

# Healing in Nature on the Detroit Riverwalk



DETROIT  
**RIVERFRONT**  
CONSERVANCY

girlscouts   
of southeastern  
michigan

# Scope

**May is Mental Health Awareness Month! Observed in the U.S. since 1949, this month emphasizes the importance of mental health, attempts to de-stigmatize it, raises awareness, and helps those who need treatment.**

Mental health affects how we feel, think, and act, so it's important to nurture our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Studies have shown that being outdoors increases our brains' serotonin and dopamine-which are considered "feel-good" hormones. When they're boosted, our anxiety and depression lessen.

During this patch program, Girl Scouts will get a good dose of "feel-good" hormones by going outdoors and exploring nature. In this special collaboration, Girl Scouts are invited to explore the outdoors on the

Detroit Riverwalk. Your troop will complete the following patch activities at Gabriel Richard Park, a beloved Detroit park located just east of the MacArthur Bridge to Belle Isle. This riverfront gem is a beautiful and serene oasis that features lush landscaping, a whimsical fountain, butterfly gardens, birding scopes, a contemplative labyrinth and fishing outlooks.

Girls are encouraged to complete the following activities within Gabriel Richard Park on the Detroit Riverfront during the month of May. If you are unable to complete the full list of activities at Gabriel Richard Park, consider completing the remaining activities in your neighborhood park or green space.

Girls will earn the GSSEM Healing in Nature patch and Detroit Riverfront patch.

## Planning and Preparation

Take these steps to plan and prepare:

- Read through this guide to familiarize yourself with the content, including facilitation tips, materials needed, and activity descriptions.
- This is an OUTDOOR only experience. Remember to review dressing for the weather and being prepared with the girls prior to this experience.
- Learn about the [Detroit Riverwalk](#), and [Gabriel Richard Park](#). Share about where you will be going with your troop before you get there.
- **Prepare for Activity #2**
  - Decide whether you will have your troop participate in the labyrinth and yoga poses
    - For the labyrinth - Prepare to guide the girls through the labyrinth by looking through this resource: <https://www.peacelabyrinth.org/how-to-walk-the-labyrinth>
    - For the yogas poses - Prepare to guide the girls through the yoga poses by looking through this resource: <https://namastekid.com/tool-type/kids-yoga-poses/>
- Ensure each leader and/or chaperone has the driving directions.
  - **Location:** Gabriel Richard Park - 7130 E. Jefferson Ave, Detroit, MI 48207
  - Free parking available on site
- Gather the **materials needed:**
  - Plain paper - Bring enough for each girl in your troop. This will be used for activity #9.
    - Plain paper - Bring enough for each girl in your troop. This will be used for activity #9.
    - Pens/pencils - Bring enough for each girl in your troop. This will be used for activity #9.
    - Crayons - Bring enough for each girl in your troop. This will be used for activity #9.
    - Journals (optional) - Girls can bring their journals if they have them. This is for activity #9. Plain paper can also work.



Riverfront badges are free thanks to the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy

- Sidewalk chalk - Bring enough for your troop. This will be used for activity #8. Please no chalk paint or permanent materials.
  - Lunch and/or a snack - Girls can bring lunch or you can choose to pre-make a trail mix to enjoy at the park. This is for activity #6.
  - Picnic blankets and/or sit-up-ons (optional) - You can bring blankets and tarps for the girls to sit on or request that they bring sit-up-ons. This is for activity #6 and/or activity #9. If you do not have blankets or sit-up-ons, there are picnic tables under the pavilion.
  - Printed maps - Bring a few printed park maps to help you navigate through all of the activities.
  - Patch Guide/Script - Be sure to bring this guide printed out!
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- Prepare yourself and your families for the topic of the program. Assure families this will be a comfortable space to learn about mental wellness and the healing power of the outdoors.

## Facilitation Script and Activity Guide

### Total Program Time: 2-2.5 hrs.

- NOTE: The time is only approximate. Many activities can be shortened or lengthened!

### Intro (5 minutes)

- Meet in the parking lot of Gabriel Richard Park and gather materials out of the cars.
- Show girls the park to familiarize themselves with the park.
- Say the purpose of the program:
  - Sample Script: Say, *Welcome to Gabriel Richard Park. Today, we are completing activities to earn the Healing in Nature Patch. May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Mental health affects how we feel, think, and act, so it's important to nurture our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Being outside helps increase our brains' serotonin and dopamine-which are considered "feel-good" hormones. When they're boosted, our anxiety and depression lessen. As we talk, draw, move our bodies, play games, eat, meditate, and connect today we will be helping our brains feel good in the presence of nature!*



### Activity #1: Color Walk (15 minutes)

- After the intro, begin the color walk from the parking lot.
- Explain the directions:
  - Directions: Each girl picks a color of their choosing. It is okay for more than one girl to have the same color. Set some parameters on where they can walk in the park or consider having them walk with a buddy. As they walk, tell them to search high and low and all around for the color they picked. Be sure to tell them to pay very close attention to their surroundings. Instruct the girls to keep track of how many places they saw OR items there were with their color.
- Tell the participants to meet under the MacArthur Bridge when they are done with their color walk.
- Sit along the benches under the MacArthur Bridge and reflect using the following questions:
  - Which color did you think you would see the most BEFORE participating in the color walk? Did that end up being true for you?
  - Which color did you see the most of?
  - Which color was hard to see? Why do you think that is?
  - Did you find your color more in nature (sky, trees, squirrel, etc). OR in man made materials (parking cones, signs, picnic tables, etc.)? Why do you think that is?

## Activity #2 - Guided Meditation (10-15 minutes)

- Begin the guided meditation babysitting along the benches under the MacArthur Bridge.
- Explain to the troop that you will be doing a guided meditation.
- Begin by setting a mindful, calm tone with the group.
  - Sample Script: Say, Check in with your senses. Stand here and find:
    - 5 things you can HEAR
    - 4 things you can SEE
    - 3 things you can FEEL
    - 2 things you can SMELL
    - 1 thing you can TASTE
- Look out at the river. Use some or all of these options to call your group to mindfulness through imagination:
  - Look for animals in the river and in the sky. Close your eyes and imagine what it would be like to swim with the fish or fly with the birds.
  - Allow yourself to become still while the birds, clouds, water, and people move around you. What do you notice?
  - Think of three things you are grateful for. Consider sharing these thoughts with someone this week.
- Gratitude Circle: End by circling up, sharing what that was like, and what you are grateful for with the group.

## Activity #3: Labyrinth Walk or Yoga Poses by the Water (15-20 mins - dependent on how many people you have!)

### Labyrinth

- Walk over to the labyrinth (see on map)
- Direct the girls to look at the labyrinth
  - Ask: What does it look like to you? Does it remind you of anything?
- Provide background info and describe what a labyrinth is
  - Sample Script: Say, *A labyrinth is a geometrical pattern used for walking. It is a meditative tool that has been used by cultures around the world for thousands of years. There is only one way in and one way out of a labyrinth. It may look like a maze, but it is not and it is not meant to trick you. The path twists and turns and eventually leads you to the center. Simply follow the path to the center and then follow the same path out.*
- Explain the purpose of a labyrinth and give direction
  - Sample Script: Say, *The labyrinth is used to help our minds and bodies feel connected and better. A lot of people walk a labyrinth to unwind and let go of their worries and things they are stressed about. Some people pray or meditate while walking the labyrinth. Some people simply focus on taking deep breaths in and out. Some people stop to focus on one thing and then keep walking. There is no wrong way to do a labyrinth. When walking the labyrinth, try your best to let your mind and body feel calm. Imagine putting your worries and frustrations aside and let yourself feel peace. As you begin, take two deep breaths in and out. Then, wait for the signal from your leader to start. If someone is leaving the center of the labyrinth and you are walking towards the center, simply step to the side.*
- Direct participants through the labyrinth, making sure to space out the start times.

### Yoga

- If you do not want to do the labyrinth, consider yoga poses by the water!
- Gather girls near the cement circle by the MacArthur bridge (see attached map)
- See table below for optional standing yoga poses. As you are directing participants through the poses, be sure to practice steady and mindful breathing!



#### Activity #4 - Butterfly Garden and Birding Scopes (10 minutes)

- Make your way to the butterfly garden and/or birding scopes (see map)
- Walk through the small butterfly garden and stop to read the interpretive signage
- Have participants share something they learned or felt walking through the butterfly garden.
- Make your way to the birding scopes, if desired.
- Take time to look through the scopes, directing participants to see what they can find, and share out.

#### Activity #5 - Tree Time (15-20 minutes)

- Choose anywhere in the park that is in close proximity to a tree for this activity.
- Share with your participants the importance of trees and their connection to our health
  - Sample Script: Say, *Did you know research shows that trees benefit our physical and mental health? In fact, spending time with trees reduces stress and anxiety, lowers blood pressure, and improves mood.*
- Then, share a mindful moment to have participants recognize that they are in the presence of the trees around them
  - Sample Script: Say, *Stand here and breathe with the trees! Trees absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen for us to breathe in. Take 3 breaths and imagine breathing with the trees around you.*
- Choose a tree activity for your group!
  - Option 1: Tree Tag
    - **Instructions:** Pick a large open space to run around. Divide students into groups of 3 or four players. Have 2 or 3 students join hands to make a tree. Have the other player inside the circle to represent the squirrels. Leave a couple squirrels without trees, in other words you need a couple less trees than you have squirrels. Now all squirrels except 1 or 2 have a tree. On the leader's signal, all squirrels must leave their home and try to find another tree. The squirrels that do not find a tree are encouraged to find a home on the next round.

- Option 2: Do a Leaf Rubbing

- Gather some leaves. The key is to look for leaves that are still green (not brown and crunchy) and have some neat texture (look for bumpy veins on the underside).
- Grab some paper and crayons. Put your leaves down underside up (brighter green side down) and put the paper on top. Gently rub the crayon over the surface of the leaf in a nice, even motion. It might help to use the side of the crayon if you can. Can you start to see the lines of the veins?

**Activity #6 - Picnic Lunch or Snack** (20-30 minutes)

- Eat lunch or make a snack underneath the picnic shelter OR find a spot on the grass with your picnic blankets and/or sit-up-ons.
- If you bought ingredients, gather them, individual snack bags, and make your own trail mix.

- Sample Trail Mix Ingredients:

- M&M's
- Raisins
- Cheerios
- Pretzel sticks
- Salted peanuts
- Mini marshmallows
- Goldfish
- Instructions: Lay out ingredients and give girls individual snack bags, instruct them to put each ingredient into their bags, seal the bags, and mix them up. Enjoy!



**Activity #7 - Clean Up** (5 minutes)

- Introduce/Share the Girl Scout principle: leave a place better than you found it.
  - Remind your girls that Girls Scouts always leave a place better than they found it. Explain that sometimes that means cleaning up craft supplies after a troop meeting or planting vegetable seeds in a community garden at a local park.
  - Girl Scouts will have two opportunities during this experience to leave a place better than they found it—the first is cleaning up lunch and the second is the next activity.
- Clean up lunch and find a spot on any piece of pavement in the park for the next activity.

**Activity #8 - Affirmation Chalk Messages** (15 minutes)

- Gather the girls on any pavement throughout the park. Make sure everyone has enough space to spread out and write messages with chalk on the pavement.
- Explain to the girls that this will be the second time they use the principle, leave a place better than you found it. They will be writing positive affirmations with chalk on the pavement.
- Explain what a positive affirmation is.
  - Sample Script: Say, *A positive affirmation is a statement that helps to challenge negative thoughts in your brain and improve your self-esteem. Positive affirmations are meant to help motivate, inspire, and encourage you. Oftentimes they are simple phrases that you can repeat over and over in your head or out loud when you need them.*
- Give examples and explain that positive affirmations are typically statements you say to yourself, but for this activity you want them to imagine them saying the statements TO others. So, instead of writing, “I am strong,” direct them to write, “You are strong.” Other examples:
  - You are brave.
  - You are courageous.
  - You are a kind person.
  - You care about yourself and your community.
  - You are smart.

- You are strong, both mentally and physically.
- You are enough
- You are a light in the world.
- You are loved.
- You are doing amazing things in the world.
- You never quit.

- Direct students to write affirmations down, giving as much time as you have.
- Circle up at the end. Ask the girls, “How is this an example of leaving a place better than you found it?”



### **Activity #9 - Reflection** (15-20 minutes)

- Find a spot (the plaza, picnic tables, under a tree, on the open grass, etc.) to gather where the girls can sit, reflect, and think.
- Have the girls take out their journals and/or pass out paper, crayons, and pencils to the girls.
- Instruct the girls to think through the activities of their day and have someone share out and remind the group of all you learned and experienced.
- Give them the option to spend the next ten minutes journaling, writing a poem, or drawing about the day. See optional prompts below.
  - Journal Prompts
    - Write a list of 10 things that always make you smile, no matter the circumstances.
    - Describe a situation that brings you anxiety or stress and brainstorm coping strategies to manage it. What is something you did today that could help you?
    - Who are you most grateful for right now? A friend, family member, someone you admire? Or maybe there is activity or material you feel grateful for, like the ability to draw, a basketball, or your room at home? Why are you grateful for these things/people?
    - Describe this park or another place in nature that brings you peace. How does it make you feel and why?
    - Describe the qualities or strengths that you admire in yourself and how they contribute to your well-being.
    - Write a love letter to yourself, celebrating your strengths, resilience, and worthiness of self-compassion.
  - Nature Poetry Prompts
    - Imagine the life of an old tree. Write from the perspective of the tree.
    - Capture the beauty of a single flower you saw today. Describe it in great detail.
    - Write about the cool breeze on a hot day.
    - Describe sunlight filtering through the trees.
    - Describe walking barefoot on the sand or grass.
    - Look at the river. Try to find a goose or duck floating, or a bird flying above. Write from the perspective of the goose, duck, or bird.
    - Imagine a sunset on the Detroit River. Describe the colors, sounds, and feelings that arise as you view that sunset.
  - Drawing Prompt
    - Think of all the parts of the park you were in today. Pick the spot in the park you felt the best. Draw it.
    - Pick a favorite tree in the park. Draw it. Include a squirrel running up the tree or a bird resting on a branch.
    - Draw a picture of a fish swimming in the Detroit River.
    - Draw a picture of a butterfly with its wings open.
    - Draw a picture of a spider spinning a web.
    - Draw a picture of two birds resting on the MacArthur Bridge.

### Activity #10 - Take Away Action (5 minutes)

- Wrap up the journaling and drawing reflections and have girls circle up.
- Remind girls of the purpose of being outside in nature today.
- Give them an action to do after the program ends today
  - Sample Script: Say, *We hope that you continue to go outside, find parks in your community, and experience the peace and joy that comes with being in nature. When you go home, think of a park or green space close to your home. Set a time aside to go to that park with an adult in your house. When you go to the green space/park, demonstrate and share something you did today.*

**To earn this patch, girls are encouraged to complete all 10 activities in May during Mental Health Awareness Month.**

