What We Stand For

Girl Scouts of the USA
What We Stand For

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This guide is intended for the sole use of Girl Scout staff and council-approved members. Therefore, it should not be distributed in its entirety or posted on public Web sites or Internet forums.

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION FOR GIRL SCOUT STAFF

This guide is intended for the sole use of Girl Scout staff and council-approved members. Therefore, it should not be distributed in its entirety or posted on public Web sites or Internet forums. It is a tool to help those entrusted with troop and council communications efforts to clearly express our commitments and to state who we are, what we stand for, and why Girl Scouting is important to girls, their families, and communities.

This revised version of What We Stand For identifies messages that clearly, concisely, and consistently communicate what Girl Scouts stands for. The purpose of this guide is to help all of us in the Girl Scout Movement effectively answer the most frequently asked questions about Girl Scouting, including its principles and practices. It also will help you respond during crises and to questions about sensitive issues.

In addition, this resource will help you clarify the Girl Scout position on policy issues, whether you’re communicating with your membership, a concerned parent or guardian, the general public in your community, or your local media. Issues addressed range from the most basic, such as “Why should my daughter belong to Girl Scouts?” to the most difficult and complex a troop/group, council, or the national organization may face.

What We Stand For is currently available only on the OCN. In the future, the resource may be gently edited to reflect changes in language and at that time GSUSA expects to offer a hard-copy version, with a special pullout section for council spokespersons.

The guide is divided into four sections. Most of the issues have two parts, a message and a rationale. Information under the “Message” heading includes efficient ways to respond to the particular issue or question. If you are pressed for more information or details, the information provided under “Rationale” will help you, because that information more fully explains the message. A few sections have several related issues, but the information under “Message” will probably suffice; again, if pressed for more information, refer to the specific rationale.

Each statement reflects the brand voice of GSUSA and is rooted in the longstanding beliefs and principles of the Girl Scout Movement. The statements are derived from documents that include the Congressional Charter of Girl Scouts of the USA and the Preamble to the Constitution of Girl Scouts of the USA, as well as from actions taken on proposals at National Council Sessions and the policies, standards, and guidelines established by the National Board of Directors.

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PUBLIC INFORMATION

The Girl Scout Promise
On my honor, I will try:
To serve God and my country,
To help people at all times,
And to live by the Girl Scout Law.

The Girl Scout Law
I will do my best to be
honest and fair,
friendly and helpful,
considerate and caring,
courageous and strong, and
responsible for what I say and do,
and to
respect myself and others,
respect authority,
use resources wisely,
make the world a better place,
and be a sister to every Girl Scout.

Guiding Principles
We believe the Girl Scout Promise defines who we are and is the cornerstone of our Movement.

We work to ensure our Movement is open to all girls and adults who accept the Girl Scout Promise and satisfy the membership requirements.

We believe girls learn by doing and that they learn best in a safe, positive environment.

We believe adults partner with girls to guide and inspire growth and achievement and that these partnerships are essential to the strength and capacity of our Movement.

We are community partners, take a leadership role in the community, and believe in the core human virtue of service, in taking action, and in making a difference in the world around us.

We are committed to advancing diversity and pluralism in our Movement and in the communities in which we live.

We are active partners in a worldwide sisterhood through our affiliation with WAGGGS and work with WAGGGS to address girls’ needs and build a network of global citizens.

We hold that the ultimate responsibility for the Girl Scout Movement rests with its members, and we govern by a decisive and nimble democratic process that demonstrates our leadership in response to a fast-changing world.

We are a premier voice for girls, give voice to them, and are expert on their growth and development.
The Girl Scout Mission Statement
Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence and character, who make the world a better place.

The Girl Scout Motto
Be Prepared

The New Girl Scout Leadership Experience
Discover: A Girl Scout understands her values and uses her knowledge and skills to explore her world.

Connect: A Girl Scout cares about, inspires, and teams with others locally and globally.

Take Action: A Girl Scout acts to make the world a better place.
SECTION II: MESSAGES, RATIONALES, AND REFERENCES

MEMBERSHIP

Message: Membership standards are established by the national organization. Girl Scout membership is open to:

- Any girl in grades K-12 who has made the Girl Scout Promise, accepts the Girl Scout Law, and pays annual membership dues.
- Any adult who accepts the organization’s principles and beliefs and pays annual or lifetime membership dues.

2006 Blue Book References:
Preamble to the Constitution of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, p. 5
“Membership Requirements,” pp. 23–24

Why Belong to Girl Scouts

Message: Girl Scouts is the place for girls in grades K–12 to belong. It’s a safe place for girls to explore their values and their world, develop an understanding of and empathy with others, and take action to make the world a better place. With other girls, some of whom may become lifetime friends, they gain courage, confidence, and character. Girls are guided by committed, caring adults who make the experience of Girl Scouting fun.

2006 Blue Book References:
Preamble to the Constitution of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, p. 5
Constitution of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, Article III, p. 6

Rationale: No other organization helps each girl achieve her personal leadership goals like Girl Scouts of the USA. Girl Scouts, guided by a wealth of experience and ongoing research, has been the nation’s leading expert on what girls need and want for nearly 100 years.

Boys

Research shows that girls benefit most from a program designed specifically for them and delivered in an all-girl setting. Boys have unique needs and interests as well, which are best addressed by an organization structured to meet their specific needs. Congress provided Girl Scouts of the United States of America with a Congressional Charter to develop a program uniquely for girls. As a private membership association, Girl Scouts provides an organization for girls to obtain leadership and other skills.

2006 Blue Book References:
Preamble to the Constitution of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, p. 5
“Membership Requirements,” p. 23
Congressional Charter of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, p. 33
Inclusion and Nondiscrimination Policy

Message: Girl Scouts of the USA and its local councils and troops value diversity and inclusiveness and do not discriminate or recruit on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, national origin, or physical or developmental disability. In addition, Girl Scouts has a long history of adapting activities for girls who have special needs, including those who have physical or developmental disabilities. Reasonable accommodations shall be made for girls with disabilities to ensure that girls have access to activities. The Girl Scout organization is proud of our policy of nondiscrimination for staff, volunteers, and the girls we serve.

2006 Blue Book References:
Preamble to the Constitution of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, p. 5
“Pluralism and Diversity/Human Resources,” pp. 21–22

Diversity

Message: The Girl Scout organization is committed to a diverse membership reflective of the girl population of communities within the respective council’s jurisdiction.

This commitment to diversity is implemented not by the use of a quota system but through the engagement of planned and sound recruitment practices. GSUSA seeks timely data on diversity, but never links the information to any one individual member. The collected data is used only for evaluation purposes and to help the Girl Scouts better serve our members.

2006 Blue Book References:
Preamble to the Constitution of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, p. 5
“Pluralism and Diversity/Human Resources,” pp. 21–22

Rationale: Through Girl Scouting, girls are able to learn not only about themselves but also about acceptance, tolerance, and appreciation of a diversity of backgrounds.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is a private matter for girls and their families to address. Girl Scouts has established standards that do not permit the advocacy or promotion of a personal lifestyle or sexual orientation. Adults working with girls must adhere to these standards.

2006 Blue Book References:
“Pluralism and Diversity in Girl Membership,” p. 21
Intellectual Disabilities and Developmental Disabilities
Young women with intellectual disabilities or developmental disabilities, or who receive services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), may retain their membership until they reach their 21st birthday or until they complete high school or its equivalent. In addition, women 21 years of age or older who have intellectual disabilities are deemed the chronological peers of Girl Scout adults, and we will help them participate in the Girl Scouting experience as adults to the greatest extent possible. These practices are in accordance with a long-standing practice of the Girl Scout organization to serve members according to their chronological age.

2006 Blue Book References:
“Pluralism and Diversity in Girl Membership,” p. 21

Volunteer and Staff Recruitment
Message: An application process exists at each council for all adult positions in Girl Scouting. The process includes a written application, a reference check, and a face-to-face interview. In addition, we make every effort to ensure that each applicant fully understands the written personnel policies prior to accepting a position.

2006 Blue Book References:
Constitution of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, Article VII, p. 8
“Selection of Adults,” p. 21

Men
Every volunteer and staff position in Girl Scouting is open to qualified men as well as women. We believe that female role models are especially important to young girls during their developing years; thus, men working directly with girls must serve as co-leaders with unrelated female leaders of troops or groups.

2006 Blue Book References:
Preamble to the Constitution of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, p. 5
“Selection of Adults,” p. 21
“Membership Requirements,” p. 23
THE NEW GIRL SCOUT LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Message: Girl Scouting is a nonformal and experiential educational program that promotes leadership skills in girls. The national program is differentiated by age level. Grounded in the values of the Girl Scout Promise and Law, the program focuses on leadership and building girls of courage, confidence, and character within a safe, supportive environment. Girls partner with caring adults to create a wide range of fun and challenging leadership activities that empower them to discover, connect, and take action to make a difference in today's world.

2006 Blue Book References:
Constitution of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, Article III, p. 6
Constitution of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, Article VII, p. 8
“Girl Scout Council Authority and Responsibility,” p. 20

Rationale: By understanding and responding to girls' changing realities, Girl Scouting remains relevant, fun, and inspiring for girls. Our philosophy of age-appropriate experiential learning is grounded in outcomes-based research. Local councils work with girls and their families to determine what program content to offer, and the national organization creates diverse program content with detailed steps and guidelines for delivering it.

Girl Scout Cookie Program

Message: The Girl Scout Cookie Program is the most comprehensive business, entrepreneurial, and financial literacy training program available for girls today. While participating in one of the most widely anticipated and enjoyable Girl Scout activities, girls strengthen their skills in goal setting, communication, budgeting, managing money, working as a team, and planning a strategy to achieve goals. Girl Scout cookie activities are voluntary and require the written permission of a parent or guardian. Safety guidelines must be followed when girls sell cookies. All money earned from cookie activities stays within the local Girl Scout council to supply essential services to the troop, groups, and girls. Girls do not receive the money individually; they decide as a troop or group how to spend it.

2006 Blue Book References:
Constitution of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, Article VII, p. 8
“Girl Scout Council Authority and Responsibility,” p. 20
“Health and Safety,” p. 22

Program

GSUSA's first and foremost concern is the safety of girls; therefore, guidelines must be followed to keep girls safe during activities such as the Girl Scout Cookie Program. For example, older girls—those who are at least 12 years of age—must use a buddy system and work with other girls while selling cookies. Younger Girl Scouts must be accompanied by an adult.

2006 Blue Book References:
“Health and Safety,” p. 22
Proceeds and Taxes
Girl Scout cookie activity proceeds are used to keep programs affordable for all girls or to improve and maintain activities or campsites. Additionally, the proceeds can be used to recruit and train volunteer leaders as well as to provide financial assistance to girls for membership fees, uniform components, camperships, and program event fees. Troops often use their proceeds for activities such as field trips, service projects, and purchasing supplies. Because the Girl Scout Cookie Program is an activity for girls and proceeds fund nonprofit Girl Scout activities in local communities, Girl Scout councils are exempt from the payment of federal taxes for the sale of these cookies. However, in a few states, local councils are subject to state or local sales taxes for sales that result from Girl Scout cookie activities.

Charitable Contributions
No part of the price of a box of Girl Scout cookies is tax-deductible because consumers purchase the product at fair market value. However, for cookie purchases that are part of a community service project, such as collecting for a food pantry, the purchase price may be considered a charitable contribution because the purchaser is not consuming the product and is donating the purchased goods for charitable purposes.

Ingredients and Bakers
Girl Scout cookies are produced at commercial bakeries in the United States and all varieties are certified kosher. The two companies currently licensed are ABC Bakers/Interbake Foods LLC, headquartered in Richmond, Virginia, and Little Brownie Bakers LLC, headquartered in Louisville, Kentucky.

Obesity
Starting with our youngest age level, Girl Scouts promotes a healthy lifestyle for its members, including a well-balanced diet and plenty of exercise. Girl Scout cookies have limited availability throughout the year. When eaten in moderation, they are a treat consumers can enjoy as part of a healthy and nutritious lifestyle. Consumers can make an informed choice. The ingredients and nutritional profile of each variety are clearly listed on both the cookie box and order form. Responding to the growing demand for foods without trans-fatty acids, Girl Scouts now requires that all varieties of Girl Scout cookies have zero grams of trans fats per serving.

Girl Scout Gold, Silver, and Bronze Awards
Message: Girl Scouting offers opportunities for girls at all age and grade levels to work toward earning highly prestigious honors by completing the award-specific requirements and an age-appropriate service project. Girl Scouts who earn these awards are true leaders who exemplify the courage, confidence, and character needed to make the world a better place. Awards range from the Girl Scout Gold Award, the highest and most prestigious honor available to Senior Girl Scouts, to the Girl Scout Silver Award and the Girl Scout Bronze Award for younger Girl Scouts.
**Girl Scout Gold Award**
The Girl Scout Gold Award is Girl Scouts’ highest honor and the single most demanding award a girl can strive toward. It is not unusual for a girl to put in more than 200 hours to fulfill the requirements. Girl Scout Gold Award recipients show outstanding accomplishments in the areas of leadership, community service, career planning, and personal development—all skills developed through the progressive levels of The New Girl Scout Leadership Experience. The essence of the Girl Scout Gold Award is a personal challenge for a girl to stretch her skills and abilities and step forward as a leader to meet a community need—locally and globally—for which she has a passion and a will to create a sustainable change.

*Requirements are as follows:*
- Build a framework.
- Earn the Girl Scout Gold Leadership Award Charm.
- Earn the Girl Scout Gold 4B’s Challenge Award Charm.
- Plan your Girl Scout Gold Award project.
- Take action.
- Reflect.

*Requirements are under revision for integration into The New Girl Scout Leadership Experience in 2009.*

Specific instructions and updates on how to complete each step can be found on the GSUSA Web site. Approximately 3,000 Girl Scouts earn the Girl Scout Gold Award annually. The recipients of this prestigious award are acknowledged by many governmental, national, and local organizations, and a growing number of colleges and universities award scholarships and grants to Girl Scout Gold Award recipients.

**Girl Scout Silver Award**
The Girl Scout Silver Award is the highest award a girl can earn as a Cadette Girl Scout. The award recognizes the efforts of girls in grades 6–9 in a range of Girl Scout and community experiences. Recipients are acknowledged for their commitment to better their own lives and the lives of others. On average, each girl spends about 100 hours fulfilling all of the requirements for her Girl Scout Silver Award.

*Requirements are as follows:*
- Get ready.
- Earn the Girl Scout Silver Leadership Award Charm.
- Earn the Girl Scout Silver Career Award Charm.
- Earn the Girl Scout Silver 4B’s Challenge Charm.
- Complete the Girl Scout Silver Award Project (minimum of 30 hours)

*Requirements are under revision for integration into The New Leadership Experience in 2009.*

Specific instructions and updates on how to complete each step can be found on the GSUSA Web site. The requirements must help each girl working to receive this award build leadership and living skills, explore career possibilities, and make a commitment to improving herself.
**Girl Scout Bronze Award**
The Girl Scout Bronze Award is an award a girl can begin to work toward as a Junior Girl Scout. This award recognizes the efforts of girls in grades 3–6 in a range of Girl Scout and community experiences. The Girl Scout Bronze Award also recognizes their commitment to work to better their lives and the lives of others. Each girl working to achieve the Girl Scout Bronze Award must complete a service project that demonstrates she understands and lives by the Girl Scout Promise and Law.

**Requirements are as follows:**
- Earn two badges related to the Girl Scout Bronze Award Project
- Complete one of the Girl Scout Signs found in the *Junior Girl Scout Handbook*.
- Earn the Junior Aide Award, the Junior Girl Scout Leadership Award, or two of the following: Girl Scouting in the USA, Girl Scouting Around the World, Girl Scouting in My Future, or Lead On.
- Complete a Girl Scout Bronze Award project. The project should take 15 hours of planning time and the project duration should be 7–8 hours. Follow the action plan in the chapter “Adventures in Girl Scouting” in the *Junior Girl Scout Handbook*. Provide community service inside or outside of Girl Scouting.

Specific instructions on how to complete each step can be found on the GSUSA Web site.

**Uniforms/Clothing**

**Message:** Girl members and adults in Girl Scouts wear Girl Scout uniforms to show their pride in belonging to a Movement whose mission is held in high regard worldwide, to provide visibility and recognition for members, and to show they belong to the Girl Scout organization. The GSUSA National Board updated the Girl Scout uniform policy as of October 2008 to reflect the changing needs of our members and transformation of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience. Uniforms are required when participating in ceremonies or officially representing the Girl Scout Movement.

**Specifics:** Girl Scouts at each level have one required element (Tunic, Sash or Vest) for the display of official pins and awards when participating in ceremonies or officially representing the Girl Scout Movement. For girls ages 5 to 14, the unifying look includes wearing a choice of a tunic, vest, sash, combined with their own solid white shirts and khaki pants or skirts. Girl Scouts in high school can also wear a scarf that unites their look with the sisterhood of Girl Scouts around the world. For adult members the uniform is a Girl Scout official scarf or tie for men, worn with the official membership pins, combined with their own navy blue business attire.

**Rationale:** Girl Scout members are required to wear a few items of clothing that gives them a common identity as Girl Scouts when participating in ceremonies or officially representing the Girl Scout Movement. There are options for uniform components at every age level of Girl Scouting, including casual wear. Financial assistance is often available through Girl Scout councils for uniform components.
**Girl Scout Week**

**Message:** The week that includes March 12 is celebrated annually across the country as the anniversary of the founding of Girl Scouting in the United States in 1912. During Girl Scout Week, it is customary for Girl Scout troops or groups to do a service project and to learn more about the history of Girl Scouting, about the life of founder Juliette Gordon Low, or about the diversity in their own communities.

**Rationale:** Girl Scout Week begins with the Sunday on or prior to March 12 and concludes the following Saturday. This allows members of diverse faiths to celebrate Girl Scouting on their chosen day of worship. In some areas and places of worship, a Girl Scout flier highlighting local activities and thanking the community for their support is inserted into bulletins and programs. The week was designated Girl Scout Week by the National Council of Girl Scouts of the USA in 1953.
BRAND IMAGE

**Girl Scout Service Mark**

**Message:** The Girl Scout service mark is a valuable and highly recognized symbol and brand name of the Girl Scout Movement. Because of the service mark’s importance, its use should comply fully with GSUSA guidelines.

**2006 Blue Book References:**
Congressional Charter, Section 80305, p. 35
Constitution of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, Article XV, p. 11
“Requirements for a Girl Scout Council Charter,” p. 25

**Rationale:** Fully chartered Girl Scout councils may use the Girl Scout service mark when carrying out Girl Scout programs or conducting Girl Scout business. Failure to protect the integrity of the service mark may result in its misuse. Girl Scouts of the USA owns and is responsible for legally protecting all its trademarks and for ensuring their continued integrity. But all Girl Scout councils and troops are responsible for carefully using the trademarks so the name, reputation, and rights of the entire organization are always protected. For these reasons, neither the Girl Scout name nor its trademarks may be used on items for resale or by persons or groups outside Girl Scouting without prior written approval of Girl Scouts of the USA.

In addition, sales on the Internet of Girl Scout merchandise (such as uniforms, insignia, publications, and equipment) may only be conducted by duly authorized and licensed Girl Scout councils, council shops, retail agencies, or GSUSA-licensed vendors.

**Endorsements**

**Message:** As a highly reputable and well-known not-for-profit organization with a membership in demand by many companies, Girl Scouts of the USA occasionally allows for certain types of product endorsements that have met specific criteria, will maintain the reputation of Girl Scouting, and provide financial benefit to the organization, but it will never allow political endorsements of any kind.

**2006 Blue Book References:**
“Permission for Commercial Endorsements,” p. 18
“Individual Testimonials,” p. 18
“Political and Legislative Activity,” p. 18
“Cause-Related Marketing,” p. 19

**Political Endorsements**

As a not-for-profit organization, Girl Scouts may take action only on legislation that directly affects the rights, responsibilities, and purposes of Girl Scouts of the USA. In their capacities as Girl Scouts, individual members may not take action on legislation or participate in any political activity that supports or opposes a candidate for public office. Also prohibited are such activities as conducting a flag ceremony at a political rally or appearing in such a manner as to be clearly identified as a Girl Scout in an advertisement for a political candidate or issue. However, activities that are designed specifically to be informative and do not advocate a position or candidate are permitted. We encourage Girl Scouts to actively promote participating in the democratic process, but not to advocate for a position or a candidate.

**2006 Blue Book References:**
“Political and Legislative Activity,” p. 18
Congressional Charter, Section 80306, p. 35
Product Endorsements
Because of our commitment to our members, the values and reputation of Girl Scouting, and our not-for-profit status, we have in place policies that restrict both direct and indirect endorsements of commercial products or services. Therefore, our first step is to evaluate whether the product or service lives up to Girl Scout standards and principles and is beneficial to the girls we serve. At the same time, we need to consider the potential impact of an endorsement on the Girl Scout Movement. Two examples of positive relationships are Mutual of America’s financial literacy program, called CentsAbility, and Intel’s summer technology camps and workshops.

2006 Blue Book References:
“Permission for Commercial Endorsements,” p.18
“Individual Testimonials,” p.18
“Cause-Related Marketing,” p.19

Fundraising for Other Organizations

Message: All monies raised in the name of Girl Scouting must be used for that purpose.

Rationale: When people give money to those identifying themselves as Girl Scouts, they assume they are helping to provide Girl Scouting to girls in their community. It would be misleading and a breach of the public trust to use the Girl Scout name to raise money for another purpose, no matter how noble.

2006 Blue Book References:
“Fundraising Methods,” p.19
“Fundraising by Girl Scouts of the United States of America and Girl Scout Councils,” p.19
“Control of Funds,” p. 19
“Solicitation of Contributions,” p. 20
GOVERNANCE, CHARTERS AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Message: Each Girl Scout council is modeled on the national organization’s efficient and effective structure and utilizes the same democratic governance system to achieve decisiveness, speed of action, and wise use of its resources. Girl Scouts of the USA received a Congressional Charter by a special act of the United States Congress in 1951.

Girl Scout councils are chartered by GSUSA. Renewal of a council’s charter requires a satisfactory assessment of the council’s performance, generally over a period of four years. If the council meets all charter requirements and is developing, managing, and maintaining Girl Scouting throughout its area of jurisdiction, GSUSA’s National Board of Directors may recommend renewal. Special provisions for charter extensions may be made during the realignment period by GSUSA’s National Board of Directors.

2006 Blue Book References:
Preamble to the Constitution of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, p. 5
Constitution of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, Article VII, p. 8
“Girl Scout Council Charter,” p. 25
“Requirements for a Girl Scout Council Charter,” pp. 25–26
“Procedures for Reviewing and Issuing Girl Scout Council Charters,” pp. 26–27

Rationale: In some cases, renewal may be with qualifications, which means that the council may be required to make specific changes to maintain its charter. Girl Scouts is embarking on an exciting evolution to better meet the needs of girls in today’s fast-changing world. This evolution includes transforming the more than 300 councils nationwide to just over 100 high-capacity councils in the United States, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. This revitalization is important to Girl Scouting because it will ensure that we remain the best leadership experience for girls in grades K–12 for decades to come.

Individual Council Responsibilities

Message: Each council is separately incorporated but chartered by GSUSA with two primary responsibilities:

1. To deliver The New Girl Scout Leadership Experience to any girl in grades K–12 who meets the membership requirements.
2. To further the development of the Girl Scout Movement in the United States.

2006 Blue Book References:
Constitution of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, Article VII, p. 8
“Girl Scout Council Authority and Responsibility,” p. 20
“Girl Scout Council Charter,” p. 25
“Requirements for a Girl Scout Council Charter,” p. 25

Rationale: More specifically, each council is responsible for carrying out The New Girl Scout Leadership Experience activities; recruiting and supporting girls and adult volunteers; securing funds for council expenses; and governing, managing, and promoting Girl Scouting in its community.

GIRL SCOUTS’ RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER YOUTH-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

Message: Girl Scouts of the USA is a separate entity from other youth-serving organizations, including the Boy Scouts of America.

Rationale: While some youth-serving groups may share programming activities with other youth-serving organizations, GSUSA is independently chartered and governed and does not comment on the policies, procedures, and actions of other organizations.
FAITH AND INDIVIDUAL BELIEFS

Message: The Girl Scout organization does not endorse or promote any particular philosophy or religious belief and allows flexibility when girls say the Girl Scout Promise.

2006 Blue Book References:
Preamble to the Constitution of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, p. 5
“Spirituality/Religion,” p. 22

Founding Principles
The Girl Scout Movement is a secular, values-based organization founded on democratic principles, including freedom of religion. We do not attempt to dictate the form or style of a member’s worship. We believe that faith is a private matter for girls and their families to address. Flexibility about the word “God” in the Girl Scout Promise can empower girls and motivate them to discuss this matter with their families.

2006 Blue Book References:
Preamble to the Constitution of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, p. 5
“Spirituality/Religion,” p. 22

The Girl Scout Promise
One of the membership requirements in Girl Scouting is making the Girl Scout Promise. Individuals are free to substitute their own wording for “God.” The wording of the Girl Scout Promise, including the use of the word “God,” may not be altered in print or in any electronic medium.

2006 Blue Book References:
Preamble to the Constitution of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, p. 5
“Spirituality/Religion,” p. 22

Graces, Blessings, and Invocations
Although Girl Scout policies support religious diversity, there is no Girl Scouts of the USA policy that prohibits or requires the saying or singing of a grace, blessing, or invocation in a troop/group setting. Such decisions are made locally at the troop or group level and should be arrived at only after full consideration of the spiritual beliefs of all participants.

2006 Blue Book References:
Preamble to the Constitution of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, p. 5
“Spirituality/Religion,” p. 22
SAFETY

Message: The Girl Scout organization is always concerned about the safety of the girls we serve. All activities are planned and carried out in accordance with program standards and guidelines established by Girl Scouts of the USA, which are designed to safeguard the well-being of both girl and adult members. These program standards and guidelines also ensure that program activities are appropriate for the age level of the girls participating in them. They are published by Girl Scouts of the USA in Safety-Wise, which is distributed free of charge to all Girl Scout troop or group leaders.

2006 Blue Book References:
“Girl Scout Council Authority and Responsibility,” p. 20
“Health and Safety,” p. 22

Camping
Camping activities must be appropriate to the age level of the girls who are participating. Girl Scout councils are required to comply with GSUSA policies and standards on health and safety, have procedures in place for approving campsites, ensure that leaders are trained according to Girl Scout standards, and obtain all proper permissions.

2006 Blue Book References:
“Girl Scout Council Authority and Responsibility,” p. 20
“Administration of Girl Scout Camping,” p. 20
“Health and Safety,” p. 22

Internet Safety
The Internet is a powerful informational resource, but it also is an open medium that can attract more than the intended audience, including cyber-stalkers who prey on children. To ensure that girls are safe when conducting activities on the Internet, GSUSA has established policies, standards, and guidelines for girls:

- Do not give out personal information such as your address, telephone number, e-mail address, or Girl Scout meeting locations and times without the permission of a parent or guardian.
- Notify an adult immediately if you notice any information that makes you feel uncomfortable.
- Never agree to meet with someone you have met online without first checking with a parent or guardian. If the parent or guardian agrees to the meeting, make sure that it is in a public place and never go alone.

2006 Blue Book References:
“Internet Sales,” p. 19
“Health and Safety,” p. 22
Security of Membership Data
Because the primary concern at Girl Scouts is the health and safety of the girls we serve, the release and distribution of any Girl Scout membership list to a Girl Scout council or non-Girl Scout entity, or release of any data or information on Girl Scout members, is prohibited except upon approval by GSUSA.

2006 Blue Book References:
"Security of Girl Scout Membership Data and Restricted Use of Membership and Mailing Lists," p. 21

Physical and Emotional Safety
Because the primary concern at Girl Scouts is the health and safety of the girls we serve, all adult volunteers and staff who work with girls are carefully selected and participate in periodic evaluations of their job performance. In addition, resources are available to help girls develop behavior and attitudes that increase their personal safety, and adults who work directly with girls receive training in how to recognize girls who are victims of psychological or physical abuse.

To help ensure the safety of our girls, GSUSA policy mandates that all programs be held in venues that meet the organization’s safety standards and that at least two adult volunteers are with the girls at all times. If a leader or a council receives a report of child abuse by an adult member in Girl Scouting, they are instructed to take immediate action to protect the girls in their care; suspend all Girl Scout activities of the suspected adult until the matter is resolved; and immediately convey the report to the appropriate law enforcement and social welfare authorities. While we believe that a person is innocent until proven otherwise, we cooperate fully with investigating authorities and provide all possible supports to the affected girls and their families.

2006 Blue Book References:
"Selection of Adults," p. 21
SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES

Advocacy in Girl Scouting
Girl Scouts’ advocacy efforts help inform and educate policymakers and community leaders about the issues that directly affect girls or the rights of the Girl Scout organization. These efforts include motivating community involvement, influencing GSUSA’s practices and governmental policies at the federal, state, and local levels, and ensuring the fair enforcement and implementation of laws that have an impact on all girls and on Girl Scouting. However, Girl Scouts does not endorse or align itself with political parties or candidates for political office.

2006 Blue Book References:
Preamble to the Constitution of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, p. 5
Congressional Charter, Section 80306, p. 35

Prayer in School
The Girl Scout organization does not take a position on prayer in schools but does encourage each member to establish for herself the nature of her beliefs. We believe the issue of prayer in schools is a private matter for girls and their families to address together.

2006 Blue Book References:
Preamble to the Constitution of Girl Scouts of the United States of America, p. 5
“Respect for Religious Opinions and Practices,” p. 22

Gun Control
The Girl Scout organization does not take a position on any political issue related to gun control at the state or federal level. We believe gun control is a private matter for girls and their families to address together.

Firearms/Hunting
If a Girl Scout activity may possibly involve the use of firearms, the troop or group leader must obtain written permission from the local council. Such an event may not involve girls less than 12 years of age, must take place under the guidance of certified instructors, and requires parental permission. Hunting is not permitted as a Girl Scout activity.

2006 Blue Book References:
“Health and Safety,” p. 22

Abortion and Birth Control
The Girl Scout organization does not take a position on abortion or birth control. Our membership is a cross-section of America with regard to opinions on religious and social issues and practices. We believe these matters are best decided by girls and their families.

2006 Blue Book References:
“Respect for Religious Opinions and Practices,” p. 22

Health and Sex Education
In some areas of the country, Girl Scout troops or groups may choose to hold discussions about human sexuality and may choose to collaborate with a local organization that specializes in these issues. The topic is discussed from a factual, informative point of view and does not include advocacy or promotion of any social or religious perspective. Participation in these discussions is optional, and each girl who participates must provide written consent from her parent or guardian.
SECTION III: EFFECTIVELY MANAGING RESPONSES

As a council staff member or a volunteer, you may need to answer questions about routine as well as sensitive issues. These queries can come from parents, guardians, or community members. They may occur during an impromptu meeting in the supermarket, via e-mail, or at a Girl Scout or other community event.

So how do you handle these queries?

- Never answer if you feel uninformed about the situation.
- Direct any questions about a sensitive situation to the council member in charge of communications or public relations.
- If you are contacted directly by the media, always redirect them to the council.
- Never do an interview with the media without consulting a council communications staff member.
- Assume that anything you say to the media will be considered “on the record.”

Basic Messaging About Girl Scouting
The following simple statements can help when talking to the general public about Girl Scouts and its purpose in the community:

1. Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place.
2. In Girl Scouts, girls discover their world and their values, connect with those around them through understanding and empathy, and take action to better their world.
3. Girl Scouting is where today’s girls become tomorrow’s leaders. Through activities that are fun, cooperative, and girl-led, girls learn decision-making skills and build self-confidence.
4. Character, conduct, and community service are core qualities of Girl Scouting. Girl Scouting is an asset to the community. Through leadership and taking action for sustainable change, its members enrich the lives of those around them.
5. Girl Scouts discover the fun, friendship, and power of girls together.
6. Girl Scouting is for every girl, everywhere. Girl Scouts not only welcomes but also seeks members from all racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic groups.
7. Girl Scouting is based on a code of values, expressed in the Girl Scout Promise and Law, which every girl can understand and apply in her everyday life.
8. Adults of all ages and backgrounds make Girl Scouting possible and gain personal satisfaction and growth by helping girls succeed.

When speaking to the general public about Girl Scouts, use the above messaging but always add a positive personal experience to your story.
SECTION IV: HANDLING CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

As the crisis communications manager and spokesperson, you will frequently be asked about routine as well as highly sensitive issues. Although these queries can come from a variety of sources, the media will generally pose the majority of them. You can expect inquiries on a range of topics, whether at a planned event (such as a scheduled meeting or call), an impromptu meeting, or a Girl Scout or other community event.

GSUSA encourages all Girl Scout spokespersons to take sensitive issues communications trainings, keep plans up to date, and conduct practices regularly.

So how do you respond to sensitive issues in a public forum? And how can you convey control of a situation with concern and empathy? While dealing with the media is the focus of the following discussion, the information can be applied in other public forums.

Some Basic Tips on Media Relations

- When talking to the press, understand that the reporter has ultimate control of how the story is reported. Your primary goal is to make sure your message comes through.
- Even if you don’t value your local media’s outlook or contribution, they are a main gatekeeper of information and do want to know about Girl Scouts.
- If you have contacted or been contacted by the media about an issue that directly impacts your council, an individual member, a troop/group in your council, or even the entire Girl Scout organization, give the matter your best attention. Journalists feel it’s their right to know who, what, where, when, why, and how. And in this day of 24/7 communications and commerce, there is a lot of space and airtime to fill with both news we want and news we don’t want.
- Although Girl Scouts is a nonprofit private organization, it provides a leadership experience and services to girls, so the public has a desire to know how the organization conducts its affairs.
- Communicating positive messages to your various audiences can be successfully accomplished through journalists, and is a dollar-valuable and credible way to do so. If you know how to “navigate” the news waters, you’ll be able to enjoy the support and trust of many constituencies.
- Be prepared to respond accurately, and reassuringly, with a need-to-know approach on sensitive issues and in a more anecdotal manner on less controversial issues. Being well prepared will make you comfortable as you navigate interview situations, and your message points will be communicated in an interesting and newsworthy manner.

Media Relations Philosophy and Policy

The types of media with whom we speak are as important to GSUSA as the messages we convey. Our philosophy is to look for opportunities in which ours is the prominent voice. Our goal is to be in contact with media that results in feature—not “sound bite”—coverage. This means we may decline requests for interviews, especially when asked to comment about the activities or issues of other organizations.

It is very important that all contacts with reporters provide opportunities for us to express the main ideas about Girl Scouting in a consistent and compelling manner to underscore our brand image.
Your Role in the Interview Process

GSUSA’s practice on media relations is for the national organization to speak with national media and for the councils to work with local or regional media outlets. Should a local council staff member or volunteer be approached by a national reporter, contact GSUSA to discuss the request.

There are three ways you may be contacted by a reporter:

1. A prearranged interview on a specific topic. You, GSUSA, or its public relations agency contacts the media outlet to generate a story. The preapproved topic or issue will be one about which you are well informed.

2. An unsolicited call. Should you receive such a call, tell the reporter you are on your way to a meeting and will call back, but learn as much as possible about the reporter and how the story will be used and ask for the reporter’s name, publication, phone number, and deadline, along with as much information as possible about the topic or issue. If you’re unsure about how or even if to respond, contact GSUSA to determine the most appropriate response and spokesperson—which may be you.

3. In person on the street or at an event. Reporters often seek to “catch” someone unprepared and might show up at an event or even while you’re shopping. Thank the reporters for their interest in Girl Scouting and take their names, employers, contact information, and the issues in which they’re interested. Tell them that you or someone else from Girl Scouts will get back to them at a mutually convenient time. (This response also can be used with community members, or even parents or guardians who approach you in public venues or reach you by phone.)

The Basics of Interviewing

An interview is an exchange of information between you and the interviewer. The goal is to provide readers, viewers, and listeners with accurate information. However, it is important to limit the discussion to key issues and, in effect, to control the exchange of information. Your challenge is to define and manage the flow of information so your expertise and knowledge of Girl Scouting and issues about girls are presented in a succinct and interesting, yet authoritative, manner. And this guide provides you with ways to reach that goal.

As a spokesperson, you are in the best position to determine the most important information for discussion. Section II of this guide contains approved statements that will help you during questioning about “tough” or sensitive issues as well as recommended key messages that should be incorporated into every interview to:

- Help build awareness about the Girl Scout philosophy and program.
- Provide key attributes/benefits of the organization.
- Educate the general public as well as the business community and private sector about the role of Girl Scouting as the premier voice for girls.
Impromptu Questioning: Maintaining Control by Being Prepared

The cardinal rule is to be prepared so you can control any unplanned for—and even planned—event as much as possible. Three essentials are needed to minimize the chances of being caught off guard:

1. Know what you want to say.
2. Familiarize yourself with the messages in this guide.
3. Know GSUSA’s philosophy about specific issues.

Quick Tips

- Take your time. Think about your answer, and don't respond until you're ready.
- Don't assume the reporter knows what he or she is talking about. Provide only appropriate background information to help the interviewer; thus the viewers/readers have an accurate picture.
- Offer further assistance and become a resource for the reporter. Although he or she will not often read the story to you, offer to clarify or provide additional information should that be necessary.
- If necessary, redirect the conversation back to your message. Be polite, but take control by using key messages and their support point as segues. Often during media interviews, reporters stray from the “intended” story line to unrelated topics or ask hypothetical questions. Do not just answer the questions, but bridge to your key message. Every question provides the chance to deliver a message, even questions we can't answer. The questions are not what matters. The reporter’s questions are the conduit to your messages.
- Use sample bridging phrases such as the following:
  - “Let me put this in perspective…”
  - “On the other hand….”
  - “What’s important to remember is…”
  - “But what we’re especially excited about is…”
  - “What this means is…”
- Use “flags” such as the following to draw attention to your messages:
  - “The key thing is…”
  - “The best part about…”
  - “The most exciting part is…”
  - “What’s most important is…”
  - “Another thing to remember is…”
Managing Communications During a Crisis
Successful crisis management anticipates media needs. Speculation and imagination can paint a dramatic picture beyond the actual facts.

Answer these five questions about the situation:
- What happened?
- How dangerous is the situation?
- What are you doing about it?
- How long will it take?
- What happens next?

The sooner you answer these five questions, the more time you can buy before you have to answer the sixth question: Whose fault is it?

Be open and honest with the media and use language with which the public is familiar. Prompt action, sincere concern and sympathy, the promise of a full investigation, and candid admission of what happened can all combine to keep an emergency situation from evolving into a crisis.

Here are some guidelines to follow:

1. Have written procedures in place to ensure that there is only one source of information. In this way, the press cannot get conflicting information from others at your office. At the same time, keep internal audiences—staff and volunteers—promptly informed to prevent rumors and inaccurate information from spreading.

2. Develop major talking points (two- to three-sentence summaries) that will be stressed when you answer questions. These are key messages the media will probably never ask about so you must be proactive about inserting them into your statement(s) and responses.
   - Never distribute these documents, as they are for internal use only.
   - Use bridging techniques to redirect the interview back to your key messages.

3. Control the media. During a crisis, reporters will speak with community leaders, parents, current and former Girl Scouts; do a computer search to find past transgressions; speak with current and former employees; surf Web chat rooms; and do whatever else is necessary to write the story. You must participate in story development so you can help contain the rumor mill. After all, when the information is honest and forthcoming, there will be less need to seek out other sources.
   - Designate one staff member to be actively responsible for public relations and make sure the spokesperson is accessible to the media.
   - Keep a log of each phone call received and interview given, since inevitably someone will come along later and evaluate your performance.
   - Try to communicate as quickly as possible and assign one person the task of keeping a chronology.
   - With very sensitive interviews, tape-record the conversation and tell the reporter you are doing so.
4. If the situation is serious, hold daily news conferences to provide progress reports. In a crisis situation, it simply can’t be business as usual.

- **Prepare, read, and distribute a brief** statement for the record and to provide sound bites, which will help you gain control of the situation and establish ground rules and the tone of follow-up questions. Most important of all, make sure the message your spokesperson delivers to the media is accurate, consistent, and credible.

- **Rehearse.** Read over the statement in front of a mirror until it has virtually been memorized so you can look at reporters comfortably when answering them.

- **Be honest.** If you don’t know the answer to a reporter’s questions, say so. Promise to get the answer and, of course, deliver on that promise. Never bluff; it will be found out and you’ll lose both credibility and control.

- **Never say, “No comment.”** Instead say, “We have nothing further to add at this time.” “No comment” is an implied admission of guilt. It actually translates into “I’m hiding something embarrassing or damaging.”

- **Don’t become a victim of intimidation.** Always respond to the media’s negative and hostile questions by answering the questions you wish the reporter had asked. People always remember the answer you give but rarely the question asked.

- **There is no such thing as “off the record.”** Always assume that if you say it, it will end up on page one the next day.

5. Because crises can occur during off-hours, it is essential that council spokespersons be prepared to operate from their home or any remote site. Have on hand a crisis kit: annual report, press kit/information packet, prepared statements covering hot topics, and the biographies and photos of senior management and members of the board of directors. Include lists of the home and weekend phone numbers of the senior and communications staff and key media in your community. Ensure that the duplicating, mailing, and messenger facilities remain open after hours.
Some Crisis Communications Do’s and Don’ts

**Do’s**

Do release only confirmed facts.

Do show concern.

Do provide updates to key contacts.

Do bridge to your key message no matter what is asked.

Do defuse hostile questions by bridging.

Do stay calm.

Do keep the lines of communication open with the CEO and appropriate staff.

**Don’ts**

Don’t arrive unprepared to a media interview.

Don’t reveal proprietary information.

Don’t repeat negative phrases used by reporters.

Don’t answer speculative or hypothetical questions.

Don’t place blame.

Don’t let your interviewer set the agenda.

Don’t become defensive or hostile.

Don’t automatically accept “either/or” questions.

Don’t answer inappropriate questions.

Don’t argue with a reporter.

Don’t say “no comment.”

Don’t underestimate any reporter and never speak “off the record.”

*For additional information on crisis communications, please check out the OCN.*

This guide is intended for the sole use of Girl Scout staff and council-approved members. Therefore, it should not be distributed in its entirety or posted on public Web sites or internet forums.

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