



Volunteer Essentials

[2024 - 2026 Edition]

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Welcome! Adventures Ahead!

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.

Thank you and welcome. We're glad you're here!

What's Inside?

This guide is designed to support you as a Girl Scout volunteer. Inside you will discover essential information that is easy to access and even easier to come back to. 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. Each title links to its own section, and you will also find links to additional resources throughout this document.

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

Are you a new troop leader? We have a resource designed especially for you. Plus, council staff and volunteer coaches are ready to help throughout your first year and beyond!

For more resources, check out Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois (GSNI)'s [Online Support for Volunteers](#) webpage for our new volunteer checklists and training guides.

All About Girl Scouts

Girl Scouts' dreams are our dreams. 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, everyone can find their place in Girl Scouts and start creating the world they want 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 lives. With you as their mentor, Girl Scouts 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

You can join Girl Scouts at any point from kindergarten through twelfth grade:

- [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)

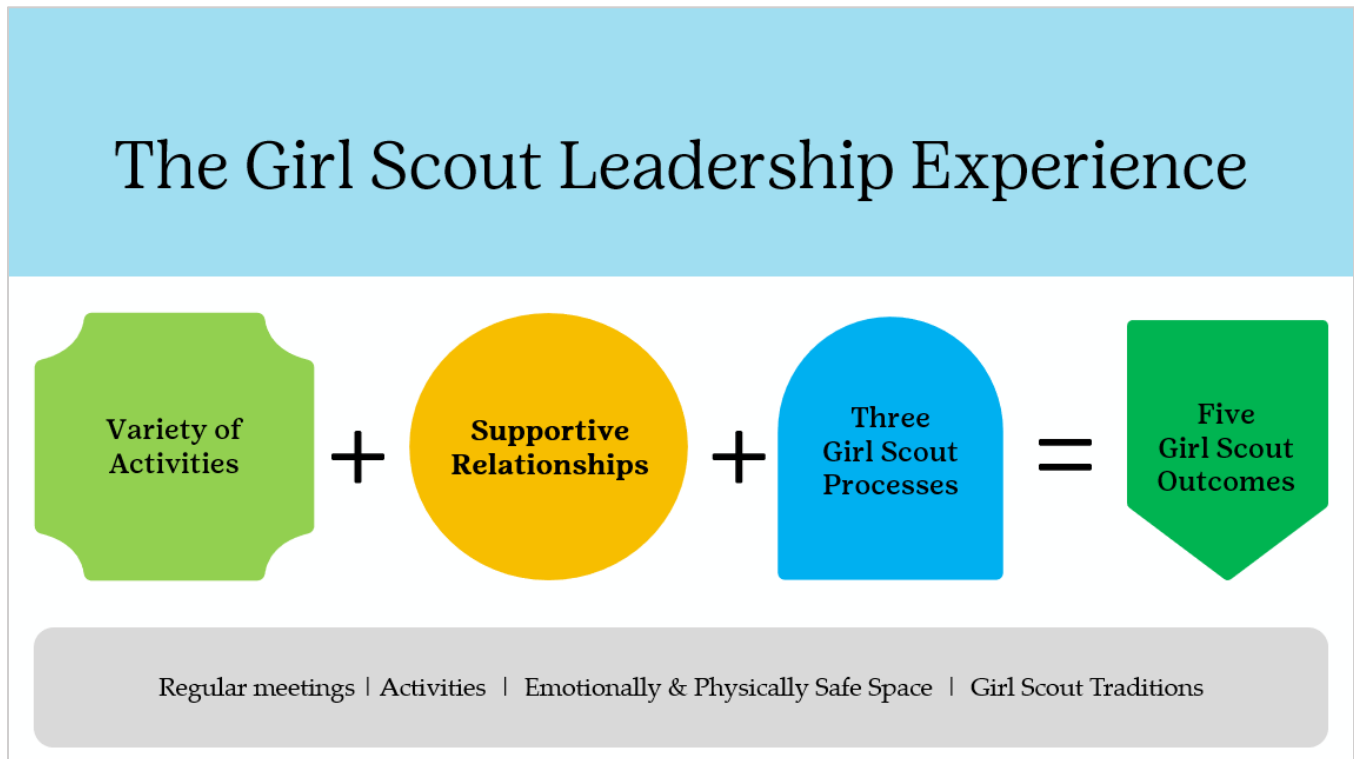
Inclusion

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

Inclusion is at the core of who we are; it's about being a sister to every Girl Scout and celebrating our unique strengths. To create an inclusive environment, the most important thing is that each Girl Scout feels seen for who they are and what they bring to the group. Through treating all Girl Scouts with kindness and respect, you can nurture an inclusive troop environment. Part of the important work you will do includes modeling friendship and kindness for your Girl Scouts and showing them what it means to practice empathy.

A critical component of inclusion is that everyone is able to participate. When scheduling, planning, and carrying out activities, carefully consider the needs of everyone involved, including school schedules, family needs, financial constraints, dietary requirements, religious holidays, and the accessibility of appropriate transportation and meeting places. Click here for [GSNI's Belonging Statement](#).

The Girl Scout Leadership Experience (GSLE)



In Girl Scouts, everything centers around the Girl Scout. Our program is designed by, with, and for Girl Scouts. The Girl Scout Leadership Experience (GSLE) is our research-based impact model that describes what members do in Girl Scouts, who they do it with, how they do it, and how they benefit. This framework should be a blueprint for every activity that your Girl Scouts participate in. When planning your year, make sure that you're implementing all parts of the GSLE regularly.

The Girl Scout Leadership Experience has been purposefully designed to include a variety of fun and challenging activities to help Girl Scouts learn, grow, and thrive. Girl Scouts have the opportunity to take on leadership roles and learn-by-doing in a safe, fun, and cooperative environment. When we say variety of activities, this means that Girl Scouts participate in at least four out five of the following:

- National Program Portfolio (badges, Journeys, awards)
- Outdoor or camping experience
- Community service and/or Take Action
- Field trip and/or events
- Cookie program

Supportive relationships mean that troop leaders care about their troop, encourage their creative thinking, are inclusive, and provide a safe space. As a result, Girl Scouts experience positive relationships with their peers and a feeling of belonging. As a **supportive adult**, you are crucial to the success of the Girl Scout Program. Supportive adult relationships are strongly linked to experiencing the GSLE with a strong dependency between the supportive adult and the three processes. When Girl Scouts feel supported and safe, they are more likely to achieve our outcomes and ultimately our mission.

The Girl Scout Leadership Experience draws on three unique processes—**Girl-led, Learning by doing, and Cooperative learning**—that encourage Girl Scouts 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 opportunity to follow their dreams and grow their skills—and gain the confidence that comes with that.
- **Learning by Doing.** Participatory 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 experience 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 Girl Scouts 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 they learn from their successful and not so successful tries, they gain confidence. All Girl Scouts should have the opportunity to lead within their peer group. By the time they 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.

And finally, when we incorporate a **variety of activities, supportive adults**, and the **three processes**, Girl Scouts experience the **5 GSLE outcomes**:

- **Strong Sense of Self.** Girl Scouts have confidence in themselves and their abilities and form positive identities.
- **Positive Values.** Girl Scouts act ethically, honestly, and responsibly, and show concern for others.
- **Challenge Seeking.** Girl Scouts learn to take appropriate risks, try things even if they might fail, and learn from mistakes.
- **Healthy Relationships.** Girl Scouts develop and maintain healthy relationships by communicating their feelings directly and resolving conflicts constructively.
- **Community Problem Solving.** Girl Scouts desire to contribute to the world in purposeful and meaningful ways, learn how to identify problems in the community, and create “action plans” to solve them.

The outcomes occur as a result of regular meetings and activities including Girl Scout traditions, in an emotionally and physically safe space, with a supportive adult.

Although they may start building their leadership skills in school and on sports teams, [research shows](#) that the courage, confidence, and character Girl Scouts develop stays with them throughout their lives. Our program and outcomes are based on research and our studies show that Girl Scouting has a measurable positive impact on Girl Scouts. In fact, we can proudly say Girl Scouts are almost 10 percent 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.

One last tip: 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 them and sparks their imaginations. Projects don't have to come out perfectly—in fact, it's a valuable learning experience when they don't—and 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 Girl Scouts 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 Girl Scouts to reflect on their latest endeavor.

Reflection is the necessary debrief that reinforces what is learned. As your Girl Scouts explore the what's and why's, they'll make meaningful connections between the activity at hand and future challenges that come their way. In other words, reflection gives them 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?
- Why do you think this activity was important?
- What key learning can we take with us?

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?
- Given this experience, what's more of a priority to you now?
- What are you curious to learn more about?
- Where would you like to go?
- Who would you like to meet?

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

Progression

Although elements of the program—like outdoor expeditions or learning entrepreneurial ventures—are consistent 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, Girl Scouts will be ready for what comes when they get there!

Girl Scout programming is designed to be progressive and makes Girl Scouting fun and effective! By building on the knowledge and skills they gain year after year, your Girl Scouts' 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 and consider that it is not about grade or age, but experience. Click on the following links for outlined suggestions that will help you determine when your Girl Scouts are ready for their next [outdoor challenge](#), their [next troop trip](#), or their next [cookie selling challenge](#).

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 Girl Scouts' 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). Girl Scouts 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 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 their outdoor confidence and skills for over 100 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 Girl Scouts' 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 curiosity and confidence as they learn the essentials of running their own businesses and how to think like entrepreneurs.

Important Differences: Journeys, Badges, and Patches

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

- **Journeys** are multi-session leadership experiences through which Girl Scouts explore topics such as bullying, media literacy, or environmental stewardship. They'll do highly participatory activities, connect with experts, and take the lead 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. You can find Journey content in the Volunteer Toolkit (VTK).
- **Badges** are about skill building. When a Girl Scout earns a badge, it shows that they learned a new skill, such as how to make a first aid kit, 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.
- **Patches** are supplementary insignia that Girl Scouts receive for participating in a special event or activity. Often called fun patches or participation patches, they are worn on the back of their uniform. These can include anything from Council-sponsored programs, troop activities...even a trip to the zoo can get them a patch.

If they choose, your Girl Scouts can pursue badges, patches, and Journey awards in the same year. There is no requirement as to how many they can earn in a single year. While they're having fun, keep in mind that the quality of a Girl Scout's experience and the skills and pride they gain from earning Journey awards, skill-building badges, and special patches far outweigh the quantity of badges, patches, and awards they earn.

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

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**, they are responding to an immediate need in a one-off, "doing for" capacity. In other words, they are making an impact right now.
- Through **Take Action/service learning**, Girl Scouts 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 them 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 Scouts' birthday, March 12, commemorates the day in 1912 when Juliette Gordon Low officially registered the organization's first 18 girl members in Savannah, Georgia.

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](#). We embrace fresh perspectives and innovation from our rich cultural legacy. We continuously review norms and traditions evolving over time to ensure they are relevant and equitable. Sometimes that may involve modifying or sunsetting traditions to make way for new ones.

Highest Awards

The Girl Scout Bronze, Silver, and Gold Awards honor Girl Scouts 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.
- [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 Scout or by a small group.
- [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 projects or earned the Silver Award and completed one Senior/Ambassador level Journey.

Did you know that a Gold Award Girl Scout is entitled to enlist at a higher paygrade when they join the U.S. military? A Gold Award Girl Scout's achievements also make them stand out in the college admissions process and may make them a top candidate for academic scholarships and other financial merit 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 they joined Girl Scouts for the first time in high school.

Ask your council about Girl Scout 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 they took the lead and made a difference. You'll be inspired when you see

and hear what they can accomplish when they take the lead—and by the confidence, perseverance, problem-solving, time and project management, and team-building expertise they gain while doing so!

For more information on Highest Awards at GSNI, check out our [Highest Awards](#) webpage.

Girl Scout Travel

Girl Scouts encourages members to try new things and explore the world, both inside and outside of their usual troop meetings. Traveling as a Girl Scout is a more engaging experience than traveling with family, school, or other groups because [Girl Scouts 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 members are set up for success. Daisies and Brownies start with field trips and progress to day trips, overnights, and short trips. Juniors can take their adventures farther with extended trips. And Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors can travel the U.S. and then the world. There are even opportunities for older Girl Scouts to travel independently by joining trips their council organizes or participating in GSUSA's travel program, Destinations. Learn more about [group travel](#) online!

Travel and Girl Scout Program Connections

It's easy to connect eye-opening travel opportunities to the leadership training and skill building your troop is doing! Girl Scouts can use their creativity to connect any badge skill into an idea for travel. For example, they learn about foods from a variety of regions and countries in the New Cuisines badge, which would connect well with a trip focusing on agriculture, culture, and sampling tasty foods! There are plenty more examples, such as the Senior Traveler badge, Eco Camper, Photographer and, of course, all the financial badges that help Girl Scouts budget and earn money for their trips.

Want to include Girl Scout traditions in your trip? Look no further than the [Juliette Gordon Low Birthplace](#) in Savannah, Georgia! Your troop also has 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. Many councils across the U.S. also have properties to rent to traveling troops, or programs traveling troops can join—[check out this map](#)! 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, or programs they may have planned for troops.

As your Girl Scouts excitedly plan their next trip, remember to limit your role to facilitating their 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!

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.

Check out GSNI's [Travel Opportunities](#).

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 Girl Scouts have mastered planning and embarking upon trips in the U.S., they might be ready for a global travel adventure! Global trips usually take a few years to plan, and the [Girl Scout Guide to Global Travel](#) can guide you through the entire process.

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 processes

Check out the [Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) and [GSNI's Volunteer Policies and Procedures](#) document for all safety processes.

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.

Troop Management

A lot of people equate leadership with “being in charge” or having a title. Anyone can be a leader. It's about 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 volunteer, you will embark on your own leadership journey as you help Girl Scouts 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 each Girl Scout 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 Girl Scouts 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 through the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.
- Completing required trainings and complying with Girl Scout policies, procedures, and safety guidelines.
- 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 their 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 your troop raises.

Maintaining a close connection to your volunteer support team and your council.

- Facilitating an inclusive environment and positive experience for every Girl Scout.

Planning for Your First Troop Meeting

Depending on the ages of your Girl Scouts, 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, and with input from Girl Scouts 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 members 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.

- Which components of the uniform will families need to purchase? Which uniform components will the troop provide for each member?
- Will our troop be a single-grade level or [facilitated as a multi-level troop](#) with Girl Scouts 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

Meeting places should be welcoming. This could mean locations that serve diverse populations, are openly inclusive, have diverse staff, and use welcoming language. 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 individuals during meetings.
- **Accessibility.** Your space should accommodate anyone with disabilities including parents/caregivers 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 members] Girl Scouts. We're doing lots of great things for youth 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 Girl Scouts 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]."

Can We Meet in a Private Home?

Girl Scouts does not recommend holding troop meetings in private homes. If you are considering meeting in a private home, check with your council to make sure it is permitted based on their council policy. In addition to the above, remember to ensure these standards:

- Always obtain prior approval from your council.
- The private home must be the home of a registered, council-approved volunteer.
- Girl Scout members may not meet in a home where a registered sex offender resides.
- Some councils require membership and background checks for all adults living in the home. Contact your council for specific guidelines.
- Troop members need to be able to focus without disruptions from other household members.
- Animals should be kept in a place that is separate from the meeting space.
- Homeowners should consider any personal insurance implications. The homeowner should ask their personal homeowner's insurance carrier if there are any insurance concerns with troop meetings in the home. Also, volunteers should confirm with the council that troop meetings in the home are covered by the council's liability insurance carrier.
- Weapons must be out of view and in a locked space. Medication, cleaning products, or any poisonous substances must be stored in a secure space, out of sight, and preferably locked.

Stuck and need additional support? Contact your council or your service unit support team for help with a troop meeting place. For more information on meeting locations, check out GSN's [Volunteers Policies and Procedures](#).

Virtual Meetings

If your group or troop can't meet in person, 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 Girl Scouts are safe online.
- Select a meeting platform that allows families who may not have internet access to call in.
- [Think about logistics](#). Work with your troop 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 they will be completing them from home.

Ahead of the meeting, send out a few simple, step-by-step instructions for how to access the platform and join the meeting. And don't worry if they 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 Girl Scouts, we recommend that groups be no fewer and no larger than:

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

A Girl Scout troop/group must have a minimum of five Girl Scout youth and two approved adult volunteers. Be sure to double-check the [volunteer-to-youth ratio table](#) below to make sure you have the right number of adults present for group meetings, events, travel, and camping. Adults and youth registering in groups of fewer than five Girl Scout youth and two approved adult volunteers who are not related to each other or in a relationship, at least one of whom is female, will be registered as individual Girl Scouts to accurately reflect their status and program experience. Individual members 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 Scout Volunteer-to-Youth Ratios	Group Meetings		Events, Travel, and Camping	
	Two unrelated volunteers (at least one of whom is female) for up to this number of youth:	One additional volunteer to each additional:	Two unrelated volunteers (at least one of whom is female) for up to this number of youths:	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

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 to manage safety and risk in Girl Scout-sanctioned activities.

Check out GSNI's Safety Activity Checkpoints [here](#).

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 not permitted by Girl Scouts of the USA and actions that Girl Scouts 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 everyone’s emotional safety.
- Individual safety activity checkpoints for specific activities—such as camping, internet use, and water sports that provide activity-specific safety information.

Safety Activity Checkpoints is laid out in three primary sections, Introduction: Safety Standards and Guidelines, Activities at a Glance, and Individual Safety Activity Checkpoint pages.

- **Introduction: Safety Standards and Guidelines** provides the standard safety guidelines for Girl Scouts of the United States of America (GSUSA) and Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois approved activities.
- **Girl Scouts’ Activities at a Glance** table provides a quick review of the safety standards for that activity with a focus on two critical points to keep in mind when considering and planning activities for you troop:
 - Age-appropriate activities and participation by grade level, and
 - Whether prior approval from your council is required before anyone participates in a specific activity.
 - The **Activities at a Glance** section is a great quick reference but ensure you refer to the individual checkpoint as you plan your activity.
- **Individual Safety Activity Checkpoint** pages provide activity-specific safety measures and guidance on individual activities.

The Buddy System

Use the buddy system, in which the troop is divided into teams of at least two. Each Girl Scout is responsible for always staying with their buddy, warning their buddy of danger, giving their buddy immediate assistance if safe to do so, and seeking help if needed. They are encouraged to stay near the group or buddy with another team so if someone is injured, one person cares for the injured while others seek help.

Registering Girls and Adults in Girl Scouting

Every participant (youth and 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 occurs in the spring. Early registration allows for uninterrupted receipt of forms and materials from the council, helps troops and councils plan ahead, and

gets everyone 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 Girl Scouts 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 in local schools, using social media to reach families in your community, or including your troop in your council's Opportunity Catalog or Troop Catalog.

Creating an Atmosphere of Acceptance and Inclusion

Girl Scouts is for every girl, and that's why we embrace Girl Scouts of all abilities and backgrounds with a specific and positive philosophy of inclusion that benefits everyone. Each Girl Scout—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, everyone 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 Scout and focus on building community. Show care by learning each person's name with correct pronunciation, caregivers included! Use a warm and friendly tone, and consistently greet each community member when they arrive. Say goodbye to each person by name as well.
- Emphasize cooperation instead of competition.
- Provide a confidential, socially comfortable environment. Occasionally ask those who participate in Girl Scout programs if anything is worrying or bothering them. Be a trusted adult they can come to with their needs and emotions without judgment. Allow, but don't require, participants to say the Pledge of Allegiance or the Girl Scout Promise and Law at meetings.
- Teach respect for, understanding of, and dignity toward all members and their families. Learn about the cultures and identities in your Girl Scout community and understand and respect cultural differences. Be sure not to put anyone on the spot or ask them to educate you. Welcome personal sharing about people's cultural traditions, languages they speak and diverse family structures. Make this kind of sharing a consistent, reliable part of your time together.

Embrace diverse gender expression by inviting each community member to share their gender pronouns aloud or on name tags. Explain that no one must share if they don't want to. Make this conversation matter-of-fact and use a positive tone.

- Actively reach out to members and families who are traditionally excluded or underrepresented.
- Learn the most valuable ways to support individual children and adults with disabilities, learning differences and/or neurodiversity. Ask parents, "What can I do to support your child to learn/participate/feel successful in our group?"
- Foster a sense of belonging to this community as a respected and valued peer.

- Honor the intrinsic value of each person’s life.

If you have questions about accommodating an individual member, please reach out to GSNI’s Customer Care Team: customercare@girlscoutsni.org.

Focus on Being Accessible to All

A key part of creating an inclusive environment is the idea that everyone has access to be able to participate. 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. Disabilities include physical, sensory, and cognitive conditions.

If you want to find out what an individual with a disability needs to make their Girl Scout experience successful, simply ask them or their parent or caregiver. If you are open, honest, and receptive, they’ll likely respond in kind, [creating an atmosphere that enriches everyone](#).

It’s important for all Girl Scouts to be rewarded based on their best efforts—not on the completion of a task. Give everyone the opportunity to do their best and they 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 so that everyone can participate:

- Invite a member to complete an activity after they have observed others doing it.
- If an activity is focused on using one sense that a Girl Scout does not have access to (like sight for a Girl Scout who is blind), find ways for them to participate using other senses. Can they touch the object or participate by hearing only?
- If an activity requires running, an individual who is unable to run could be asked to walk or do another physical movement.

Language Related to Disability

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

Say:	Instead of:
They have a learning disability.	They are learning disabled.
They have a developmental delay.	They are mentally retarded; they are slow.
They use a wheelchair.	They are wheelchair bound.

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

- When talking to an individual with a disability, speak directly to them, not through a family member or friend.
- It's okay to offer assistance to an individual 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 person's wheelchair is invading their space and can be considered rude.
- When speaking to an individual who is deaf and using an interpreter, speak to them, not to the interpreter.
- When speaking for more than a few minutes to an individual who uses a wheelchair, place yourself at their eye level.
- When greeting an individual 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."

To learn more about delivering inclusive programming to your troop, take our GSUSA Delivering Inclusive Training course in gsLearn. Sign in to gsLearn through [MyGS](#). Login, go to My Account, and click gsLearn.

Registering Members with Cognitive Disabilities

Girl Scouts 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 them for ongoing activities of the grade level to which the group belongs. Girl Scouts with cognitive disorders may choose to retain their youth membership through their 21st 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 youth, product sales, and much more.

Before you hold your first troop meeting, 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 occasional help 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.

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. You can get such must-have tools as the Volunteer Toolkit (VTK) and gsLearn to keep your troop going strong on [MYGS](#)—always accessible via the icon on the upper right corner of our website. Click the **login** button and then **my account** button and you'll find the **gsLearn and VTK buttons** via the left menu bar. They are accessible on any desktop, tablet, or mobile device, and it will be populated with any trainings you should view. Here's a list of some important resources you'll want to check out.

The Volunteer Toolkit

The Volunteer Toolkit is a customizable planning tool where you can find suggested meeting plans for most badges, access activity guides and 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.

With the Volunteer Toolkit, Girl Scouts 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 Girl Scout memberships, and update Girl Scout 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 GSNI's [Online Support for Volunteers](#).

gsLearn

gsLearn. gsLearn is our online training platform that gives you easy access to online and in-person learning opportunities as well as the ability to track all your accomplishments! Learn at your own pace, access additional resources, and repeat info when you need it!

Accessing gsLearn. To take advantage of the learning opportunities and other programmatic training offered to Troop Leaders, you'll need to access our online learning management tool, gsLearn. To access gsLearn, log in to MyGS. You will find gsLearn in the options on the left-hand navigation once you've logged into [MyGS](#).

Tools and Resources

Girl Scout Handbooks. These grade level-specific handbooks will break it down for your Girl Scouts. Adventures include earning badges and awards, running your own cookie business and learning about the traditions that have brought Girl Scouts together for over a century. girlscoutshop.org

Safety Activity Checkpoints. Safety is paramount in Girl Scouting, and [Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) contains everything you need to know to help keep everyone 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.

Troop Year Plans. Our age-appropriate troop year plans are the best tool for first year troop leaders to get started with Girl Scouts without getting overwhelmed, or to help any troop leader with planning out a well-balanced Girl Scout year. The entire year is mapped out—just follow along to help your Girl Scouts complete badge activities, improve their communities, and explore the world around them. [Access Troop Year Plans online here!](#)

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 or email customercare@girlscoutsni.org. During normal [business hours](#), you can reach a Customer Service Specialist by calling 1-844-476-4463.

Take Advantage of Learning Opportunities

We know that when you have the knowledge and skills you need to manage your Girl Scouts, both you and your troop will thrive. We offer national onboarding training for new Troop Leaders in addition to local training courses provided by your council.

New Leader Onboarding Courses:

GSUSA New Leader Onboarding: What Girl Scouts Do

In this course, you will learn about what Girl Scouts do and how they do it at each grade level so you

can plan your troop's year. This course is presented through the lens of an experienced troop leader whose troop completed all grade levels of the Girl Scout program. You will have the opportunity to explore the troop's interactive journal and learn about the things they did on their Girl Scout journey. Please note, you are only required to explore the grade levels you will be leading, although you are welcome to explore more if you'd like.

GSUSA New Leader Onboarding: Your First Troop Meeting

This course provides new troop leaders with the structure and tools to plan a successful first troop meeting—and beyond—with their Girl Scout troop.

GSUSA New Leader Onboarding: The Girl Scout Leadership Experience (GSLE)

The framework we use to grow future leaders, also known as the Girl Scout Leadership Experience, is what sets Girl Scouts apart from other organizations. In this course, you will learn how to facilitate the Girl Scout Leadership Experience with your troop in an age-appropriate way. Throughout the course, you will learn about lots of real-world examples so you can apply the framework as your troop ages through the Girl Scout program.

GSUSA New Leader Onboarding: Family Engagement: The Key To Success

Engaging families in their Girl Scout's experience benefits troop leaders, Girl Scouts, and families too. This course illuminates the value of family engagement and provides practical strategies for how to enlist family support. It also equips you with an agenda to plan a parent/caregiver meeting to set the tone for family engagement for the year.

GSUSA New Leader Onboarding: The Girl Scout Cookie Program

In this course, you will learn the basics of the Girl Scout Cookie program. You'll discover how and why Girl Scouts sell cookies, who the bakers are that make the cookies, and how to utilize your cookie proceeds with your troop. A review of all the exciting program options you can explore with your troop as you build their entrepreneurial skills is also included. Cookie selling safety and important ways to bring families and caregivers along in your troop's cookie business adventure are also part of the course

These courses are available online via gsLearn as referenced above. Your council may offer additional local onboarding training for new Troop Leaders, as well as other ongoing training opportunities. Contact your council to ask about additional training opportunities that will help you grow your skills and confidence.

Other Program Courses Available

Delivering Inclusive Program

In this course, you will practice using inclusive and equitable language to support the identities of all Girl Scouts and foster a cohesive troop environment.

Courses are also offered on specific badges including Daisy petals, Math In Nature, and Mental Wellness.

GSNI requires customized training according to the position for which you volunteer. For more information about required trainings, check out the training guides for new volunteers [here](#).

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 our members 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

For GSNI specific Troop Financial information, check out [Volunteer Policies and Procedures](#).

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 Girl Scouts 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 as a whole 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

You'll need a safe place to deposit your troop dues, product program proceeds, and other funds. If you're a new leader of 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:

- 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 than cash payments.
- Be prepared and make sure another troop volunteer has 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.

Money-Earning Basics for Troops

For GSNI specific Money-Earning guidelines, check out [Volunteer Policies and Procedures](#).

Troops flex their financial muscles in two distinct ways:

The Girl Scout Cookie Program and other product sales of Girl Scouts (authorized product sales such as calendars, magazines, or nuts and candy) organized by your council. All youth 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—Girl Scouts do.

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

Participation Guidance

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

- Voluntary participation.
- Written permission of each member’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 member.
- Arrangements for safeguarding the money.

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.

- **All rewards earned by Girl Scouts 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 of Basic Documents* policy forbids Girl Scouts from the direct solicitation of cash.** Girl Scouts 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 participants** and be 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.** Girl Scouts 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.
- **Raising money in times of national or international emergency.** Per Girl Scouts *Blue Book of Basic Documents* policy, the National CEO in consultation with the National Board Chair may give permission to raise money in times of a major national or international emergency with prior written notice to the National Board. Councils will be notified of this action in writing and troops should consult with their council for appropriate guidelines. Councils may designate an outside organization to receive donations.

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 Girl Scouts are planning; for instance, if they are earning money for travel, they could tie the meal to their destination

Service(s)

- Service-a-thon (people sponsor a Girl Scout 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 Girl Scouts. From there, your troop may decide to earn additional funds on its own.

Help Your Troop Reach Its Financial Goals

As a volunteer, you have the opportunity to facilitate girl-led financial planning, which may include the following steps for your troop:

1. **Set goals for money-earning activities.** What does the group 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 them 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 your troop created.

Remember: It’s great for Girl Scouts to have opportunities like the Girl Scout Cookie Program to earn funds that help them fulfill their goals. As a volunteer, try to help them 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 them to spend a lot of money!

Financial Management and Product Program Abilities by Grade Level

As with other Girl Scout activities, Girl Scouts build their financial and sales savvy as they get older. Each individual will be different, but here you’ll find some examples of the abilities and opportunities for the progression of Girl Scouts 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.
- Daisies can participate in Girl Scout Cookie Program activities and other council-sponsored product programs.
- Daisies are always paired with a volunteer when selling anything. They do the asking and deliver the product, but volunteers handle the money and keep them safe.
- Daisies 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.
- Brownies discuss the cost of activities (supplies, fees, transportation, rentals, and so on) with guidance from their volunteer(s).
- Brownies set goals for and participate in council-sponsored product programs.
- Brownies 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.
- Juniors set goals for and participate in council-sponsored product programs.
- Juniors decide on group dues, if any. Dues are collected by them and recorded by a group treasurer selected by the troop.
- Juniors budget for the short-term needs of the group based on their plans and income from the group dues.
- Juniors budget for more long-term activities, such as overnight trips, group camping, and special events.
- Juniors budget for Take Action projects including the Girl Scout Bronze Award if they are pursuing it.

Girl Scout Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors

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

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 Girl Scouts 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 one 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, Girl Scouts and volunteers have not been allowed to endorse, provide a testimonial for, or sell such products.

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 Girl Scouts how they want to pay it forward. They may decide to pay for Girl Scout activities or to donate any unused funds to their service unit or to another troop. Activities can also include purchasing materials to support another organization through Take Action projects.

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.

For GSNI-specific disbanding and closing bank account policies and procedures, refer to [Volunteer Policies and Procedures](#).

Engaging Girl Scouts by Level

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

Understanding Healthy Development in Youth

It sounds simple, but just being attentive to what Girl Scouts 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 their needs and abilities at different grade levels. Keep in mind that these guidelines reflect neurotypical experiences.

Girl Scout Daisies	
At the Girl Scout Daisy level (kindergarten and first grades), many Daisies...	<i>This means...</i>
Have loads of energy and need to run, walk, or 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, if they are able. They 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 them draw a picture of something they are trying to communicate, or picking from images of feelings, 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 they 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), many Brownies...	<i>This means...</i>
Have loads of energy and need to run, walk, or play outside.	<i>Taking your session activities outside whenever possible.</i>
Are social and enjoy working in groups.	<i>Allowing them to team up in small or large groups for art projects and performances if they would like to.</i>
Want to help others and appreciate being given individual responsibilities for a task.	<i>Letting them lead, direct, and help out in activities whenever possible. Allow them 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 them about the Brownie Elf's adventures. Ask them 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 them 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 them 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. Most can tie shoes, use basic tools, begin to sew, and the like.	<i>Encouraging them to express themselves and their creativity by making things with their hands, if they are able to. They may need some assistance, however, holding scissors, threading needs, and so on.</i>
Love to act in plays, create music, and dance.	<i>They might like to create a play about welcoming a new student 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 they 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), many Juniors...	<i>This means...</i>
Want to make decisions and express their opinions.	<i>Whenever possible, allowing them to make decisions and express their opinions through guided discussion and active reflection activities. Also, have them set rules for listening to others' opinions and offering assistance in decision making.</i>
Are social and enjoy working in groups.	<i>Allowing them to team up in small or large groups for art projects, performances, and written activities, if they would like to.</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 they 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 them 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 them 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 them in moving their minds and their bodies. Allow them to express themselves through the written word, choreography, and so on.</i>
Love to act in plays, create music, and dance.	<i>They might like to tell a story through playwriting, playing an instrument, or choreographing a dance.</i>
May be starting puberty, which may include beginning breast development, skin changes, and weight changes. Some may be getting their periods.	<i>Being sensitive to their changing bodies, possible discomfort over these changes, and their desire for more information or total avoidance of the topic. Create an environment that acknowledges and celebrates this transition as healthy and normal for them.</i>

Girl Scout Cadettes	
At the Girl Scout Cadette level (sixth, seventh, and eighth grades), many Cadettes...	<i>This means...</i>
Are going through puberty, including changes in their skin, body shape, and weight. Many also will be starting their menstrual cycles and have occasional shifts in mood.	<i>Being sensitive to the many changes Cadettes are undergoing and acknowledging that these changes are normal as growing taller! They 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>
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.	<i>That many 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. If you're noticing a pattern of isolation for any troop member, check in with them—are they content to work solo, or are they being excluded?</i>
Can be very self-conscious, wanting to be like everyone else but fearing they are unique in their thoughts and feelings.	<i>Encouraging them 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>
Are beginning to navigate their increasing independence and expectations from adults at school and at home.	<i>Trusting them to plan and make key decisions and allowing them to experience “fun failure,” which is learning from trying something new and making mistakes.</i>

Girl Scout Seniors	
At the Girl Scout Senior level (ninth and tenth grades), many Seniors...	<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 them to explain the reasoning behind their decisions. Engage them 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>They are more than able to go beyond community service to develop projects that will create sustainable solutions in their communities. Be sure to have them 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>They 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 they interact with those they might not usually pair up with.</i>
Frequently enjoy expressing their individuality.	<i>Encouraging them to express their individuality in their dress, creative expression, and thinking. Remind them frequently that there isn't just one way to look, feel, think, or act. Assist them 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 their pressures and sharing how stress can limit health, creativity, and productivity. Help them 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 them 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), many Ambassadors...	<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 them 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. Most will recognize and incorporate practical limitations to solutions.	<i>They are more than able to go beyond community service to develop projects that will create sustainable solutions in their communities. Be sure to have them 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>They 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 they interact with those they might not usually pair up with.</i>
Frequently enjoy expressing their individuality.	<i>Encouraging them to express their individuality in their dress, creative expression, and thinking. Remind them frequently that there isn't just one way to look, feel, think, or act. Assist them 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 their pressures and sharing how stress can limit health, creativity, and productivity. Help them 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 them 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 Girl Scouts

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

Recognize and Support Each Individual

You're a role model and a mentor to your troop. 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 them trying their best, not just when they've had a clear success.
- Emphasize the positive qualities that make each person worthy and unique.
- Be generous with praise and stingy with rebuke.
- Help your troop find ways to show acceptance of and support for one another.

Promote Fairness

They are sensitive to fairness for all. 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 them 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 them explore and decide for themselves the fair ways of solving problems, carrying out activities, and responding to behavior and accomplishments.

Build Trust

They need your belief and support when they try new things and you'll need to show that you won't betray their confidence. Show them that you are making an effort to understand them as individuals.

- Inspire them to think for themselves and use their own judgment.
- Encourage them to make the important decisions in the group and ensure them that all troop members have an equal say.
- Give them assistance in correcting their own mistakes.
- Support them in trusting one another—let them see firsthand how trust can be built, lost, regained, and strengthened.

Inspire Open Communication

They 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 them. Respond with words and actions.
- Speak your mind openly when you are happy or concerned about something and encourage them to do the same.
- Leave the door open for them to seek advice, share ideas and feelings, and propose plans or improvements.
- Help them 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, and if handled constructively they show Girl Scouts that they can overcome their differences of opinions, 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 in your troop, 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 Girl Scouts of Any Age

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

Listen. Listening to them, 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 okay 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.

Be Open to Real Issues. Outside of Girl Scouts, members 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. Girl Scouts often say that their best experiences were the ones where adults treated them as equal partners. Speak to them respectfully to reinforce that their opinions matter and that they deserve respect.

Offer Options. Members' 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 they choose to do.

Stay Current. Show members 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 member is upset, angry, or confused.

Listen. Hear them out, ask for details, and reflect back what you hear; try "What happened next?" or "What did they say?"

Understand. Show that you understand where they are 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 they just can't handle right now on their own. Let them know that you're there to listen and accept how they are 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 them know you can imagine feeling what they are feeling with comments such as, "I'm sure that really hurts" or "I can imagine how painful this is for you."

Remember you don't have to solve their problems for them or have all the answers. Ask them what they would like to do about the situation and how you can support them.

Addressing the Needs of Older Girl Scouts

Let these simple tips guide you when working with teenage Girl Scouts:

- Think of yourself as a "guide on the side"—a partner, a coach, or a mentor, not a "leader."
- Ask them what rules they need for safety and what group agreements they need to be a good team. When they take the lead in establishing group rules, they're more likely to stick to them.
- Understand that they need time to talk, unwind, and have fun together.
- Ask what they think and what they want to do.
- Encourage them 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 person. For some, 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 them like partners.

- Don't repeat what's said in the group to anyone outside of it (unless necessary for their 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, understanding their own identity, 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 troop.

Girl Scouts welcomes and serves youth and families from a wide spectrum of faiths and cultures. When they 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 them 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 Girl Scouts 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.

For more information about GSNI's position on sensitive issues and processes, check out [Volunteer Policies and Procedures](#).

Parents/caregivers make all decisions regarding their child's participation in the 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 Girl Scouts will take when the activity is complete. Be sure to have a form for each troop member 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 individuals in your group. Alcohol, drugs, sex, bullying, abuse, depression, and eating disorders are some of the issues they may encounter. You are on the frontlines of their lives which places you in a unique position to identify a situation in which they may need help. If you believe someone is at risk of hurting themselves or others, your role is to promptly bring that information to the parent/caregiver or the council so they can get the expert assistance they need. Your concern about their 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 someone 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/efforts to hide their body.
- Tendency toward perfectionism (i.e. mistakes are considered unacceptable, unwillingness to start or try something for fear of failure, belief there is only one way to do something).
- 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, or animals.

For more information on GSNI's process for reporting concerns, check GSNI's [Volunteer Policies and Procedures](#).

To report incidents, check out the [Incident Reporting Form Guide](#)

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 children, but getting families to pitch in and play an active role in the troop while also enhancing the experience for their Girl Scout 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 Caregivers

Parents and caregivers will feel most connected to the troop when you are proactive in engaging them early on. Express your desire for them to play an active role in troop life, and how that can contribute to the connection, joy, and sense of pride the Girl Scouts feel. At the same time, recognize that not all families have the same capacity to be involved for various reasons (don’t take it personally!). Be open with parents about your hopes for their involvement and listen to what can work for them.

What is a Parent and Caregiver Meeting?

It’s the first meeting you have 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 troop members benefit! The meeting helps:

- Families understand what Girl Scouting can do for their child.
- 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. One out of three Girl Scout parents say no one had communicated expectations around involvement with their child’s troop—this is troubling! Parents may have many talents, but they’re certainly not mind readers. Ask for what you need. If you’re nervous about getting turned down, don’t be. Sure, a few parents might be unable to offer assistance, but the helpers you do get will be worth their weight in gold. And 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 many Girl Scouts feel a special sense of pride in seeing

their own family member take a leadership role. Getting involved can strengthen the caregiver/child bond and is a meaningful way to show them that they are a priority in their adults' lives.

Find out What People Want to Do. Start with asking what people enjoy doing and what they are good at. Does someone love coordinating events, making flyers, etc., or managing money? Does someone love using social media and could help promote cookie sales? Get a sense of the desires in the room that will energize people. Then talk about time commitment because it will really depend on what they are doing. It's easier to make time for something you find fun.

Make it Quick and Easy. Continue the conversation by asking how much time each week they might be able to dedicate to the troop, then go from there. For instance, if a troop caregiver 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. Be time conscious and consider the commitment.

Make Family Part of the Formula. While Girl Scout programming is always focused on the Girl Scouts, it's important and helpful to open a few events to their families throughout the year. Inviting the whole crew to celebrate their accomplishments in Girl Scouting—whether at a holiday open house, a bridging ceremony, or a fun “reverse meeting” where Girl Scouts take the role of leaders and guide the adults, including caregivers, through an activity—will help parents and caregivers 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 Girl Scout's 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 troop is doing and learning during each meeting. The first meeting is a great time to ask how they prefer to receive updates!

Encourage them to let their Girl Scouts “be the experts” at home, explaining or teaching the new skills they've learned.

Girl Scout Product Programs

For GSNI's specific Product Programs information, check out GSNI's [Product Program](#) webpages and [Volunteer Policies and Procedures](#).

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

Whether they participate in the Girl Scout Cookie Program or the Girl Scout Fall Product Program (or both!), everything they learn prepares them to take on the world. Plus, Girl Scout Cookie proceeds stay in your local community to power amazing year-round experiences that broaden their 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 that will help them be successful today and throughout their lives:

- **Goal Setting.** Girl Scouts learn to create a plan to reach their goals.
- **Decision Making.** Girl Scouts learn to make decisions on their own and as a team.
- **Money Management.** Girl Scouts learn to create a budget and handle money.
- **People Skills.** Girl Scouts find their voice and up their confidence through customer interactions that build relationships.
- **Business Ethics.** Girl Scouts 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 over year.

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

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

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 Girl Scouts, 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 Girl Scouts and their families so everyone understands that product programs support your local council.

Troop members share in the proceeds from successful product programs; proceeds are not distributed to individual members. Girl Scouts, however, may be eligible for rewards and credits that they put toward council-sponsored camps, programs, and store related credits, or travel experiences. The council plan for rewards applies equally to all participants in the product program activity. Visit the [cookie section](#) of your council website for more information about individual rewards and troop proceeds locally.

The [Girl Scouts 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,” Girl Scouts 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 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 Girl Scouts 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 section](#) of your council'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](#). M2 Media Group provides online tools and activities for Girl Scouts. Check with your council for more details.

Your Role

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

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

Not only can Girl Scouts sell individually, both in-person and using the online tools provided, but they can also participate in group booth sales during product programs. Girl Scouts will always be able to sell cookies to members of their personal network, regardless of where they live. Your local council may have additional guidance and processes to 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 troop and let their entrepreneurial spirit soar. Learning by doing is exactly how your Girl Scouts 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), and that all product is tracked. For older Girl Scouts, 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 participating in the Girl Scout Cookie Program and other product programs. Volunteers, families, and Girl Scouts 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 girlscout.org and in *Safety Activity Checkpoints*.

Selling Cookies Online

Before Girl Scouts open their online storefront, they should partner with their troop leader and their families to learn how to safely run their online business.

We know Girl Scouts and their troops are creative, and the Girl Scout Cookie Program provides the perfect opportunity to highlight this creativity. Participants can use vanity URLs to add a creative component to

their marketing and learning (e.g. Shana’s Cookie Sale or Buy Cookies from Shana). Troops and Girl Scouts cannot use GSUSA’s intellectual property (Buy Thin Mints Now or Buy Girl Scout Cookies) as part of a vanity URL.

A few more online safety practices to keep in mind:

- The Girl Scout Cookie Program is a girl-led program; they should always lead online marketing and sales efforts, with the supervision of their caregiver.
- Girl Scouts engaging in online sales and marketing must review and apply the [Digital Marketing Tips for Cookie Entrepreneurs and Their Families](#).
- Girl Scouts, volunteers and caregivers must review and adhere to the [Girl Scout Internet Safety Pledge](#), the [Digital Cookie Pledge](#), and Girl Scouts’ *Safety Activity Checkpoints* Product Programs.
- Posting individual or troop sales links to resale sites (Craigslist, eBay, Facebook Marketplace, etc.) is prohibited.
- Girl Scouts must adhere to all terms and conditions on the Digital Cookie platform.
- Girl Scouts of the USA reserves the right to remove or disable their 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, Girl Scouts, and volunteers should contact and collaborate with their council and GSUSA in advance of any national news media opportunities tied to their online marketing and sales efforts.

The Buddy System

Remember to always incorporate the buddy system when Girl Scouts engage in Product Sales. Girl Scouts should not sell or deliver cookies alone.

Adults should provide supervision and guidance for all program levels, and must accompany Daisies, Brownies, and Juniors when they are selling, taking orders, and delivering products. Adults oversee Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors and must be aware of how, when, and where they are when selling products. In addition, an adult must be readily available to them when they are participating in product programs. This can be accomplished by an adult being present with them or by having an adult and Girl Scouts exchange telephone numbers.

Preparing for Your Girl Scout Cookie Booth

Cookie booths—that is, cookie pop-up shops 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. Cookie Booths are only permitted within the jurisdiction of the Girl Scout and troop’s primary council.

For more about GSNI’s Cookie Booth information, check out the GSNI [Cookie Resource](#) webpage.

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 members and potential customers.

- Choosing a high traffic area—this could be your local supermarket, mall, or park—where the maximum number of customers can visit the 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 the booth isn't blocking a store entrance or exit.

Encourage 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 them to be polite and to have their sales pitch ready for interested customers.

And keep in mind:

- Adults must always be present for cookie booths in public places.
- For each troop cookie booth, a minimum of two adults (at least one of whom is a registered Girl Scout volunteer with the required background check), and one Girl Scout should be present at all times. With two or more volunteers, you'll have adequate booth coverage if Girl Scouts need to be accompanied to the restroom.
- Daisies are still learning how to make correct change. Help them handle money as needed, but remember that Girl Scouts make all sales at the booth!
- Keep your customers in the loop and update your baker's software system if you need to cancel or are unable to attend a cookie booth. If not, customers could be routed to cancelled booths as all scheduled booths are available on GSUSA's Find Cookie Now!
- Certain locations may be inappropriate for younger Girl Scouts based on the standards of your local community and may negatively impact the cookie program experience for Girl Scouts, and/or may negatively impact our brand in the community. For additional clarity, Girl Scouts 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-appealing 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.
- Retail sales without Girl Scouts present are not approved by GSUSA. Councils, troops, and Girl Scouts may not sell cookies in a retail space where Girl Scouts cannot be present to market, manage inventory, collect, and process payments for cookies. Store employees and/or adults cannot sell cookies on behalf of a Girl Scout or troop.

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.

To report incidents at cookie booths, check out the [Incident Reporting Form Guide](#).

Cookie Donation Programs

Cookies also help Girl Scouts 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. Encourage your troop members to share about the Cookie Donation program with customers. It's a great way for customers to give back to their community, too!

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.

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 emphasis of the Girl Scout Cookie Program. The cookie program has never been about and does not focus on individual sales results.

- There are many impressive cookie entrepreneurs throughout the U.S., and the Girl Scout Movement 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 individuals as “top sellers” in the media. Doing so detracts from the essence of the Girl Scout Cookie Program, which is based on offering members important experiences in entrepreneurship, business, and finance from an early age as well as providing Girl Scouts and local Girl Scout councils with the funds necessary to power amazing experiences and opportunities for Girl Scouts year-round.
- A Girl Scout's or troop's sales link should not be highlighted when speaking to the media. All calls to action should be directed to the Girl Scout Cookie Finder or a council's own cookie finder/map and not a specific individual or troop.
- Volunteers, parents/caregivers, and Girl Scouts may not secure paid media to enhance a troop's or individual's positioning in the media.

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. Girl Scouts wouldn't exist without volunteers like you. Your first step as a troop leader may lead to other volunteer opportunities once this year is over.

When you're ready for more opportunities, be sure to let your council support team know how you'd like to be a part of Girl Scouts' 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 Girl Scouts at camp? Work with a troop 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!

Check out GSNI's [Volunteer Appreciation](#) and [Adult Awards & Recognition](#) webpages for more information on how GSNI appreciates our volunteers!

Additional Resources and Support

We know that volunteering isn't always easy, especially when you're new, so we can't thank you enough for giving your time and energy to be the mentor and role model your troop 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 always help and support you! Thanks again! It's going to be a great Girl Scout year!

Contact GSNI's Customer Care at customercare@girlscoutsni.org for any questions!

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