



Volunteer Essentials

2022-2023 Edition

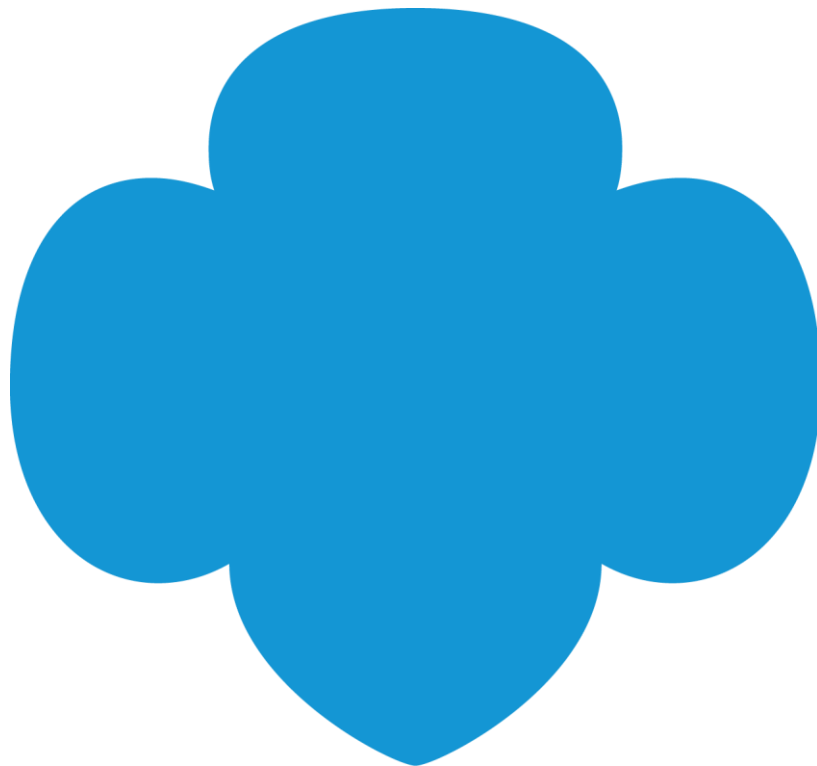


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Welcome! Adventures Ahead!

You're her hero—and ours too! Thanks to you, girls will learn to listen to their hearts, think on their feet, and raise their voices for what they believe in. From all of us at Girl Scouts, thank you for sharing your time and talents as a Girl Scout volunteer!

As a Girl Scout volunteer, you are a community-builder, mentor, champion of fun, and a role model for what it means to lead with your heart. And because of you, Girl Scouts of all ages will have the opportunity to discover that a little imagination can go a long way as they chase their dreams, explore the world around them, take action to improve their communities, and make the world a better place.

Whether you're supporting them through their Girl Scout experience, guiding them as they choose the way they will run their Girl Scout Cookie business, or encouraging them as they raise their voices on issues, they care about most, you'll be their cheerleader, guide, and mentor as they develop essential life skills and gain the confidence they will rely on throughout their lives. The best part of this experience is while you're teaching them important life lessons and setting them up for happy, successful lives, you'll grow too! Because when you embrace leadership in all forms and show girls what it means to be resilient and strong, they learn, grow, and thrive. Before you know it, you'll be trying to keep up with your unstoppable troop. Imagine the excitement, the impact, and the memories that will be made—those are the moments you'll enjoy as a Girl Scout volunteer.

Thank you and welcome, we're glad you're here!

What's Inside?

This guide is designed to support busy, on-the-go troop volunteers. Inside you will find details and information to help you get started on your newest adventure—being an awesome leader for girls. We recommend that you begin by browsing the sections below and come back throughout the year to find answers to your questions as they arise. Ready to get started? Let's go!

- [All About Girl Scouts](#)
- [Troop Management](#)
- [Troop Finances](#)
- [Engaging Girls](#)
- [Creating a Safe Space for Girls](#)
- [Engaging Families](#)
- [Girl Scout Product Programs](#)
- [Additional Resources and Support](#)

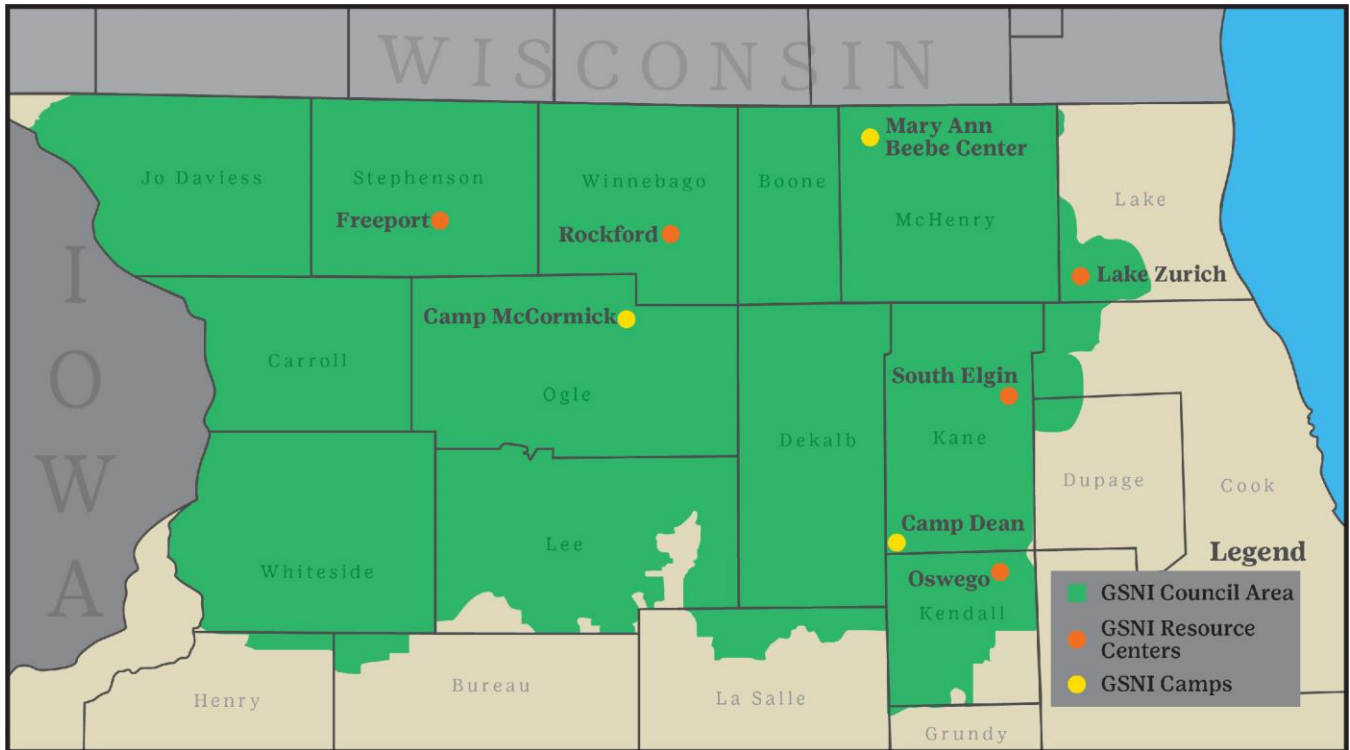
New troop leader? We've got you covered. Check out the *New Leadership Guide* for Daisy, Brownie, Junior and Older Girl volunteers, a resource designed especially for you. Plus, council staff and volunteer coaches are ready to help throughout your first year and beyond!

Volunteers can find our new Leadership Guides on our website [Online Support for Volunteers](#). New for the 2023 Membership Year, new Girl Scout Daisy and Girl Scout Brownie leaders will

receive a hard copy of the guide in their New Leader Bag. Check in with your Recruitment Specialist to receive yours today!

Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois

We're 15,000 strong—10,000 future leaders and nearly 5,000 adults serving 16 counties!



Resource Centers

Freeport
1834 S. West Ave., Suite 21
Freeport, IL 61032

Lake Zurich
499 Ela Rd.
Lake Zurich, IL 60047

Oswego
3425 Orchard Rd.
Oswego, IL 60543

Rockford
1886 Daimler Rd.
Rockford, IL 61112

South Elgin
353 Randall Rd.
South Elgin, IL 60177

GSNI Camps

Camp Dean
Big Rock, IL

Camp McCormick
Stillman Valley, IL

Mary Ann Beebe Center
Harvard, IL

GSNI Contact Information

All GSNI Resource Centers and staff can be reached by calling or emailing Customer Care:

1-844-GSNI-4-ME (1-844-476-4463)
Email: customer care@girlscoutsni.org

All About Girl Scouts

At Girl Scouts, girls' dreams are our dreams, and Girl Scouts is where girls see the limitless possibilities ahead, because they are encouraged to aim for the stars and reach them! Whether she's making a new friend on the playground, raising her hand in class, starting her own nonprofit, or advocating for climate change or social justice, a Girl Scout builds a better world—just as Girl Scouts have been doing for over a century. With programs in every zip code, coast-to-coast and around the globe, every girl can find her place in Girl Scouts and start creating the world she wants to see.

Girl Scout Volunteers

Girl Scout volunteers are a dynamic and diverse group. Whether you're a recent college graduate, parent, retiree, or really, anyone with a sense of curiosity and adventure (of any gender, who is 18 years or older and has passed their council's screening process), your unique skills and experiences have the power to change girls' lives. With you as their mentor, girls will grow and thrive.

Girl Scout members and volunteers are united by the values in the [Girl Scout Promise and Law](#) and their shared commitment to embrace leadership in all forms. Each member agrees to follow Girl Scouts' safety guidelines and pay annual membership dues of \$25. Volunteers and adults also have the option to purchase a [lifetime membership](#).

Girl Scout Grade Levels

Girls can join the fun at any point from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Girl Scouts' six grade levels are:

- [Girl Scout Daisy](#) (grades K-1)
- [Girl Scout Brownie](#) (grades 2-3)
- [Girl Scout Junior](#) (grades 4-5)
- [Girl Scout Cadette](#) (grades 6-8)
- [Girl Scout Senior](#) (grades 9-10)
- [Girl Scout Ambassador](#) (grades 11-12)

The Girl Scout Leadership Experience (GSLE)

The Girl Scout Leadership Experience provides the foundation for all we do. It is the core of our program and encompasses everything from our Promise and Law to our badges, activities, and Journeys. And at the center of it all are the girls. At Girl Scouts, everything centers around the girl, [it's what makes Girl Scouts truly unique](#). Our program is designed by, with, and for girls. With a focus on girl-led programming and activities, girls have the opportunity to take on leadership roles and learn-by-doing in a safe, fun, and cooperative environment.

Although girls may start building their leadership skills in school and on sports teams, [research shows](#) that the courage, confidence, and character girls develop as Girl Scouts stay with them throughout their lives. Our program and outcomes are based in research, and our studies show that Girl Scouting has a measurable positive impact on girls. In fact, we can proudly say Girl

Scouts are almost 10% more likely, than non-Girl Scouts, to have positive expectations about their future based on our studies. We encourage you to learn more about our program and outcomes as you [check out our studies and in-depth research](#) for insights and information.

The Girl Scout Leadership Experience has been purposefully designed to include a variety of fun and challenging activities to help girls learn, grow, and thrive. At the base of it all are three keys and three processes.

What girls *do* in Girl Scouting all fit within our three keys: **Discover**, **Connect**, and **Take Action**.

- **Discover.** When Girl Scouts take part in fun and exciting badge activities, earn a Girl Scout Journey award, go camping, or attend an amazing Girl Scout program or event, you are helping them *discover* who they are, what they care about, and where their talents lie.
- **Connect.** When Girl Scouts collaborate with others—including the members and leaders of their troop, Girl Scouts from their local community, or community partners and experts—they *connect* and expand their horizons. This helps them care about, support, inspire, and team up with others both locally and globally.
- **Take Action.** When girls deepen their relationship with the world around them, they're eager to *take action* to improve the local community and the greater global community and make the world a better place.

So how do we *do* it? The Girl Scout Leadership Experience draws on three unique processes—**Girl-led**, **Learning by Doing**, and **Cooperative Learning**—that encourage girls to try new things, write their own stories, and develop the skills and confidence to say, “I know I can do this!”

- **Girl-led.** Girl Scouts take the lead, no matter their age. From selecting the badges they'll pursue to how they'll organize an activity; Girl Scouts have the chance to follow their dreams and grow their skills—and gain the confidence that comes with that.
- **Learning-by-Doing.** Hands-on activities are fun for Girl Scouts of any age, but they also help them feel empowered to shape their own experience. Girl Scouts unlock their “I got this” attitude as they discover they can always dust themselves off and try again when things don't go according to plan.
- **Cooperative Learning.** There's power in having a tight-knit group of friends who will learn with you, grow with you, and always cheer you on. Girl Scouts see firsthand that teamwork, respect, and collaboration can fuel them through any challenge that comes their way.

As a volunteer, you'll draw on these **three processes** as you lead girls of any age. And naturally, girl-led at the Daisy level will look very different from girl-led at the Ambassador level. What is most important is that your Girl Scouts make decisions about the activities they will do *together* and make choices as they're doing the activities *together*. As girls learn from their successful, and not so successful tries, they gain confidence. All girls should have the opportunity to lead within their peer group. By the time girls are Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors, they will be using the leadership skills they've developed to take on more ownership of their activities, mentor younger Girl Scouts, and take action to make the world a better place.

One last tip about following these processes. Girl Scouting **isn't** a to-do list, so please don't feel that checking activities off a list is more important than tuning in to what interests girls and sparks their imaginations. Projects don't have to come out perfectly—in fact, it's a valuable learning experience when they don't—Girl Scouts don't have to fill their vests and sashes with badges. What matters most is the fun and learning that takes place as they make experiences their own, so don't be afraid to [step back and let your girls take the lead](#).

Reflection

Was a badge-earning activity a resounding success? Or was it derailed by something your troop hadn't factored in? No matter the activity's outcome, you can amplify its impact by encouraging your girls to reflect on their latest endeavor.

Reflection is the necessary debrief that reinforces what girls learned. As your Girl Scouts explore the what's and whys, they'll make meaningful connections between the activity at hand and future challenges that come their way. In other words, reflection gives girls the confidence boost they need to pick themselves up, try again, and succeed.

Keep in mind that reflection does not need to be a formal process, but you can kick-start the conversation with three simple questions: What? So what? and Now what?

What? Go over the “what” of the activity. For example, ask:

- What did we do today?
- What part was your favorite?
- If we did it again, what would you want to do differently, and what would you want to repeat?

So what? Next, move to the “so what.” You might ask:

- So, what did you learn by doing this activity?
- So, what did you learn about yourself?
- So, what did you learn about your community (or environment, school, or others) that you didn't know before?

Last, review the “now what.” Say something like:

- Now that we've done this, what would you like to do next?
- Now that you know this about yourselves, what would you like to try next?
- Now that we've completed this Take Action™ project, what do you think we should do next to make sure it continues?

This form of reflection, or whatever style of reflection you choose to use with your girls, is a powerful component of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience that helps girls to carry these lessons with them for the rest of their lives.

Progression

Although program elements—like outdoor expeditions or entrepreneurial ventures—align across all grade levels, Girl Scout Brownies and Juniors won't be doing the same activities as Girl Scout Seniors and Ambassadors. But with your support, they will get there!

Girl Scout programming is designed to be progressive, and it's what makes Girl Scouting fun and effective! By building on the knowledge and skills they gain year after year, your girls' confidence will grow exponentially, and they'll be eager to try new things and take on new challenges. As a volunteer, you will cultivate a [supportive, nonjudgmental space](#) where your Girl Scouts can test their skills and be unafraid to fail.

Keep in mind that progression drives success for your troop. In the following links, we've outlined some suggestions that will help you determine when your girls are ready for their next [outdoor challenge](#), their [next troop trip](#), or their next cookie-selling challenge.

Inclusion

Girl Scouts has a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion, and we welcome and embrace girls of all abilities and backgrounds into our wonderful movement.

Inclusion is at the core of who we are; it's about being a sister to every Girl Scout and celebrating our unique strengths. Part of the important work you will do includes modeling friendship and kindness for your girls and showing them what it means to practice empathy. Through equal treatment, you can nurture an inclusive troop environment.

When scheduling, planning, and carrying out activities, carefully consider the needs of everyone involved, including school schedules, family needs, financial constraints, religious holidays, and the accessibility of appropriate transportation and meeting places.

The Girl Scout Program: National Program Pillars & More

[Girl Scouts' four Program Pillars](#)—STEM, Life Skills, Outdoors, and Entrepreneurship—form the foundation of the Girl Scout program and work together to build girls' curiosity, kindness, and can-do spirit. In fact, every aspect of our program, and every Girl Scout adventure, can be traced back to one of our four program pillars.

[STEM](#) (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). Girls are naturally curious and have a strong desire to help others. Whether they're building a robot, developing a video game, or studying the stars, Girl Scouts become better problem-solvers and critical thinkers through STEM and gain the confidence to turn their ideas into breakthrough inventions to help others.

[Life Skills](#). Girl Scouts' life skills programming includes a mix of practical skills, tools, and activities that foster positive values in girls like financial literacy, civic engagement, and community service. Skills that help them discover that they have what it takes to raise their voices as community advocates, make smart decisions about their finances, and form strong, healthy relationships—skills that inspire them to accept challenges and overcome obstacles, now and always.

[Outdoors](#). Girl Scouts has been building girls' outdoor confidence and skills for over one hundred years through a variety of outdoor adventures like camping and nature focused badges that inspire them to spend time outdoors and develop a lifelong appreciation of nature—an appreciation that sparks girls' desire to take action as environmental stewards in their community and across the globe.

Entrepreneurship. Starting with Girl Scouts' iconic Girl Scout Cookie Program and growing to include the Fall Product Program and a series of entrepreneurship badges, this pillar instills and nurtures an entrepreneurial mindset and fuels girls' curiosity and confidence as they learn the essentials of running their own businesses and how to think like entrepreneurs.

The Volunteer Toolkit (VTK) can provide inspiring ideas so you can engage your troop in an exciting mix of activities all year long. For example, if you want to take your girls outside when doing a badge activity, look for the evergreen icon, which tells you that activity can be taken outdoors.

Important Differences: Journeys and Badges

Journeys and badges are designed to give girls different leadership-building experiences, all while having fun!

- **Journeys** are multi-session leadership experiences through which girls explore topics such as bullying, media literacy, or environmental stewardship. They'll do hands-on activities, connect with experts, and take the reins on age-appropriate Take Action projects. Because of their leadership focus, Journeys are also a prerequisite for Girl Scouts highest awards, the Bronze, Silver, and Gold Awards.
- **Badges** are about skill building. When a Girl Scout earns a badge, it shows that she's learned a new skill, such as how to make a healthy snack, build and test a toy race car, or take great digital photos. Badges may even spark an interest at school or plant the seed for a future career.

If they choose, your Girl Scouts can pursue badges and Journey awards in the same year. If they do choose to take this approach, encourage them to find the connections between the two to magnify their Girl Scout experience. While you're having fun, keep in mind that the quality of a girl's experience and the skills and pride she gains from earning Journey awards and skill-building badges far outweigh the quantity of badges she earns.

As a volunteer, you don't have to be the expert in any badge or Journey topic. In fact, when you show that you're not afraid to fail and willing to try something new, you are modeling what it is to be a Girl Scout. Our badge and Journey requirements are structured so your girls can learn new skills without you having to be an expert in all the assorted topics, including STEM.

Important Differences: Community Service and Take Action Projects

As your Girl Scouts look for meaningful ways to give back to their community, you can help sharpen their problem-solving skills and expand their definition of doing good by discussing community service and Take Action projects. **Both projects serve essential needs, but at different levels.**

- When a Girl Scout performs **community service**, she is responding to an immediate need in a one-off, "doing for" capacity. In other words, she is making an impact right now.
- Through **Take Action/service learning**, girls explore the root causes of a community need and address it in a lasting way; they truly make the world—or their part of it—a better place.

If your troop members want to pursue their Bronze, Silver, or Gold Award, they'll develop a Take Action project on an issue that's close to their hearts. To make Take Action projects even more impactful for your Girl Scouts, set time aside for them to reflect on their projects. When they take time to internalize the lessons they've learned, they're more likely to find success in their future projects—or anything else they put their minds to.

Traditions, Ceremonies, and Special Girl Scout Days

Time-honored traditions and ceremonies unite Girl Scout sisters, and the millions of Girl Scout alums who came before them—around the country and around the globe—and remind girls how far their fellow trailblazers have come and just how far they'll go.

A few of those extra special days, when you will want to turn up the celebrations, include:

- Juliette Gordon Low's Birthday or Founder's Day, October 31, marks the birth in 1860 of [Girl Scouts of the USA founder Juliette Gordon Low](#) in Savannah, Georgia.
- [World Thinking Day](#), February 22, celebrates international friendship. It is an opportunity for Girl Scouts and Girl Guides to connect with each other and explore a common theme around the world.
- Girl Scout Birthday, March 12, commemorates the day in 1912 when Juliette Gordon Low officially registered the organization's first eighteen girl members in Savannah, Georgia.

So, whether they're working on a new badge, making new friends, or closing meetings with a friendship circle, your troop won't want to miss out on Girl Scouts' treasured [traditions, ceremonies, and special Girl Scout days](#).

Highest Awards

The Girl Scout Bronze, Silver, and Gold Awards honor girls who become forces for good and create a lasting impact in their communities, nationally and around the world.

As your Girl Scouts discover the power of their voices, they'll want to take on an issue that is close to their hearts and meaningful to them. Encourage them to turn their ideas into reality by pursuing Girl Scouts' highest awards.

- [The Girl Scout Bronze Award](#) can be earned by Juniors. The prerequisite is completion of one Junior Journey and the associated Take Action project. The Bronze Award is earned by the group. Additional [GSNI Bronze Award Resources](#).
- [The Girl Scout Silver Award](#) can be earned by Cadettes. The prerequisite is completion of one Cadette Journey and the associated Take Action project. The Silver Award can be earned by an individual girl or by a small group. Additional [GSNI Silver Award Resources](#).
- [The Girl Scout Gold Award](#) can be earned by Seniors and Ambassadors who have completed either two Girl Scout Senior/Ambassador level Journeys and the associated Take Action project or earned the Silver Award and completed one Senior/Ambassador level Journey. Additional [GSNI Gold Award Resources](#).

Did you know that a Gold Award Girl Scout is entitled to enlist at a higher paygrade when she joins the U.S. military? A Gold Award Girl Scout's achievements also prime her for the fast track

when it comes to college admissions and make her an outstanding candidate for academic scholarships and other financial awards.

Girl Scouts are eligible to earn any recognition at the grade level in which they are registered. Any Girl Scout is eligible to earn the Girl Scout Gold Award even if she joined Girl Scouts for the first time in high school.

Ask your council about Gold Award Girl Scouts in your community and how they're doing their part to make the world a better place. For inspiration, consider inviting a local Gold Award Girl Scout to speak to your troop about how she took the lead and made a difference. You'll be inspired when you see and hear what girls can accomplish when they take the lead—and the confidence, grit, problem-solving, time and project management, and team-building expertise they gain while doing so!

Girl Scout Travel and Destinations

Girl Scouts encourages girls to try new things and see the world with fresh eyes, both inside and outside of their usual troop meetings. As COVID-19-related travel restrictions are lifted across the globe and you and your troop feel safe doing so, you may be excited to travel and explore the world as a troop.

Traveling as a Girl Scout is a more engaging experience than traveling with family, school, or other groups because [girls take the lead](#). They'll make important decisions about where to go, what to do, and take increasing responsibility for the planning of their trips. During this process, they will also build their organizational and management skills—skills that will benefit them throughout their lives.

Girl Scout travel is built on a [progression of activities](#), so girls are set up for success. Daisies and Brownies start with field trips and progress to day trips, overnights, and weekend trips. Juniors can take their adventures farther with longer regional trips. Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors can travel the United States and then the world. There are even opportunities for older girls to travel independently by joining trips their council organizes or participating in GSUSA's travel program, [Destinations](#), **which resumes in 2022**.

Planning Troop Adventures

Contact your council as soon as you start thinking about planning a trip to find out more about their approval process for overnight and extended travel. They will also likely have training programs that will raise your confidence as a chaperone.

Find all of GSNI's Travel Forms and Processes on our [Travel and Global Community](#) page.

Not sure where to begin? Check out the [Girl Scout Guide to U.S. Travel](#). This resource is designed for Juniors and older Girl Scouts who want to take extended trips—that is, longer than a weekend—but also features tips and tools for budding explorers who are just getting started with field trips and overnights.

Once girls have mastered planning and embarking upon trips in the United States, they might be ready for a global travel adventure! Global trips usually take a few years to plan, and the [Girl Scout Global Travel Toolkit](#) can walk you through the entire process.

GSNI Traveling with Girls

Girls love trips! Girl Scouts is a great place for them to learn how to plan and take exciting trips, because travel is built on a progression of activities—that is, one activity leads to the next. Girl Scout Daisies, for example, can begin with a discovery walk. As girls grow in their travel skills and experience and can better manage the planning process, they progress to longer trips. The Journey Adult Guides have a lot of other ideas about trips that bring the Journey to life. Here are some examples of the progression of events and trips in Girl Scouting:

- **Short trips to local points of interest (Daisies and older):** A walk to the nearby garden or a short ride by car or public transportation to the firehouse or courthouse is a great first step for Daisies.
- **Overnight Camping (Daisies and older):** A Daisy troop may participate in an occasional overnight camping experience. Daisies who have completed kindergarten may independently participate at day camp and in resident camp experiences lasting up to three nights. Daisies who have completed first grade may independently participate in resident camp experiences lasting four or more nights.
- **Day Trip (Brownies and older):** An all-day visit to a point of historical or natural interest (bringing their own lunch) or a day-long trip to a nearby city (stopping at a restaurant for a meal)—younger girls can select locations and do much of the trip-planning, while never being too far from home. A Troop Trip & Overnight form is needed for trips over 60 miles from your normal meeting place.
- **Overnight Trips (Brownies and older):** One (or possibly two) nights away to a state or national park, historic city, or nearby city for sightseeing, staying in a hotel, motel, or campground. Do not utilize internet- advertised overnight accommodations such as Flipkey, VRBO, HomeAway, or Housetrip. These short trips are just long enough to whet their appetites but not long enough to generate homesickness. Planning an overnight at one of GSNI's camps is a wonderful way to get girls comfortable with traveling. Check out all our camp facilities by visiting our website. A Troop Trip Travel & Overnight form is needed if staying at a non-GSNI facility.
- **Extended Overnight Trips (Juniors and older):** Three or four nights camping or a stay in a hotel, motel, or hostel within the girls' home region (for example, New England, the Upper Midwest, the Southeast, the Pacific Northwest, and so on). Do not utilize internet - advertised overnight accommodations such as Flipkey, VRBO, HomeAway, or Housetrip. Planning a trip to a large museum—and many offer unique opportunities for girls to actually spend the night on museum grounds—makes for an exciting experience for girls. The Girl Scout Destination program is a wonderful opportunity for girls to gain both national and international travel experience.
- **National Trips (Cadettes and older):** Travel anywhere in the country, often lasting a week or more! Try to avoid ordinary recreational trips girls might take with their families and consider those that offer some educational component such as incredible cities, historic sites, and museums around the country. Hostel International in Chicago has Girl Scout-specific programs to help girls explore the city safely, check out a Broadway in Chicago show, and assist in planning a troop trip.
- **International Trips (Cadettes and older):** Travel around the world, often requiring one or two years of preparation. International trips are available to Girl Scout Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors who have successfully participated in a progression of

overnight trips with Girl Scouting. When girls show an interest in traveling abroad, contact your council to get permission to plan the trip and download the Global Travel Toolkit. Adult volunteers should ensure that girls are mature enough to participate in the trip. Factors to consider are adaptability, good decision-making, previous cross-cultural experience, group dynamics, team capability, language skills (where applicable), and specific skills and interests related to the trip. Visiting one of the four World Centers is a wonderful place to start, but also consider traveling with international service-learning organizations. Girls have traveled to rural Costa Rica to volunteer at elementary schools, to Mexico to volunteer with Habitat for Humanity, and to India to work with girls living in poverty in urban slums. WAGGGS World Centers or your Girl Scout Council may have additional guidelines regarding age requirements.

Safety First

If you're planning any kind of trip—from a short field trip to an overseas expedition—the “Trip and Travel” section of *Safety Activity Checkpoints* is your go-to resource for safety. Your council may also have additional resources and approval process on the [Travel and Global Community](#). Be sure to follow all the basic safety guidelines, like the buddy system and first aid requirements, in addition to the specific guidelines for travel. You'll also want to refer to the COVID-19 guidelines in *Safety Activity Checkpoints* as well as any COVID-19 guidelines for your destination. You will [learn more about how to use and follow Girl Scouts Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) in the next section.

Note that extended travel (more than three nights) is not covered under the basic Girl Scout insurance plan and will require additional coverage.

Travel and Girl Scout Program Connections

It's easy to connect eye-opening travel opportunities to the leadership training and skill building your girls are doing in Girl Scouts! When it's safe to travel together, girls can use their creativity to connect any leadership Journey theme into an idea for travel. For example, girls learn where their food comes from in the *Sow What?* Journey. That would connect well with a trip focusing on sustainable agriculture and sampling tasty foods!

There are abundant opportunities to build real skills through earning badges, too. The most obvious example is the Senior Traveler badge, but there are plenty more, such as Eco Camper, New Cuisines, Coding for Good, and, of course, all the financial badges that help girls budget and earn money for their trips.

Want to include Girl Scout traditions in your trip? Look no farther than the [Juliette Gordon Low Birthplace](#) in Savannah, Georgia! Your girls also have the chance to deepen their connections to Girl Scouts around the world by visiting one of the WAGGGS (World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts) [World Centers](#), which offer low-cost accommodations and special programs in five locations around the world.

And if your troop is looking to stay closer to home this year? Ask your council about council-owned camps and other facilities that can be rented out.

As your Girl Scouts excitedly plan their next trip, remember to limit your role to facilitating the girls' brainstorming and planning, never doing the work for them. Share your ideas and insights,

ask tough questions when you have to, and support all their decisions with enthusiasm and encouragement!

Troop Management

Leadership is more than “being in charge” or having a title; it’s recognizing that you are part of a team and understanding that team’s needs and interests. Here’s how you’ll do that with your troop!

Your Role as a Girl Scout Volunteer

The Girl Scout Leadership Experience is based on three keys—discover, connect, and take action—but it’s not just for your troop. As a Girl Scout leader, you will embark on your own leadership journey as you help girls develop the leadership skills they’ll use to make the world a better place. Here are a few basic concepts that outline what leadership means in Girl Scouting.

Leadership is teaching your Girl Scouts:

- That they can do and be anything!
- That they are decision makers and should own their decisions.
- How to live the Girl Scout Law by modeling it for them.

As a leader, see yourself as a coach who:

- Advises, discusses, and cheers on your troop, not as a teacher with a planned lesson or activity but as a mentor and coach.
- Ensures each member understands and can carry out their responsibilities within the troop.
- Encourages Girl Scouts to build their skills and their ethics.
- Gives more responsibilities to the girls as they grow and develop.

It is important to remember that:

- You cannot know everything that your Girl Scouts might ever want to learn.
- You’ll explore and learn alongside your girls and grow your confidence in the process.
- You’re not expected to know everything about Girl Scouting, but you should know where to go for information—and to ask for help when you need it.

Your Responsibilities as a Girl Scout Volunteer

Your responsibilities as a Girl Scout volunteer include:

- Accepting the [Girl Scout Promise and Law](#).
- Understanding and coaching Girl Scouts Three Keys to Leadership—discover, connect, and take action—that are the basis of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.
- Sharing your knowledge, experience, and skills with a positive and flexible approach.
- Working in a partnership with your Girl Scouts so that their activities are girl-led and that they learn by doing, individually and as a group. You’ll also partner with other volunteers and council staff for support and guidance.
- Organizing fun, interactive, girl-led activities that address relevant issues and match girls’ interests and needs.

- Providing guidance and information regarding Girl Scout group meetings with troop families on a regular and ongoing basis through a variety of tools, including email, phone calls, newsletters, blogs, other forms of social media, and any other method you choose.
- Processing and completing registration forms and other paperwork, such as permission slips.
- Communicating effectively and delivering clear, organized, and vibrant presentations or information to an individual or the group.
- Overseeing with honesty, integrity, and careful record-keeping the funds that girls raise.
- Maintaining a close connection to your volunteer support team as well as your council.
- Facilitating a safe experience for every Girl Scout.

Your Responsibilities as a Girl Scout Volunteer in GSNI

Now that you're a registered member of Girl Scouts and have had a background check, you can start preparing for your role as a Girl Scout volunteer! Here are some of your responsibilities as a volunteer in GSNI:

- Completing all required training for your volunteer position or role
- Acting responsibly when with girls, including representing a role model of appropriate behavior, and including refraining from the use of tobacco, alcoholic beverages, or use of drugs in a non-prescribed manor
- Representing Girl Scouts and the Girl Scout program when with girls and refrain from endorsements or advertising of smoking, alcohol use, profanity, racial/ethnic or religious discrimination, or advocating political issues or causes
- Not releasing and/or distributing Girl Scout membership lists unless approved by GSNI or GSUSA
- Not accepting gifts, entertainment services, loan or promise of future benefits from anyone who might benefit, or appear to benefit from that volunteer's connection with GSNI without disclosing intent to accept and receiving approval from GSNI
- Treating all members safely with care and supervision both physically and emotionally.

Planning for Your First Troop Meeting

Depending on the ages of your girls, you might take the lead in guiding the structure and experiences of your troop—from how and when meetings are held to how the troop communicates, from steering girl-led activities to setting financial expectations. You'll make these decisions collaboratively with your volunteer team or co-leader, as well as with input from the girls and their parents and caregivers.

Use the questions below to guide your conversations with your troop committee volunteers or co-leader before discussing these topics with parents and caregivers.

- When will we meet and for how long? How frequently should we schedule troop meetings?
- Where will we meet? Your meeting space should be somewhere safe, clean, and secure that allows all girls to participate. Some great meeting space ideas include schools, places of worship, libraries, and community centers. If working with teens, consider meeting at coffee shops, bookstores, or another place they enjoy.
 - GSNI does allow troops to meet in homes. Troop Leadership volunteers should follow the guidelines below to meeting within their home:
 - Location:
 - The private home must be the home of an approved volunteer. (Approved volunteer means an adult that is background checked and registered as a Girl Scout adult member.)
 - Girls may not meet in a home where a registered sex offender lives.
 - Be sure the home is allergen-free. Ensure that pet dander, smoke, and other common allergens will not bother susceptible girls during the meeting.
 - Meeting Space:
 - Ensure that the space is safe, secure, clean, properly ventilated, heated (or cooled, depending on your location), free from hazards, and has at least two exits that are well-marked and fully functional. Also be sure first-aid equipment, smoke detectors, and fire extinguisher are on hand. NOTE: If meeting in the basement of the home, there must be two exits from the basement.
 - The troop needs to be able to focus without disruptions from other household members.
 - Be sure the space is accessible to girls with disabilities, as well as parents with disabilities who may come to the meetings.
 - Supervision of girls
 - Must meet the appropriate girl/adult ratio.
 - As always, the group must have at least two unrelated, approved volunteers present at all times, plus additional volunteers, as necessary. Any adult supervising girls must be an approved volunteer. Adult volunteers must be at least 18 years old. One troop leader in every group must be female. (Approved volunteer means an adult that is background checked and registered as a Girl Scout adult member.)
 - Ensure girls are never left alone or stray off into areas of the home where they would not be supervised by approved adult volunteers.
 - Insurance:
 - Copy of current Homeowner's/Renter's Insurance (stating coverage amounts for Personal Liability and Medical Payment to Others) must

be on file with GSNI. Certificates of insurance may be submitted to customercare@girlscoutsni.org with the subject line: Proof of Insurance for Troop#___ in home meeting.

- Homeowner's/Renter's Insurance covers injuries that occur on the premises and is the primary insurance. GSNI's insurance company represents the Council not the Homeowner in the case of suit/claim
- Homeowners/renter should consider any personal insurance implications. The homeowner/renter should ask their personal Homeowner's/Renter insurance carrier if there are any insurance concerns with troops meeting at the home.
- Activity accident insurance is a supplemental health insurance that protects registered Girl Scout members. Registered members are automatically covered under activity accident insurance when participating in all Girl Scout events and activities including trips that involve two (or less) overnight stays.
- Other:
 - Items off limits to members must be secured. Example, backyard trampolines and pools are secured so troop members cannot access.
 - Weapons must be out of view and in a locked space.
 - Medication, cleaning products, or any poisonous substance must be stored in a secure space out of sight, preferably locked.
 - Animals should be kept in a place that is separate from the meeting space. Members may be fearful of the animal or not have clear understanding of how to treat the animal. Animals may become overwhelmed by the number of participants in the meeting.
- Which components of the uniform will families need to purchase? Which uniform components will the troop provide for each girl?
- Will our troop be a single-grade level or [facilitated as a multi-level troop](#) with girls of many grade levels combined into one troop? If multi-level, how will we make sure they each get an age-appropriate experience?
- How will we keep troop activities and decisions girl-led? Use the Volunteer Toolkit to help you through this process by exploring options for activities and reviewing the meeting plans and resource lists.
- How often are we going to communicate with troop families? Which channels will we use to keep families in the loop? Effective communication [will help set expectations](#) and clarify parent/ caregiver responsibilities.
- Will our troop charge dues, use product program proceeds, and/or charge per activity? How much money will we need to cover supplies and activities? What should our financial plan look like?

Choosing a Meeting Place

What makes a great meeting space? It depends on your troop, but here are a few considerations as you visit potential locations:

- **Cost.** The space should be free to use.
- **Size.** Make sure the space is large enough for the whole group and all planned activities.

- **Availability.** Be sure the space is available for the day and the entire length of time you want to meet.
- **Resources.** Ask if tables and chairs come with the room and ensure that the lighting is adequate. A bonus would be a cubby of some sort where you could store supplies or a safe outdoor space for activities.
- **Safety.** Potential spaces must be safe, secure, clean, properly ventilated, heated (or cooled, depending on your location), free from hazards, and have at least two exits that are well-marked and fully functional. Also be sure first-aid equipment is on hand.
- **Facilities.** It goes without saying, but make sure that toilets are sanitary and accessible.
- **Communication-Friendly.** Check for cell reception in the potential space and whether Wi-Fi is available.
- **Allergen-Free.** Ensure that pet dander and other common allergens won't bother susceptible girls during meetings.
- **Accessibility.** Your space should accommodate girls with disabilities as well as parents with disabilities who may come to meetings.

Need a few talking points to get the conversation started? Try...

“I’m a Girl Scout volunteer with a group of [number of girls] girls. We’re doing lots of great things for girls and for the community, like [something your group is doing] and [something else your troop is doing]. We’re all about leadership—the kind that girls use in their daily lives and the kind that makes our community better. We’d love to hold our meetings here because [reason why you’d like to meet there].”

Stuck and need additional support? Contact your council or your service unit support team for help with a troop meeting place.

Virtual Meetings

If your group or troop can't meet in person or hold a traditional meeting, there are many ways to bring the power of Girl Scouting home! Meeting virtually can be a fun and engaging option for your troop.

[Before setting up a virtual meeting](#), you'll want to:

- Partner with troop families to make sure the girls are safe online.
- Select a meeting platform that allows families who may not have internet access to call in.
- [Think about logistics.](#) Work with the girls to set up ground rules; consider how you will incorporate in-person meeting traditions in your virtual space and how you'll keep meetings on track.
- Talk with families on [how to keep activities girl-led](#) if your girls will be completing them from home.

Don't worry if your girls want to use a web or social platform you're not as familiar with, because you'll learn alongside them! For more tips on successful virtual meetings, check out [Tips, Tools, and Ideas for Planning a Great Virtual Meeting](#).

Girl Scout Troop Size

The troop size “sweet spot” is large enough to provide an interactive and cooperative learning environment and small enough to encourage individual development. Though the ideal troop size is 12 girls, we recommend that groups be no fewer and no larger than:

- Girl Scout Daisies: 5–12 girls
- Girl Scout Brownies: 10–20 girls
- Girl Scout Juniors 10–25 girls
- Girl Scout Cadettes: 5–25 girls
- Girl Scout Seniors: 5–30 girls
- Girl Scout Ambassadors: 5–30 girls

A Girl Scout troop/group must have a minimum of five girls and two approved adult volunteers. Be sure to double-check the volunteer-to-girl ratio table below to make sure you have the right number of adults present for group meetings, events, travel, and camping. Adults and girls registering in groups of fewer than five girls and two approved, unrelated adult volunteers, at least one of whom is female, will be registered as individual Girl Scouts to accurately reflect their status and program experience. Individual girls are always welcome to participate in Girl Scout activities and events.

Knowing How Many Volunteers You Need

From troop meetings to camping weekends and cookie booths, adult volunteers must always be present to ensure Girl Scouts have fun and stay safe, no matter their grade level. If you are not sure about the number of adults you will need for your activity, the chart below breaks down the minimum number of volunteers needed to supervise a specific number of Girl Scouts; your council may also establish maximums due to size or cost restrictions, so be sure to check with them as you plan your activity.

Girl Scouts Volunteer-to-Girl Ratios	Group Meetings		Events, Travel, and Camping	
	Two unrelated volunteers (at least one of whom is female) for up to this number of girls:	One additional volunteer to each additional:	Two unrelated volunteers (at least one of whom is female) for up to this number of girls:	One additional volunteer to each additional:
Girl Scout Daises (Grades K-1)	12	1-6	6	1-4
Girl Scout Brownies (Grades 2-3)	20	1-8	12	1-6

Girl Scout Juniors (Grades 4–5)	25	1–10	16	1–8
Girl Scout Cadettes (Grades 6–8)	25	1–12	20	1–10
Girl Scout Seniors (Grades 9–10)	30	1–15	24	1–12
Girl Scout Ambassadors (Grades 11–12)	30	1–15	24	1–12

*Per GSNI's policies, all additional volunteers must be registered, background checked and trained for their position to count towards Volunteer to Girl Ratios. This includes Troop Volunteers, Troop Leaders, Troop Administrators, and Girl Program Mentors.

Safety in Girl Scouting

The emotional and physical safety and well-being of Girl Scouts is our top priority. *Safety Activity Checkpoints* outlines the Safety Standards and Guidelines used in Girl Scouting, which apply to all Girl Scout activities. All volunteers should review the *Safety Activity Checkpoints* manual when planning activities with girls in order to manage safety and risk in Girl Scout-sanctioned activities.

For current COVID-19 guidelines, check your local council's version of [Safety Activity Checkpoints](#).

In *Safety Activity Checkpoints*, you will find:

- Girl Scouts Safety Standards and Guidelines, which apply to all Girl Scout activities, including requirements for adult supervision, permission slips, preparation, field trips and overnight trips, and other vital information.
- Activities that are not permitted by Girl Scouts of the USA and actions that girls and volunteers should not take.
- Policies surrounding chartered aircraft trips and aviation.
- First aid and overall health information.
- Standards for well-being and inclusivity along with ways to include Girl Scouts with disabilities and ways to ensure girls' emotional safety.
- Individual safety activity checkpoints for specific activities—such as camping, internet use, and water sports that provide activity-specific safety information.

The document is laid out in three primary sections, Safety Standards and Guidelines, Activities at a Glance, and individual safety activity checkpoint pages.

- **Girl Scouts' Activities at a Glance** table provides a quick look at the safety standards for that activity with a focus on two critical points to keep in mind when considering and planning activities for your troop:

- age-appropriate activities and participation by grade level, and
 - whether prior approval from your council is required before girls participate in a specific activity.
- **Individual Safety Activity Checkpoint** pages provide activity-specific safety measures and guidance on the individual activities that troops and girls may choose participate in.

Registering Girls and Adults in Girl Scouting

Every participant (girl or adult) in Girl Scouting must register and become a member of Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA). GSUSA membership dues are valid for one year. Membership dues cannot be transferred to another member and are not refundable.

Preregistration for the upcoming membership year begins in the spring. Girls are encouraged to register early to avoid the fall rush. Early registration allows for uninterrupted receipt of forms and materials from the council, helps girls and councils plan ahead, and gets girls excited about all the great things they want to do as Girl Scouts next year. A Girl Scout's grade level is determined by the current membership year beginning October 1.

[Lifetime membership](#) is available to anyone who accepts the principles and beliefs of the Girl Scout Promise and Law, pays the one-time lifetime membership fee, and is at least 18 years old (or a high school graduate or equivalent). Volunteers with ten or more years of service can become lifetime members at the discounted young alum rate.

Adding New Girls to Your Troop

Growing your troop is a great way to share the power of the Girl Scout experience and [there are many ways to get the word out](#), like hanging posters at your girl's school, using social media to reach families in your community, or including your troop in your council's Opportunity Catalog or Troop Catalog.

GSNI makes it easy for troops to update their meeting and troop information by using GSNI's [Troop Update Form](#) found on our website. This helps parents of potential Girl Scouts find a troop in their schedule.

Other ways for troops to grow their members are to reach out to the GS Organizer in your service unit or your Recruitment Specialist. These volunteers and GSNI staff will help troops plan recruitment events, create recruitment fliers, and more!

Girl Scouts can take the lead in growing the troop by inviting friends who are not in Girl Scouts to visit the troop and join throughout the year. Troops can offer a Bring a Friend event for new families to learn about Girl Scouts.

Creating an Atmosphere of Acceptance and Inclusion

Girl Scouts is for every girl, and that's why we embrace girls of all abilities and backgrounds with a specific and positive philosophy of inclusion that benefits everyone. Each girl—regardless of socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, physical or cognitive ability, sexual orientation, primary language, or religion—is an equal and valued member of the group, and groups reflect the diversity of the community.

We believe inclusion is an approach and an attitude, rather than a set of guidelines. Inclusion is about belonging, all girls being offered the same opportunities with respect, dignity, and celebration of their unique strengths. It's about being a sister to every Girl Scout. You're accepting and inclusive when you:

- 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.
- Actively reach out to girls and families who are traditionally excluded or marginalized.
- Foster a sense of belonging to community as a respected and valued peer.
- Honor the intrinsic value of each person's life.

If you have questions about accommodating an individual girl, please reach out to GSNI's Customer Care at customercare@girlscoutsni.org.

As you think about where, when, and how often to meet with your group, consider the needs, resources, safety, and beliefs of all members and potential members. Include the special needs of any members who have disabilities or whose parents or caregivers have disabilities. But please, do not 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.

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 parent or caregiver. If you are open and honest, they'll likely 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 a sculpture, 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.

Focus on a person's abilities—on what she can do rather than on what she cannot. In that spirit, use people-first language that puts the person before the disability.

Say:	Instead of:
She has a learning disability.	She is learning disabled.
She has a developmental delay.	She is mentally retarded; she is slow.
She uses a wheelchair.	She is wheelchair bound.

When interacting with a girl (or parent/caregiver) with a disability, consider these tips:

- When talking to a girl with a disability, speak directly to her, not through a family member 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.
- When speaking to a girl who is deaf and using an interpreter, speak to the girl, 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."

Registering Girls with Cognitive Disabilities

Girls with cognitive disabilities can be registered as closely as possible to their chronological ages. They wear the uniform of that grade level. Make any adaptations for the girl to ongoing activities of the grade level to which the group belongs. Young women with cognitive disorders may choose to retain their girl membership through their twenty-first year, and then move into an adult membership category.

Getting Support for Your Troop

Just as your Girl Scouts rally around each other for support, you will also have a dedicated Girl Scout support team, consisting of council staff and passionate volunteers like you. Your support team, which may be called a service unit at your council, is ready to offer local learning opportunities and advice as well as [answer your questions](#) about the Girl Scout program, working with girls, product programs, and much more.

Before you hold your first troop meeting with girls, consider the support and people resources you'll need to cultivate an energizing troop experience. Parents, friends, family, and other members of the community have their own unique strengths and can provide time, experience, and ideas to a troop, so get them involved from the very beginning as part of your volunteer troop team. This team is made up of troop leaders (like you) and troop committee volunteers.

Your [troop committee volunteers](#) are the extra set of eyes, ears, and hands that help the troop safely explore the world around them. Depending on your troop's needs, they can play a more

active role—for instance, someone can step up as a dedicated troop treasurer—or simply provide an occasional helping hand when you need to keep a meeting activity on track.

If a parent or caregiver isn't sure if they can commit to a committee or co-leader role, encourage them to try [volunteering in a smaller capacity](#) that matches their skill set. Just like your young Girl Scouts, once troop parents and caregivers discover they can succeed in their volunteer role, they'll feel empowered to volunteer again. GSNI does recommend any parent or caregiver who volunteers with the troop 95% to 100% of the time must be registered as a Girl Scout Troop Volunteer, pass a background check and complete Troop Volunteer Training.

Troop Management Tools and Resources

From toolkits and guides to regular contact with experienced individuals, you'll have all the support you need to be a Girl Scout volunteer. Here's a list of some important resources you'll want to check out.

The Volunteer Toolkit



Girl Scouts Volunteer Toolkit (VTK)

The Volunteer Toolkit is a customizable planning tool where you can find suggested meeting plans for most badges, access activity guides and badge requirements, track your Girl Scouts' achievements, and so much more. With inspiring ideas so you can engage your troop in a mix of activities all year long, it's the digital planning assistant that will help you power a fun-filled—and organized—Girl Scout year. Be sure to look for helpful icons to identify activity focus areas like the evergreen icon which tells you the activity can be taken outside or the globe icon which lets you know you can bring a global perspective to the activity. You'll find the Volunteer Toolkit in the left menu bar under My GS / My Account. VTK is accessible on any desktop, tablet, or mobile device.

With the Volunteer Toolkit, girls and leaders can explore meeting topics and program activities together and follow the fun as they plan their Girl Scout year. Using the Volunteer Toolkit:

Troop leaders can:

- Plan the troop's calendar year and meeting schedule.
- Email parents/caregivers with one click.
- View the troop roster, renew girls' memberships, and update girls' contact information.
- View meeting plans for Journeys and badges, including suggested tracks for multi-level groups (K-5 and 6-12).
- Customize meeting agendas to fit your troop.
- Explore individual meeting plans that show a breakdown of every step, including a list of materials needed, editable time allotments for each activity within a meeting, and printable meeting aids.
- Record attendance at meetings and their troop's badge and Journey achievements.

- Add council or custom events to the troop’s calendar.
- Submit troop finance reports (depending on the council’s process).
- Easily locate both national and local council resources, such as *Safety Activity Checkpoints*.

Parents and caregivers can:

- View the troop’s meeting schedule and individual meeting plans to stay up to date on the badges and Journeys the troop is working on.
- Renew their memberships and update their contact information.
- View their Girl Scout’s attendance and achievements.
- See upcoming events the troop is planning or attending.
- Easily locate both national and local council resources.
- View the troop’s finance report (depending on the council’s process).

Get started by visiting: www.girlscoutsni.org

Additional Tools and Resources

Girl Scout Handbooks- Daisy, Brownie, and Junior Girl Scouts have handbooks with grade level-specific information. [Click here to check them out!](#)

The Girl’s Guide to Girl Scouting. What does it mean to be a Girl Scout? You’ll find it all in *The Girl’s Guide to Girl Scouting*. These grade level-specific binders will break it down for your girls. It’s part handbook, part badge book, and 100 percent fun! [Click here to check them out!](#)

Safety Activity Checkpoints. Safety is paramount in Girl Scouting, and [Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) contains everything you need to know to help keep your girls safe during a variety of exciting activities outside of their regular Girl Scout troop meetings.

Tips for Troop Leaders. When you’re looking for real-world advice from fellow troop leaders who've been there, [this volunteer-to-volunteer resource](#) on the Girl Scouts of the USA website has what you need for a successful troop year.

Girl Scout Volunteers in Your Community. Remember that Girl Scout support team we mentioned? You’ll find them in your service unit! Troops are organized geographically into service units or communities. You’ll find a local network of fellow leaders and administrative volunteers [ready to offer tips and advice](#) to help you succeed in your volunteer role.

Customer Care Contacts. Questions? Need help resolving an issue? We’ve got you! Reach out anytime by either clicking on the “Contact Us” form at [GSNI’s website](#) or email customercare@girlscoutsni.org. During [business hours](#), you can reach a customer service specialist by calling 1-844-GSNI-4-ME (1-844-476-4463).

Newsletters/Communication.

GSNI communicates with our volunteers and families through several newsletters and publications.

Around GSNI - Monthly newsletter to troop leaders.

GSNI News for Parents - Monthly newsletter to all parents.

GSNI Volunteer Connections – see our online calendar.

Take Advantage of Learning Opportunities

We know that when you have the knowledge and skills you need to manage your girls, both you and your troop will thrive. Contact your council to ask about ongoing learning opportunities that will help you grow your skills and confidence.

All of GSNI's required trainings and learning opportunities can be found on our [Online Support for Volunteers](#) webpage. Have questions? Contact [Customer Care](#) for more information.

Know How Much You are Appreciated

What begins with Girl Scouts speaking up at a troop meeting can go all the way to speaking in front of their city council for a cause they champion—and they will have your support to thank for that. Your volunteer role makes a powerful difference. Thank you for all you do.

Just as you'll receive support throughout your volunteer experience, when you reach the end of the term you signed up for, you'll talk with your support team about the positive parts of your experience as well as the challenges you faced, and you'll discuss whether you want to return to this position or try something new. The end of your troop year, camp season, overseas trip, or series/event session is just the beginning of your next adventure with Girl Scouts!

If you're ready for more opportunities, be sure to let your council support team know how you'd like to be a part of girls' lives in the future—whether in the same position or in other, flexible ways. Are you ready to organize a series or event? Take a trip? Work with girls at camp? Work with a troop of girls as a yearlong volunteer? Share your skills at a council office, working behind the scenes? The possibilities are endless and can be tailored to fit your skills and interests.

Volunteer Appreciation



Without our passionate and dedicated volunteers, there would be no Girl Scouting. That's why we celebrate National Volunteer Month every April and turn up the party as we ring in National Girl Scout Leader's Day on April 22.

Girl Scouts also celebrates National Volunteer Week, which falls during the third day of April. What can we say, we love our volunteers!

GSNI's Volunteer Recognition

GSNI values our volunteers. Our Adult Recognition nominations open every year in January for fellow volunteers and GSNI Staff to nominate volunteers who have done a wonderful job supporting our mission throughout the prior membership year. Information about current and previous awardees and our Adult Recognition Awards can be found on our [Volunteer Recognition](#) page.

GSNI recognizes all volunteers who receive Adult Recognition awards at our Annual Meeting and Recognition meeting in April every year.

Girl Scout Participation in Activities with Other Scouting Organizations

The decision by Boy Scouts of America (BSA) to open the Boy Scout program to girls has fundamentally altered the nature of the relationship between BSA and Girl Scouts nationally and locally. Local relationships between BSA and Girl Scout councils that have led to partnerships and joint activities in the past may now create certain risks or challenges for Girl Scouts. For this reason, councils are encouraged to avoid joint recruiting and/or joint participation in community events or activities.

Marketplace Confusion

To protect the integrity of the Girl Scout brand and reinforce our programming as unique, girl-only, and best in class, we must ensure that we take care that the activities in which girls participate are exclusive to the Girl Scout program, are safe and girl-led, and are conducted under the appropriate supervision of Girl Scouts.

Protecting Use of Girl Scout Materials

Girl Scout materials are intended for the exclusive use of Girl Scouts and are protected as the intellectual property of Girl Scouts of the USA. Materials include but are not limited to: Girl Scout logo, tag lines, and/or program and badge requirements.

Troop Finances

With your guidance, your Girl Scouts will learn money skills that will serve them throughout their lives. Your Girl Scout troop will plan and finance its own activities, and you'll coach your girls as they earn and manage troop funds. Troop activities are powered by proceeds earned through council-sponsored product program activities (such as the Girl Scout Cookie Program), group money-earning activities (council approved, of course), and any dues your troop may charge.

Remember that all funds collected, raised, earned, or otherwise received in the name of and for the benefit of Girl Scouting belong to the troop and must be used for the purposes of Girl Scouting. Funds are administered through the troop and do not belong to individuals.

Establishing a Troop Account

No matter how much your troop plans to save or spend, you'll need a safe place to deposit your troop dues, product program proceeds, and other funds. If you've stepped up to lead an existing troop, you may inherit a checking account, but with a new troop, you'll want to open a new bank account.

Here are a few helpful tips you can take to the bank:

- To open an account, troops/groups must have only two registered adult signers (non-related). Both signers must have gone through the volunteer approval process (registered as an adult Girl Scout and pass the criminal background check).
- If a Bank Signer is not a troop leader and has not completed the New Troop Leadership required training; the Bank Signer must complete the following learning path in gsLearn: 415 Learn the Basics.
- After training is complete, request an ACH Agreement Form and New Troop Bank Letter from the Volunteer Resource Manager via email: customercare@girlscoutsni.org.
- Be sure to find a bank that has free checking and low fees.
- Designate a "troop treasurer," that is, one person who is responsible for troop funds and for keeping a daily account of expenditures.
- Ensure your account comes with a debit card that you can use during activities or trips. These transactions are easier to track at the end of the year.
- Be prepared like a Girl Scout, and make sure another troop volunteer has accessible a debit card for the troop account in case the main card is lost.
- Handle a lost troop debit card the same way you would a personal debit card: cancel it immediately.
- Keep troop funds in the bank before an activity or trip and pay for as many items as possible in advance of your departure.

Follow your council's financial policies and procedures for setting up an account. Most council-sponsored product program activities have specific banking and tracking procedures.

Budgeting, Record Keeping, Financial Reporting

- Any person handling money, writing/signing checks, or handling bank accounts and records must be a currently registered member of Girl Scouts and have completed a background check and have taken the Troop Financial Training. Background checks are updated every three years.
- Anyone who purchases troop supplies should carry a copy of the [GSNI Tax Exempt Letter](#) located on the [Online Support for Volunteers](#) page of GSNI's website.
- All volunteers associated with a troop/group should have up-to-date accurate records of all monies received and spent, including receipts, the troop/group's bank account statements, and checkbook register.
- Troop/Group members, parents, girls, Service Unit Managers, Service Unit Treasurer, and the council have the right to review all financial records upon request. Bank Signers should give a quarterly report to the girls and parents in the troop.
- Troops/Groups should budget and plan to spend their money within a single membership year for the benefit of girls within the troop/group. If plans are being made for an extended trip or the troop/group is planning activities for the next membership year, then funds can be carried over to the new membership year.
- The troop/group must provide an annual financial report to the Service Unit Manager or their designee by **June 15**. The annual financial report includes a completed Detailed Cash Record-Annual Financial Report form, all receipts, and bank statements for September, November, March, and May of that year.
- GSNI reserves the right to request mid-year audits of troop bank accounts.
- Volunteer reappointment may depend on receipt and approval of financial reports.
- Troops/groups/individuals sponsoring a service unit event must account for all income and expenses through the service unit bank account, not a troop/group account.

Follow your council's financial policies and procedures for setting up an account. Most council-sponsored product program activities have specific banking and tracking procedures.

Disbanding Troops and Unused Troop Funds

When a troop disbands, any unused Girl Scout money left in the account becomes the property of the council. Troop funds are not the property of any individual member. Before disbanding, ask your girls how they want to pay it forward. They may decide to donate any unused funds to their service unit, to another troop, or to pay for Girl Scout activities. Activities can also include purchasing materials to support another organization through Take Action projects.

How to Handle Changes within a Troop/Group

1. If a girl leaves, transfers to another troop/group, or registers as an individually Registered Member (IRM):

- All money remains with the original troop/group and is neither given to the girl nor transferred to another troop/group.
- If a girl leaves during the Girl Scout Cookie Program, the decision about cookie proceeds will be processed on a case-by-case basis by GSNI. It is NOT recommended for a girl to transfer into another troop during the Girl Scout Cookie Program.

2. When an entire troop/group moves from one program level to another:

- All money moves with the troop/group (i.e., from Girl Scout Brownies to Juniors).

3. In an ongoing troop/group, where only some of the girls are bridging to a new program age level troop/group:

- All money will remain with the original troop/group and is neither given to the girls nor transferred to another troop/group.

4. If the troop/group divides:

- An annual financial report is completed and turned into the Service Unit Manager.
- All assets are apportioned between the two treasuries on a pro-rata basis according to girl membership at the time of division.

5. If a troop/group disbands, is no longer functioning, or has not re-registered as of October 1 of the membership year:

- The leader must have completed and submitted a Detailed Cash Record-Annual Finance Report and a Disbanded Troop/Group Form.
- The troop/group bank account must be closed and a cashier's check for the ending balance, payable to GSNI, is submitted to the council. All assets, together with disbandment and financial reports, unused checks and debit cards must also be turned in to the council.
- The distribution of gift cards/retail merchandise/cash to each girl/adult is not permitted when closing a troop/group treasury upon disbandment.
- Renewal of membership dues for girls who would like to continue in Girl Scouts is permitted.

6. If some of the girls from the disbanded troop/group continue in a new troop/group:

- All assets are divided on a pro-rated basis. Assets for girls continuing in Girl Scouts are given to the new troop/group.
- All remaining assets are returned to the council for the best interest of girls within the council.

7. If there is a change of leadership:

- Outgoing leaders must submit a financial report to the Service Unit Manager at the time of leadership change.
- A copy of the financial report with all assets, funds, bank statements, and unused checks will be given to the new leader.
- The outgoing leader must coordinate with the new leader and bank account signers to make necessary changes to the troop/group account.
- The new leader must submit the New or Changing ACH Agreement to the council.

Closing the Troop Account

When closing a troop account, be sure all checks and other debits have cleared the account before you close it. Remember, you may have to close the account in person. Turn remaining funds over to a council staff member.

Money-Earning Basics for Troops

Troops flex their financial muscles in two distinct ways:

The Girl Scout Cookie Program and other product programs of Girl Scouts (authorized product programs such as calendars, magazines, or nuts and candy) organized by your council. All girl members are eligible to participate in two council-sponsored product program activities each year with volunteer supervision—the Girl Scout Cookie Program and one other council-authorized product program. Please remember, volunteers and Girl Scout council staff don't sell cookies and other products—girls do.

Group money-earning activities organized by the troop (not by the council) that are planned and carried out by girls (in partnership with volunteers) and that earn money for the group.

Participation Guidance

Girls' participation in both council-sponsored product program activities and group money-earning projects is based on the following:

- Voluntary participation.
- Written permission of each girl's parent or guardian.
- An understanding of (and ability to explain clearly to others) why the money is needed.
- An understanding that money earning should not exceed what the group needs to support its program activities.
- Observance of local ordinances related to involvement of children in money-earning activities as well as health and safety laws.
- Vigilance in protecting the personal safety of each girl.
- Arrangements for safeguarding the money.

GSNI Product Program and Money Earning Project Guidelines

Troop size requirements have been in effect since the 2016/2017 Membership Year Product Programs.

- For Girl Scout Daisy, Brownie, and Junior Troops: Minimum size is 5 girls (from multiple families) and 2 unrelated leaders, one of which is a female.
- For Girl Scout Cadette, Senior, and Ambassador Troops: Minimum size is 3 girls (from multiple families) and 2 unrelated leaders, one of which is a female.

Girls in Troops that have not met these minimums will be treated as Independently Registered Members (IRMs) for the purposes of troop proceeds and girl rewards. This minimum **MUST** be met by October 20, 2019.

If your troop does not meet the minimum size as outlined above, your troop will automatically be treated as a group of IRMs. For example: If you have a Brownie troop of four girls or a Cadette Troop of two girls, your troop will be treated as a group of IRMs for product rewards and no troop proceeds will be awarded.

During sweeps, your troop account will be swept for the entire cost of product sold. Proceeds are NOT kept by the troop. Girls will earn S'more Dough in place of troop proceeds.

It does NOT mean your troop will no longer be a troop. Your troop remains intact and would be included in the Opportunity Catalog for additional girls to join.

For more information, please contact your Service Unit Fall Product Program Coordinator, Service Unit Cookie Coordinator, or contact a member of GSNI's Product Program Team.

Additional Guidelines

Keep these specific guidelines—some of which are required by the Internal Revenue Service—in mind to ensure that sales are conducted with legal and financial integrity.

- **See *GSNI Money-Earning Application Process* for more on GSNI's Money-Earning Guidelines.**
- **All rewards earned by girls through the product program activities must support Girl Scout program experiences** (such as camp, travel, and program events, but not scholarships or financial credits toward outside organizations).
- **Rewards are based on sales ranges** set by councils and may not be based on a dollar-per-dollar calculation.
- **Troops are encouraged to participate in council product programs as their primary money-earning activity**; any group money earning shouldn't compete with the Girl Scout Cookie Program or other council product programs.
- **Obtain written approval from your council before a group money-earning event**; most councils ask that you submit a request for approval.
- **Girl Scouts discourages the use of games of chance.** Any activity which could be considered a game of chance (raffles, contests, bingo) must be approved by the local Girl Scout council and be conducted in compliance with all local and state laws.
- **Girl Scouts' *Blue Book* policy forbids girls from the direct solicitation of cash.** Girls can collect partial payment toward the purchase of a package of Girl Scout Cookies and other Girl Scout-authorized products through participation in council-approved product program donation programs.
- **Girl Scouts forbids product demonstration** parties where the use of the Girl Scout trademark increases revenue for another business, such as in-home product parties. Any business using the Girl Scout trademark or other Girl Scout intellectual property must seek authorization from GSUSA.
- **Group money-earning activities need to be suited to the ages and abilities of the girls** and consistent with the principles of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.

- **Money earned is for Girl Scout activities and is not to be retained by individuals.** Girls can, however, be awarded incentives and/or may earn credits from their Girl Scout product programs. Funds acquired through group money-earning projects must be reported and accounted for by the group according to council procedures.

GSNI's money-earning requirements

The Fall Product Program and Girl Scout Cookie Program are GSNI's main money-earning financial literacy programs for troops to earn funds. Sometimes these are not enough for the troop to provide the best Girl Scouting experience the girls want to have. Therefore, Brownie through Ambassador troops have the opportunity to apply to do other money-earning activities. Before the troop can be approved to plan a money-earning activity, they must fulfill the following requirements:

Money earned is for Girl Scout activities and is not to be retained by individuals. Girls can, however, be awarded incentives and/or may earn credits from their Girl Scout product programs. Funds acquired through group money-earning projects must be reported and accounted for by the group, while following council procedures.

- Participation in the Fall Product Program: Troops/groups must have at least 25% of registered girls participate and achieve a \$150 troop/group total. For example, a troop of 10 registered girls must have at least three girls sell an average of \$50 each to have a troop total of \$150. If all 10 registered girls participate, they would each need to sell an average of \$15 to achieve the \$150 troop total.
- Participation in the Girl Scout Cookie Program: Troops/groups must have at least 50% of registered girls participate and achieve at least a 180 package troop/group total. For example, a troop of 10 registered girls must have at least five girls sell an average of 36 packages each to reach 180 packages. If all 10 registered girls participate, they would each need to sell an average of 18 packages each.

In an effort to preserve the integrity of the Fall Product and Girl Scout Cookie Programs, troops/groups should avoid holding money-earning activities targeted to the public from September 15–October 31 and December 15–March 31. All applications for money-earning activities during these times will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Money-Earning Application Process

After reviewing the guidelines for Money-Earning Basics above and in Volunteer Essentials: Troop Finances, your troop will be required to submit a Money-Earning Application to GSNI before scheduling your money-earning project for approval. You can find the Money-Earning Application on GSNI's website on the Forms and Document page or the Resource Tab on Volunteer Toolkit.

Follow these steps to ensure your Money-Earning Application gets approved:

1. Go over your troop's budget with your girls. Did the girls earn enough money during the Fall Product and Cookie Programs to accomplish their goals for the year?
2. How much more money will the girls need to raise in order to accomplish their goals?
3. Brainstorm some money-earning ideas with the girls following the guidelines for money-earning projects in Volunteer Essentials.

4. Pick a money-earning idea.
5. Have the girls help complete the Money-Earning Application.
6. Submit the Money-Earning Application to your Member Support Specialist to verify Fall Product and Cookie Program participation requirements within 30 days of the project start date.
7. Your Member Support Specialist or the Fund Development representative will respond to your request for approval or denial within a week of your submission.
8. Once your Money-Earning Application is approved, you may continue your troop's planning for the project!

Sample Money-Earning Activities

Collections/Drives

- Cell phones for refurbishment
- Used ink cartridges turned in for money
- Christmas tree recycling

Food/Meal Events

- Lunch box auction (prepared lunch or meal auctioned off)
- Themed meals, like a high tea or a build-your-own-taco bar, related to activities girls are planning; for instance, if girls are earning money for travel, they could tie the meal to their destination

Service(s)

- Service-a-thon (people sponsor a girl doing service and funds go to support a trip or other activity)
- Babysitting for holiday (New Year's Eve) or council events
- Raking leaves, weeding, cutting grass, shoveling snow, walking pets
- Cooking class or other specialty class

The Girl Scout Cookie Program and other council-sponsored product programs are designed to unleash the entrepreneurial potential in your girls. From there, your troop may decide to earn additional funds on its own.

Help Your Troop Reach Its Financial Goals

We get it—there's something exciting about opening that first case of Girl Scout Cookies. However, before your girls take part in all the cookie program fun, it's important they have a clear plan and purpose for their product program activities. As a volunteer, you have the opportunity to facilitate girl-led financial planning, which may include the following steps for the girls:

1. **Set goals for money-earning activities.** What do girls hope to accomplish through this activity? In addition to earning money, what skills do they hope to build? What leadership opportunities present themselves?

2. **Create a budget.** Use a budget worksheet that includes both expenses (the cost of supplies, admission to events, travel, and so on) and available income (the group’s account balance, projected cookie proceeds, and so on).
3. **Determine how much the group needs to earn.** Subtract expenses from available income to determine how much money your group needs to earn.
4. **Make a plan.** The group can brainstorm and make decisions about its financial plans. Will cookie and other product programs—if approached proactively and energetically—earn enough money to meet the group’s goals? If not, which group money-earning activities might offset the difference? Will more than one group money-earning activity be necessary to achieve the group’s financial goals? In this planning stage, engage the girls through the Girl Scout processes (girl-led, learning by doing, and cooperative learning) and consider the value of any potential activity. Have them weigh feasibility, implementation, and safety factors.
5. **Write it out.** Once the group has decided on its financial plan, describe it in writing. If the plan involves a group money-earning activity, fill out an application for approval from your council and submit it along with the budget worksheet the girls created.

Remember: It’s great for girls to have opportunities like the Girl Scout Cookie Program to earn funds that help them fulfill their goals. As a volunteer, try to help girls balance the money earning they do with opportunities to enjoy other activities that have less emphasis on earning and spending money. Take Action projects, for example, may not always require girls to spend a lot of money!

Financial Management and Product Program Abilities by Grade Level

As with other Girl Scout activities, girls build their financial and sales savvy as they get older. Every girl will be different, but here you’ll find some examples of the abilities and opportunities for progression of girls at each grade level.

Girl Scout Daisies

- The group volunteer handles money, keeps financial records, and does all group budgeting.
- Parents/caregivers may decide they will contribute to the cost of activities.
- Girls can participate in Girl Scout Cookie Program activities and other council-sponsored product programs.
- Daisies are always paired with a volunteer when selling anything. Girls do the asking and deliver the product, but volunteers handle the money and keep the girls safe.
- Girls should be given the opportunity to practice identifying money and counting back change with an adult during each transaction.

Girl Scout Brownies

- The group volunteer handles money, keeps financial records, and shares some of the group budgeting responsibilities.
- Girls discuss the cost of activities (supplies, fees, transportation, rentals, and so on) with guidance from their volunteer(s).
- Girls set goals for and participate in council-sponsored product programs.
- Girls may decide to pay dues to contribute to the cost of activities.

Girl Scout Juniors

- The group volunteer retains overall responsibility for long-term budgeting and record keeping but shares or delegates all other financial responsibilities.
- Girls set goals for and participate in council-sponsored product programs.
- Girls decide on group dues, if any. Dues are collected by girls and recorded by a group treasurer selected by the girls.
- Girls budget for the short-term needs of the group based on their plans and income from the group dues.
- Girls budget for more long-term activities, such as overnight trips, group camping, and special events.
- Girls budget for Take Action projects including the Girl Scout Bronze Award if they are pursuing it.

Girl Scout Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors

- Girls estimate costs based on plans.
- Girls determine the amount of group dues, if any, and the scope of money-earning projects.
- Girls set goals for and participate in council-sponsored product programs.
- Girls carry out budgeting, planning, and group money-earning programs.
- Girls budget for extended travel, Take Action projects, and leadership projects.
- Girls may be involved in seeking donations for Take Action projects with council approval.
- Girls keep their own financial records and give reports to parents and group volunteers.
- Girls budget for Take Action projects, including the Girl Scout Silver or Girl Scout Gold Awards, if they are pursuing them.

Working with Sponsors and Other Organizations

Local sponsors can help councils power innovative programs for Girl Scouts. Community organizations, businesses, religious organizations, and individuals may be sponsors and may provide group meeting places, volunteer their time, offer in-kind donations, provide activity materials, or loan equipment. Encourage your girls to celebrate a sponsor's contribution to the troop by sending thank-you cards, inviting the sponsor to a meeting or ceremony, or working together on a Take Action project.

For information on working with a sponsor, consult your council, which can give you guidance on the availability of sponsors, recruiting guidelines, and any council policies or practices that must be followed. Your council may already have relationships with certain organizations or may know of some reasons not to collaborate with certain organizations.

When collaborating with any other organization, keep these additional guidelines in mind:

Avoid fundraising for other organizations. Girl Scouts are not allowed to solicit money on behalf of another organization when identifying themselves as Girl Scouts by wearing a uniform, a sash or vest, official pins, and so on. This includes participating in a walkathon or telethon while in uniform. However, you and your group can support another organization through Take Action projects. Girl Scouts as individuals are able to participate in whatever events they choose as long as they are not wearing anything that officially identifies them as Girl Scouts.

Steer clear of political fundraisers. When in an official Girl Scout capacity or in any way identifying yourselves as Girl Scouts, your group may not participate, directly or indirectly, in any political campaign or work on behalf of or in opposition to a candidate for public office. Letter-writing campaigns are not allowed, nor is participating in a political rally, circulating a petition, or carrying a political banner.

Be respectful when collaborating with religious organizations. Girl Scout groups must respect the opinions and practices of religious partners, but no girl should be required to take part in any religious observance or practice of the sponsoring group.

Avoid selling or endorsing commercial products. A commercial product is any product sold at a retail location. Since 1939, girls and volunteers have not been allowed to endorse, provide a testimonial for, or sell such products.

Troop/Group In-Kind Donations

1. If a troop/group wishes to request an in-kind donation from a community business, solicitation approval from the Philanthropy Department must be granted prior to requesting the donation. It is the troop/group's responsibility to complete the Permission Request for Solicitation form and submit two weeks prior to solicitation. It is important the form be completed in its entirety for ease of approval. The Philanthropy Department will respond to your request within five business days. This form must be approved, as many times the council already has an established relationship with a potential donor or a relationship is being cultivated. In many cases, more donations will be granted if the council exhibits a unified effort in making a collaborative "ask."

2. After approval of the solicitation request, the troop/group must report back to the Philanthropy Department on the result of each request. All in-kind donations must be reported to the Philanthropy Department on the Gift In-Kind form for proper recording and council acknowledgement.

Troop/Group Receiving Monetary Donations

1. A troop/group may not solicit cash donations from community organizations, corporations, or businesses.
2. In efforts to build a broader base of individual support and corporate partners through the help of our Girl Scout friends and families, donations designated to a troop/group will be considered tax deductible and passed through to the intended troop/group when the gift is made to Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois accompanied by written instructions to be used for the specific troop/group. All gifts will be acknowledged, and a check request will be initiated to pass the donation to the specified troop/group via check to the troop. This process may take up to 14 business days from receipt of donation.
3. In some circumstances, troops/groups may be permitted to seek support from a corporate or grant funder for a specific project (for example, a local “Youth Engaged in Philanthropy” grant designed to support youth service projects). The troop/group seeking support must contact the Philanthropy Department to discuss the potential opportunity and must coordinate with the Philanthropy Department to submit their request. If the troop/group receives funding, they will also be required to advise the GSNI Philanthropy Department of their responsibilities for fulfilling funder requirements. The troop will also need to stay in communication with the Philanthropy Department regarding the project’s progress and any required reports to the funder.

Employer Matching Gifts

1. Many employers offer a matching gift program to employees who make a financial donation to a non-profit organization. If you have made a gift to Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois, speak to your employer (often handled through the Human Resources Department) about the matching gift policies at your place of employment. The Philanthropy Department is available to assist in this process.
2. Many employers also offer a matching volunteer program where the employer will make a financial donation on behalf of their employee for the time they have volunteered with a non-profit organization. If your employer participates in this type of program, speak to your Human Resources Department to verify the process for applying for this match program. The Philanthropy Department is available to assist in this process.

Girl Scout Giving

1. Girl Scouts may not raise or solicit money for other organizations on behalf of Girl Scouts.
2. If the girls from your troop/group have all voted and agreed, they may contribute a portion of their troop/group treasury to an organization whose projects they consider worthwhile on a limited basis. The funds used should not take away from the overall activities of the troop/group throughout the Girl Scout year. Some examples would be to help other Girl Scouts, local community or international community service projects, or environmental projects.

Girl Scout Council Annual Giving Campaign

Thanks to the generous support of Girl Scout alums, friends, and the community, Girl Scouting continues its long-standing tradition of helping today's girls build the character and skills needed to become tomorrow's leaders. When we invest in Girl Scouting, we invest in the future of our girls. The Girl Scout Annual Giving Campaign provides for many of the important support services to girls, leaders, and other volunteers of Girl Scouting.

Donations through Registration

The annual registration fee paid for membership in the Girl Scouts is paid to Girl Scouts of the USA and does not stay within our local council. It is the responsibility of all Girl Scouts to support Girl Scouting personally and to encourage others to support Girl Scouting by making a contribution through the Family Partnership Campaign. Each year, Girl Scout families are asked to help support the council through this campaign. This campaign assists the council in keeping Girl Scouts relevant in our communities, provides financial assistance to girls who could otherwise not afford to be a part of Girl Scouts, provides financial assistance to girls attending summer camp, helps with maintaining our camp properties and resource centers, and provides volunteer training. Together, we can provide the financial support to build girls of courage, confidence, and character through the Girl Scout Leadership Experience for all girls in Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois!

Engaging Girls

Creating the kind of environment in which girls are unafraid to try new things and to be who they want to be starts with you! By meeting your girls where they are, you'll help them develop the leadership skills they'll use today and in the future.

Understanding Healthy Development in Girls

It sounds simple, but just being attentive to what girls are experiencing as they mature is a big help to them—and to you, as you guide and mentor them! You'll experience different joys and challenges with each Girl Scout level, but here are some guidelines for meeting girls' needs and abilities at different grade levels, you'll also find these listed in the adult guide of each leadership Journey.

Girl Scout Daisies	
At the Girl Scout Daisy level (kindergarten and first grades), girls...	<i>This means...</i>
Have loads of energy and need to run, walk, and play outside.	<i>They'll enjoy going on nature walks and outdoor scavenger hunts.</i>
Are great builders and budding artists, though they are still developing their fine motor skills.	<i>Encouraging them to express themselves and their creativity by making things with their hands. Girls may need assistance holding scissors, cutting in a straight line, and so on.</i>
Love to move and dance.	<i>They might especially enjoy marching like a penguin, dancing like a dolphin, or acting out how they might care for animals in the jungle.</i>
Are concrete thinkers and focused on the here and now.	<i>Showing instead of telling, for example, about how animals are cared for. Plan visits to animal shelters, farms, or zoos; meet care providers, or make a creative bird feeder.</i>
Are only beginning to learn about basic number concepts, time, and money.	<i>You'll want to take opportunities to count out supplies together—and, perhaps, the legs on a caterpillar!</i>
Are just beginning to write and spell, and they don't always have the words for what they're thinking or feeling.	<i>That having girls draw a picture of something they are trying to communicate is easier and more meaningful for them.</i>
Know how to follow simple directions and respond well to recognition for doing so.	<i>Being specific and offering only one direction at a time. Acknowledge when girls have followed directions well to increase their motivation to listen and follow again.</i>

Girl Scout Brownies

At the Girl Scout Brownie level (second and third grades), girls...	<i>This means...</i>
Have loads of energy and need to run, walk, and play outside.	<i>Taking your session activities outside whenever possible.</i>
Are social and enjoy working in groups.	<i>Allowing girls to team up in small or large groups for art projects and performances.</i>
Want to help others and appreciate being given individual responsibilities for a task.	<i>Letting girls lead, direct, and help out in activities whenever possible. Allow girls as a group to make decisions about individual roles and responsibilities.</i>
Are concrete thinkers and focused on the here and now.	<i>Doing more than just reading to girls about the Brownie Elf's adventures. Ask girls questions to gauge their understanding and allow them to role play their own pretend visit to a new country.</i>
Need clear directions and structure and like knowing what to expect.	<i>Offering only one direction at a time. Also, have girls create the schedule and flow of your get-togethers and share those at the start.</i>
Are becoming comfortable with basic number concepts, time, money, and distance.	<i>Offering support only when needed. Allow girls to set schedules for meetings or performances, count out money for a trip, and so on.</i>
Are continuing to develop their fine motor skills and can tie shoes, use basic tools, begin to sew, etc.	<i>Encouraging girls to express themselves and their creativity by making things with their hands. Girls may need some assistance, however, holding scissors, threading needles, and so on.</i>
Love to act in plays, create music, and dance.	<i>Girls might like to create a play about welcoming a new girl to their school or to tell a story through dance or creative movement.</i>
Know how to follow rules, listen well, and appreciate recognition of a job well done.	<i>Acknowledging when the girls have listened or followed the directions well, which will increase their motivation to listen and follow again.</i>

Girl Scout Juniors

At the Girl Scout Junior level (fourth and fifth grades), girls...	<i>This means...</i>
Want to make decisions and express their opinions.	<i>Whenever possible, allowing girls to make decisions and express their opinions through guided discussion and active reflection activities. Also, have girls set rules for listening to others' opinions and offer assistance in decision making.</i>
Are social and enjoy working in groups.	<i>Allowing girls to team up in small or large groups for art projects, performances, and written activities.</i>
Are aware of expectations and sensitive to the judgments of others.	<i>Although it's okay to have expectations, the expectation is not perfection! Share your own mistakes and what you learned from them and be sure to create an environment where girls can be comfortable sharing theirs.</i>
Are concerned about equity and fairness.	<i>Not shying away from discussing why rules are in place and having girls develop their own rules for their group.</i>
Are beginning to think abstractly and critically and are capable of flexible thought. Juniors can consider more than one perspective as well as the feelings and attitudes of another.	<i>Asking girls to explain why they made a decision, to share their visions of their roles in the future, and to challenge their own and others' perspectives.</i>
Have strong fine and gross motor skills and coordination.	<i>Engaging girls in moving their minds and their bodies. Allow girls to express themselves through the written word, choreography, and so on.</i>
Love to act in plays, create music, and dance.	<i>Girls might like to tell a story through playwriting, playing an instrument, or choreographing a dance.</i>
May be starting puberty, which means beginning breast development, skin changes, and weight changes. Some may be getting their periods.	<i>Being sensitive to girls' changing bodies, possible discomfort over these changes, and their desire for more information. Create an environment that acknowledges and celebrates this transition as healthy and normal for girls.</i>

Girl Scout Cadettes

At the Girl Scout Cadette level (sixth, seventh, and eighth grades), girls...	<i>This means...</i>
<p>Are going through puberty, including changes in their skin, body shape, and weight. They're also starting their menstrual cycles and have occasional shifts in mood.</p>	<p><i>Being sensitive to the many changes Cadettes are undergoing and acknowledging that these changes are as normal as growing taller! Girls need time to adapt to their changing bodies, and their feelings about their bodies may not keep up. Reinforce that, as with everything else, people go through puberty in different ways and at different times.</i></p>
<p>Are starting to spend more time in peer groups than with their families and are very concerned about friends and relationships with others their age.</p>	<p><i>That girls will enjoy teaming up in small or large groups for art projects, performances, and written activities as well as tackling relationship issues through both artistic endeavors and Take Action projects.</i></p>
<p>Can be very self-conscious, wanting to be like everyone else but fearing they are unique in their thoughts and feelings.</p>	<p><i>Encouraging girls to share, but only when they are ready. At this age, they may be more comfortable sharing a piece of artwork or a fictional story than their own words. Throughout the activities, highlight and discuss differences as positive, interesting, and beautiful.</i></p>
<p>Are beginning to navigate their increasing independence and expectations from adults at school and at home.</p>	<p><i>Trusting girls to plan and make key decisions and allowing them to experience "fun failure," which is learning from trying something new and making mistakes.</i></p>

Girl Scout Seniors

At the Girl Scout Senior level (ninth and tenth grades), girls...	<i>This means...</i>
Are beginning to clarify their own values, consider alternative points of view on controversial issues, and see multiple aspects of a situation.	<i>Asking girls to explain the reasoning behind their decisions. Engage girls in role-play and performances, where others can watch and offer alternative solutions.</i>
Have strong problem-solving and critical thinking skills and are able to plan and reflect on their own learning experiences.	<i>Girls are more than able to go beyond community service to develop projects that will create sustainable solutions in their communities. Be sure to have girls plan and follow up on these experiences through written and discussion-based reflective activities.</i>
Spend more time in peer groups than with their families and are very concerned about friends and relationships with others their age.	<i>That girls will enjoy teaming up in small or large groups for art projects, performances, and written activities. They'll also want to tackle relationship issues through both artistic endeavors and Take Action projects. Alter the makeup of groups with each activity so that girls interact with those they might not usually pair up with.</i>
Frequently enjoy expressing their individuality.	<i>Encouraging girls to express their individuality in their dress, creative expression, and thinking. Remind girls frequently that there isn't just one way to look, feel, think, or act. Assist girls in coming up with new ways of expressing their individuality.</i>
Feel they have lots of responsibilities and pressures—from home, school, peers, work, and other sources.	<i>Acknowledging girls' pressures and sharing how stress can limit health, creativity, and productivity. Help girls release stress through creative expression, movement, and more traditional stress-reduction techniques.</i>
Are continuing to navigate their increasing independence and expectations from adults at school and at home.	<i>Trusting girls to plan and make key decisions, allowing them to experience "fun failure," which is learning from trying something new and making mistakes.</i>

Girl Scout Ambassadors

At the Girl Scout Ambassador level (eleventh and twelfth grades), girls...	<i>This means...</i>
Can see the complexity of situations and controversial issues—they understand that problems often have no clear solution and that varying points of view may each have merit.	<i>Inviting girls to develop stories as a group and then individually create endings that they later discuss and share.</i>
Have strong problem-solving and critical thinking skills and can adapt logical thinking to real-life situations. Ambassadors recognize and incorporate practical limitations to solutions.	<i>Girls are more than able to go beyond community service to develop projects that will create sustainable solutions in their communities. Be sure to have girls plan and follow up on these experiences through written and discussion-based reflective activities.</i>
Spend more time with peers than with their families and are very concerned about friends and relationships with others their age.	<i>Girls will enjoy teaming up in small or large groups for art projects, performances, and written activities. They'll also want to tackle relationship issues through artistic endeavors and Take Action projects. Alter the makeup of groups with each activity so that girls interact with those they might not usually pair up with.</i>
Frequently enjoy expressing their individuality.	<i>Encouraging girls to express their individuality in their dress, creative expression, and thinking. Remind girls frequently that there isn't just one way to look, feel, think, or act. Assist girls in coming up with new ways of expressing their individuality.</i>
Feel they have lots of responsibilities and pressures—from home, school, peers, work, and other sources.	<i>Acknowledging girls' pressures and sharing how stress can limit health, creativity, and productivity. Help girls release stress through creative expression, movement, and more traditional stress-reduction techniques.</i>
Are continuing to navigate their increasing independence and expectations from adults—at school and at home—and are looking to their futures.	<i>Trusting girls to plan and make key decisions, allowing them to experience “fun failure,” which is learning from trying something new and making mistakes.</i>

Creating a Safe Space for Girls

A safe space is where girls feel that they can be themselves, without explanation or judgment. As a volunteer, the environment you create is just as important as the activities girls do—it's the key to developing the sort of group that girls want to be part of! Cultivate a space where confidentiality is respected, and girls can express their true selves.

Recognize and Support 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.

Promote 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.

Build 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.

Inspire 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 the same.
- 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.

Managing Conflict

Conflicts and disagreements are an inevitable part of life, but if handled constructively, they show girls that they can overcome their differences, exercise diplomacy, and improve their communication and relationships. Respecting others and being a sister to every Girl Scout means that shouting, verbal abuse, or physical confrontations are never warranted and cannot be tolerated in the Girl Scout environment.

When a conflict arises between girls or a girl and a volunteer, get those involved to sit down together and [talk calmly in a nonjudgmental manner](#), keeping in mind that each party may need some time—a few days or a week—to calm down before being able to do this. Talking in this way might feel uncomfortable and difficult now, but it lays the groundwork for working well together in the future. Whatever you do, do not spread your complaint around to others—that won't help the situation and causes only embarrassment and anger.

You'll also find conflict resolution activities in some of the Journeys, such as the Amaze Journey for Cadettes or the Mission Sisterhood Journey for Seniors.

If a conflict persists, be sure you explain the matter to your volunteer support team. If the supervisor cannot resolve the issues satisfactorily (or if the problem involves the supervisor), the issue can be taken to the next level of supervision and, ultimately, to your council if you need extra help.

Communicating Effectively with Girls of Any Age

Make sure your words and intentions create connection with the girls. Keep in mind how important the following attitudes are.

Listen. Listening to girls, as opposed to telling them what to think, feel, or do (no “you should”) is the first step in building a trusting relationship and helping them take ownership of their Girl Scout experience.

Be Honest. If you're not comfortable with a topic or activity, it's OK to say so. No one expects you to be an expert on every topic. Ask for alternatives or seek out volunteers with the required expertise. Owning up to mistakes—and apologizing for them—goes a long way with girls.

Be Open to Real Issues. Outside of Girl Scouts, girls may be dealing with issues like relationships, peer pressure, school, money, drugs, and other serious topics. When you don't

know, listen. Also seek help from your council if you need assistance or more information than you currently have.

Show Respect. Girls often say that their best experiences were the ones where adults treated them as equal partners. Being spoken to as young adults reinforces that their opinions matter and that they deserve respect.

Offer Options. Girls' needs and interests change and being flexible shows them that you respect them and their busy lives. Be ready with age-appropriate guidance and parameters no matter what the girls choose to do.

Stay Current. Show your girls that you're interested in their world by asking them about the TV shows and movies they like; the books, magazines, or blogs they read; the social media influencers they follow; and the music they listen to.

Remember LUTE: Listen, Understand, Tolerate, and Empathize. Try using the LUTE method to thoughtfully respond when a girl is upset, angry, or confused.

Listen. Hear her out, ask for details, and reflect back what you hear; try “What happened next?” or “What did she say?”

Understand. Show that you understand where she's coming from with comments such as, “So what I hear you saying is...” or “I understand why you're unhappy,” or “Your feelings are hurt; mine would be, too.”

Tolerate. You can tolerate the feelings that she just can't handle right now on her own. Let her know that you're there to listen and accept how she is feeling about the situation. Say something like: “Try talking to me about it. I'll listen,” or “I know you're mad—talking it out helps,” or “I can handle it—say whatever you want to.”

Empathize. Let her know you can imagine feeling what she's feeling with comments such as, “I'm sure that really hurts” or “I can imagine how painful this is for you.”

Addressing the Needs of Older Girls

Let these simple tips guide you when working with teenage girls:

- Think of yourself as a “guide on the side”—a partner, a coach, or a mentor, not a “leader.”
- Ask girls what rules they need for safety and what group agreements they need to be a good team. When girls take the lead in establishing group rules, they're more likely to stick to them.
- Understand that girls need time to talk, unwind, and have fun together.
- Ask what they think and what they want to do.
- Encourage girls to speak their minds.
- Provide structure, but don't micromanage.

- Give everyone a voice in the group—understanding that “speaking up” may look different for each girl. For some girls, it might mean sharing their ideas in front of the entire group; for others it could mean submitting a written response or contributing as part of a group.
- Treat girls like partners.
- Don’t repeat what’s said in the group to anyone outside of it (unless necessary for a girl’s safety). See “Report Concerns” below to understand the guard rails.

When Sensitive Topics Come Up

It’s an amazing feeling when your Girl Scouts put their trust in you—and when they do, they may come to you with some of the issues they are facing such as bullying, peer pressure, dating, athletic and academic performance, and more. Some of these issues may be considered sensitive by families who may have opinions or input about how, and whether, Girl Scouts should cover these topics with their girls.

Girl Scouts welcomes and serves girls and families from a wide spectrum of faiths and cultures. When girls wish to participate in discussions or activities that could be considered sensitive—even for some—put the topic on hold until you have spoken with the parents and received guidance from your council.

When Girl Scout activities involve sensitive issues, your role is that of a caring adult volunteer who can help girls acquire skills and knowledge in a supportive atmosphere, not someone who advocates a particular position.

Girl Scouts of the USA does not take a position or develop materials on issues relating to human sexuality, birth control, or abortion. We feel our role is to help girls develop self-confidence and good decision-making skills that will help them make wise choices in all areas of their lives. We believe parents and caregivers, along with schools and faith communities, are the primary sources of information on these topics.

We at Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois support that parents/caregivers make all decisions regarding their girl’s participation in Girl Scout program that may be of a sensitive nature. As a volunteer leader, you must get written parental permission for any locally planned program offering that could be considered sensitive. Included on the permission form should be the topic of the activity, any specific content that might create controversy, and any action steps the girls will take when the activity is complete. Be sure to have a form for each girl and keep the forms on hand in case a problem arises. For activities not sponsored by Girl Scouts, find out in advance (from organizers or other volunteers who may be familiar with the content) what will be presented, and follow your council’s guidelines for obtaining written permission.

Report Concerns

There may be times when you worry about the health and well-being of girls in your group. Alcohol, drugs, sex, bullying, abuse, depression, and eating disorders are some of the issues girls may encounter. You are on the frontlines of girls' lives which places you in a unique position to identify a situation in which a girl may need help. If you believe a girl is at risk of hurting herself or others, your role is to promptly bring that information to her parent/caregiver or the council so she can get the expert assistance she needs. Your concern about a girl's well-being and safety is taken seriously and your council will guide you in addressing these concerns.

Here are a few signs that could indicate a girl needs expert help:

- Marked changes in behavior or personality (for example, unusual moodiness, aggressiveness, or sensitivity).
- Declining academic performance and/or inability to concentrate.
- Withdrawal from school, family activities, or friendships.
- Fatigue, apathy, or loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities.
- Sleep disturbances.
- Increased secretiveness.
- Deterioration in appearance and personal hygiene.
- Eating extremes, unexplained weight loss, distorted body image.
- Tendency toward perfectionism.
- Giving away prized possessions; preoccupation with the subject of death.
- Unexplained injuries such as bruises, burns, or fractures.
- Avoidance of eye contact or physical contact.
- Excessive fearfulness or distrust of adults.
- Abusive behavior toward other children, especially younger ones.

You Witness or Experience Abuse

Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois supports and maintains environments free of child abuse and neglect. All states require certain professionals and institutions to report suspected child abuse. Failure to report suspected child abuse can result in criminal and/or civil liability. All states require the report to be made to some type of law enforcement authority or child protection agency.

Reporting to a parent or relative will not satisfy the reporter's legal duty under the statutes. The following guidelines outline how reporting should happen in GSNI.

While volunteers are not mandated reporters within GSNI, we would encourage them to report suspected child abuse and/or neglect. GSNI requires all staff members to act as mandated reporters.

While not required, volunteers may find the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) online training module or online manual useful.

The training, *Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse: Training for Mandated Reporters*, can be accessed at:

- The [Manual for Mandated Reporters](#)
- [Mandated Reporter Training](#)

Ideally the person with the most direct knowledge of the suspected abuse should be the one to call the DCFS Hotline, however, this is not a requirement. Volunteers suspecting child abuse have two options:

1) REPORT CHILD ABUSE TO DCFS: Volunteers who suspect abuse or neglect may contact the DCFS Hotline Number at 1-800-25-ABUSE (1-800-252-2873) directly. If it's not an emergency, you can report online at: <https://dcfsonlinereporting.dcf.illinois.gov/>

A GSNI volunteer who has made a report based on information discovered during a Girl Scout activity is also asked to provide to GSNI a confidential incident report (written or verbal) outlining their DCFS report immediately after reporting to DCFS.

2) REPORT CHILD ABUSE TO GSNI: If a volunteer suspects child abuse and is not comfortable calling the hotline, they may contact one of the following: your Member Support Specialist or GSNI's Customer Care line. If calling the Customer Care line, please let them know you are concerned about a possible child abuse situation, and they will either connect you directly with an appropriate staff member or have the staff member call you back as quickly as possible. Once possible child abuse is reported to a GSNI staff member, the staff member is mandated to report it to DCFS.

In all cases, please preserve confidentiality of all reports made to the hotline. Discuss only with the appropriate GSNI staff member and with DCFS/law enforcement personnel.

Engaging Families

You want your Girl Scouts to have fun, be inspired, take risks, and learn about themselves and the world—that’s why you’re a Girl Scout troop leader or troop volunteer! Parents and caregivers want the same thing for their girls but getting families to pitch in and play an active role in the troop while also enhancing the experience for their girl and themselves can be tricky for many volunteers. It doesn’t have to be this way.

Kick the Year Off Right by Engaging Parents and Other Caregivers

When families step up and play an active part in troop life, your troop can shine its brightest! Plus, girls feel a special sense of pride when their families take part and show interest in the things they are doing.

What Is a Parent and Caregiver Meeting?

It’s the first meeting to start each troop year—whether you are a new or returning troop, it’s valuable for all troops.

Why Hold a Meeting? [Kicking off each year with a parent and caregiver meeting](#) sets the troop up for success. Outlining clear expectations, building a team, and engaging parents in the Girl Scout experience is a great way to start off on the right foot. When parents are involved, leaders have support, the troop has a plan, and girls benefit! The meeting helps:

- Families understand what Girl Scouting can do for their girl.
- Families and leaders identify ways they will work as a team to support the troop.
- Families and leaders agree about what the troop pays for and what families pay for individually.
- You fill key troop positions—you never know which parent will make an awesome assistant leader or troop cookie manager.
- Families know how the troop will communicate things like upcoming events or schedule changes.
- Families learn about uniforms, books, and other important basics.

For even more tips on working with troop families, check out [Girl Scouts’ Tips for Troop Leaders](#) hub.

How to Keep Parents and Caregivers Engaged

Make the Ask(s). The main reason people don’t take action is because they were never asked to in the first place. That’s why hearing one out of three Girl Scout parents say no one had communicated expectations around involvement with their girl’s troop is so troubling. Parents may have many talents, but they’re certainly not mind readers. If you’re nervous about getting turned down, don’t be. Sure, a few parents might be unable to lend a hand, but the helpers you do get will be worth their weight in gold. Just because someone wasn’t available a month or two ago doesn’t mean they won’t be free to help now. Loop back, follow up, and ask again!

Make Sense of “Why.” Explain that not only does the whole troop benefit with extra help from parents and other caregivers, but also that girls feel a special sense of pride in seeing their own family member step up and take a leadership role. Getting involved can strengthen the caregiver/girl bond and is a meaningful way to show daughters that they are a priority in their parents’ lives.

Make It Quick and Easy. Everybody’s got a full plate these days, so instead of starting conversations with a list of tasks or responsibilities that parents and other caregivers could take on (which can be intimidating), ask how much time each week they might be able to dedicate to the troop, then go from there. For instance, if a troop mom or dad has 15 minutes each week to spare, they could organize and manage the calendar for troop snacks and carpools. If a grandparent has one to two hours, they could assist with leading the troop through a specific badge on a topic they’re already comfortable with.

Make Family Part of the Formula. While Girl Scout programming is always focused on the girls themselves, it’s important and helpful to open a few events to their families throughout the year. Inviting the whole crew to celebrate her accomplishments in Girl Scouting—whether at a holiday open house, a bridging ceremony, or a fun “reverse meeting” where girls take the role of leaders and guide the adults, including caregivers, through an activity—will help parents better understand the value of Girl Scouts, and they’ll be more likely to invest their time and talents to the troop.

That said, there’s no need to wait for a special event to engage families in their girls’ Girl Scout life. Keep communication lines open throughout the year—whether it’s through your troop’s social media page, personal emails, or in-person chats—to keep parents in the loop on what the girls are doing and learning during each meeting and encourage them to let their daughters “be the experts” at home, explaining or teaching the new skills they’ve learned. You can get everyone in on the fun and keep Girl Scouts strong at home by sharing the family badge guides on the Volunteer Toolkit with parents and caregivers.

Girl Scout Product Programs

Learning to think like an entrepreneur? Developing business smarts? Getting to know customers and building lasting relationships? There's so much more to that box of Thin Mints®.

Whether girls participate in the Girl Scout Cookie Program or the Girl Scout Fall Product Program (or both!), everything your Girl Scouts learn prepares them to take on the world. Plus, Girl Scout Cookie proceeds stay in your local community to power amazing year-round experiences—experiences that broaden girls' worlds and spark their sense of wonder.

Five Essential Skills

Girl Scouts as young as five develop five essential skills through the Girl Scout Cookie Program—skills that will help them be successful today and throughout their lives:

- **Goal Setting.** Girls learn to create a plan to reach their goals.
- **Decision Making.** Girls learn to make decisions on their own and as a team.
- **Money Management.** Girls learn to create a budget and handle money.
- **People Skills.** Girls find their voice and increase their confidence through customer interactions that build relationships.
- **Business Ethics.** Girls learn to act responsibly and honestly, both in business and in life.

But building their business know-how isn't just tied to the cookies themselves! Girl Scouts at any level can continue honing their entrepreneurial skills by earning the [Cookie Business badges](#), [Cookie Entrepreneur Family Pin](#), and the [Financial Literacy badges](#) year after year.

Before your cookie bosses open shop, be sure to check out these [helpful troop leader resources](#) that will empower you to:

- Manage your troop's funds.
- Learn how girls participate in money earning.
- Discover how your troop can reach its financial goals.
- Plan activities to help her earn cookie pins and badges
- Understand just how much your girls are capable of by grade level and [how their entrepreneurial skills progress](#).

Understanding the Fall Product Program

Every year, Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois offers Girl Scouts in all pathways the opportunity to participate in a magazine, nut, and candy program. The Fall Product Program is a great way to teach girls important skills—goal setting, decision making, money management, people skills, and business ethics—and enables them to earn money for troop/group activities at the beginning of the membership year.

The program begins in October and lasts for a period of about three weeks. Besides having a variety of nuts and candy, there is also a wide selection of magazines and more for purchase.

Delivery of nuts and candy to each service unit is in mid-November—just in time for the Thanksgiving holiday!

Volunteers from each service unit attend training in August to learn about our vendor and its products. Information (order cards, product samples, etc.) is sent directly to the Service Unit Fall Product Coordinator for distribution to troops/groups at September service unit meetings.

Troop Size Requirements Relating to Product Program Participation

Daisy, Brownie and Junior Troops

Cadette, Senior and Ambassador Troops

What does this mean?
If your troop does not meet the minimum size as outlined above, your troop will automatically be treated as a group of Independently Registered Members (IRMs).

What DOESN'T it mean?
It does NOT mean that your troop will no longer be a troop. Your troop remains intact and would be included in the Opportunity Catalog for additional girls to join.

Troop size requirements have been in effect since the 2016/2017 Membership Year Product Programs.

For Girl Scout Daisy, Brownie, and Junior Troops: Minimum size is five girls (from multiple families) and two unrelated leaders, one of which is a female.

For Girl Scout Cadette, Senior, and Ambassador Troops: Minimum size is three girls (from multiple families) and two unrelated leaders, one of which is a female.

Girls in troops that have not met these minimums will be treated as Independently Registered Members (IRMs) for the purposes of troop proceeds and girl rewards. This minimum MUST be met by October 15, 2022.

If your troop does not meet the minimum size as outlined above, your troop will automatically be treated as a group of IRMs. For example: If you have a Brownie troop of four girls or a Cadette Troop of two girls, your troop will be treated as a group of IRMs for product rewards and no troop proceeds will be awarded.

During sweeps, your troop account will be swept for the entire cost of product sold. Proceeds are NOT kept by the troop. Girls will earn S'more Dough in place of troop proceeds.

It does NOT mean your troop will no longer be a troop. Your troop remains intact and would be included in the Opportunity Catalog for additional girls to join.

For more information, please contact your Service Unit Fall Product Program Coordinator, Service Unit Cookie Coordinator, or contact a member of GSNI's Product Program Team.

Girl Scout Cookie History

What started with Girl Scouts selling home-baked cookies to raise money grew into enlisting professional bakers in 1936 to handle the growing demand—and the rest is history. [Explore Girl Scout Cookie History](#) to find out how cookies have helped build generations of female entrepreneurs and leaders who make the world a better place.

Where Cookie Proceeds Go

After paying for the cost of cookies and materials, [Girl Scout Cookie proceeds stay local](#) and help councils provide Girl Scout programs in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), the outdoors, life skills, entrepreneurship, and more—in camps, through leadership training, and multiple other ways. A portion of the proceeds is directly managed by girls, and it's up to them to decide how to invest their troop's share of the earnings.

Your council will provide a breakdown of how cookie program proceeds support Girl Scout activities locally. Please share this information with girls and their families so everyone understands that product program sales make it possible for your Girl Scout council to serve girls.

Troop members share in the proceeds from a successful product program; proceeds are not distributed to individual girl members. Girls, however, may be eligible for rewards and credits that they put toward council-sponsored camps, programs, and Girl Scout swag. The council plan for rewards applies equally to all girls participating in the product program activity. Visit the [cookie section](#) of GSNI's website for more information about individual rewards and troop proceeds locally.

The [Girl Scout Blue Book of Basic Documents](#) specifies that:

“All money and other assets, including property, that are raised, earned, or otherwise received in the name of and for the benefit of Girl Scouting must be held and authorized by a Girl Scout council or Girl Scouts of the USA. Such money and other assets must be used for the purposes of Girl Scouting.”

“Ownership of Assets,” *Blue Book of Basic Documents*

Making s'mores under the stars, creating a lasting impact in your community, or ordering supplies for an eye-opening STEM project—there are limitless ways to put troop proceeds toward dynamic Girl Scout experiences! There are a few things, however, that don't qualify for “purposes of Girl Scouting,” for instance, using troop proceeds to purchase memberships in or

uniforms for another organization. We encourage all councils to remind their volunteers of this policy in order to protect the all-girl environment and to avoid diversion of Girl Scout funds.

Your Council's Role

When you are set up for success, you are better able to set up your girls for success! That's why every year, your council provides trainings, guidelines, and procedures for conducting the Girl Scout Cookie Program and Fall Product program and determines how the proceeds and product rewards system will be managed. Check the [Cookie Resources](#) page of GSNI's website to find the answers you need as well as local trainings and resources.

Each council also selects the vendors of its choice to provide the products for their product programs. Two commercial bakers are licensed by Girl Scouts of the USA to produce Girl Scout Cookies: [Little Brownie Bakers](#) and [ABC Bakers](#). You can also [Meet the Cookies](#) and find additional info on cookie varieties, including nutritional details.

Councils also work with vendors to offer magazine subscriptions, nut and candy products, and more for the fall product program. These companies are [Ashdon Farms](#), [Trophy Nut](#), and [M2 Media Group](#). Each provides online tools and activities for girls to download. Magazine selection and sales may take place online—check with your council for more details.

Your Role

You play an exciting role in giving your Girl Scouts opportunities to practice the five skills as they learn how to think like entrepreneurs. Some of the things you'll do include:

- Get girls excited about the opportunities to support the troop (but allowing their participation to be voluntary).
- Support both [competitive and apprehensive cookie bosses](#), helping all your girls set meaningful goals for themselves.
- [Fostering partnerships with each Girl Scout's family](#) to ensure cookie season success, whatever that may look like for her, will help you build a positive partnership with girls and families, and the [Cookie Entrepreneur Family pin](#) is designed to help families support girls' growth at home.

Not only can girls sell individually, both in-person and using the online tools provided by each vendor, they can also participate in group booth sales during product programs. Your local council has additional guidance and processes to market and ensure every booth is in a safe and appropriate location.

As your Girl Scouts grow, your role will evolve from a hands-on one to providing oversight and support where needed. No matter their ages, remember that volunteers and parents/caregivers do not sell the product. Your role is to encourage your girls and let their entrepreneurial spirit soar. Learning by doing is exactly how your girls develop the business savvy and communication skills that will [empower them to reach any goals they set for themselves](#).

Another critical task for each troop is to establish a clear accounting system for all proceeds and product during the programs. It's up to you to make sure that money is spent wisely, that excellent records are kept (remember to keep copies of all receipts in a binder or folder), and that

all product is tracked. For older girls, your job is to oversee their work as they learn to keep impeccable records. Be sure to attend product program orientation or training so you are aware of the systems and helpful tools available.

The Girl Scout Cookie Program and the Fall Product Program can be exhilarating and busy times during the troop year, but you're never alone in your efforts! You can reach out to your service unit product program manager when you're feeling stuck, or you can [build a cookie team](#) to provide the support your troop needs.

Product Program Safety

Safety is the top priority while selling Girl Scout Cookies and other products. Volunteers, families, and girls should be familiar with and practice the safety guidelines outlined in local program resources as well as those available in the [troop leader resources](#) section of girlscoutcookies.org and in *Safety Activity Checkpoints*.

Selling Cookies Online

Will your troop use the Digital Cookie® platform to manage its cookie business? Check the specific guidelines provided by each cookie vendor before participating. Before girls begin selling online, they should partner with their troop leader and families to learn how to safely run their business online.

A few more online safety practices to keep in mind:

- The Girl Scout Cookie Program is a girl-led program; a Girl Scout should always lead online marketing and sales efforts, with the supervision of her parent or caregiver.
- Girl Scouts engaging in online sales and marketing must review and apply the [Digital Marketing Tips for Cookie Entrepreneurs and Their Families](#).
- Girls, volunteers, and parents must review and adhere to the [Girl Scout Internet Safety Pledge](#), the [Digital Cookie Pledge](#), the [Supplemental Safety Tips for Online Marketing](#), and Girl Scouts' *Safety Activity Checkpoints* for Computer and Internet Use and Cookie and Product Sales (with the exception that they may share beyond friends and family).
- Girl sales links should never be posted to resale sites (Craigslist, eBay, Facebook Marketplace etc.).
- Girls must adhere to all terms and conditions on Digital Cookie and Smart Cookie platforms. For copies of terms and conditions, please contact GSUSA, ABC, or M2 as needed.
- Girl Scouts of the USA reserves the right to remove or disable the link for any reason including violation of guidance, inventory fulfillment issues, safety issues, or if sales and marketing activity goes viral and otherwise creates unanticipated disruption.

Additionally, families, girls, and volunteers should contact and collaborate with their councils and Girl Scouts of the USA in advance on any national news media opportunities tied to girls online marketing and sales efforts.

The Buddy System

Using the buddy system, the troop is divided into teams of two. Each Girl Scout 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 if needed. Girls are encouraged to stay near the group or buddy with another team of two so that in the event someone is injured, one person cares for the patient while two others seek help.

Preparing for Your Girl Scout Cookie Booth

Cookie booths—that is, cookie pop-up sales in areas with lots of foot traffic—are a fun way for Girl Scouts to connect with their community and practice their sales pitch with new customers. Booth locations must be approved by councils, facilitated within council jurisdiction, and participants must follow all council guidelines regarding setting up, running, and taking down a booth.

Please check your local COVID-19 guidelines for any restrictions on booth locations and other safety considerations, or [consider a virtual cookie booth](#) or [virtual cookie rally](#) if it makes sense for your troop.

Create a great cookie booth experience for your Girl Scouts by:

- Using your best judgment in setting up cookie booths in locations that will be open, accessible, and safe for all Girl Scouts and potential customers.
- Choosing a high traffic area—this could be your local supermarket, mall, or park—where you'll maximize the number of visitors to your booth.
- Checking out your booth site ahead of the sale. Talk to business owners in the area so they'll know what to expect. Find out what security measures are in place—these may include lights for evening sales and whether a security camera watches the booth area—and where the nearest bathrooms are located.
- Respecting the surrounding businesses by making sure your booth isn't blocking a store entrance or exit.

Encouraging your Girl Scouts to unleash their creativity—and work on their advertising skills—to make colorful signs and booth decorations that potential customers can't resist! Remind girls to be polite and to have their sales pitch ready for interested customers.

And keep in mind:

- A minimum of two volunteers (at least one of whom is a registered Girl Scout volunteer with the required background check), and one Girl Scout should be present at the booth at all times. With two or more volunteers, you'll have adequate booth coverage if the girls need to be accompanied to the restroom.
- If your Daisies are still learning how to make correct change, help them handle money as needed. But remember that girls make all sales at the booth!
- Changing your cookie booth hours or location? Keep your customers in the loop and update your baker's Digital Cookie or Smart Cookie system with the new details. All scheduled booths are available on the Cookie Finder App ([IOS](#) or [Android](#)).

- Certain locations may be inappropriate for younger Girl Scouts based on the standards of your local community, may negatively impact the cookie program experience for girls, and/or may negatively impact our brand in your community. For additional clarity, girls should not sell in or in front of establishments that they themselves cannot legally patronize.
- Additionally, with respect to marijuana dispensaries, we have been steadfastly combating the unauthorized uses of the Girl Scout trademark by the cannabis community, which has been marketing—without our authorization—certain cannabis products under our youth-appelling brand. We are continuing to aggressively fight these unauthorized uses of the Girl Scout brand and hope that our councils and volunteers will join Girl Scouts of the USA’s efforts by discouraging cookie booth locations at such locations.

For more tips to make your booth a success, check out our [Cookie Booth Essentials](#). For additional information about setting up a booth and safety and security suggestions, consult your council guidelines.

Cookie Donation Programs

Cookies also help girls make a big impact in their community! Your council may have an established cookie donation program where customers can purchase cookies that will be donated to an organization by your council. Cookie donations are not only a great talking point for girls to share with their customers—they’re also a thoughtful way to show girls how cookies can help them give back.

With cookie donations, remember that:

- All cookie donation programs must be approved by your council.
- Donated cookies must stay within the council jurisdiction unless your council has the approval from other council jurisdictions.
- Donated products cannot be resold and must be used in a responsible and ethical way.
- Donated products are used in a way that does not undermine the work of councils or jeopardize the integrity of the Girl Scout brand.

GSNI's Cookie Donation Program:

GSNI has a cookie donation program known as Gift of Caring (GOC) where customers may purchase cookies for the sole purpose of having them donated to numerous military organizations with which GSNI collaborates. This is a great talking point for girls to share with their customers and a great way to help teach girls how the cookie program can make a big impact in their community and to others!

GSNI's GOC program not only accepts donations for military members but for other local community organizations as well.

Handling Product Complaints

Girl Scout Cookies are well loved and for good reason—it has always been the practice of Girl Scout councils and the bakers to guarantee customer satisfaction with their delicious cookies. If a customer is not satisfied with the quality of their cookies for some reason, they can contact the

baker via the phone number printed on the side of the cookie package. Troops should notify their council if they are aware of any customer dissatisfaction.

Recognizing Cookie Sellers in the Media

Focusing on entrepreneurial outcomes has always been the focus of the Girl Scout Cookie Program. The cookie program has never been about and does not focus on individual girls' sales results.

- There are many impressive cookie bosses throughout the United States, and the Girl Scout organization will continue to recognize dynamic cookie entrepreneurs for various achievements tied to the Girl Scout Cookie Program and through their participation in Girl Scouts.
- Girl Scouts of the USA does not currently track the top seller(s) of Girl Scout Cookies on a national level and does not identify a specific Girl Scout as the number one or “record-breaking” national cookie seller.
- Girl Scout councils should not reference such girls as “top sellers” in the media. Doing so detracts from the essence of the Girl Scout Cookie Program, which is based on offering girls important experiences in entrepreneurship, business, and finance from a young age as well as providing girls and local Girl Scout councils with the funds necessary to power amazing experiences and opportunities for Girl Scouts year-round.

Additional Resources and Support

So how are you feeling? Excited? Anxious? Not quite sure yet? That's ok, it's normal. We know that volunteering isn't always easy, especially when you're new, so we can't thank you enough for jumping in to be the mentor and role model she needs! Guiding your Girl Scouts—even if you're still figuring things out—is nothing short of amazing!

The important thing to remember is, you're not alone. We are in this with you, ready to help and support you at all times! Thanks again! It's going to be a great Girl Scout year!