

### General Volunteer Personnel Policies and Procedures

GSWO recognizes that the volunteer role is valuable and complex. Volunteer personnel policies and procedures are designed to support volunteers working through situations that they may encounter.

- **Volunteer Problem Solving**  
Occasionally, volunteers may encounter difficult and complex situations involving their troops/groups. Girl Scouts of Western Ohio works to equip all adult volunteers with the information and support necessary to address issues as they develop in a way that results in little or no negative impact on the girls.

#### **Use the following guidelines when confronted with an issue:**

- Keep an open mind and an open heart while always focusing on the girls. How does this situation affect them? What resolution would be best for all girls?
- Keep the Girl Scout Promise and Law in mind and use it as a “code of ethics.”
- Confidentiality is key. Only those parties directly involved with the situation should be knowledgeable about the details and participate in the problem-solving. (See guidelines for involving additional administrative volunteers or council staff members on the next page.)
- Operate on facts rather than rumors or speculation. Listen to all perspectives, keeping the best interests of the girls in mind.
- Work in partnership with caregivers, allowing for two-way communication at all times.
- Under no circumstances is a girl removed from a troop or group without first working with the girl(s), caregiver(s), and ultimately Girl Scout staff to find a solution that is in the best interest of all girls and adults involved.
- It is the policy of Girl Scouts of Western Ohio to resolve volunteer conflicts in a fair and equitable manner consistent with council policies and procedures.

#### **Follow these steps when problem-solving an issue:**

- Bring all involved parties together
- Identify who the issue or situation is currently affecting or could affect
- Allow each person to state their concerns without interruption
- Encourage re-stating of concerns shared by others to check for understanding
- All parties should seek an understanding of the other parties’ perspectives
- All discussions should be grounded in the
- Girl Scout Promise and Law and Girl Scout Leadership Experience
- Identify options for a mutually satisfactory solution
- Discuss ideas for resolving the situation, so that all parties’ needs are met while the needs of the girls are the priority
- Agree on a solution
- Set a time frame to ensure the solution is effective for all parties

- Put it in writing! All parties should agree to the solution and the time frame as well as what next steps will be taken if the solution proves ineffective
- Maintain respectful, open communication with all parties throughout the problem-solving
- Remember: as a Girl Scout adult you are modeling positive, responsible, and mature behavior for the girls

### **Requesting Problem-Solving Assistance from Council Staff**

Girl Scouts of Western Ohio encourages the problem-solving of concerns to occur with the parties most directly involved in the situation, but there are times when council staff assistance is necessary.

This may include but is not limited to:

- The safety and well-being of the girls
- and their assets are at risk.
- The safety and well-being of adult volunteers, caregivers or community members are at risk.
- Problem-solving attempts with parties directly involved were unsuccessful.
- The initial issue or concern has escalated in seriousness or urgency. In cases of unsuccessful problem-solving with parties most directly involved in the situation, work with members of your service team (service unit chair, product program coordinator, etc.) and paid staff support person. They will coach and guide you through the situation, involving additional staff members as needed. Please know that decisions made by the Director of Regional Services and Girl Scouts of Western Ohio's CEO and COO are final. Refusal to participate in the established problem-solving process is grounds for removal from a volunteer role.

In cases of urgent safety concerns for girls or adults, first call 911 when appropriate, then contact your Girl Scout center directly.

## Creating a Safe Space for Girls

A safe space is one in which girls feel as though they can be themselves—without explanation, judgment, or ridicule. Girl Scout research shows that girls are looking for an emotionally safe environment, where girls can be themselves, confidentiality is respected, and they can express themselves without fear. Therefore, the environment you create, is key to developing the sort of group that girls want to be part of year after year. The following sections share some tips on creating a warm, safe environment for girls.

- **Recognizing and Supporting Each Girl**

You're a role model and a mentor to your girls. Since you play an important role in their lives, they need to know that you consider each of them an important person too. They can weather a poor meeting place or an activity that flops, but they cannot endure being ignored or rejected.

- Give a shout-out when you see girls trying their best, not just when they've had a clear success.
- Emphasize the positive qualities that make each girl worthy and unique.
- Be generous with praise and stingy with rebuke.
- Help your girls find ways to show acceptance of and support for one another.

- **Promoting Fairness**

Girls are sensitive to injustice. They forgive mistakes if they are sure you are trying to be fair. They look for fairness in how responsibilities are shared, in handling of disagreements, and in your responses to performance and accomplishment

- When possible, ask the girls what they think is fair before decisions are made.
- Explain your reasoning and show why you did something.
- Be willing to apologize if needed.
- Try to see that responsibilities as well as the chances for feeling important are equally divided.
- Help girls explore and decide for themselves the fair ways of solving problems, carrying out activities, and responding to behavior and accomplishments.

- **Building Trust**

Girls need your belief in them and your support when they try new things. You'll also need to show them that you won't betray their confidence.

- Show girls you trust them to think for themselves and use their own judgment.
- Encourage them to make the important decisions in the group.
- Give them assistance in correcting their own mistakes.
- Support girls in trusting one another—let them see firsthand how trust can be built, lost, regained, and strengthened.

- Inspiring Open Communication

Girls want someone who will listen to what they think, feel, and want to do. They like having someone they can talk to about the important things happening in their lives.

  - Listen to the girls. Respond with words and actions.
  - Speak your mind openly when you are happy or concerned about something and encourage girls to do this too.
  - Leave the door open for girls to seek advice, share ideas and feelings, and propose plans or improvements.
  - Help girls see how open communication can result in action, discovery, better understanding of self and others, and a more comfortable climate for fun and accomplishment.

### Creating an Atmosphere of Acceptance and Inclusion

Girl Scouts embraces girls of all abilities, backgrounds, and heritage, with a specific and positive philosophy of inclusion that benefits everyone. Each girl—without regard to socioeconomic status, race, physical or cognitive ability, ethnicity, primary language, or religion—is an equal and valued member.

Inclusion is an approach and an attitude, rather than a set of guidelines. Inclusion is about belonging, all girls having equal access to Girl Scout experiences and activities:

- Welcome every girl and focus on building community.
- Emphasize cooperation instead of competition.
- Provide a safe and socially comfortable environment for girls.
- Teach respect for understanding of, and dignity toward all girls and their families.
- Ensuring all girls have access to the Girl Scout experiences.

**Please note:** *Girl Scouts is working to translate many of its publications into Spanish. Over time, Girl Scouts will continue to identify members' needs and produce resources to support those needs, including translating publications into additional languages and formats.*

- **Transgender and Non-Binary Youth and Individuals**

Girl Scouts is a program that honors and celebrates the evidence-based girl-only environment. These spaces provide safety, care, confidence-building opportunities and a break from dominant culture. We are proud to offer brave spaces for Girl Scouts to shine.

We respect the right of families and girls to make decisions about the way that their child's gender is reflected in Girl Scouts. If a child lives as a girl in her daily life, she is welcome in Girl Scouts. We will honor and use the gender pronouns that best reflect the Girl Scout. We are loyal to the children and families who participate in our program and are evolving our inclusive practices all the time.

- **Inclusion for Individuals with Disabilities**

As you think about where, when, and how often to meet with your group, you will find yourself considering the needs, resources, safety, and beliefs of all members and potential members. As you do this, include the special needs of any members who have disabilities, or whose parents or caregivers have disabilities. With this in mind, please don't rely on visual cues to inform you of a disability. Approximately 20 percent of the U.S. population has a disability—that's one in five people, of every socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and religion—and many can be 'unseen.'

As a volunteer, your interactions with girls present an opportunity to improve the way society views girls (and their caregivers) with disabilities. The focus is on a person's abilities—on what she can do rather than on what she/he/they cannot.

If you want to find out what a girl with a disability needs to make her Girl Scout experience successful, simply ask her or her caregiver. If you are open and honest, it's likely they will respond in kind, creating an atmosphere that enriches everyone.

It's important for all girls to be rewarded based on their best efforts—not on the completion of a task. Give any girl the opportunity to do her best and she will. Sometimes that means changing a few rules or approaching an activity in a more creative way.

**Here are some examples of ways to modify activities:**

- Invite a girl to complete an activity after she has observed others doing it.
- If you are visiting a museum to view sculptures, find out if a girl who is blind might be given permission to touch the pieces.
- If an activity requires running, a girl who is unable to run could be asked to walk or do another physical movement.

**When interacting with a girl with a disability, consider these final tips:**

- Speak directly to her, not through a parent/caregiver or friend.
- It's okay to offer assistance to a girl with a disability, but wait until your offer is accepted before you begin to help. Listen closely to any instructions the person may have.
- Leaning on a girl's wheelchair is invading her space and is considered annoying and rude. Also, grabbing the wheelchair without permission to "move" them.
- When speaking to a girl who is deaf and using an interpreter, speak to the girl (in a normal voice) not to the interpreter.
- When speaking for more than a few minutes to a girl who uses a wheelchair, place yourself at eye level.
- When greeting a girl with a visual disability, always identify yourself and others. You might say, "Hi, it's Sheryl. Tara is on my right, and Chris is on my left."

