can include familiar favorites like fruit, trail mixes, yogurt cups, or cheese sticks, paired with more nutrient rich options that add protein, fiber, and vitamins.

Water is important because even mild dehydration can lead to fatigue, headaches, trouble concentrating, and a drop in mood. Kids often get caught up in the excitement of an activity and forget to drink enough. Adventurers should drink at least eight ounces of water every hour during active outdoor time, and more in hot weather. Encouragement from leaders, planned water breaks, and keeping water bottles within easy reach make a real difference.

Foods that pack well, stay fresh without much effort, and offer real nutritional value help kids keep going without slowing down the adventure. High protein snacks like nut butters, beans, cheese, jerky, or seeded bars give lasting energy, while fruits and vegetables help with hydration and essential nutrients. When hydration and nutrition stay balanced, Girl Scouts feel stronger, stay safer, and are free to focus on the best parts of the outdoors.

The **GSMW Outdoor Training Manual** highlights several recipes for no-cook and trail-ready foods along with a myriad of recipes for meals Girl Scouts can cook at camp or before they depart on their adventures. Here are three trail-ready, nutrition-packed snack ideas to get you started:

### **Gorp or Trail Mix**

A signature Girl Scout snack. Mix nuts or seeds, dried fruit, whole grain cereal, pretzels, and a small amount of chocolate or yogurt covered bits. This offers a balance of quick energy from carbs and lasting energy from protein and healthy fats. Groups can customize ingredients to handle allergies and preferences.

### **Energy Bites**

If pre made ahead of time, these are perfect for the trail. Roll oats, nut or seed butter, honey or maple syrup, and small extras like chia seeds, coconut shreds, or chocolate chips. They are soft, satisfying, and full of long lasting energy.

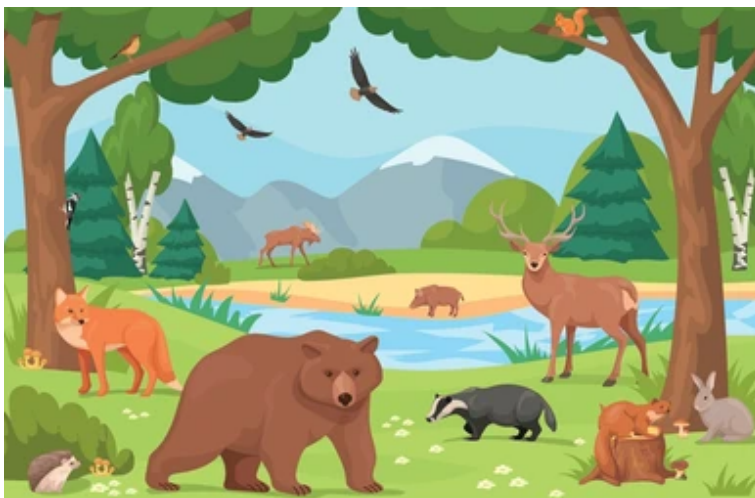
### **Fruit Leathers and Trail Fruit**

Dried mango, apricots, fruit leathers, or apple chips pack easily and provide quick natural sugar for bursts of energy during active parts of the day.



## Animal Aware

Wildlife is everywhere in Montana and Wyoming, even in backyards. Girls can start building outdoor awareness by practicing good habits like Leave No Trace. On trips, keep pets leashed and away from eating areas, and maintain a clean campsite. Dispose of trash properly in a car trunk, a bear safe container, or a bear hang. Keep food, toiletries, gum, and scented items at least one hundred feet from sleeping areas. Clean campsites protect both wildlife and campers.



### **Human Behavior**

Good wildlife safety begins with human behavior. Before any outdoor adventure, ask regional rangers about recent wildlife activity, and always carry bear spray and first aid supplies.

Travel in a close group during daylight hours. Make noise as you hike so animals are not startled. At camp, cook and eat away from sleeping areas, avoid strongly scented foods, and do not enter your tents or sleep in clothes used for cooking. Secure all scented items in a car or bear resistant container like a bear box provided at the campsite.

### **Small Mammals & Birds**

Small mammals like bunnies, mice, squirrels, and chipmunks are common in the outdoors and are usually harmless. They may seem friendly or curious, but it is important not to feed or touch them. Observing these animals from a distance teaches respect for wildlife and prevents them from becoming dependent on humans.

Birds are also curious and can swoop down for food scraps and small trinkets when campers least expect them. While birds may appear harmless, if they find something they want in your campsite, they can cause harm to people and objects.

Remind girls to keep a clean camp and secure food and snacks at all times, as even small creatures can be attracted to crumbs and wrappers. The last thing any campers want is a rodent or bird in their tent, backpack, or food pantry. Never leave food, of any size or type, unattended.

## Insects

Most insects are harmless and play an important role in nature. Encourage girls to observe them respectfully and appreciate their place in the ecosystem. When camping, after all, we are in an insect's home, where they belong, and we are the visitors.

Use insect repellent and wear long sleeves and pants when possible. Remind girls to check for ticks daily. Choose campsites away from standing water to reduce mosquito contact. If anyone has a severe bee or other sting allergy, make sure they bring their EpiPen or emergency nasal spray and an extra set of medication for the first aider adult to hold.

The **GSMW Outdoor Training Manual** contains more detailed information on specific insects and ticks and other animals considerations.



## Bears

Before heading out, check for recent bear activity in the area. Hike in groups, talk or sing along the trail, and stay alert. Travel in groups and prevent startling a bear. Always carry bear spray and know how to use it. Troops can purchase inert practice bear spray canisters to try before a hike.

If you encounter a bear, stay calm, look large, and talk firmly. Never run. If charged, use bear spray. If attacked, fight back and protect your neck and stomach. If traveling in grizzly country, learn more about how to act toward grizzly bears and black bears.

### Bear Identification Tips

- Grizzlies have a shoulder hump, a concave face, short ears, and long claws.
- Black bears have no hump, a straight face profile, larger ears, and smaller claws.

Learn more about bear identification and safety at [igbconline.org](http://igbconline.org), [fwp.mt.gov](http://fwp.mt.gov), or [wgfd.wyo.gov](http://wgfd.wyo.gov)



## DO YOU KNOW YOUR BEARS?

### Grizzly Bear



Front toes form a straighter line

Smaller, round ears

Shoulder hump



Dished face profile

Long, 2-4" claws

### Black Bear



Front toes form an arched line

Pointed, tall ears

No shoulder hump



Straight face profile

Short, 1.5" claws

Do not rely on size or color to make an identification. Size can vary and colors can range from black to blonde for both species.

### Mountain Lions

The best approach to staying safe around mountain lions in the Rocky Mountains is prevention along with a clear plan in case of an encounter.

- Hike in groups and keep girls close, especially at dawn and dusk when lions are most active.
- Make steady noise on the trail so you do not surprise wildlife, stay aware of your surroundings, and store all food securely in camp.
- Teach girls how to notice tracks, including that large cat tracks usually show no claw marks and have a rounder shape, while dog tracks often show claws and a more oval shape.
- Remind girls never to approach wildlife and to alert an adult right away if they notice tracks or a sighting.



MOUNTAIN LION / PANTHER



LARGE DOMESTIC DOG



If you encounter a mountain lion, stay calm and do not run. Face the animal, speak in a firm voice, and make yourselves look larger by raising your arms or opening your jackets. Pick up younger girls without bending over and back away slowly while giving the animal space to leave. If a lion behaves aggressively, throw sticks or rocks and be prepared to defend yourselves. In the rare case of an attack, protect the head and neck and fight back with any available object.

## Moose, Elk, Deer

The safest way to hike and camp around elk, deer, and moose in the Rocky Mountains is to keep your distance and stay alert. Stay at least seventy five feet from deer and elk and at least one hundred twenty feet from moose. Teach girls the rule of thumb by having them hold out an arm and check whether the animal can be covered by a thumb. If it looks larger than that, the group is too close. Never feed or approach wildlife and stay extra aware during the fall rut and in spring when mothers protect their young.

If your group ends up too close, stay calm and move away slowly. Keep the girls together, avoid running, and place a tree or boulder between you and the animal if possible. If an elk, deer, or moose shows signs of stress such as staring, raising its head, or walking toward you, continue to back away until it relaxes. Review these steps with the girls before the hike so everyone knows how to keep wildlife and people safe.



## Other Animals

- Never approach or startle any animals, and do not feed them or leave food behind. This keeps wildlife healthy and prevents animals from becoming bold or aggressive.
- Step off the trail for dogs and horseback riders, staying on the same side and keeping girls calm and visible. Moving predictably helps animals and their handlers feel safe.
- Do not pet dogs on the trail unless the owner invites it and all adults are comfortable. Even friendly dogs can react unpredictably in new environments.
- When horses pass, greet the riders, give them space, and remain still so the horses do not startle. Horses rely on calm surroundings to stay steady and avoid accidental kicks or sudden movements.
- Be courteous to other hikers by keeping noise low and respecting their desire for quiet. This helps everyone enjoy the natural setting without unnecessary distractions.
- Always use good judgment and caution around unfamiliar people on the trail. Staying aware of your surroundings is an important part of safe outdoor travel.

# First Aid

When adventuring and camping away from home, groups must prepare for the possibility that they will encounter injuries and sicknesses that can become medical emergencies. The best way to prepare yourself and your troop for an outdoor adventure of any kind is to take the proper certification courses. For any trips or gatherings away from your usual Girl Scout meeting space, GSMW requires one First Aid & CPR trained adult member. Visit our website or contact [customercare@gsmw.org](mailto:customercare@gsmw.org) for tips on finding appropriate certification courses.

## Basic First Aid Safety Guidelines:

- At any Girl Scout gathering outside of your typical meeting space, you must have a current First Aid & CPR trained adult volunteer. GSMW highly encourages a First Aid & CPR trained adult at all Girl Scout gatherings, including regular troop meetings.
- In case of an emergency, follow the emergency procedures outlined in the most current Volunteer Essentials handbook.
- Always have a First Aid kit with you, and adapt your kit for specific activities.
- Restock your kit when you return home or back to camp.
- Delegate an adult as the primary first aider, and make sure everyone in the group knows who that person is.
- If access to emergency medical services is more than 30 minutes away from your activity, your group must have a currently certified Wilderness First Aider (WFA) or Wilderness First Responder (WFR) or someone with higher medical training.
- Online First Aid and CPR classes do not fulfill GSUSA's requirement for certification.



During your First Aid or other medical response trainings and preparations, you and your troop should prepare to encounter some of **the most common injuries you may face:**

- Cuts, scrapes, and bruises from running, climbing, slipping or tripping on rocks and roots.
- Sprains, strains, and twisted ankles often caused by uneven ground, downhill running, or heavy backpacks.
- Burns from campfires, stoves, or hot food and drinks.
- Blisters that result from wet or poorly fitting shoes on hikes.

Leaders and their groups should also prepare to face some of these **common illnesses**:

- Dehydration – caused by not drinking enough fluids during active play or hot weather.
- Gastrointestinal Illness – caused by germs from unwashed hands, unsafe food storage, or untreated water.
- Respiratory Illness – caused by cold air, close quarters, allergens, or smoke irritation.
- Skin Reactions & Rashes – caused by insect bites, poisonous plants, or heat/moisture irritation.
- Heat Illness (Heat Exhaustion/Stroke) – caused by overheating from exertion, sun exposure, or inadequate hydration.
  - Hypothermia – caused by prolonged exposure to cold, wind, or wet clothing.
  - Severe Allergic Reactions (Anaphylaxis) – caused by exposure to allergens such as foods, insects, or plants.
  - Asthma Flares – caused by triggers like smoke, cold air, pollen, or intense activity.
  - Tick-borne Illnesses – caused by bites from infected ticks in wooded or grassy areas.
  - Water-Related Illnesses (Near-Drowning/Secondary Drowning) – caused by accidental submersion or inhalation of water during swimming or water play.



### **First Aid Beyond Injuries & Illnesses**

First aid is more than treating injuries. It also means understanding potential dangers, knowing how to respond, and keeping everyone safe. Leaders should review safety procedures with their girls and prepare for potential emergencies in any situation, activity, or location.

Leaders must create emergency action plans (EAPs) for every trip or activity. This includes identifying safe meeting points, mapping escape routes, planning communication methods, deciding who leads each part of the response, and practicing these steps with the girls so everyone knows what to do.

Emergency action plans should include steps for wildfire conditions. Leaders should monitor weather and fire danger before and during outings, identify at least two evacuation routes, avoid camping near dry grasses or deadfall, and keep vehicles facing outward for quick departure.

Leaders should be ready for sudden weather changes such as strong winds, thunderstorms, blizzards, and extreme cold. Preparation includes checking forecasts frequently, setting up camp away from dead trees or loose branches, securing tents and gear, choosing shelters that protect from blowing debris, and identifying indoor or sturdy structures for relief from sudden storms.

### **Managing Medical Forms & Medications**

Store medical forms in a protected but accessible location, such as a waterproof folder, resealable plastic pouch, or water resistant binder kept in the leader's daypack. This keeps critical health information and permissions safe from the elements while keeping them accessible.

Girl medications should be turned in to the leader in their original labeled containers so they can be administered correctly and safely.

**GSMW's Outdoor Training Manual** covers additional first aid topics including EAPs, treatments for specific injuries and illnesses, and First Aid kit supply lists.



# Tents



## Tent Safety Tips

- Tents must be made of fire-retardant materials.
- Never take a candle or an open flame into a tent. This means white gas/propane lanterns. They get hot and the fumes are toxic.
- Do not use gas space heaters in a tent.
- Do not pin anything to a tent.
- During heavy winds or when leaving your campsite, close and fasten all tent flaps.

## Choosing a Tent

When selecting a tent for your troop, consider the number of attendees including girls and adults, the location, length of stay, and regional weather conditions. Also think about obstacles at the campsite such as rocks, trees, or snow, and whether you need extra gear storage inside the tent. Answering these questions will help ensure everyone has enough space and the tent meets your group's needs.

## Tent Placement

Proper placement is key to safety and comfort. Pitch tents in designated campsites, ideally with the group's doors facing inward so everyone is visible to each other. Avoid low areas, lone tall trees, and areas near water or food prep sites. Leave walking space around each tent and keep tents at least ten feet from campfires. Brightly colored fabric or bandanas can be tied around tripping hazards to make them visible.

## Setting Up a Tent

Girl Scouts should practice assembling their tents before heading out. When assembling, they must also check for missing parts or damage. Steps include:

- Select an established and designated tent site
- Lay a ground cloth or tarp under the tent with edges inside the tent perimeter to prevent moisture pooling
- Position the tent on the cloth with the door facing the correct direction
- Lay out poles and stakes and insert poles as instructed
- Stake corners by pressing stakes diagonally inward into the ground
- Attach the rain fly above the tent, keeping it slightly separated from the main tent body and staking it securely



**GSMW's Outdoor Training Manual** includes additional tent tips.

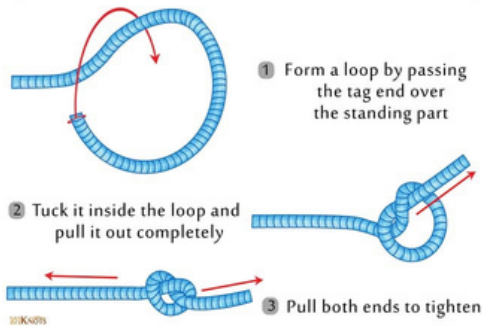
# Tying Knots

There are many types of knots, each with its own use. Use square knots to secure tents, bowline to provide loops to hang hammocks, and clove hitch knots to create clotheslines for drying mess kits. Have your Girl Scouts explore their camp to find knots and practice their skills. *Knot diagrams courtesy of [www.101knots.com](http://www.101knots.com). For more tips on teaching knots, view GSMW's Outdoor Training Manual.*

## Overhand Knots:

Overhand knots are used when a simple knot is needed.

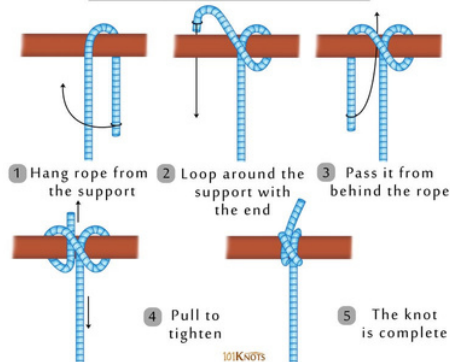
### Overhand Knot Instructions



## Clove Hitch:

Clove Hitch is used to fasten one end of a rope to a tree or post.

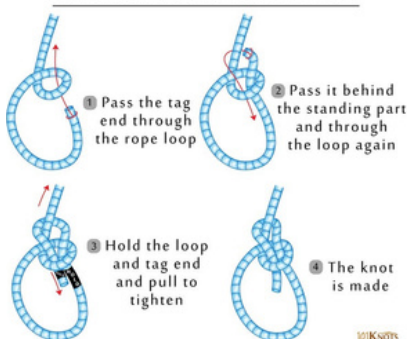
### Clove Hitch Tutorial



## Bowline Knot:

Bowline knots are used to make a loop that won't slip.

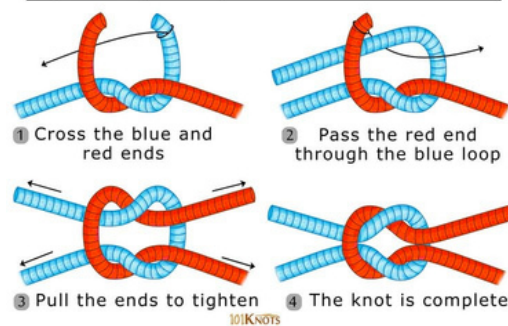
### Bowline Knot Directions



## Square Knot:

Square knots are used to join two ropes of the same thickness.

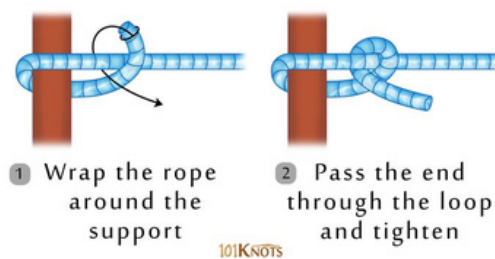
### Square (Reef) Knot Instructions



## Half Hitch:

Half Hitch is used to fasten rope around a ring.

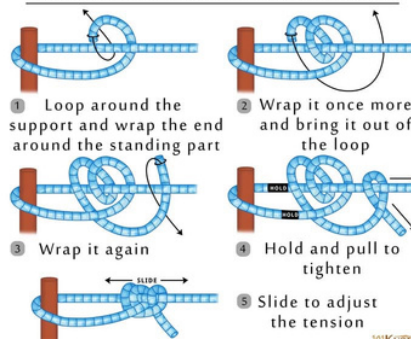
### Half Hitch Instructions



## Taut Line Hitch:

Taut Line Hitch is used to make a loop that will slip.

### Taut Line Hitch Instructions



# Hiking Basics

## Hiking Safety

- Have a plan and share it with someone who is not going on your trip.
- Stick together. If you get separated from the group, STOP! Stay where you are, and listen. If you can hear your group, yell. Remain where you are until they come back.
- Be “Bear Aware” and aware of any other dangerous animals in the area.
- Check the weather forecast and prepare. Always pack a raincoat.
- As a leader, always pack extra water, extra layers, and a first aid kit.

**The Hiker Responsibility Code** is a set of principles intended to help hikers understand their responsibility for safety. The hiker code acknowledges the inherent danger of hiking in the backcountry and encourages hikers to thoroughly prepare every time they plan to be on the trail.

## You are responsible for yourself, so be prepared:

1. Knowledge and gear. Each individual should know about the terrain, conditions, local weather, and equipment before starting the hike.
2. Leave your plans. Tell someone where you are going, the trails you are hiking, when you will return, and your emergency plans.
3. Stay together. Start as a group, and hike as a group. Pace your hike to the slowest person in the group. Let your slowest hiker be the leader!
4. Turn back. Weather changes quickly in the mountains. Fatigue and unexpected conditions can also affect your hike. Know your group’s limitations. Know when you need to postpone your hike. The mountains will be there another day.
5. Prepare for emergencies. Even if your hike is short, an injury, severe weather, or a wrong turn could become life threatening. Do not rely on Search-and-Rescue. Know how to rescue yourself.
6. Share the hiker code with others. Teach your troop and your friends.



## Basic Skills Guide Conclusion

As a Girl Scout volunteer, you guide your Girl Scouts through safe, fun, and meaningful outdoor experiences. Use the skills in this guide to plan adventures, teach campers outdoor skills, and care for their well-being and health. Encourage teamwork, preparation, and observation to make every trip smooth and enjoyable. For additional fun, use **GSMW's Troop Outdoor Basic Skills Activity booklet**, which includes engaging activities to enhance outdoor learning.

For more detailed guidance on all the topics covered in this guide and additional outdoor skills, consult **GSMW's Outdoor Training Manual**. With thoughtful planning, clear safety practices, and a spirit of adventure, you can help your girls build confidence, learn new skills, and create lasting memories with Girl Scouts!