

Volunteer Essentials

2020–2021

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Adventure Ahead!

Welcome to the great adventure that is Girl Scouting! Thanks to volunteers and mentors like you, generations of girls have learned to be leaders in their own lives and in the world. Have no doubt: you, and nearly a million other volunteers like you, are helping girls make a lasting impact on the world. And we thank you from the bottom of our hearts!

This guide, *Volunteer Essentials*, is designed to support busy troop volunteers on the go. You can easily find what you need to get started on your Girl Scout journey and search for answers throughout the troop year.

Get started by browsing through these sections:

- [All About Girl Scouts](#)
- [Engaging Girls](#) & [Engaging Families](#)
- [Troop Management](#)
- [Product Program](#)
- [Troop Finances](#)
- [Safety](#)
- [Returning to In-Person Troop Meetings and Activities: Interim COVID-19 Guidance for Volunteers](#)

New troop leader? We've got you covered. Check out the *New Leader's Guide to Success*, a resource designed especially for you! Plus, council staff and volunteer coaches are ready to help throughout your first year and beyond!

Girl Scouts of Gulfcoast Florida, Inc.

Girl Scout councils are chartered by the national office to attract and retain members in a geographic area, provide ways for girls to participate in Girl Scouting, create an environment that reflects Girl Scout values and ideals, manage volunteers' experience with Girl Scouting, and keep girls and volunteers as safe as possible. The national office provides support materials to all councils to ensure that the Girl Scout experience is nationally consistent.

Girl Scouts of Gulfcoast Florida, Inc. (GSGCF) serves 10 counties in six regions, from the Skyway Bridge to the Everglades, to meet the needs of our girls and volunteers.

Contact any staff member by calling council headquarters, or by email at customercare@gsgcf.org. Council offices are open Tuesday–Friday from 7:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m.

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All About Girl Scouts

Since 1912, when we were founded by trailblazer Juliette Gordon Low, [Girl Scouts](#) has given girls the tools to lead, break barriers, and create positive change. We are the largest girl-led leadership development organization for girls in the world and a member of the [World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts](#), a sisterhood of nearly 10 million girls and adults in 150 countries. With programs from coast to coast and across the globe, Girl Scouts offers every girl the chance to practice a lifetime of leadership, adventure, and success.

Who Can Join Girl Scouts—and How?

Girl Scouts is about sharing the fun, friendship, and inherent power of girls and women in an inclusive, supportive, girl-led environment!

Girl Scout volunteers are a dynamic and diverse group, and there's no one "type" of volunteer. Whether you're a recent college grad, a parent, a retiree, female or male—really, anyone with a sense of curiosity and adventure who has passed the necessary screening process—your unique skills and experiences help make Girl Scouting a powerful leadership experience for girls.

What all members share are the values in the [Girl Scout Promise and Law](#), as well as our extraordinary strengths as go-getters, innovators, risk-takers, and leaders. Each member also agrees to follow safety guidelines and pay the annual membership dues of \$25. Adults have the option to purchase a [lifetime membership](#) for \$400.

Girl Scouts of Gulfcoast Florida encourages online registration to ensure the accuracy and consent of parents/guardians. Invite your parents to visit our website at www.gsgcf.org and click on join. To ensure all girls are covered with Girl Scouts' secondary accidental insurance, all members need to become registered by the third meeting. Families with the inability to pay for the Girl Scout membership may choose to apply for financial assistance at the time of registration.

Girls at Every Grade Level

Girls can join in the fun at any grade level:

Girl Scout Daisy (grades K–1)
Girl Scout Brownie (grades 2–3)
Girl Scout Junior (grades 4–5)

Girl Scout Cadette (grades 6–8)
Girl Scout Senior (grades 9–10)
Girl Scout Ambassador (grades 11–12)

The Girl Scout Leadership Experience

At Girl Scouts, everything centers around the girl: activities are girl-led, which gives girls the opportunity to take on leadership roles and learn by doing in a cooperative learning environment. [It's what makes Girl Scouts truly unique](#)—our program is designed by, with, and for girls.

Although girls may start building their leadership skills in school and on sports teams, [research shows](#) that the courage, confidence, and character they develop as Girl Scouts stay with them throughout their lives.

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

- When girls do exciting badge activities, earn a Girl Scout Journey award, attend an amazing program or event, or go camping, you are helping them *discover* who they are, what excites them, and what their talents are.
- Girls *connect* when they collaborate with others—their Girl Scout sisters, leaders, or community experts—and expand their horizons. This helps them care about, support, inspire, and team with others locally and globally.
- With your guidance, these budding leaders will deepen their relationship with the world around them, and they'll be eager to *take action* to make the world a better place.

As for how they do it? The Girl Scout Leadership Experience draws on three unique processes that help girls unlock their inner leader.

- *Girl-led* means girls of every age take an active and age-appropriate role in figuring out the what, where, when, why, and how of all the exciting activities they'll do. The girl-led process is critically important to the Girl Scout Leadership Experience—when girls actively lead and shape their experiences, they know their voice matters, they feel empowered to make decisions, and they stay engaged in their activities.
- Girls enjoy hands-on activities and *learn by doing*. Then, after reflecting on their activities, girls gain a deeper understanding of the concepts and skills the activities require.
- Through *cooperative learning*, girls learn to share knowledge and skills in an atmosphere of respect, teamwork, and collaboration as they work toward a common goal.

As a volunteer, you'll draw on these Girl Scout processes as you lead girls of any age. Girl-led at the Daisy level will look very different from the Ambassador level, of course. What's most important is that girls make decisions about the activities to do *together* and that they also make choices *within* that activity. As they learn from their successes and failures—and gain a major confidence boost in the process—the girl-led process will give each of them the opportunity to lead within their peer group. By the time girls are Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors, they'll be using the leadership skills they've developed to mentor younger girls and take action to make the world a better place

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

Reflection

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

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

Reflection doesn't need to be a formal process, but you can kick-start the conversation with three simple questions: What?, So what?, and Now what?

- Go over the *what* of the activity with girls. 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 repeat?”
- Then move to the *so what* elements. 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?”
- Lastly, review the *now what* with the girls. 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 did this Take Action project, what do you think we should do next to make sure it continues on?”

What?, So what?, and Now what?—or whatever style of reflection you choose to use with your girls—are powerful elements of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience, and they’ll carry these lessons with them for the rest of their lives.

Progression *

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

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

Keep in mind that good progression drives success for girls. We’ve outlined some suggestions that will help you determine when your girls are ready for their next [outdoor challenge](#), [troop trip](#), or [entrepreneurial venture](#).

Inclusion

Girl Scouts has a strong commitment to inclusion and diversity, and we embrace girls of all abilities and backgrounds in 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. Part of the important work you do includes modeling friendship and kindness for your girls and showing them what it means to practice empathy. Here’s how you can [nurture an inclusive troop environment](#).

Equal Treatment: Girl Scouts welcomes all members, regardless of race, ethnicity, background, cognitive or physical abilities, family structure, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender identity, and socioeconomic status. When scheduling, planning, and carrying out activities, carefully consider the needs of all girls involved, including school schedules, family needs, financial constraints, religious holidays, and the accessibility of appropriate transportation and meeting places.

The National Program Pillars

At Girl Scouts, girls lead their own adventures and team up with their fellow troop members in an all-girl environment to choose the exciting, hands-on activities that interest them most. Girl Scouts focuses on [four areas \(pillars\) that form the foundation](#) of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience:

- [Outdoors](#): When girls embark on outdoor adventures, they learn to confidently meet challenges while developing a lifelong appreciation of nature.
- [Science, technology, engineering, and math \(STEM\)](#): Whether they're building a robot, developing a video game, or studying the stars, girls become better problem-solvers and critical thinkers through STEM activities and learn how they can use STEM to help others.
- [Life skills](#): Girls discover they have what it takes to become outspoken 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.
- [Entrepreneurship](#): By participating in the Girl Scout Cookie Program or fall product program or by earning one of the new entrepreneurship badges, girls spark their curiosity, confidence, and innovation as they learn the essentials of running their own business and how to think like entrepreneurs.



The [Volunteer Toolkit](#) can provide inspiring ideas for engaging your troop in an exciting mix of activities all year long. For example, if you want to take your girls outside when doing a badge activity, look for the evergreen icon, which tells you that activity can be taken outdoors, or the globe icon, which lets you know you can bring a global perspective to the activity.

The Important Difference Between Journeys and Badges

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

- [Journeys](#) are multi-session leadership experiences for girls to explore topics such as bullying, media literacy, design thinking, or environmental stewardship. Girls do hands-on activities, connect with experts, and take the reins on age-appropriate Take Action projects. Because of their leadership focus, Journeys are also a prerequisite for the highly regarded Bronze, Silver, and Gold Awards
- [Badges](#) are all about skill building. When a Girl Scout earns a badge, it shows that she's learned a new skill, such as how to make a healthy snack, build and test a toy race car, or take great digital photos. It may even spark an interest at school or plant the seed for a future career. And remember: you'll have fun and learn by doing right alongside your girls!

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

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

The Difference Between Community Service and Take Action Projects

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

If your troop members want to pursue their Bronze, Silver, or Gold Awards, 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 girls, give time for them to reflect on their projects. When girls make 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 Day

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

A few of those extra-special days, when you'll want to crank 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's 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 making cool SWAPS to share with new friends or closing meetings with a friendship circle, your troop won't want to miss out on these [traditions, ceremonies, and special Girl Scout days](#).

Highest Awards

As your girls discover their passions and the power of their voices, they'll want to take on an issue that's captured their interest and is meaningful to them. Encourage them to turn their vision into reality by taking on the ultimate Take Action projects in order to earn Girl Scouts' highest awards.

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

- [The Girl Scout Bronze Award](#) can be earned by Juniors; the prerequisite is one Junior Journey and its 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 one Cadette Journey and its associated Take Action project. The Silver Award can be earned by an individual girl or by a small group.

- [The Girl Scout Gold Award](#) is the standout achievement of girls who develop meaningful, sustainable solutions to challenges in their communities and the world. Seniors and Ambassadors who have completed either two Girl Scout Senior/Ambassador level Journeys or earned the Silver Award and completed one Senior/Ambassador level Journey can pursue their Gold Award.

Did you know that a Gold Award Girl Scout is entitled to enlist at a higher pay grade when she joins the U.S. military? A Gold Award Girl Scout's achievements also prime her for the fast track when it comes to college admissions and make her an outstanding candidate for scholarships and other financial awards. Her future has never looked brighter!

Girls are eligible to earn any recognition for their grade level. Any girl is eligible to earn the Gold Award even if she joined Girl Scouts for the first time in high school.

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

Girl Scouts of Gulfcoast Florida hosts program workshops for girls working on awards and celebrates their accomplishments annually at our Young Women of Distinction Awards Ceremony. This is a time-honored tradition to recognize girls who have achieved the highest awards in Girl Scouting. To ensure girls are properly recognized, be sure to complete a Girl Award Worksheet by the March 15 deadline to be recognized at our Young Women of Distinction Awards Ceremony in May.

Girl Scout Travel and Destinations

As COVID-19–related travel restrictions are lifted across the globe and you and your troop feel safe doing so, your girls will find that Girl Scouts is the best way to travel. They'll challenge themselves in a safe environment that sparks their curiosity, and they'll create lifelong memories with their Girl Scout sisters. And the [Girl Scout Cookie Program](#) can help to make travel dreams a reality as girls use their cookie earnings every year to power [amazing adventures](#) for themselves and their troop.

Traveling with Girl Scouts is very different from traveling with family, school, or other groups because [girls take the lead](#). As they make the decisions about where to go and what to do and take increasing responsibility for the planning and management of their trips, girls build important organizational and management skills that will benefit them in college and beyond.

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

Planning Ahead for Adventure

Get in touch with your council as you start thinking about planning a trip. They likely have training programs that will raise your confidence as a chaperone as well as an approval process for overnight and extended travel.

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

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

Safety First

If you're planning any kind of trip—from a short field trip to an overseas expedition—the “Trips and Travel” section of [Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) is your go-to resource for safety.

Girl Scouts of Gulfcoast Florida has travel resources to help you with travel support. Visit our [Forms](#) page online. 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.

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

Girl Scout Connections

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

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

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

Girl Scouts of Gulfcoast Florida Outdoor Camps

Are your girls looking to stay closer to home this year? Your outdoor adventure starts here! Learn more about the facilities and amenities available at [Camp Honi Hanta](#) in Bradenton and [Camp Caloosa](#) in North Fort Myers.

As your girls excitedly plan their next trip, remember limit your role to facilitating the girls' brainstorming and planning, never doing the work for them. Share your ideas and insight, ask tough questions when you have to, and support all their decisions with enthusiasm and encouragement!

Engaging Girls

Creating an environment where girls are unafraid to try new things and can be who they want to be starts with you! By meeting your girls where they are, you'll help them develop the leadership skills they'll use now and as they grow.

Understanding Healthy Development in Girls

It sounds simple, but just being attentive to what girls are experiencing as they mature is a big help to them—and to you, as you guide and mentor them!

You'll experience different joys and challenges with each Girl Scout level, but here are some guidelines for meeting girls' needs and abilities at different grade levels; you'll also find these listed in the adult guide of each leadership Journey.

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

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

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

Girl Scout Cadettes	
At the Girl Scout Cadette level (sixth, seventh, and eighth grades), girls . . .	This means . . .
Are going through puberty, including changes in their skin, body shape, and weight. They're also starting their menstrual cycles and have occasional shifts in mood.	<i>Being sensitive to the many changes Cadettes are undergoing and acknowledging that these changes are as normal as growing taller! Girls need time to adapt to their changing bodies, and their feelings about their bodies may not keep up. Reinforce that, as with everything else, people go through puberty in different ways and at different times.</i>
Are starting to spend more time in peer groups than with their families and are very concerned about	<i>That girls will enjoy teaming up in small or large groups for art projects, performances, and written activities as well as tackling</i>

friends and relationships with others their age.	<i>relationship issues through both artistic endeavors and Take Action projects.</i>
Can be very self-conscious—wanting to be like everyone else but fearing they are unique in their thoughts and feelings.	<i>Encouraging girls to share, but only when they are ready. At this age, they may be more comfortable sharing a piece of artwork or a fictional story than their own words. Throughout the activities, highlight and discuss differences as positive, interesting, and beautiful.</i>
Are beginning to navigate their increasing independence and expectations from adults at school and at home.	<i>Trusting girls to plan and make key decisions and allowing them to experience “fun failure,” which is learning from trying something new and making mistakes.</i>

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

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

Creating a Safe Space for Girls

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

Recognizing and Supporting Each Girl

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

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

Promoting Fairness

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

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

Building Trust

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

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

Inspiring Open Communication

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

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

Managing Conflict

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

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

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

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

Communicating Effectively with Girls of Any Age

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

Listen

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

Be Honest

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

Be Open to Real Issues

Outside of Girl Scouts, girls may be dealing with issues like relationships, peer pressure, school, money, drugs, and other serious topics. When you don't know, listen. Also seek help from your council if you need assistance or more information than you currently have.

Show Respect

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

Offer Options

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

Stay Current

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

Remember to LUTE: Listen, Understand, Tolerate, and Empathize

Try using the LUTE method to thoughtfully respond when a girl is upset, angry, or confused.

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

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

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

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

Addressing the Needs of Older Girls

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

- Think of yourself as a “guide on the side”—a partner, a coach, or a mentor, not a “leader.”
- Ask girls what rules they need for safety and what group agreements they need to be a good team. When girls take the lead in establishing group rules, they’re more likely to stick to them!
- Understand that girls need time to talk, unwind, and have fun together.
- Ask what they think and what they want to do.
- Encourage girls to speak their minds.
- Provide structure, but don’t micromanage.
- Give everyone a voice in the group, understanding that “speaking up” may look different for each girl. For some, it might mean sharing their ideas in front of the entire group; for others, it could mean submitting a written response or contributing as part of a group.
- Treat girls like partners.
- Don’t repeat what’s said in the group to anyone outside of it (unless necessary for a girl’s safety). See the “report concerns” section below to understand the guardrails.

When Sensitive Topics Come Up

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

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

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

GSUSA does not take a position or develop materials on issues relating to human sexuality, birth control, or abortion. We feel our role is to help girls develop self-confidence and good decision-making skills that will help them make wise choices in all areas of their lives. We believe parents and

caregivers, along with schools and faith communities, are the primary sources of information on these topics.

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

Report Concerns

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

Mandated reporting of child abuse: Under chapter 39 of the Florida Statutes, everyone in the State of Florida is a mandated reporter required by law to report suspicions of child abuse (neglect, physical, sexual, emotional, abandonment) to the Florida Abuse Hotline: 800-96ABUSE; 800-962-2873 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week). Provide as much information as possible: your name, phone, and what you are reporting. Child's information: name, address, phone, social security number, date of birth, race, gender, parent/guardian. Trained personnel are available to discuss the facts with you. Anonymous reports are permitted.

- **Contact a staff member to find out how to refer the girl and her parent/guardian to experts at school or in the community.**
- **Share your concern with the girl's family, if this is feasible.**

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

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

Engaging Families

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

Kick the Year Off Right by Engaging Parents and Other Caregivers

Girl Scouting provides the best opportunities for girls when families step up and play an active part in the troop. Without meaningful support from parents and caregivers, it's difficult for a troop to be all it can be. Plus, girls feel a special sense of pride when their families take part and show interest in the things they're doing!

What Is a Parent and Caregiver Meeting?

It's the first meeting you have to start each troop year—whether you're a new or returning troop. It's valuable for all troops.

Why Hold a Meeting?

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

- Families understand what Girl Scouting can do for their girl.
- Families and leaders identify ways they'll 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.

Check out our step-by-step guide and “Parents & Caregivers Meeting Outline” on the Volunteer Toolkit. This 60–90-minute meeting will make all the difference in the year ahead.

Another meeting you don't want to miss is the **Cookie Program Girl & Family Meeting** in the Volunteer Toolkit. Just like the parent and caregiver meeting at the beginning of the year, this meeting is your chance to share what girls gain through the cookie program, outline expectations, and find the support you need for a successful cookie season. The cookie program is a team effort and you'll want to get families on board!

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

How to Keep Parents and Other Caregivers on Board

Make the Ask(s)

The main reason people don't take action is because they were never asked to in the first place. That's why hearing one out of three Girl Scout parents say no one communicated expectations around involvement with their girl's troop is so troubling. Parents may have many talents, but they're certainly not mind readers! If you're nervous about getting turned down, don't be. Sure, a few parents might be unable to lend a hand, but the helpers you do get will be worth their weight in gold. 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 girls feel a special sense of pride in seeing their own family member step up and take a leadership role. Getting involved can strengthen the caregiver/girl bond and is a meaningful way to show daughters that they are a priority in their parents' lives.

Make It Quick and Easy

Everybody's got a full plate these days, so instead of starting conversations with a list of tasks or responsibilities that parents and other caregivers could take on (which can be intimidating!), ask how much time each week they might be able to dedicate to the troop, then go from there. For instance, if a troop mom or dad has 15 minutes each week to spare, they could organize and manage the calendar for troop snacks and carpools. If a grandparent has one to two hours, they could assist with leading the troop through a specific badge on a topic they're already comfortable with. For more ways parents and other caregivers can help out when faced with a tricky schedule, check out the Family Resources tab in the Volunteer Toolkit.

Make Family Part of the Formula

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

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

Troop Management

Leadership is more than “being in charge” or having a title; it’s recognizing that you’re 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 Volunteer

The [Girl Scout Leadership Experience](#) is based on three keys—discover, connect, and take action—but it’s not just for the girls! As a Girl Scout leader, you’ll embark on your own leadership journey as you help girls develop the vital leadership skills they’ll use to make the world a better place. The Girl Scout perspective on leadership is permeated with a few basic, but all-important, concepts.

Leadership is teaching girls:

- 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 canned lesson or activity.
- Ensures each girl understands and can carry out her responsibilities within the troop.
- Encourages girls to build their skills and their ethics.
- Gives more responsibilities to the girls as they grow and develop.

It’s important to remember that:

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

Your Responsibilities as a Girl Scout Volunteer

Your responsibilities as a Girl Scout volunteer include:

- Accepting the [Girl Scout Promise and Law](#).
- Understanding and coaching the three keys to leadership that are the basis of the [Girl Scout Leadership Experience](#): discover, connect, and take action.
- Sharing your knowledge, experience, and skills with a positive and flexible approach.
- Working in a partnership with girls so that their activities are girl-led and they learn by doing, individually and as a group. You’ll also partner with other volunteers and council staff for support and guidance.
- Organizing fun, interactive, girl-led activities that address relevant issues and match girls’ interests and needs.
- Providing guidance and information regarding Girl Scout group meetings with girls’ families on a regular and ongoing basis through a variety of tools, including email, phone calls, newsletters, blogs, other forms of social media, and any other method you choose.
- Processing and completing registration forms and other paperwork, such as permission slips.

- Communicating effectively and delivering clear, organized, and vibrant presentations or information to an individual or the group.
- Overseeing with honesty, integrity, and careful record keeping the funds that girls raise.
- Maintaining a close connection to your volunteer support team as well as your council.
- Facilitating a safe experience for every girl.

Planning for Your First Troop Meeting

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

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

- When will we meet and for how long? How frequently should we schedule troop meetings?
- Where will we meet? Your meeting space should be somewhere safe, clean, and secure that allows all girls to participate. Some great meeting space ideas include schools, places of worship, libraries, and community centers. If working with teens, consider meeting at coffee shops, bookstores, or other places they enjoy.
- Which components of the uniform will families need to purchase? Which uniform components will the troop provide for each girl?
- Will our troop be a single grade level or [facilitated as a multi-level troop](#) with girls of many grade levels combined into one troop? If multi-level, how will we make sure they each get an age-appropriate experience?
- How will we keep troop activities and decisions girl-led? Use the [Volunteer Toolkit](#) to help you through this process by exploring options for activities and reviewing the meeting plans and resources lists.
- How often are we going to communicate to troop families? Which channels will we use to keep families in the loop? Effective communication [will help set expectations](#) and clarify parent/caregiver responsibilities.
- Will our troop charge dues, use product program proceeds, and/or charge per activity? How much money will we need to cover supplies and activities? [What should our financial plan look like?](#)

Choosing a Meeting Place

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

Cost: The space should be free to use.

Size: Make sure the space is large enough for the whole group and all planned activities.

Availability: Be sure the space is available for the day and the entire length of time you want to meet.

Resources: Ask if tables and chairs come with the room and ensure that the lighting is adequate. A bonus would be a cubby of some sort where you could store supplies or a safe outdoor space for activities.

Safety: Potential spaces must be safe, secure, clean, properly ventilated, heated (or cooled, depending on your location), free from hazards, and have at least two exits that are well marked and fully functional. Also be sure first-aid equipment is on hand.

Facilities: It goes without saying, but make sure that toilets are sanitary and accessible.

Communication-friendly: Check for cell reception in the potential space and whether Wi-Fi is available.

Allergen-free: Ensure that pet dander and other common allergens won't bother susceptible girls during meetings.

Accessibility: Your space should accommodate girls with disabilities as well as parents with disabilities who may come to meetings.

Need a few talking points to get started? Try:

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

Stuck and need additional support? Regular troop meetings should be held at a public facility such as, house of worship, school, library, community, etc. Hosting troop meeting at personal residences are not encouraged due to safety and liability issues. Should you wish to meet at a personal residence, it must be approved. Contact your council or your service unit support team for help with a troop meeting place.

Virtual Meetings

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

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

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

And don't worry if your girls want to use a web or social platform you're not as familiar with, because you'll learn alongside them! You'll also find lots of inspiring badge activities and tips on [Girl Scouts at Home](#). Visit Girl Scout's of Gulfcoast Florida's [online training page](#) for resources.

Girl Scout Troop Size

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

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

A Girl Scout troop/group must have at minimum five girls and two approved adult volunteers. (Double-check the [volunteer-to-girl ratio chart](#) to make sure you've got the right amount of coverage for your troop!) Adults and girls registering in groups of fewer than five girls and/or two approved, unrelated adult volunteers, at least one of whom is female, will be registered as individual Girl Scouts to more accurately reflect their status and program experience. Individual girls are always welcome to participate in Girl Scout activities and events.

Registering Girls and Adults in Girl Scouting

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

Preregistration for the upcoming membership year occurs in the spring. Girls are encouraged to register early to avoid the fall rush. Early registration allows for uninterrupted receipt of forms and materials from the council, helps girls and councils plan ahead, and gets girls excited about all the great stuff they want to do as Girl Scouts next year. Girl Scout 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).

Adding New Girls to Your Troop

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

Contact your GSGCF community manager or member engagement specialist for marketing and recruitment materials.

Creating an Atmosphere of Acceptance and Inclusion

Girl Scouts is for every girl, and that's why we embrace girls of all abilities and backgrounds with a specific and positive philosophy of inclusion that benefits everyone. Each girl—regardless of her 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—about all girls being offered the same opportunities with respect, dignity, and celebration of their unique strengths. It's about being a sister to every Girl Scout! You're accepting and inclusive when you:

- Welcome every girl and focus on building community.
- Emphasize cooperation instead of competition.
- Provide a safe and socially comfortable environment for girls.
- Teach respect for, understanding of, and dignity toward all girls and their families.
- Actively reach out to girls and families who are traditionally excluded or marginalized.
- Foster a sense of belonging to community as a respected and valued peer.
- Honor the intrinsic value of each person's life.

If you have questions about accommodating an individual girl, please reach out to customercare@gsgcf.org.

As you think about where, when, and how often to meet with your group, consider the needs, resources, safety, and beliefs of all members and potential members. Include the special needs of any members who have disabilities or whose parents or caregivers have disabilities. But, please, don't rely on visual cues to inform you of a disability: approximately 20 percent of the U.S. population has a disability—that's one in five people of every socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and religion.

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

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

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

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

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

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

- When talking to a girl with a disability, speak directly to her, not through a family member or friend.
- It's okay to offer assistance to a girl with a disability, but wait until your offer is accepted before you begin to help. Listen closely to any instructions the person may have.
- Leaning on a girl's wheelchair is invading her space and is considered annoying and rude.
- When speaking to a girl who is deaf and using an interpreter, speak to the girl, not to the interpreter.
- When speaking for more than a few minutes to a girl who uses a wheelchair, place yourself at eye level.
- When greeting a girl with a visual disability, always identify yourself and others. You might say, "Hi, it's Sheryl. Tara is on my right, and Chris is on my left."

Registering Girls with Cognitive Disabilities

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

Getting Support for Your Troop

It takes a village to lift up the next generation of female leaders, but you won't do it alone. You can count on a dedicated Girl Scout support team, consisting of council staff and passionate volunteers just like you. Your support team, which may be called a service unit in your council, is ready to offer local learning opportunities and advice as well as answer your questions about the Girl Scout program, working with girls, product sales, and so much more.

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

Your [troop committee volunteers](#) are the extra sets of eyes, ears, and hands that help the troop safely explore the world around them. Depending on your troop's needs, they can play a more active role—for instance, someone can step up as a dedicated troop treasurer—or simply provide an occasional helping hand when you need to keep a meeting's 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 people, you'll have all the support you need to be a Girl Scout volunteer. Here's a list of some important resources you'll want to check out.

The Volunteer Toolkit

The Volunteer Toolkit is a customizable digital planning tool for troop leaders and co-leaders to conveniently manage their troop year-round and deliver easy, fun troop meetings. Accessible via desktop and mobile devices, the Volunteer Toolkit saves you time and energy all year long, so you can focus on ensuring every girl has the opportunities she deserves to build a lifetime of leadership, success, and adventure.

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

- Plan the troop's calendar year and meeting schedule.
- Email parents/caregivers with one click.
- View the troop roster, renew girls' membership, and update girls' contact information.

- View meeting plans for Journeys and badges, including suggested tracks for multi-level groups (K–5 and 6–12).
- Customize meeting agendas to fit your unique 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 girls' attendance at meetings and their badge and Journey achievements.
- Add council or custom events to the troop's calendar.
- Submit your troop's 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 girls are 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, such as the Family Hub.
- View the troop's finance report (depending on the council's process).

Get started by visiting: www.gsgcf.org

The Girl's Guide to Girl Scouting

What does it mean to be a go-getting Girl Scout? It's all in *The Girl's Guide to Girl Scouting*. These grade level-specific binders will help you break it down for your girls. It's part handbook, part badge book, and 100 percent fun!

Safety Activity Checkpoints

Safety is paramount in Girl Scouting, and this resource—*Safety Activity Checkpoints*—contains everything you need to know to help keep your girls safe during a variety of exciting activities outside of their regular Girl Scout troop meetings.

Tips for Troop Leaders

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

Girl Scout Volunteers in Your Community

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

Customer Care Contacts

Questions? Need help resolving an issue? We've got you! Reach out anytime by either clicking on the "Contact Us" form at www.gsgcf.org or email **customercare@gsgcf.org**.

Offices open Tuesday–Friday from 7:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. 4780 Cattlemen Road, Sarasota, FL 34233
941-921-5358 or 800-232-4475

Communication

Girl Scouts of Gulfcoast Florida, Inc. shares event information, learning opportunities, tips, and advice at our website at www.gsgcf.org.

Please visit all of our social media channels created as resources for you! The following is a list of our account names:



Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/GirlScoutsofGulfcoastFlorida/>



Twitter: [@GSGCF](https://twitter.com/GSGCF)



Instagram: [girlscoutsgulfcoast](https://www.instagram.com/girlscoutsgulfcoast)



LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/girl-scouts-of-gulfcoast-florida-inc->



Blog: <http://gsgcfblog.org/>



Pinterest: Girl Scouts of Gulfcoast Florida



Youtube: Girl Scouts of Gulfcoast Florida, Inc

Taking Advantage of Learning Opportunities

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

Visit www.gsgcf.org and click on our [online training page](#) and [events calendar](#) to view training opportunities.

Knowing How Much You're Appreciated

Whatever your volunteer position, your hard work means the world to girls, to your council staff, and to Girl Scouts of the USA. So thank you, from the bottom of our hearts!

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

If you're ready for more opportunities to work with girls, be sure to let your council support team know how you'd like to be a part of girls' lives in the future—whether in the same position or in other, flexible

ways. Are you ready to organize a series or event? Take a trip? Work with girls at camp? Work with a troop of girls as a yearlong volunteer? Share your skills at a council office, working behind the scenes? The possibilities are endless and can be tailored to fit your skills and interests.

Girl Scouts of Gulfcoast Florida recognizes volunteers informally throughout the year and formally through our recognition program.

Volunteers make Girl Scouting happen for girls in their area. Girls Scouts learn they can make a difference and become confident leaders because of dedicated volunteers like you. You can help girls do amazing things! It is important to recognize volunteer efforts and recognition should be on going and happen often. Below are suggested ways volunteers can recognize their fellow volunteers. Volunteers are also recognized on a council and national level based on the impact they make in their community. GSUSA has updated our national volunteer recognitions to reflect today's volunteer efforts. Visit our website for a detailed list of award criteria.

Volunteer Appreciation Month

Without our passionate and dedicated volunteers, there would be no Girl Scouting. That's why we celebrate National Volunteer Month every April! And get ready to crank 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 week of April. What can we say—we love our volunteers!

Girl Scout Participation in Activities with Other Scouting Organizations

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

Marketplace Confusion

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

Protecting Use of Girl Scout Materials

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

Girl Scout Cookie Program and Fall Product Program

The Girl Scout Cookie Program and the Girl Scout fall product program are foundational experiences during which girls learn to think like entrepreneurs and to develop vital business skills. As the largest

girl-led entrepreneurial program in the world, the Girl Scout Cookie Program equips girls with the business smarts they need to take on the world. Plus, Girl Scout Cookie proceeds stay local in your community to power amazing year-round experiences—experiences that broaden their worlds, teach them essential skills, and launch them into a lifetime of leadership.

Teaching Essential Skills for a Lifetime of Leadership

Through the Girl Scout Cookie Program, girls as young as five develop these five essential skills that will help them be successful today and throughout their lives:

- *Goal setting:* Girls learn to create a plan to reach their goals.
- *Decision making:* Girls learn to make decisions on their own and as a team.
- *Money management:* Girls learn to create a budget and handle money.
- *People skills:* Girls find their voice and up their confidence through customer interactions that build relationships.
- *Business ethics:* Girls learn to act responsibly and honestly, both in business and in life.

But the exciting skill building isn't just tied to the cookies themselves! Girls of all Girl Scout levels 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 cookie bosses open shop, be sure to check out these [helpful troop leader resources](#) that will empower you to:

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

A Sweet Tradition

It has been a century since Girl Scouts began selling home-baked cookies to raise money. The idea was so popular that in 1936 Girl Scouts enlisted bakers 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, [local councils use Girl Scout Cookie proceeds](#) to help provide Girl Scout programs in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), the outdoors, life skills, entrepreneurship, and more—in camps, through leadership training, and multiple other ways. A portion of the proceeds is directly managed by girls, and it's up to them to decide how to invest their troop's share of the earnings.

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

Troop members share in the proceeds from a successful product program; proceeds aren't distributed to individual girl members. Girls, however, may be eligible for rewards and credits that they put toward council-sponsored camps, programs, and Girl Scout swag. The council plan for rewards applies equally

to all girls participating in the product program activity. Visit the [cookie section](#) of our council website for more information about individual rewards and troop proceeds locally.

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

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

—“Ownership of Assets,” *Blue Book of Basic Documents* (April 2020), page 21

Making s’mores under the stars, creating a lasting impact on your community, or ordering supplies for an eye-opening STEM project—there are limitless ways to put troop proceeds toward dynamic Girl Scout experiences! There are a few things, however, that don’t qualify for “purposes of Girl Scouting,” for instance, using troop proceeds to purchase memberships in or uniforms for another organization. We encourage all councils to remind their volunteers of this policy in order to protect the all-girl environment and to avoid diversion of Girl Scout funds.

Your Council’s Role

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

Each council also selects the vendors that provide the products for their product programs. Two commercial bakers are licensed by GSUSA to produce Girl Scout Cookies: [Little Brownie Bakers](#) and [ABC Bakers](#). You’ll find additional information on cookie varieties, including nutritional details, in the [Meet the Cookies](#) section of [girlscouts.org](#).

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

Your Role

You play an exciting role in giving your girls opportunities to practice the five skills as they learn how to think like entrepreneurs in a girl-led setting. Some of the things you’ll do include:

- Getting girls excited about the opportunities to support her troop (but allowing her participation to be voluntary).
- Supporting both [competitive and apprehensive cookie bosses](#), helping all your girls set meaningful goals for themselves.
- Fostering partnerships with each girl’s family to ensure cookie season success, whatever that may look like for her. The [Creating Cookie Success](#) and [Coaching Your Budding Businesswoman](#) resources will help you build a positive partnership with girls and families, and the [Cookie Entrepreneur Family pin](#) is designed to help families support girls’ growth at home.

Not only can girls sell individually, both in person and with the online tools provided by each vendor, they can also participate in group booth sales during product programs. Your local council has additional guidance and processes to market booths and ensure they are situated in safe and appropriate locations for girls

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

Another critical task for each troop is to establish a clear accounting system for all proceeds and product during the programs. It's up to you to make sure that money is spent wisely, that excellent records are kept (remember to keep copies of all receipts in a binder or folder), and that all product is tracked. For older girls, your job is to oversee their work as they learn to keep impeccable records. Be sure to attend product program orientation or training so you are aware of the systems and helpful tools available.

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

Product Program Safety

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

Selling Cookies Online

Will your troop use the [Digital Cookie® platform](#) to manage its cookie business? Check the specific guidelines provided by each cookie vendor before participating. Before girls use their Digital Cookie or Smart Cookie site, they should partner with their families to learn how to safely run their business online.

A few more online safety practices to keep in mind:

- The Girl Scout Cookie Program is a girl-led program, and online marketing and sales efforts should always be led by a girl, with the supervision of her parent or caregiver.
- Girls engaging in online sales and marketing must review and apply the [Digital Marketing Tips for Cookie Entrepreneurs and Families](#).
- Girls, volunteers, and parents must review and adhere to the [Girl Scout Internet Safety Pledge](#), the [Digital Cookie Pledge](#), the [Supplemental Safety Tips for Online Marketing](#), and Girl Scouts' Safety Activity Checkpoints for [Computer and Internet Use](#) and [Cookie and Product Sales](#) (with the exception that they may share beyond friends and family).
- Girl sales links should never be posted to resale sites (Craigslist, eBay, Facebook Marketplace, etc.).
- Girls must adhere to all terms and conditions on Digital Cookie and Smart Cookie platforms. For copies of terms and conditions, please contact GSUSA, ABC, Little Brownie, or M2 as needed.

- GSUSA reserves the right to remove or disable the link for any reason including violation of guidance, inventory fulfillment issues, safety issues, or if sales and marketing activity goes viral and otherwise creates unanticipated disruption.

Additionally, families, girls, and volunteers should contact and collaborate with their councils and GSUSA in advance on any national news media opportunities tied to girls' online marketing and sales efforts.

The Buddy System

Using the buddy system, girls are divided into teams of two. Each girl is responsible for staying with her buddy at all times, warning her buddy of danger, giving her buddy immediate assistance if safe to do so, and seeking help if needed. Girls are encouraged to stay near the group or buddy with another team of two so that in the event someone is injured, one person cares for the patient while two others seek help.

Preparing for Your Girl Scout Cookie Booth

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

Create a great cookie booth experience for your girls by:

- Using your best judgment in setting up cookie booths in locations that will be open, accessible, and safe for all girls and potential customers.
- Choosing a high-traffic area—this could be your local supermarket, mall, or park—where you'll maximize the number of visitors to your booth.
- Checking out your booth site ahead of the sale. Talk to business owners in the area so they'll know what to expect. Find out what security measures are in place—these may include lights for evening sales and whether a security camera watches the booth area—and where the nearest bathrooms are located.
- Respecting the surrounding businesses by making sure your booth isn't blocking a store entrance or exit.
- Encouraging your girls to unleash their creativity—and work on their advertising skills—to make colorful signs and booth decorations that potential customers can't resist! Remind girls to be polite and to have their sales pitch ready for interested customers.

And keep in mind:

- A minimum of two volunteers (at least one of whom is a registered Girl Scout volunteer with the required background check) and one girl should be present at the booth at all times. With two or more volunteers, you'll have adequate booth coverage if the girls need to be accompanied to the restroom.
- If your Daisies are still learning how to make correct change, help them handle money as needed. But remember that girls make all sales at the booth!
- Changing your cookie booth hours or location? Keep your customers in the loop and update your baker's Digital Cookie or Smart Cookie system with the new details. All scheduled booths are available on the Cookie Finder App ([iOS](#) or [Android](#)).
- Certain locations may be inappropriate for young girls based on the standards of your local community, may negatively impact the cookie program experience for girls, and/or may negatively impact our brand in your community. For additional clarity, girls should not sell in or in front of establishments that they themselves cannot legally patronize.

- Additionally, with respect to marijuana dispensaries, we have been steadfastly combating the unauthorized uses of the Girl Scout trademark by the cannabis community, which has been marketing—without our authorization—certain cannabis products under our youth-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 booths at such locations.

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

Cookie Donation Programs

Cookies also help girls make a big impact in their community! Girl Scouts of Gulfcoast Florida has an established cookie donation program where customers can purchase cookies that will be donated to the military. This program is called Mints for the Military. Cookie donations are not only a great talking point for girls to share with their customers—they’re also a thoughtful way to show girls how cookies can help them give back.

With cookie donations, remember that:

- All cookie donation programs must be approved by your council.
- Donated cookies must stay within the council jurisdiction unless your council has approval from other council jurisdictions.
- Donated products cannot be resold and must be used in a responsible and ethical way.
- Donated products must be 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

The Girl Scout Cookie Program has always been about and focused on the program outcomes through which girls learn important entrepreneurial and life skills and invest their earnings to positively affect their local communities. The cookie program has never been about and does not focus on individual girls’ sales results.

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

Troop Finances

How do girls become financially empowered women? Through the [Girl Scout Leadership Experience](#) (GSLE), that's how! Your Girl Scout troop should plan and finance its own activities, and you'll coach your girls as they earn and manage troop funds. Troop activities are powered by proceeds earned through council-sponsored product program activities (such as the Girl Scout Cookie Program), group money-earning activities (council approved, of course!), and any dues your troop may charge.

With your guidance, girls will learn key money skills that will serve them throughout their lives.

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

Establishing a Troop Account

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

Here are a few helpful tips:

- Girl Scouts of Gulfcoast Florida has a partnership with Wells Fargo. This is the only banking institution where troops establish an account. There are council-specific instructions for setting up the troop bank account. These procedures are shared with account holders as a part of the onboarding process.
- 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 is opened as a "Simple Business Checking Account" which comes with a debit card that you can use during activities or trips. These transactions are easier to track at the end of the year.
- Be prepared like a Girl Scout, and make sure another troop volunteer has a debit card accessible 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. Each troop must submit finance reports annually by June 1.

Troop Disbanding 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 girl. Before disbanding, ask your girls how they want to pay it forward: they may decide to donate any unused funds to their service unit or another troop or to pay for girl activities. Girl activities can include purchasing materials to support another organization through Take Action projects. Use the [Troop Merge/Disbanding Process](#).

Closing the Troop Account

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

Money-Earning Basics for Troops

Troops flex their financial muscles in two distinct ways:

- [The Girl Scout Cookie Program and other sales](#) of Girl Scout–authorized products (such as calendars, magazines, or nuts and candy) organized by your council. All girl members are eligible to participate in two council-sponsored product program activities each year with volunteer supervision: the cookie program and one other council-authorized product program . Please remember, volunteers and Girl Scout council staff don't sell cookies and other products—girls do.
- Group money-earning activities organized by the troop (not by the council) that are planned and carried out by girls (in partnership with volunteers) and that earn money for the group.

Participation Guidance

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

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

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 girls through the product program activities must support Girl Scout program experiences (such as camp, travel, and program events, but not scholarships or financial credits toward outside organizations).
- Rewards are based on sales ranges set by councils and may not be based on a dollar-per-dollar calculation.
- Troops are encouraged to participate in council product programs as their primary money-earning activity; any group money earning shouldn't compete with the Girl Scout Cookie Program or other council product programs.
- Brownie through Ambassador troops must obtain written approval from your council before a group money-earning event; submit a [request](#) for approval.
- Girl Scouts discourages the use of games of chance. Any activity which could be considered a game of chance (raffles, contests, bingo) must be approved by the local Girl Scout council and be conducted in compliance with all local and state laws.

- Girl Scouts' [Blue Book](#) policy forbids girls from the direct solicitation of cash. Girls can collect partial payment toward the purchase of a package of Girl Scout Cookies and other Girl Scout–authorized products through participation in council-approved product program donation programs.
- Girl Scouts forbids product demonstration parties where the use of the Girl Scout trademark increases revenue for another business, such as in-home product parties. Any business using the Girl Scout trademark or other Girl Scout intellectual property must seek authorization from GSUSA.
- Group money-earning activities need to be suited to the ages and abilities of the girls and consistent with the principles of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience. Girl Scouts of Gulfcoast Florida does not endorse money-earning projects for Daisies.
- Money earned is for Girl Scout activities and is not to be retained by individuals. Girls can, however, be awarded incentives and/or may earn credits from their Girl Scout product programs. Funds acquired through group money-earning projects must be reported and accounted for by the group according to council procedures.

Sample Money-Earning Activities

Collections/Drives

- Cell phones for refurbishment
- Used ink cartridges turned in for money

Food/Meal Events

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

Service(s)

- Babysitting (holidays, council events, service unit meetings, trainings)
- Raking leaves, weeding, cutting grass, walking pets
- Cooking class or other specialty class
- Car wash
- Gift wrapping
- Host an event for Girl Scouts

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

Help Your Troop Reach Its Financial Goals

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

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

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

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

Financial Management and Product Program Abilities by Grade Level

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

Girl Scout Daisies

The group volunteer handles money, keeps financial records, and does all group budgeting.

Parents/guardians may decide they will contribute to the cost of activities.

Girls can participate in Girl Scout Cookie activities and other council-sponsored product programs.

Daisies are always paired with a volunteer when selling anything. Girls do the asking and deliver the product, but volunteers handle the money and keep the girls secure.

Girls should be given the opportunity to practice identifying money and counting back change with an adult during each transaction.

Girl Scout Brownies

The group volunteer handles money, keeps financial records, and shares some of the group-budgeting responsibilities.

Girls discuss the cost of activities (supplies, fees, transportation, rentals, and so on) with guidance from their volunteer(s).

Girls set goals for and participate in council-sponsored product programs.

Girls may decide to pay dues to contribute to the cost of activities.

Girl Scout Juniors

The group volunteer retains overall responsibility for long-term budgeting and record keeping, but shares or delegates all other financial responsibilities.

Girls set goals for and participate in council-sponsored product programs.

Girls decide on group dues, if any. Dues are collected by girls and recorded by a group treasurer selected by the girls.

Girls budget for the short-term needs of the group based on their plans and income from the group dues.

Girls budget for more long-term activities, such as overnight trips, group camping, and special events.

Girls budget for Take Action projects, including the Girl Scout Bronze Award, if they are pursuing it.

Girl Scout Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors

Girls estimate costs based on plans.

Girls determine the amount of group dues, if any, and the scope of money-earning projects.

Girls set goals for and participate in council-sponsored product programs.

Girls carry out budgeting, planning, and group money-earning projects.

Girls budget for extended travel, Take Action projects, and leadership projects.

Girls may be involved in seeking donations for Take Action projects with council approval.

Girls keep their own financial records and give reports to parents and group volunteers.

Girls budget for Take Action projects, including the Girl Scout Silver or Gold Awards, if they are pursuing them.

Working with Sponsors and Other Organizations

Every girl deserves an empowering leadership experience like Girl Scouts, and local sponsors can help councils make that vision a reality. Community organizations, businesses, religious organizations, and individuals may be sponsors and may provide group meeting places, volunteer their time, offer in-kind donations, provide activity materials, or loan equipment. Encourage your girls to celebrate a sponsor's contribution to the troop by sending thank-you cards, inviting the sponsor to a meeting or ceremony, or working together on a Take Action project.

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

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

Avoid Fundraising for Other Organizations

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

Steer Clear of Political Fundraisers

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

Be Respectful When Collaborating with Religious Organizations

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

Avoid Selling or Endorsing Commercial Products

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

Safety in Girl Scouting

In Girl Scouting, the emotional and physical safety and well-being of girls is our top priority. *Safety Activity Checkpoints* outlines the safety standards and guidelines used in Girl Scouting, which apply to *all* Girl Scout activities.

All volunteers should review the *Safety Activity Checkpoints* manual when planning activities with girls in order to manage safety and risk in Girl Scout-sanctioned activities.

In *Safety Activity Checkpoints*, you'll find:

- Girl Scout Activity safety standards and guidelines with requirements for adult supervision, permission slips, preparation, field trips and overnight trips, and other vital information
- Activities that are not permitted by GSUSA, and actions that girls and volunteers should not take
- Policies surrounding chartered aircraft trips and aviation
- First-aid and overall health information you'll need from the girls
- Standards for well-being and inclusivity, including working with girls with disabilities and ensuring emotional safety

- A breakdown of specific activities—such as camping, internet use, and water sports—and their individual safety checkpoints

Following the safety standards and guidelines is an activity chart that details two critical points to keep in mind:

- Age-appropriate activities and participation by grade level
- Whether prior approval from your council is required before girls participate in a specific activity

Knowing How Many Volunteers You Need

From camping weekends to cookie booths, adult volunteers must always be present to ensure their girls have fun and stay safe, no matter their grade level.

Not sure just how many adults you'll need for your activity? The following chart breaks down the minimum number of volunteers needed to supervise a specific number of girls; councils may also establish maximums due to size or cost restrictions, so be sure to check with them as you plan your activity.

	Group Meetings		Events, Travel, and Camping	
	<i>Two</i> unrelated volunteers (at least one of whom is female) for up to this number of girls:	<i>One</i> additional volunteer to each additional:	<i>Two</i> unrelated volunteers (at least one of whom is female) for up to this number of girls:	<i>One</i> additional volunteer to each additional:
Girl Scout Daisies (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

Returning to In-Person Troop Meetings and Activities: Interim COVID-19 Guidance for Volunteers

Girl Scouts of Gulfcoast Florida, Inc. is committed to providing regular updates regarding COVID-19 guidance. Please click here for the [most up-to-date information and guidelines.](#)