

Preventing & Managing Conflict

Conflicts and disagreements are an inevitable part of life, and when handled constructively can actually enhance communication and relationships. At the very least, Girl Scouts are expected to practice self-control and diplomacy so that conflicts do not erupt into regrettable incidents. 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 and in a nonjudgmental manner. (Each party may need some time—a few days or a week—to calm down before being able to do this.) Although talking in this way can be uncomfortable and difficult, it does lay 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.

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, contact your council if you need extra help.

Preventing Problems

The easiest way to deal with conflicts is to prevent them from happening! In Girl Scouting, we use many techniques to accomplish this:

- **Team Agreements (Ground Rules):** It's a good idea to have the troop establish expectations and agree on consequences at the very beginning. The troop agreement can be revisited throughout the year to see if it needs any adjustment.
 - Girls should be involved in making them.
 - Rules/consequences should be settled in advance at a calm time.
 - Girls and adults must agree to them (some rules are non-negotiable, especially those relating to safety).
 - It's a good idea to post the rules at meetings as a reminder to all.
 - It's a good idea to relate rules to the Girl Scout Promise and Law.

	Opening	Hostesses	Clean Up	Closing
Sept. 15				
Sept. 30				
Oct. 15				
Oct. 31				
	Ladybugs: Laura R. Sabrina Sofia Hayley Lauren	Songbirds: Jessica Taylor Daniela Rebecca Kristin	Puppies: Christina Stephanie Brooke Brittany Suan	Frogs: Karen Lizzie Marie Sarah Deena

- **Use Kaper Charts:** This allows for a fair way to divide up chores, avoids the appearance of playing favorites or having the leader's daughter get stuck with more than her share, and also gives a way to mix up the girls to help them get to know each other better. You can make Kaper charts in a variety of ways. You can also use Kaper charts to rotate tasks for individual girls or to rotate adult responsibilities (and even schedule breaks).
- **Teambuilding Activities and Games:** Ensuring that the girls have an opportunity to get to know each other is important. This can be done by providing opportunities to work in small groups and pairs, rotating them frequently. Cooperative games can also help the girls in your troop 'be a sister to every Girl Scout'.
- **Changing Activities Frequently:** Changing activities often can help a variety of problems. Girls, especially young ones, have short attention spans. Savvy adults know that if girls start picking at each other or having problems getting along, that is time to pull out something new to do and possibly change the groups around.
- **Split the girls up into groups for activities:** This allows the opportunity to put girls together who potentially might be good friends (great idea for shy girls or if you have a girl or girls who don't yet have friends in the troop), separate girls who are having interpersonal difficulties before the problem escalates, and allows girls the opportunity to get to know all of the girls, rather than always sticking with those one or two "best friends".
- **Do It/Did It:** Start with two cans and all girls' names (on popsicle sticks) in the Do It can. Draw a name from the can when you need a line leader, the person to be "It" in a game, or the person who gets to do the special thing that everyone wants to do. Put that person's

name in the Did It can. Start over when everyone has had a turn. (Can also use slips of paper in a bag).

- **Program Resources:** The adult Journey guides have lots of ideas for how to do activities. There are also fun badges in the Girl's Guide to Girl Scouting that foster teambuilding and developing inclusive behavior and empathy in girls.
- **Talking Sign:** When a girl wishes to speak during a discussion, she taps her raised index and middle fingers (two fingers) in front of her on the floor or on the table.
- **Talking Stick:** Have a special stick (could be broomstick size or smaller, could decorate) or other item and the only person who can talk is the one holding it. During certain types of discussions, the discussion leader (could be a girl) holds on to the other end and does not let go so she can get it back when needed to hand it to another person.

Positive Reinforcement Techniques

- **CFL (Caught Following the Law) Stickers:** (Could print CFL with a smiley face on computer return address labels). Walk around during the meeting and stick on those who are 'caught' following the Girl Scout Law. Don't use them at every meeting and the girls will never know when they will get one.
- **Marble Jar:** You will need a small jar and some marbles or some other small objects to fill the jar. You can pre-determine reasons objects are placed in the jar, e.g. everyone turning in permission slips on time, bringing asked for materials, etc. You place objects into the jar for these rewards, and you take objects out of the jar for misbehavior. When the jar is full, they receive a reward: a party, field trip, etc.
- **Quiet Sign Leader:** (or anyone who wishes to get the group's attention) quietly raises right hand. The girls should learn that they then also raise their hands, and "when your hand goes up, your mouth goes shut."

Managing Problems

If an activity is not going well, it's a great idea to stop and have the troop talk about it. Would the troop like to take a break? Adjust the activity? Stop the activity and do something else? Did the girls choose this activity? Is it turning out as well as they thought it would? This is a great opportunity to let the girls make some girl-led decisions about what should happen next.

Sometimes it is a good idea for adults to step back and ask themselves whether it really is a problem for the girls to be giggling while doing an activity, being noisy, taking creative license on a project, taking "too long", or not participating in a planned project. Is it really bothering anyone besides you? Do they really need to finish it at all? Girl Scouting is supposed to be fun, and should feel more relaxed than school.

Consequences for Negative Behavior

Discuss the following ideas with the girls when they are creating their Team Agreement to see if they are interested in trying any of them.

- **Doghouse:** Have a small dog figurine, make a doghouse out of a small box. As long as girls are doing well at meeting the dog stays out of the doghouse to enjoy their activities. When the girls are not following rules, become too loud, etc. the dog retreats to his doghouse to get away. The dog usually will retreat into his house for 5 minutes before he peeks out to check on the girls.
- **Blue Spot:** The "Blue Spot" can be just a blue piece of construction paper. If someone is breaking a rule or is overly disruptive, the leader (without stopping the activity, and usually without a word) calmly hands the Blue Spot to the girl. She would then take the Blue Spot to a designated place away from everyone and sit until she felt ready to rejoin the group (or a specified few minutes). Occasionally, you may ask if a girl feels like she needs the blue spot and let her make the decision herself.
- **Situation Jar:** Ask each girl to write some "unacceptable situations" on slips of paper. Discuss these situations together as a troop, and after each has been discussed, place the slip into the jar. When the troop is satisfied that they have thought of all the situations they can, they then all agree to avoid these situations. Situations can be added as the year progresses and as they arise. You might ask: "Is this a situation for our jar?" and then write it on a slip of paper and add it to the jar. You might have an individual girl go to the jar, write the situation and add it to the jar. This accomplishes two things: it makes her aware of the situation, and also gives her a chance to remove herself from the situation and creates a "time out" (a time to refocus).
- **Three Strikes:** A strike is represented by a ticket. If a girl is breaking the rules, etc., just quietly go over to her with no comment, and place a ticket in front of her. Continue what you are doing. If she continues, place a second ticket in front of her. If it is necessary to place the third and final ticket, she is then instructed to call for a ride home.

If a girl is acting out, or if girls are having interpersonal difficulties, if possible the adult volunteer team should take a moment to privately discuss how best to handle the situation. Here are a few reminders:

- Whenever possible, handle issues privately with girls. Each girl must always be treated with respect. Often, behavior problems or acting out may be a result of difficult situations in a girl's life or simply a bad day.
- Keep your cool! If you find yourself tempted to act or speak in anger, have one of the other adults handle the situation.
- In conflicts, both sides of the story or issue must be heard.
- Girls should talk about their feelings and differences and resolve their own problems as much as possible.
- Avoid calling undue attention to the girl(s) involved. If possible, don't stop the activity or what you're doing, and instead have one of the adults speak privately with those involved.
- Never discuss one girl with another (especially with your own daughter) or with another adult who is not part of the leadership team. Issues and conflicts must be kept confidential.
- Program resources can be used to promote conflict resolution and active listening. Use the values in the Girl Scout Promise and Law as behavioral guidelines.

- Involve a girl's parents or guardians in problem-solving. They may be able to help give ideas for effective strategies, or may be able to help you understand a girl's personality or temperament better, or if there may be any issues that might be contributing to the situation.
- Consult with local volunteers (remember to protect confidentiality) or council staff for creative ideas or solutions.

Be aware that acting out or other inappropriate behavior can be a symptom of emotional or physical child abuse.

Volunteers are not "mandatory reporters" under California law, but should consider themselves morally responsible to report any suspected child abuse. Note that you do not have to be convinced that abuse is definitely occurring—if the thought crosses your mind and you think there is a possibility that it could be true, then this means that you suspect abuse.

If you suspect child abuse, contact a council staff member for assistance. Staff members are mandated reporters, and have been trained in reporting suspected child abuse.