

Conflict Management Essentials for Volunteers

The goal for the staff and volunteers of Girl Scouts of Missouri Heartland is to provide a high-quality experience for our girls, while ensuring their safety and well-being. Our volunteers are active role models for our girls—who witness our actions, attitudes, and behaviors. Volunteers are instrumental in instilling the values that are clearly conveyed in the Girl Scout law, mission, and vision. It is a volunteer's own "Girl Scout Leadership Experience."

One key aspect of leadership is the ability to work with others and effectively use communication and teamwork to achieve the desired goals and outcomes. Differences of opinion, disagreements, and conflicts are inevitable parts of life. Conflict can lead to new ideas and approaches—it brings important issues to light and provides an opportunity for people to come together and create a solution or mutual agreement. The following conflict management essentials should be favored when resolving a conflict.

Try to talk it out directly. When conflict arises, parties involved are encouraged to sit down together and talk in a calm, nonjudgmental manner to resolve the disagreement. Although talking in this way can be uncomfortable and difficult, it does lay the groundwork for working well together in the future. Direct communication results in a better outcome than email and text messages, which should be avoided.

Refrain from posting about conflict on social media. Parties should refrain from posting comments on social media to maintain confidentiality and respect the dignity and rights of the individuals involved.

Keep it confidential. Confidentiality is an important part of any resolution process. Discussing the situation with others that are not in a position to assist in resolving the issue can end up being a source of embarrassment and anger for those involved. Also, involving third parties could result in significant delay in working past the issue and focusing on ensuring future interactions are positive and productive.

Keep it positive and private. Shouting, verbal abuse, or physical confrontations are never warranted and will not be tolerated in the Girl Scout environment. Children and youth should not be present at adult resolution meetings.

What You Can Do

When you perceive a conflict within your troop, be it parent/volunteer, volunteer/volunteer, or parent/parent, make an appointment with the parties involved to remind them of their shared interest in ensuring their girls have an excellent Girl Scout experience. Just remember:

1. Listen to what is being said. Be mindful of body language. Take notes even and ask questions.
2. If you are mediating between two parties, hear both parties out separately prior to the meeting and then bring them together. If you are one of the parties involved, try to put yourself in the other person's shoes and work together to uncover solutions that could result in mutual gain and have the best possible outcome for all parties.
3. Be direct. Many girls have been told since they were young to "play nice." That might mean softening our speech or assuring someone that something "isn't a big deal" even when it is. Don't tiptoe around important troop matters or apologize for doing what needs to be done for your troop. You can be both polite and assertive at the same time.
4. Efforts to resolve conflict should focus on facts, not people. Focus on specific events, how they negatively impacted, or could have negatively impacted, a fellow Girl Scout.
5. Set clear expectations. Conflict often arises as a result of confusion regarding roles, responsibilities, and expectations. Create a written agreement that specifies what the expectation is and what will happen moving forward.
6. Focus on the positive! Working through and getting past these conflicts now means for a stronger, healthier relationship later.

That Didn't Work, Now What?

If efforts have been made to resolve the situation but prove ineffective, any of the involved parties can reach out to their New Leader Specialist (NLS) or Troop and Service Unit Support Specialist (TSS) for guidance and support with self-resolution. If all steps have been taken to resolve the situation informally, but the matter is still not resolved, the NLS or TSS will then complete the *Conflict Resolution Request* to start the conflict resolution process.

Conflict Resolution Process

A GSMH Customer Service Specialist (CSS) will begin the information gathering process. This process can include: phone calls, emails, in-person meetings with parties involved, interviewing witnessing parties, and involvement of other GSMH departments, such as Finance and Product Program, as needed. At this point, the CSS will act as an impartial mediator that will support the parties in creating a mutually agreed upon plan of action that outlines expectations regarding each party's future behavior regarding the source of conflict. In the absence of mutual agreement, the CSS will work to establish a fair and balanced course of action.

Failure to reach a resolution at this level will result in the CSS consulting with director level and above, and may result in actions up to and including the release from volunteer appointment of one or both parties involved. This decision will not be made lightly. A volunteer may have their appointment terminated by GSMH because of, but not limited to:

- Refusal to comply with GSMH or GSUSA policies.
- Conduct inconsistent with the principles of the Girl Scout Movement as indicated by the Girl Scout Promise and Law.
- Inability to perform or fulfill duties of the position as outlined in the Volunteer Position Description.
- Unsatisfactory completion of objectives and corrective action regarding their role.
- Refusal or failure to adhere to financial guidelines of GSMH.
- Registered sex offender status or crimes against a child.

In coming to a resolution, it is important to focus on possible solutions rather than desired personal outcomes. Solutions should be defined actions that are specific, achievable, comprehensive, and final. The solution should have an evaluation process and subsequent actions for non-compliance. In all resolutions, it is expected to identify and do what is best for the girls.

If any party is not satisfied with the resolution process, there is an opportunity for review as outlined in the GSMH volunteer policies.

Guide to Navigating Troop Conflict

Girl Scouts is a one-of-a-kind leadership development program that is committed to building girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place. When girls are empowered to identify and solve conflict in their own lives, they become confident in their abilities to make good decisions and can build healthy and lasting relationships. When guiding girls in their Girl Scout journeys, successfully navigating conflicts can provide opportunities for growth not only in yourself, but also in your troop.

Girl Behavior

Instilling girls with the skills they need to be leaders can be challenging. Girls at all grade levels can, from time to time, exhibit behaviors that can disrupt troop activities and have a negative impact on the experiences of the entire troop. Recognize that many of these behaviors are merely ways to gain attention. But, if you give girls an opportunity to lead and keep them involved in the conflict resolution process, they'll learn how to handle life's challenges independently.

Appreciate the power of prevention! Take the following steps to set clear expectations and establish boundaries regarding acceptable behaviors within your troop:

1. **Review the Family Conduct Agreement regularly as a troop.** Share this document with parents so that expectations may be discussed at home. Ensure parents/guardians and girls sign the Family Conduct Agreement.
2. **Create a troop agreement.** Allowing the girls to participate in and deciding what should go into the agreement based on how they should be treated, and their own values will establish ground rules for behaviors that will support an efficient meeting. When the girls are included in creating the ground rules, they will not only be more likely to follow them but will also increase the likelihood that they will hold one another accountable if the rules are broken. Help the girls establish appropriate consequences for breaking these rules. The troop agreement may be posted as a reminder next to the Girl Scout Promise and Law in your meeting space.
3. **Be prepared at meetings.** Preparing in advance and talking with co-volunteers and helpers about the meeting's agenda ahead of time will keep the meeting moving along and the girls on-task.
4. **Arrive early.** Arriving early and being ready to start before the girls arrive allows you time to greet the girls as they arrive and make them feel welcome.
5. **Establish an order for your meetings.** By establishing a routine order of events during meetings, girls will understand expectations and know what comes next. The creation of a routine will increase cooperation and initiative from the girls.
6. **Encourage participation in decision making and goal setting.** When girls are involved in the process, they are more likely to be engaged and less likely to jeopardize activities through misbehavior.

Suggestions for Addressing Girl Behavior

Praise in public, correct in private. Providing on the spot praise for exhibiting a positive behavior or a job well done provides reinforcement to both the girl and the troop as a demonstration of what good behavior looks like. Praise should be specific, sincere, and as frequent as possible. Be mindful not only of your words, but your tone and body language to make sure they understand the value of their behavior.

On the occasion that correction is warranted, respond quickly and appropriately, so that the rest of the troop's routine is maintained with minimal disruption. You can start with non-verbal cues, gentle reminders addressed to the group or redirection. If these prove ineffective, use the tips below:

- **Provide correction away from the other girls.** This will prevent her from being embarrassed. It also ensures the attention of the girl and limits the amount of attention given by the rest of the troop.
- **Be certain to talk with her, not at her.** Use a calm, neutral tone. Be mindful of your body language. Keep it open and non-threatening. Respect the girl's personal space.
- **Share what troop agreement or expectation was not followed.** Describe what the impact on the group was. Avoid overreacting. Keep this brief and avoid lecturing.

- **Ask what she thinks the best way to handle in the future will be.** Consider employing role reversal to increase empathy and engage problem-solving skills. If girl is not willing to engage, offer several choices, and give her a timeline to decide.
- **Gain her agreement on an appropriate behavior.** Ensure the girl is in agreement of the appropriate behavior instead of focusing on the incident itself.
- **Document these discussions.** Write down key details like date, behavior issue, and corrective action—for your own records.

Mix things up to encourage inclusion. Without an effort, girls will gravitate into groups based on similar activities, interests, and backgrounds. It can result in “clique-ish” behavior. Encouraging interaction with girls not already in their social circle will allow girls to form new bonds of friendship. Additionally, girls will be exposed to new interests and ideas. Partner girls during troop meetings in a variety of fun ways—by their favorite ways to celebrate their birthdays, their zodiac signs, or their favorite movies.

Keep the fun going when girls are having trouble. Have all the girls decide upon a semi-private space away from the group but visible by volunteers where they can go when they become frustrated or overwhelmed and need a moment to calm down or just until they’re ready to rejoin the others. While she regroups, keep the fun going for the rest of the troop and give her some space. Eventually, the girl will probably want to come back to join in on the fun. At the end of the troop meeting, check-in with girls who took a moment to themselves and make sure they’re doing okay or if she has anything she would like to discuss with you.

Let girls lead with qualities of fair and good leadership. Talk with the girls in your troop about the qualities of fair and good leadership. Help them identify examples of leadership and teamwork that worked well with the group in the past and discuss why they worked. If someone starts to take over a discussion or activity and won’t listen to input from their troop members, discuss the importance of recognizing different perspectives. Point out the difference between suggesting and demanding and how these differences can affect how a person feels about the task they are being asked to complete.

Address instances of bullying promptly. If you notice bullying within your troop, call them together to discuss. Discuss how people can have different perspectives; what seems funny to one girl can be embarrassing to another. Review the Girl Scout Law, especially “considerate and caring,” “respect myself and others,” and “be a sister to every Girl Scout.” Help the girls to understand what bullying is and the negative consequences that come with it.

Problem-Solving

Occasionally, verbal correction to unacceptable behavior fails to accomplish the desired result. You may need further intervention when behavior becomes destructive, hurtful, or it hinders the rest of the group’s progress.

Problem-solving with a girl. Using phrases like, “I have noticed that you ____.” “Is something bothering you?” may help uncover underlying issues. Ask these questions away from other girls so that the girl does not feel singled out or embarrassed. Never promise confidentiality, as some responses may require further investigation or follow up with other volunteers or parents.

Problem-solving with co-volunteer(s), other volunteers, or GSMH staff. Ask for assistance and ideas on developing a positive environment. Focus on finding creative ways to redirect specific behaviors, and not the individual or group.

Parental notification and problem-solving. Consult with parents for assistance, ideas, and additional information that may help you to manage normal adjustment problems pertaining to their girl(s). Depending on the severity of the situation, the parents may need to be contacted right away. Let them know you are concerned about their daughter, and that you would like to discuss the situation as soon as possible. If you have documented corrections, provide this information to the parent in order to establish a need for support.

Problem-solving with the daughter of a volunteer. It may be difficult for a girl to share their parent with the rest of their troop. Consider allowing girls to pick nicknames for troop volunteers so that daughters of volunteers can call them by their nickname instead of using “Mom” or “Dad.” Randomly assigning special tasks is also a good way to prevent a volunteer from being viewed as showing favoritism.

Problem-solving and notification to GSMH staff. If you are uncertain about how to handle a situation, you can always contact your New Leader Specialist or Troop and Service Unit Support Specialist for issues related to normal adjustment problems.

Recurring behavioral issues call for parent notification. Maintaining an open line of communication with parents regarding their girl's behavior builds rapport and trust. It helps establish and maintain consistent behavioral limits and gives parents the power to enforce and follow through with limits and consequences. It also allows helps uncover potential factors that may explain the negative behavior that had not previously been considered (i.e. death, illness in family, or divorce). As valuable as they are, it is natural to feel nervous about having these conversations. Hearing negative feedback about their girl can make a parent feel defensive. They might even try to blame you.

Follow the tips below when giving parents information that they need to know but may not want to hear:

- Maintain a calm, neutral tone.
- Describe the behavior clearly. Explain the effect and why it matters.
- Be prepared to explain the steps that have already been taken to address the behavior. Have specific dates and incidents of behavior issues available to share.
- Do not dwell on the behavior, or who you feel is to blame. Rather, focus on solutions, whether on the girl's part, or the parents. Provide a point of positive feedback to the parent regarding their girl so that they understand you have not labelled their girl as "good" or "bad."
- Ask the parent for their input and ideas to engage them in identifying potential solutions.

Approaching parents as partners, by using matter of fact, nonaggressive language to win their support and find a solution defuses any uncomfortable tension around the issue and can inspire willingness to acknowledge the behavior and actively support a successful solution.

Signs to be Concerned About

It isn't always easy being a girl. Sometimes, a girl may be presented with issues that surpass her experience to address on her own or those of the adults involved in her care. These issues may call for expert help in reconciling.

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

Addressing concerns of abuse or neglect

As a volunteer with GSMH, you accept the responsibility for the safety and care of children. Reporting suspicions of child abuse/neglect can be distressing, scary, and uncomfortable. It requires adults to take risks, not knowing what the outcome might be. If a child shares information with you that results in suspicion of abuse or neglect, give reassurance that telling you about what happened is okay and safe. Respect the privacy of the child and do not press for details as they may need to tell their story in detail later to investigators. Do not to display shock or

disapproval of the parents, child, or situation. Instead, let the child know that you are going to call someone you trust for help.

In addition to immediately notifying a GSMH staff member of suspected abuse or neglect, Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma volunteers are required by state law to act as a state mandated reporter. As a mandated reporter, you may be required to act as the voice of the child who may be experiencing abuse/neglect. It is important to remember that when you make a report, you are not making an accusation, you are requesting a professional service to intervene. Children's Division for the state receiving the report will base the decision on how to proceed on information provided.

Completion of GSMH Mandated Reporter Training is required annually by all GSMH volunteers and staff and the training material is available at any time for review on gsLearn. As a best practice, the volunteer and staff member may make one report to ensure that they have met legal obligations.

Volunteers confronted with a situation that results in suspicion, discovery, or disclosure of abuse or neglect, or observe a child being subjected to conditions or circumstances which would reasonably result in abuse or neglect have cause to report. Mandated reporters are also required to report information about child abuse/neglect obtained from third parties.

Always keep safety in mind. If you need immediate help to ensure a child is safe, call 911. Remember, Missouri mandated reporters reporting suspicions of abuse or neglect to law enforcement are still bound by the obligation as a mandated reporter to make a report to the Children's Division.

Conducting your own investigation to solidify your concerns prior to reporting is not part of the mandated reporter role. Doing so may not only interfere with any investigation and/or prosecution that may result, but also has the potential to re-traumatize the girl.

To report suspected child abuse/neglect, contact the state the impacted child resides in.

Missouri Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline	1-800-392-3738
To submit online reports of non-emergencies for MO children	https://dss.mo.gov/cd/keeping-kids-safe/can.htm
Kansas Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline	1-800-922-5330
To submit online reports of non-emergencies for KS children	http://bit.do/DCFreport
Oklahoma Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline	1-800-522-3511
To submit online reports of non-emergencies for OK children	http://www.dcf.ks.gov

Family Conduct Agreement

As the Girl Scout, and the family of a Girl Scout, we agree to:

- _____ Demonstrate an interest in participation in Girl Scouts and reflect the Girl Scout Promise and Law to be a positive role model for others. We will uphold the Girl Scout Promise and Law by demonstrating positive support and respecting the opinions and goals of other Girl Scouts.
- _____ Respect the Girl Scout program and support the volunteers who are leading our Girl Scout Leadership Experience to encourage a positive and enjoyable Girl Scout experience for all. We will make every effort to attend required troop meetings, parent meetings, and adhere to parent deadlines.
- _____ Ensure our behavior supports the Girl Scout Promise and Law.
- _____ Submit requested permission slips, dues, and/or materials on time. We will ensure that we are prepared for Girl Scout activities, and that our Girl Scout is dropped off and picked up from activities on time.
- _____ Support our Girl Scout's participation in Product Program.
- _____ Communicate any concerns directly to the volunteer responsibly, respectfully, and in private. If unable to resolve a conflict, we will contact GSMH for next steps in conflict resolution per our volunteer policies.
- _____ We will refrain from behavior, online or in-person, that may undermine the leadership of a Girl Scout activity or troop/group, including gossip or negative statements of any kind. Should we or our Girl Scout have a complaint or problem, we will communicate it in a respectful way and will share a suggested solution to the problem.
- _____ Follow safety guidelines for all activities and commit to ensuring a high-quality environment for our Girl Scout to learn and grow. We agree to refrain from use of and possession of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco at any Girl Scout activity. We understand possession of firearms and ammunition is strictly prohibited at any Girl Scout activity or on Girl Scout properties, with exception of:
 - GSMH-approved program activity for girls by approved and certified GSMH staff.
 - GSMH staff for use in wildlife control on camp properties.
 - Law enforcement officials legally required to carry weapons.
- _____ Refrain from profane/abusive language in the presence of girls or toward any Girl Scout member, parent, or staff while conducting Girl Scout business. Coarse and threatening language, as well as all forms of physical aggression are prohibited.
- _____ Refrain from sharing views or engaging in behaviors at Girl Scout activities, and in the presence of girls, that may run counter to the Girl Scout values of diversity and inclusion. GSUSA, as well as GSMH, asks that all girls and their families treat others with respect, regardless of race, color, creed, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, citizenship, ancestry, physical or mental disability, marital status, veteran status, socio-economic/public assistance status, national origin, or any other protected status.

We understand that our behavior directly impacts the ability to participate in a troop/group or other Girl Scout activities. We will honor this agreement so that our Girl Scout can have a high-quality Girl Scout Leadership Experience.

Girl Signature _____ Date _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____