

# Volunteer Essentials 2012–2013

## Section three: Engaging girls at all grade levels

As a Girl Scout volunteer, you will work with girls of all backgrounds, behaviors, skills and abilities. No matter what a girl's grade level or background, you have the opportunity to engage her in meaningful ways and help her develop leadership skills she can use now and as she grows—all in a safe and accepting environment. This section gives you tips for doing just that. Information found in this section:

### **Arranging a time and space for girl-led meetings**

#### **Understanding healthy development in girls**

#### **Creating a safe space for girls**

#### **Arranging meetings with parents/guardians or a friends-and-family network**

#### **Focus on abilities**

## Arranging a time and space for girl-led meetings

When to meet is at your troop's discretion. What day and times work best for the girls, for you, for your co-volunteer(s) and for other adults who will be presenting or mentoring? Once a week throughout the school year is common, but so are longer meetings once or twice a month. Is after school best? Can your co-volunteers meet at that time, or will meetings work better in the evenings or on the weekends?

Where to meet can be a bit trickier. A meeting place needs to provide a safe, clean and secure environment that allows for the participation of all girls. You might consider using meeting rooms at schools, libraries, houses of worship, community buildings, childcare facilities and local businesses. For teens, you can also rotate meetings at coffee shops, bookstores and other places girls enjoy spending time.

Perhaps the following tips go without saying, but in case you're looking for some guidance on choosing a space, consider the following:

**Cost:** The space should be free to use.

**Size:** Make sure the space is large enough to hold all the girls in the group while engaged in a variety of activities.

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

**Resources:** Determine what types of furnishings (table? chairs?) come with the room and ensure that the lighting is adequate. A bonus would be a cubby of some sort where you can store supplies.

**Safety:** Ensure that the space is safe, secure, clean, properly ventilated, heated (or cooled, depending on your location), free from hazards and has at least two exits that are well-marked and fully functional. Also be sure first-aid equipment is on hand and that girls and adults with disabilities can safely enter and exit the space.

**Facilities:** Sanitary and accessible toilets are critical.

**Communication-friendly:** Be sure your cell phone works in the meeting space.

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

**Accessibility:** Be sure the space can accommodate girls with disabilities, as well as parents/guardians with disabilities who may come to meetings.

If this is your first time asking for a Girl Scout meeting place, here are a few speaking points to get you started: "I'm a Girl Scout volunteer, with a group of \_\_\_\_\_ girls. We're doing lots of great things for girls and for the community, like \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. 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 \_\_\_\_\_."

### **Girl-adult partnership**

Since the group meets for the enjoyment and benefit of the girls, meetings are built around the girls' ideas. When you put the girl first, you're helping develop a team relationship, making space for the development of leadership skills and allowing girls to benefit from the guidance, mentoring and coaching of caring adults.

The three leadership processes of girl-led, learning by doing and cooperative learning are key to the foundation of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience and are integral to the girl-adult partnership. Take time to read over the description of these processes and think about how to incorporate them into your group's experiences.

### **Extra! Extra! for Girl Scout leaders**

River Valleys offers Girl Scout grade-level-focused enrichment sessions that help Girl Scout leaders discover new ways to keep girls excited, entertained and engaged at troop meetings. These two-hour, interactive training sessions are not required for being a Girl Scout leader, but will provide an opportunity for you to network with other Girl Scout leaders while learning about the developmental characteristics of the grade levels you're working with, behavior and conflict management skills, democratic and girl-led planning techniques and earned awards. You should complete Leadership Essentials or have an understanding of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience before attending your grade-level Extra! Extra! training session. See the Training page at [GirlScoutsRV.org](http://GirlScoutsRV.org) to find a session date that works for you.

## Understanding healthy development in girls

Just being attentive to what girls are experiencing as they mature is a big help to girls. So take some time to understand the likes, needs and abilities of girls at different ages.

As you listen and learn along with girls, you may find it useful to review the highlights of their development. What follows are the developmental abilities and needs of girls at various grade levels. You'll also find these listed in the adult how-to guide that accompanies each leadership journey, along with tips for how to make the most of them as you guide and partner with girls. Of course, each girl is an individual, so these are only guidelines that help you get to know the girls.

<b>Girl Scout Daisies</b>	
<b>At the Girl Scout Daisy level (kindergarten and first grade), girls . . .</b>	<b>This means . . .</b>
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>Encourage 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 listen and follow 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 it 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, etc.	<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>That girls might like to create a play about welcoming a new girl to their school, or 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 for listening and following 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 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>That although it's OK 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, share their visions of their roles in the future and 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 written word, choreography and so on.</i>
Love to act in plays, create music and dance.	<i>That 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 and weight changes. Some may be getting their periods.	<i>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.</i>

## Girl Scout Cadettes

At the Girl Scout Cadette level (sixth, seventh and eighth grades), girls . . .	This means . . .
<p>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.</p>	<p><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></p>
<p>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.</p>	<p><i>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.</i></p>
<p>Can be very self-conscious—wanting to be like everyone else, but fearing they are unique in their thoughts and feelings.</p>	<p><i>Encouraging girls to share, but only when they are comfortable. 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></p>
<p>Are beginning to navigate their increasing independence and expectations from adults—at school and at home.</p>	<p><i>Trusting girls to plan and make key decisions and allowing them to experience what's known as “fun failure,” in which girls learn from trying something new and making mistakes.</i></p>

## 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>That 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 so on.	<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 and allowing them to experience what's known as "fun failure," in which girls learn from trying something new and making mistakes.</i>

## 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 and incorporate practical limitations to solutions.	<i>That 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>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, etc.	<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 and allowing them to experience what's known as "fun failure," in which girls learn from trying something new and making mistakes.</i>

## **Advocating for girls**

The Girl Scouts Public Policy and Advocacy Office in Washington, D.C., builds relationships with members of Congress, White House officials and other federal departments and agencies, and continuously inform and educate them about issues important to girls and Girl Scouting. These advocacy efforts help demonstrate to lawmakers that Girl Scouts is a resource and an authority on issues affecting girls. Visit the Advocacy office at [girlscouts.org/who\\_we\\_are/advocacy](https://girlscouts.org/who_we_are/advocacy).

## **Creating a safe space for girls**

A safe space is one in which girls feel as though they can be themselves, without explanation, judgment or ridicule. Girl Scout research shows that girls are looking for an emotionally safe environment where confidentiality is respected and they can express themselves without fear. The environment you create, therefore, is key to developing the sort of group that girls want to be part of. The following sections share some tips on creating a warm, safe environment for girls.

### **Recognizing and supporting each girl**

Girls look up to their volunteers. They need to know you consider each of them important. They can survive a poor meeting place or an activity that flops, but they cannot endure being ignored or rejected. Recognize acts of trying as well as instances of clear success. Emphasize the positive qualities that make each girl worthy and unique. Be generous with praise and stingy with rebuke. Help girls find ways to show acceptance and support for one another.

### **Promoting fairness**

Girls are sensitive to injustice. They forgive mistakes if they are sure you are trying to be fair. They look for fairness in the way responsibilities are shared, in the handling of disagreements and in responses to performance and accomplishment. When possible, consult girls about 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 ensure that the chances for feeling important, as well as the responsibilities, are equally divided among the girls. Help girls explore and decide for themselves the fair ways of solving problems, carrying out activities and looking at behavior and accomplishments.

### **Building trust**

Girls need your belief in them and your support when they try new things. They must be sure you will not betray a confidence. Show girls you trust them to think for themselves and use their own judgment. Help them make important decisions in the group. Help them correct their own mistakes. Help girls give and show trust toward one another. Help them see how trust can be built, lost and strengthened.

### **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 need 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 in a calm and nonjudgmental manner. (Each party may need some time—even 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, don't spread your complaint around to others—gossip does not 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. Ultimately, contact River Valleys if you need extra help.

### **Inspiring open communication**

Girls want someone who will listen seriously to what they think, feel and want to do. They like someone they can talk to about important things, including some things that might not seem important to adults. Listen to 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 for 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.

### **Communicating effectively with girls of any age**

When communicating with girls, consider the following tips:

**Listen:** Listening to girls, as opposed to telling them what to think, feel or do (no “you shoulds”) is the first step in helping them take ownership of their program.

**Be honest:** If you're not comfortable with a topic or activity, 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:** For girls, important topics are things such as relationships, peer pressure, school, money, drugs and other serious issues. (You'll also have plenty of time to discuss less weighty subjects.) When you don't know, listen. Also seek help from River Valleys if you need assistance or more information.

**Show respect:** Girls often say that their best experiences were the ones where adults treated them as equal partners. Being spoken to as a young adult helps them grow.

**Offer options:** Providing flexibility to meet changing needs and interests shows that you respect the girls and their busy lives. But whatever option is chosen, girls at every grade level also want guidance and parameters.

**Stay current:** Be aware of the TV shows girls watch, the movies they like, the books and magazines they read and the music they listen to—not to pretend you have the same interests, but to show you're interested in their world. One easy way to check in with girls is to visit [Let Me Know](#), an interactive website for girls from Microsoft Windows and Girl Scouts. You might also want to direct parents/guardians to this site, which includes information about online safety, cyber-bullying and social networking, among other topics.

One way to communicate with girls is through the LUTE method—listen, understand, tolerate and empathize. Here is a breakdown of the acronym LUTE to remind you of how to respond when a girl is upset, angry or confused.

**L = Listen:** Hear her out and ask for details with questions such as, “What happened next?” or “What did she say?”

**U = Understand:** Try to be understanding of her feelings and reflect back what you hear. Use comments such as, “So what I hear you saying is...” “I’m sure that upset you,” “I understand why you’re unhappy,” and “Your feelings are hurt. Mine would be, too.”

**T = Tolerate:** You can tolerate the feelings she just can’t handle right now on her own. This doesn’t mean that you necessarily agree with her idea, but it signifies that you can listen and accept how she is feeling about the situation. Suggestions: “Try talking to me about it. I’ll listen,” “I know you’re mad—talking it out helps,” and “I can handle it—say whatever you want to.”

**E = 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**

Consider the following tips when working with teenage girls:

- Think of yourself as a partner (not a “leader”) and as a coach or mentor when needed.
- Ask girls what rules they need for safety and what group agreements they need to be a good team.
- 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.
- Treat girls like partners.
- Don’t repeat what’s said in the group to anyone outside of it (unless necessary for the girl’s safety).

### ***Girl Scout Research Institute***

It’s amazing what you can learn when you listen to girls.

Since its founding in 2000, the Girl Scout Research Institute (GSRI) has become an internationally recognized center for research and public policy information on the development and well-being of girls. Not just Girl Scouts, but *all* girls.

In addition to research staff, the GSRI draws on experts in child development, education, business, government and the not-for-profit sector. GSRI provides the youth development field with definitive research reviews that consolidate existing studies. And, by most measures, GSRI is now the leading source of original research into the issues that girls face and the social trends that affect their lives. Visit [girlscouts.org/research](https://girlscouts.org/research).

## Discussing sensitive topics

According to “Feeling Safe: What Girls Say,” a 2003 Girl Scout Research Institute study, girls are looking for groups that allow connection and a sense of intimacy and closeness. They want volunteers who are teen savvy and can help them with issues they face such as bullying and other conflicts (online and offline), peer pressure, dating, sexual harassment (online and offline), academic or athletic performance, eating disorders, alcohol and drug abuse, depression and more. When Girl Scout activities involve sensitive issues, your role is that of caring adult who can help girls acquire their own skills and knowledge in a supportive atmosphere, not someone who advocates any particular position. Check with River Valleys about which sensitive issues may require additional council support to present and discuss, as well as whether parent/guardian permission is required.

**Listen and ask:** As the preceding sections suggest, you can help most just by being an empathetic listener. That’s right—just by listening, you’re helping! Sometimes, you may also find that by asking questions, you can help girls figure out how to get more information and guidance at school or at home. You don’t have to solve their issues, but you can put them on the trail toward understanding them.

**Arrange for education:** Don’t feel that you have to solve everything. River Valleys offers a variety of council programming that helps girls develop healthy living skills. Your role is to help girls get information about and access this programming.

**Report concerns:** There may be times when you worry about the health and well-being of girls in your group. There are a variety of obstacles that girls may encounter throughout their Girl Scout career. If you believe a girl is at risk of hurting herself or others, your role is to communicate with the girl’s family or the local authorities, depending on the situation. If you believe a girl is being abused or neglected, you are mandated to report the information to the proper authorities. Refer to Volunteer Essentials Chapters 4 and 6 for specific guidelines regarding the communicating/reporting of suspected concerns.

## When a girl needs expert help

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

## Working with parents and guardians

Most parents and guardians are helpful and supportive and sincerely appreciate your time and effort on behalf of their daughters. And you almost always have the same goal, which is to make Girl Scouting an enriching experience for their girls. Encourage them to check out [girlscouts4girls.org](http://girlscouts4girls.org) to find out how to expand their roles as advocates for their girls.

## Using “I” statements

As you know, families today are terribly busy—parents and guardians may want to be involved but sometimes need a reminder or specific guidelines. Perhaps the most important tip for communicating with parents/guardians is for you to use “I” statements instead of “you” statements, which are detailed in the *aMAZE* journey for Girl Scout Cadettes. “I” statements tell a parent/guardian what you need from her or him, while “you” statements may make a parent/guardian feel defensive.

Here are examples of “you” statements:

“Your daughter just isn’t responsible.”

“You’re not doing your share.”

Now look at “I” statements:

“I’d really like to help your daughter learn to take more responsibility.”

“I’d really appreciate your help with registration.”

If you need help with specific scenarios involving parents/guardians, try the following:

If a parent or guardian . . .	You can say . . .
Is uninvolved and asks how she can help but seems to have no idea of how to follow through or take leadership of even the smallest activity,	“I do need your help. Here are some written guidelines on how to prepare for our camping trip.”
Constantly talks about all the ways you could make the group better,	“I need your leadership. Project ideas you would like to develop and lead can fit in well with our plan. Please put your ideas in writing, and perhaps I can help you carry them out.”
Tells you things like, “Denise’s mother is on welfare, and Denise really doesn’t belong in this group,”	“I need your sensitivity. Girl Scouting is for all girls, and by teaching your daughter to be sensitive to others’ feelings you help teach the whole group sensitivity.”
Shifts parental responsibilities to you and is so busy with her own life that she allows no time to help,	“I love volunteering for Girl Scouts and want to make a difference. If you could take a few moments from your busy schedule to let me know what you value about what we’re doing, I’d appreciate it. It would keep me going for another year.”

## Arranging Meetings with parents/guardians or a friends-and-family network

You will receive additional information on parent/guardian meetings during your Fast Start Meeting.

A parent/guardian meeting, or a meeting of your friends-and-family network (as encouraged in many of the leadership journeys), is a chance for you to get to know the families of the girls in your group. Before the meeting, be sure you and/or your co-volunteers have done the following:

- For younger girls, arranged for a parent/guardian, another volunteer or a group of older girls to lead activities with the girls in your group while you talk with their parents/guardians (if girls will attend the meeting, too).
- Practiced a discussion on the following: Girl Scout Mission, Promise and Law, benefits of Girl Scouting for their girls including how the Girl Scout Leadership Experience is a world-class system for developing girl leaders; all the fun the girls are going to have, expectations for girls and their parents/guardians and ideas of how parents and other guardians can participate in and enrich their girls' Girl Scout experiences.
- Determined when product programs (including the Girl Scout Cookie Program Activity and Fall Product Program) will happen in River Valleys. Parents/guardians will absolutely want to know!
- Determined what information parents/guardians should bring to the meeting.
- Used the Friends and Family pages provided in the adult how-to guides for many of the journeys, or created your own one-page information sheet that gives your contact information, contact information of co-volunteers and helpers, the day and time of each meeting, location of and directions to the meeting place, what to bring with them and information on how to get a journey's resources (books, awards and keepsakes) and other merchandise such as sashes/tunics/vests, T-shirts and so on.
- Gathered or created supplies, including a sign-in sheet, an information sheet, permission forms for parents/guardians (available at [GirlScoutsRV.org](http://GirlScoutsRV.org)), health history forms (as required by River Valleys) and Girl Scouts of the USA registration forms.
- Prepared yourself to ask parents and guardians for help, being as specific as you can about the kind of help you will need (the journey's Friends and Family pages will come in handy here).

## Registering the girls 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 (currently \$12) are sent by River Valleys to GSUSA—no portion of the dues stays with River Valleys. Membership dues may not be transferred to another member and are not refundable.

Pre-registration for the upcoming membership year occurs in the spring. Girls are encouraged to register early to avoid the fall rush. Early registration gets girls excited about all the great activities they want to do as Girl Scouts next year, helps ensure uninterrupted receipt of forms and materials from River Valleys and helps girls and River Valleys plan ahead. The Girl Scout grade level is determined by the current membership year, which begins October 1.

Lifetime membership is available at a reduced rate. A lifetime member must be at least 18 years old (or a 17-year-old high-school graduate) and agree to the Girl Scout Promise and Law.

## Structuring the parent/guardian meeting

You're free to structure the parent/guardian meeting in whatever way works for you, but the following structure works for many volunteers:

- As the girls and adults arrive, ask them to sign in. Hand out registration forms and any other paperwork, including a one-page information sheet.
- Open the meeting by welcoming the girls and adults. Introduce yourself and other co-volunteers or helpers. Have adults and girls introduce themselves, discuss whether anyone in their families has been a Girl Scout and talk about what Girl Scouting means to them. Welcome everyone, regardless of experience, and let them know they will be learning about Girl Scouts today. (If you're new to Girl Scouting, don't worry—just let everyone know you'll be learning about Girl Scouting together.)
- Ask the girls to go with the adult or teen in charge of their activity and begin the discussion.
- Discuss the information you prepared for this meeting such as:
  - All the fun girls are going to have!
  - When and where the group will meet and some examples of activities the girls might choose to do.
  - That a parent/guardian permission form is used for activities outside the group's usual meeting place and the importance of completing and returning it as indicated.
  - How you plan to keep in touch with parents/guardians (some ideas are e-mail, text messaging, a phone tree, fliers the girls take home, and/or posting on an invitation-only group on Facebook).
- The Girl Scout Mission, Promise and Law.
- The Girl Scout Leadership Experience and what the program does for their daughters.
- When Girl Scout Cookies (and other products) will go on sale and how participation in product sales teaches life skills and helps fund group activities.
- The cost of membership (which includes annual GSUSA dues), any group payments, optional uniforms and any resources parents/guardians will need to buy (such as a journey book).
- The availability of financial assistance and how the Girl Scout Cookie Program Activity and Fall Product Program generate funds for the group treasury.

- That families can also make monetary donations to the council and why they might want to do that.
- That you may be looking for additional volunteers, and in which areas you are looking (be as specific as possible!).
- Collect the completed registration forms.
- Remind the group about the next meeting (if you'll have one) and thank everyone for attending. Hold the next meeting when it makes sense for you and your co-volunteers—that may be in two months if face-to-face meetings are best or not at all if you're diligent about keeping in touch with parents/guardians via e-mail, phone calls or some other form of communication.
- After the meeting, follow up with any parents/guardians who did not attend, connect them with the group, inform them of decisions and discuss how they can best help the girls.

## Focus on abilities

As you think about where, when and how often to meet with your group, you will find yourself considering the needs, resources, safety and beliefs of all members and potential members. As you do this, include the accommodation needs of any members who have disabilities, or whose parents or guardians 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.

As a volunteer, your interactions present an opportunity to improve the way society views girls (and their parents/guardians) with disabilities. Historically, disabilities have been looked at from a deficit viewpoint with a focus on how people with disabilities could be fixed. Today, the focus is on a person's abilities—on what she *can* do rather than what she cannot.

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/guardian. If you are frank and accessible, it's likely they will 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 has limited vision 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.
- In addition, note that people-first language 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/guardian) with a disability, consider these final tips:

- When talking to a girl with a disability, speak directly to her, not through a parent/guardian 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 her 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 and they should wear the uniform of that grade level. Make any adaptations for the girl to participate in ongoing activities of the grade level in which the group belongs. Young women with cognitive disorders may choose to retain their girl membership through their 21st year and then move into an adult membership category.

### **Girl Scouts is for all girls**

Girl Scouts embraces girls of every ability level, background and heritage, with a specific and positive philosophy of inclusion that benefits everyone. Each girl—without regard to socioeconomic status, race, physical or cognitive ability, ethnicity, primary language or religion—is an equal and valued member of the group, and groups reflect the diversity of the community.

"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, about respect and dignity and about honoring the uniqueness in all of us.

You are being 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

In January 2012, River Valleys officially adopted this definition of Inclusion for our council:

*"As a River Valleys member, I do my best to think, speak and act in ways that ensure everyone across the council feels they belong and can meaningfully participate in all aspects of Girl Scouting regardless of ability, age, culture, education, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status."*

### **A variety of formats for publications**

The Latino population is the largest-growing in the United States, which is why Girls Scouts has translated many of its publications into Spanish. Over time, Girl Scouts will continue to identify members' needs and produce resources to support those needs, including translating publications into additional languages and formats.