



ENGAGING FAMILIES

Creating the kind of environment in which girls are unafraid to try new things and to be who they want to be starts with you! By meeting your girls where they are, you’ll help them develop the leadership skills they’ll use 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 will 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 will 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.	They’ll enjoy going on nature walks and outdoor scavenger hunts.
Are great builders and budding artists, though they are still developing their fine motor skills.	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.
Love to move and dance.	They might especially enjoy marching like a penguin, dancing like a dolphin, or acting out how they might care for animals in the jungle.
Are concrete thinkers and focused on the here and now.	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.
Are only beginning to learn about basic number concepts, time, and money.	You’ll want to take opportunities to count out supplies together—and, perhaps, the legs on a caterpillar!
Are just beginning to write and spell, and they don’t always have the words for what they’re thinking or feeling.	That having girls draw a picture of something they are trying to communicate is easier and more meaningful for them.
Know how to follow simple directions and respond well to recognition for doing so.	Being specific and offering only one direction at a time. Acknowledge when girls have followed directions well to increase their motivation to listen and follow again.

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.	Taking your session activities outside whenever possible.
Are social and enjoy working in groups.	Allowing girls to team up in small or large groups for art projects and performances.
Want to help others and appreciate being given individual responsibilities for a task.	Letting girls lead, direct, and help out in activities whenever possible. Allow girls as a group to make decisions about individual roles and responsibilities.
Are concrete thinkers and focused on the here and now.	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.
Need clear directions and structure and like knowing what to expect.	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.
Are becoming comfortable with basic number concepts, time, money, and distance.	Offering support only when needed. Allow girls to set schedules for meetings or performances, count out money for a trip, and so on.
Are continuing to develop their fine motor skills and can tie shoes, use basic tools, begin to sew, and the like.	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.
Love to act in plays, create music, and dance.	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.
Know how to follow rules, listen well, and appreciate recognition of a job done well.	Acknowledging when the girls have listened or followed the directions well, which will increase their motivation to listen and follow again!

Girl Scout Juniors

At the Girl Scout Junior level (fourth and fifth grades), girls . . .	This means . . .
Want to make decisions and express their opinions.	Whenever possible, allowing girls to make decisions and express their opinions through guided discussion and active reflection activities. Also, have girls set rules for listening to others' opinions and offering assistance in decision making.
Are social and enjoy doing things in groups.	Allowing girls to team up in small or large groups for art projects, performances, and written activities.
Are aware of expectations and sensitive to the judgments of others.	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.
Are concerned about equity and fairness.	Not shying away from discussing why rules are in place and having girls develop their own rules for their group.
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.	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.
Have strong fine and gross motor skills and coordination.	Engaging girls in moving their minds and their bodies. Allow girls to express themselves through the written word, choreography, and so on.
Love to act in plays, create music, and dance.	Girls might like to tell a story through playwriting, playing an instrument, or choreographing a dance.
May be starting puberty, which means beginning breast development, skin changes, and weight changes. Some may be getting their periods.	Being sensitive to girls' changing bodies, possible discomfort over these changes, and their desire for more information. Create an environment that acknowledges and celebrates this transition as healthy and normal for girls.

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.	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.
Are starting to spend more time in peer groups than with their families and are very concerned about friends and relationships with others their age.	That girls will enjoy teaming up in small or large groups for art projects, performances, and written activities as well as tackling relationship issues through both artistic endeavors and Take Action projects.
Can be very self-conscious—wanting to be like everyone else but fearing they are unique in their thoughts and feelings.	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.
Are beginning to navigate their increasing independence and expectations from adults at school and at home.	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.

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.	Asking girls to explain the reasoning behind their decisions. Engage girls in role-play and performances, where others can watch and offer alternative solutions.
Have strong problem-solving and critical thinking skills and are able to plan and reflect on their own learning experiences.	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.
Spend more time in peer groups than with their families and are very concerned about friends and relationships with others their age.	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.
Frequently enjoy expressing their individuality.	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.
Feel they have lots of responsibilities and pressures—from home, school, peers, work, and other sources.	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.
Are continuing to navigate their increasing independence and expectations from adults at school and at home.	Trusting girls to plan and make key decisions, allowing them to experience "fun failure," which is learning from trying something new and making mistakes.

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.	Inviting girls to develop stories as a group and then individually create endings that they later discuss and share.
Have strong problem-solving and critical thinking skills and can adapt logical thinking to real-life situations. Ambassadors recognize and incorporate practical limitations to solutions.	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.
Spend more time with peers than with their families and are very concerned about friends and relationships with others their age.	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.
Frequently enjoy expressing their individuality.	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.
Feel they have lots of responsibilities and pressures—from home, school, peers, work, and other sources.	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.
Are continuing to navigate their increasing independence and expectations from adults—at school and at home—and are looking to their futures.	Trusting girls to plan and make key decisions, allowing them to experience “fun failure,” which is learning from trying something new and making mistakes.

Engaging Families

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

Kick the Year Off Right by Engaging Parents and Other Caregivers

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

What Is a Parent and Caregiver Meeting?

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

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

The meeting helps:

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

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

How to Keep Parents and Caregivers Engaged

Make the Ask(s)

The main reason people don't take action is because they were never asked to in the first place. That's why hearing one out of three Girl Scout parents say no one had communicated expectations around involvement with their girl's troop is so troubling. Parents may have many talents, but they're certainly not mind readers.

If you're nervous about getting turned down, don't be. Sure, a few parents might be unable to lend a hand, but the helpers you do get will be worth their weight in gold. 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.

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 to the troop.

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