

Camp Culture Code & DEIB Guide

At Girl Scout Camp, we all commit to actively building a sense of belonging for all of our community members. We ask all staff, volunteers, parents, caregivers, and youth to commit to working towards the practices of LGBTQIA+ Allyship, Antiracism, and Anti-Oppression.

The Girl Scouts of Northern California (GSNorCal) Camp Team has prepared the following Camp Culture Code & Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Guide to help better prepare campers, families, and staff for some of the unique questions, concerns, and opportunities for inclusion that come up in the residential space of camp.

Camp Culture: What to Expect

Camp is a place where everyone should feel comfortable being their authentic self. As the youth mental health crisis grows increasingly urgent, GSNorCal dedicates ourselves to making all youth feel seen, heard, and safe. In the residential space of camp, this culture is especially empowering for youth. Our campers develop the confidence to love who they are, to feel that they are valued, and to experience the warmth and kindness of peers and adults.

Camp is a community. The community of camp is unique; it is shaped by the physical, outdoor space of camp, the independent and teambuilding nature of our activities, and the welcoming environment that we strive to create. This means that camp has its own distinct culture. Your camper should expect to be immersed in an environment that encourages:

- Personal responsibility: Campers take care of themselves, camp, and one another.
- Respect and joy in nature: Campers learn environmental stewardship and share space with bugs and critters.
- Unplugging and focusing on being present: Campers will not have access to electronics.
- Self-exploration: Campers try new things, explore their identity, and gain confidence.
- Teamwork: Campers work together as part of a team in their camp residence and activity groups and work with a spirit of collaboration and community.
- Respect, inclusivity, and belonging: Campers and staff strive to create a safe space with an open mind and heart to learn about and respect one another's lived experiences and identities, practice being an ally, and to create a sense of belonging for all. This means that we will not tolerate passing any type of judgment about another's gender identity or expression, religious or spiritual beliefs, or other beliefs or lived experiences as "right" or "wrong", or failing to acknowledge one another's pronouns.

How do today's camp traditions foster belonging?

Summer camp as an industry is often steeped in tradition and rituals. GSNorCal Camps have made a concentrated effort to dismantle traditions and rituals that are othering, offensive, or triggering. Each year, we review the songs and games we engage in to ensure that they are welcoming to all. Our daily ceremonies, including flag ceremonies, no longer include pledges, vows, or symbolism that is not positive for everyone; instead, we focus on greeting one another and celebrating a new day of fun together at camp.

This means that new campers can expect a welcoming environment where they will not feel left out because they don't already know traditions, and returning campers will get to experience new activities everyday within a daily structure that feels familiar and reassuring to them.

Alumnae may not see all the activities that they remember as a camper, as we acknowledge that some of those activities caused harm. The fun, friendship, community, and outdoor experience are the focus of the program, and that remains.

Gender Identity and Expression

Camp extends opportunities to campers and staff who identify with the girl experience. Girl Scouts serves campers who have been historically marginalized and systemically excluded from outdoor spaces. This can and does include cisgender girls, gender-expansive youth/ non-binary youth, and trans-female and trans-male youth.

Key Terms

- Gender Identity – a person's psychological sense of self. This is how a person has come to understand themselves to be. This may or may not align with their sex assigned at birth.
- Sex assigned at birth – A term that a medical professional uses to describe a child at birth based on their external anatomy.
- Gender Expression – How someone presents themselves on the outside. This may be expressed by the way someone acts or their clothing, and is typically associated with presenting either masculine or feminine.
- Gender-Expansive – a person who may have a more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the gender binary.
- Non-binary – Describes a person who identifies outside of the gender binary. Non-binary people may identify as being neither a man or a woman, male or female, boy or girl, both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories entirely.
- Cisgender - A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned to them at birth.
- Transgender – A term used to describe people whose gender identity and/or expression differs from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation.
 - Trans-Female - a trans female is a woman/girl who was assigned male at birth
 - Trans-Male - a trans male is a man/boy who was assigned female at birth
- Queer - An umbrella identity term used by people who do not conform to norms of heterosexuality and/or the gender binary.

Will my camper be at Girl Scout camp with boys?

Our camps are committed to serving all youth who identify with the girl experience. Our camps serve cisgender girls, gender-expansive youth, non-binary youth, and trans-female and trans-male youth. As members of the Girl Scout community, we embrace a youth-centered approach to notions of sex and gender. Some kids who attend camp have come to understand their gender identity does not align with female. Camp is a space where identities and pronouns are respected and celebrated; children should not have to keep their identity a secret to retain a place in our program. To this end, we have expanded our understanding of who belongs at Girl Scout camp, as well as our commitment to serving all youth who identify with the girl experience.

Are all of the camp staff women?

No. Staff applicants are encouraged to apply without regard to gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation. Our staff reflect a spectrum of gender identities and have a wide range of lived experiences.

What about bathrooms and showers?

Privacy is an essential and fundamental right to everyone at camp. This includes toilets, changing areas, and showers, which are all-gender. Showers and bathroom stalls are single use. At no point are bathrooms occupied by staff and campers at the same time. Campers and staff members can also utilize lockable bathroom stalls as private changing spaces.

What about bunks?

There is only one body per bed at camp. Beds are considered private spaces that are not shared with others. Campers have separate sleeping spaces from staff members. If a camper needs the attention of a staff member during the night, they will have access to the staff member cabin/sleeping area.

Campers are grouped in living units by age and not by gender identity.

What is the Swimsuit Policy?

For the emotional safety and equity of all our campers, our swimsuit policy for camp includes both a top and a bottom covering for all campers and staff members, regardless of gender identity. Some examples of this may look like a rash-guard and boardshorts, a bathing suit top and bottom (navels do not need to be covered, but chests do), or some combination of the two. This policy is also extended to camp staff.

Will my camper be asked to share their pronouns?

Yes. However, we will never force anyone to disclose or discuss these aspects of their identity. Counselors will model by sharing their pronouns and we will ask how your camper would like us to refer to them during their time at camp and to share their pronouns if they are comfortable doing so. As with everything at camp, sharing pronouns is “challenge by choice”; campers who would prefer not to share will not be pushed to.

It is the camper’s decision who they disclose information about their identity to. We value the relationships and trust we build with campers while at camp. For this reason, we will not break the trust and confidentiality of the camper unless it pertains to their own or others’ safety. This includes, but is not limited to, anything the camper discloses with regards to their gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation. We encourage campers to share their identities with people at home if and when they feel safe doing so.

What is your approach if gender identity topics are raised at camp?

We respect and nurture belonging and safe spaces for every camper by respecting their gender identity and expression. If questions or issues about gender identity arise among campers, staff are trained to address the questions or issues with respect and in an age-appropriate manner.

Sexual Orientation

Sometimes, families and campers may be confused about how gender identity and expression and sexual orientation differ. Gender identity and expression is a topic we openly discuss at camp and sexual orientation is a topic we do not actively discuss.

- Gender Identity is about how *you* feel about *yourself*. It doesn't involve anyone else and should be respected at all times.
- Sexual Orientation is about how you feel about others, referring to who someone feels romantically and/or emotionally attracted to. Unlike gender identity, it is a topic that is largely irrelevant to most youth programming.
 - About Key Terms: There are many identifiers that correspond to people's individual romantic or sexual orientations. Examples include straight, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, pan-sexual, etc. What identifier suits an individual is a personal choice.
 - Queer is an umbrella identity term used by people who do not conform to norms of heterosexuality and/or the gender binary.

What is your approach if sexual orientation topics are raised at camp?

There is no need to "out" or discuss a camper's (or staff member's) sexual orientation, and we do not initiate discussions about sexual orientation or sexuality at camp. We know that questions and conversations sometimes arise organically at camp about "crushes" or attraction, and we are respectful and non-judgmental regarding everyone's romantic and sexual orientations.

Although sexual orientation can be a part of someone's identity, conversations surrounding romantic intimacy are not appropriate at camp, and staff are trained to intervene in these instances with respect and in an age-appropriate manner.

Physical and Mental Health Accommodations and Practices

Our Camp Directors work directly with families to identify accommodation that can be made in order to meet the needs of every camper, focusing on their strengths, gifts and assets. We are dedicated to meeting each child's needs and making them feel included and have a sense of belonging at camp.

What physical accommodations are available?

We have three council-run resident camp sites in Soquel, Arnold, and Fairfax, CA. All locations are in rustic environments and while some parts of camp are ADA accessible, not all parts are. You can explore our sites [HERE](#) to determine which would be the best fit for you and your camper.

What is your approach if my child is having mental health challenges (sadness, depression, anxiety, panic, etc.)?

GSNorCal Camp Staff receive extensive training on camper risk factors and behaviors, as well as trauma-informed care training and a Camp Mental Health First Aid Certification (through [L.E.A.D.](#)). These training courses equip staff with the tools to decelerate a child's anxiety, anger, or stress in the moment. They learn how to recognize and respond to a mental health crisis, promote and model self-care and good mental health habits, and help campers get the mental health help they need. Mental health concerns are escalated to our healthcare team, who will connect with the camper's family to determine the best course of action in the context of any previous treatment, the unique context of camp, and any professional recommendations.

If your camper attends therapy during the school year, and you would like them to continue to be able to do so at camp, please reach out to us; we would be happy to collaborate to schedule teletherapy.

For information about how our camps assist campers with navigating typical emotional challenges such as missing home, sadness, conflict, etc, please review your Camper Packet in CampInTouch.

How does camp support neurodiverse campers?

We provide personalized support plans, sensory-friendly activities, and structured routines to ensure every camper can fully participate and thrive. Additionally, we promote acceptance and celebrate the unique strengths of each individual, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment among all campers. After registration, families are encouraged to share their campers' needs with the camp team via their medical forms so that we are able to connect with them and create a one-on-one plan to best support their camper.

All campers participate in a communal contract system as part of their first day of camp, where they establish community expectations with one another for how they would like to be treated. Counselors monitor and facilitate these conversations with each of their camper's care plans in mind to ensure that all of their campers are encouraged to lead with empathy, understanding, and patience with one another.

What other accommodations are available?

In addition to the physical environment, camp is often a busy and loud place. At times, it may be overwhelming for youth who are neurodivergent or have sensory sensitivities. We will gladly talk through what to expect at camp with you and your child and can discuss accommodations to set them up for success.

If you have any questions or concerns about the accessibility of our camp properties due to physical, mental, social, or emotional needs of your camper, please contact the respective Camp Director.

Financial Access

GS NorCal recognizes that the cost of sending a child to camp is a significant consideration for families. We are dedicated to simplifying and streamlining the financial aid application process for our programs and camps in order to make the outdoors accessible.

How much financial aid will I receive?

Our financial aid program is robust and flexible. Campers pay sliding fees based on income eligibility and county. GSNorCal has evaluated Financial Aid limits based on cost-of-living data across our demographic footprint in an effort to be as equitable as possible. Below are the upper income limits for our service counties:

- For campers residing in Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo, and Santa Clara counties, financial aid is available to families with a household income under \$260,000 per year.
- For campers residing in Napa, Solano, and Sonoma counties, financial aid is available to families with a household income under \$180,000 per year.
- For campers residing in Butte, Del Norte, Glenn, Humboldt, Lake, Lassen, Mendocino, Shasta, Siskiyou, Tehama, and Trinity counties, financial aid is available to families with a household income under \$140,000 per year.

How do I apply for Financial Aid?

The Financial Aid application is seamlessly integrated into the registration process. When registering for camp through Camp-In-Touch, one of the first questions you will be asked is "Would you like to apply for financial aid?". When you select "yes", the system will reduce your deposit to a flat \$50 fee. This holds your camper's spot while your financial aid application is processed. After you complete registration, you will find the Financial Aid Form in your account to complete.

Racial and Ethnic Diversity

GSNorCal strives to promote equity by making active efforts to help Black people, Indigenous people, and People of Color (BIPOC)-identified community members to feel welcomed, included, and a sense of belonging in our camps and Girl Scout program.

How does camp address instances of discrimination or bias?

Our camp staff are trained (through [OAAARS](#) and [L.E.A.D](#)) to recognize and address discriminatory behavior, microaggressions, and bias. They are trained in restorative justice principles and equipped with the skills to lead campers and staff in conversations that allow all voices to be heard in order to build empathy and maintain equity in our camp community. Our staff also adhere to both state and federal laws regarding the reporting and handling of any violations pertaining to protected classes.

Are the camp staff racially diverse?

Our camp staff represent a range of cultures, genders, race/ethnicity, and countries of origin. That said, it is an undeniable fact that summer camp is a space that has historically excluded and systemically marginalized people of color, and it remains a space that is predominantly white. GSNorCal strives to recruit and hire a diverse staff each summer. We are still growing in this area.

We recognize that structural inequities related to family responsibilities and financial obligations create significant barriers for BIPOC staff working at camp, where wages are low industry-wide, and time commitments are substantial. To address this, we are striving to offer fairer wages and more flexible schedules for all staff members.

What is your approach if race-related questions come up at camp?

At our camp, we foster an environment where respectful discourse is encouraged. If race-related questions arise, we approach them with sensitivity and openness, facilitating constructive dialogue among campers and staff. These conversations center the voice of the individual who was harmed and acknowledge that we live in a racist and unjust world built on structural racism. We acknowledge and celebrate that our campers are coming to camp with diverse lived experiences. Our staff are trained to lead thoughtful discussions between campers about privilege, justice, race, and allyship when they arise.

Do you have a land acknowledgement?

All of our camps are on stolen native land. As we gather at our campsites in Arnold, residing on ancestral Central Sierra Me-Wuk land, in Soquel on Ohlone territory, and in Fairfax on MiWok ancestral land, we acknowledge the profound injustice and ongoing harm being inflicted upon Indigenous peoples. The lands on which we operate have been stewarded by these Indigenous peoples throughout the generations, and were taken through violence, displacement, and genocide, resulting in immeasurable loss and suffering for the Me-Wuk, Ohlone, and MiWok communities, respectively.

We recognize that this land acknowledgment, though necessary, is inherently performative and falls short of addressing the systemic injustices faced by Indigenous peoples. While we are acknowledging here the history of colonization and the continued struggles of Native communities, it's important to acknowledge that our team is behind and is mindful of the urgent need for genuine efforts to support Indigenous sovereignty, land repatriation, decolonization, and education, and to make forward movement on education and reparation.

Written in alignment with guidance from the [Native Governance Center](#).

Spirituality and Faith

Campers and staff are welcome and encouraged to express their full selves. For some, religion may be a big part of their personal identity. All personal identities are welcomed and celebrated at camp. While we invite every camper and staff member to share their experiences and feelings about the world around them, religion is only discussed at camp if the topic comes up organically. Staff are trained to supervise these conversations between campers and ensure that they are respectful.

It is an expectation of everyone in the camp community to respect one another. Respecting one another's beliefs means making space for them to believe what they do, without judgment. It does not mean that someone else needs to adjust their lifestyle or beliefs to align with someone else's. We firmly reject the notion that one individual's belief can invalidate another's identity. Disregarding someone's experience or identity causes harm, which is detrimental to fostering a positive camp community. Therefore, we have zero tolerance for any dismissal of someone's identity simply because it conflicts with religious beliefs.

Thank you.

Thank you for taking the time to read our Camp Culture Code & DEIB Guide and discuss it with your camper. We sincerely hope that this document reflects a community that you and your camper are excited about being a part of. If you have any additional questions, please reach out to your respective Camp Director. We look forward to seeing your camper at camp this summer.

Glossary of Terms

- Diversity - Psychological, physical, and social differences among individuals, including but not limited to gender identity and expression, race, ethnicity, nationality, income, education, marital status, religion, language, age, , sexual orientation, neurodiversity, and physical disability.
- Inclusion - The act of creating environments in which any individual or group feels welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate and bring their full authentic selves.
- Equity - The guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups.
- Belonging – A sense of feeling accepted and valued.
- Discrimination - the unfair or prejudicial treatment of people and groups based on characteristics including race, gender identity and expression, age, sexual orientation, disability, religion, family status, and national origin.
- Privilege- certain social advantages, benefits, or degrees of prestige and respect that an individual has by virtue of belonging to certain social identity groups that have historically occupied positions of dominance over others.
- Intersectionality- the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender within individuals that create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination, disadvantage, or advantage.
- Allyship- role of a person who advocates and actively works for the inclusion of a marginalized group, not as a member of that group but in solidarity with its struggle and point of view and under its leadership.
- Antiracism- the practice of proactively working towards dismantling racist views, cultures, and systemic practices that have historically oppressed, and continue to prevent BIPOC from participating, prospering, and reaching their full potential in our society. Systemic racism affects everyone, including our campers, and requires care and commitment to dismantle.