



Inclusive Girl Scouting A Guide for Volunteers



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Why Inclusion Matters

Girl Scouting is built on the belief that every Girl Scout deserves a place where they can belong, grow, and thrive. Our troops bring together members with different experiences, abilities, identities, and perspectives—and that diversity is what makes the Girl Scout experience so meaningful.

As a volunteer, you help shape the environment where members learn, connect, and discover who they are. By leading with empathy, flexibility, and openness, you create a space where every Girl Scout feels valued, supported, and included.

In an inclusive troop:

- Every Girl Scout has the opportunity to participate in their own way.
- Differences are respected and celebrated.
- Girl Scouts support and learn from one another.
- Success is defined by effort, growth, and belonging, not comparison.

Inclusive language also includes respecting names, pronouns, and the many ways Girl Scouts and their families identify and communicate. Creating this kind of environment doesn't require having all the answers. It starts with a willingness to listen, adapt, and ensure that every Girl Scout feels like they are an important part of the troop.

The Girl Scout Promise and Law

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.

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,

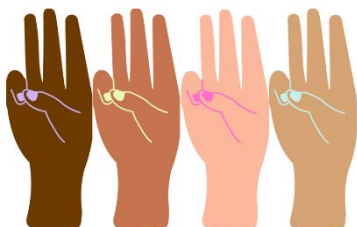
and to respect myself and others,

respect authority,

use resources wisely,

make the world a better place,

and be a sister to every Girl Scout



Core Principles for Inclusive Volunteer Practice

Creating an inclusive Girl Scout experience starts with a few core practices that guide how we lead, communicate, and support every Girl Scout. These principles help ensure that all troop members feel respected, valued, and able to participate fully.

Partner with Caregivers

Caregivers know their Girl Scout best. When appropriate, connect with them to better understand strengths, needs, and helpful strategies that support a positive experience.

Respect Privacy and Autonomy

A Girl Scout's personal information is theirs to share. Never assume or disclose details about identity, abilities, or needs without permission. Include them in decisions about their own experience whenever possible.

Speak Directly to the Girl Scout

Always address the Girl Scout first, whether communicating, offering help, or asking questions. This reinforces respect, independence, and belonging.

Normalize Differences

Every Girl Scout learns, communicates, and participates in their own way. Treat differences as a natural and valued part of the troop experience, not something unusual or separate.

Ask How to Support

Avoid making assumptions. Instead, ask simple, respectful questions like, "How can I support you?" or "What would help you feel successful in this activity?"

Support, Don't Control

Your role is to guide and encourage, not to take over. Offer support when needed, but allow Girl Scouts to make choices, take the lead, and build independence.

Create Predictable, Safe, and Consistent Spaces

Consistent routines, clear expectations, and a supportive environment help all Girl Scouts feel secure and ready to participate. When possible, maintain structure and give advance notice of changes.



Language Matters

The words we use shape how Girl Scouts feel about themselves and each other. Using respectful, inclusive language helps create a troop environment where every member feels valued, seen, and supported.

What is Person-First Language?

Person-first language puts the individual before any label or diagnosis. It recognizes that a Girl Scout is a person first—not defined by a disability, condition, or identity.

Examples:

- “A Girl Scout with a disability” instead of “a disabled Girl Scout.”
- “A person who uses a wheelchair” instead of “wheelchair-bound.”

Let the Individual Lead

Each person decides if, when, and how they identify. Some individuals may prefer identity-first language (such as “Autistic”), while others may not. When in doubt, follow their lead and respect their preference.

Use Respectful, Clear Language

Choose words that are neutral, accurate, and empowering. Avoid language that:

- Suggests pity, limitation, or helplessness.
- Labels someone by a condition or stereotype.
- Uses outdated or harmful terms.

For example:

- Say “accessible space” instead of “handicapped space.”
- Say “person with a mental health condition” instead of stigmatizing terms.

Focus on Support and Accessibility

Shift the focus from limitations to support. Instead of asking what someone *can’t* do, think about what tools, adjustments, or supports will help them participate fully.

Remember: Language Evolves

Language and preferences can change over time. Staying open, listening, and being willing to adjust your language shows respect and helps build an inclusive environment for everyone.

Language Matters: Quick Reference Guide

Say This	Instead of This
A Girl Scout with a disability	Disabled Girl Scout, handicapped
A person who uses a wheelchair	Wheelchair-bound, confined to a wheelchair
A person who is deaf or hard of hearing	Deaf and dumb, hearing impaired
A person who is blind or has low vision	The blind
A person with an intellectual or developmental disability	Slow, special
A person with a mental health condition	Crazy, psycho
Accessible parking, seating, or space	Handicapped parking/area
A person who communicates using a device	Non-verbal, mute

How to Talk About Disability and Support Needs

Talking about disability or support needs can feel unfamiliar, but it doesn't have to be complicated. The goal is not to "figure everything out," but to ensure each Girl Scout feels supported, respected, and included.

Start with What's Needed in the Moment

If a Girl Scout seems to be having difficulty, it may or may not be related to a disability. Focus first on what support is needed right now, not on identifying a diagnosis.

Pause Before Asking

Before asking about a disability or support need, take a moment to reflect:

- *Why am I asking this?*
- *Is this information necessary to support participation?*
- *How will this help me better support the Girl Scout?*

If the answer isn't clear or necessary, it may be best not to ask.

Ask Permission First

Disability is personal. Always ask if it's okay before discussing it. Some individuals are comfortable sharing, while others are not, and both are okay.

Example:

- "Would you be open to sharing what might help make this activity easier for you?"

Ask Simple, Respectful Questions

When it is appropriate to ask, keep questions:

- Short
- Clear
- Neutral in tone

Avoid asking out of curiosity alone or using language that suggests judgment, pity, or assumptions.

Focus on Support, Not Limitations

Shift the conversation away from "what's wrong" to "what would help."

Instead of:

- "What's your limitation?"
- "Why can't you do this?"

Try:

- "How can I support you in this activity?"
- "What would help you feel successful today?"

Respect Choice and Privacy

Sharing is always a personal choice. A Girl Scout or caregiver may choose not to disclose information, and that's okay. Your role is to provide support with the information you have, not to require disclosure.

Trauma-Informed Practice

Trauma-informed practice is an approach that helps volunteers understand and respond to the ways life experiences can impact how Girl Scouts feel, behave, and engage.

What is Trauma?

Trauma is a response to deeply distressing or overwhelming experiences. These experiences can affect how a Girl Scout feels, reacts, and interacts with others.

What is Trauma-Informed Care?

Trauma-informed care means recognizing that past experiences may influence behavior and choosing to respond with understanding, patience, and support.

Behavior is Communication

Sometimes behaviors such as withdrawal, frustration, or difficulty focusing are not intentional. They may reflect stress, trauma, or unmet needs. When we shift our perspective, we can respond in ways that support rather than escalate.

Trauma-Informed Practices for Volunteers

Call In, Not Call Out

Instead of correcting behavior publicly or harshly, invite the Girl Scout back into the activity in a supportive way.

Use Short, Clear Directions

Give one direction at a time and clearly state what you want the Girl Scout *to do*. This reduces confusion and supports success.

Use Behavior-Specific Praise

Recognize and name positive behaviors to reinforce them.

Check In with Girl Scouts

Take time to notice changes in behavior and check in with care and curiosity.

Create Predictable, Consistent Spaces

Routines help Girl Scouts feel safe and secure. Keep meeting structures consistent and give advance notice when changes are coming.

A Supportive Mindset

Girl Scouts want to do well. When we lead with patience, consistency, and empathy, we create an environment where all Girl Scouts feel safe to participate, take risks, and grow.

Why This Matters

These small shifts in language and approach help Girl Scouts feel safe, respected, and supported, especially when they may be experiencing stress or strong emotions. Trauma-informed responses focus on connection, not correction.

Real-Life Scenarios: Trauma-Informed in Action:

Scenario 1: A Girl Scout won't sit still during an activity

Instead of:

"Sit down and stop moving."

Try:

"I can see you have a lot of energy right now. Let's stand and stretch for a minute, then come back together."

Scenario 2: A Girl Scout becomes frustrated and shuts down

Instead of:

"Why aren't you participating?"

Try:

"I noticed this activity might feel frustrating. Would you like help, a break, or to try it a different way?"

Scenario 3: A Girl Scout is interrupting or calling out

Instead of:

"Stop interrupting."

Try:

"I want to hear what you have to say—let's take turns so everyone gets a chance to share."

Scenario 4: A Girl Scout is withdrawn or unusually quiet

Instead of:

"What's wrong with you?"

Try:

"I noticed you seem a little quieter today. How are you feeling?"

Scenario 5: A Girl Scout refuses to join an activity

Instead of:

"You have to participate."

Try:

"You're welcome to join when you're ready. Would it help to watch first or try a different role?"

Practical Support Strategies

Every Girl Scout has unique strengths, needs, and ways of engaging. While diagnoses can vary, many support strategies are effective across a wide range of situations. Organizing supports by **what a Girl Scout needs in the moment** rather than by diagnosis helps create a more flexible, inclusive troop environment. Use the strategies below as tools you can adapt to meet the needs of your troop.

Communication Supports

Support understanding by making information clear, simple, and accessible.

- Give clear, concise directions, one or two steps at a time.
- Use visual supports like schedules, charts, or examples.
- Provide written reminders or instructions when possible.
- Check for understanding by asking Girl Scouts to repeat or explain directions.
- Use consistent language and routines to reinforce expectations.

Sensory and Regulation Supports

Help Girl Scouts manage energy, focus, and sensory needs.

- Provide a quiet space for breaks or self-regulation.
- Reduce background noise and distractions when possible.
- Build in movement breaks between activities.
- Offer comfort items or calming tools when appropriate.
- Give transition warnings (e.g., “5 more minutes”) before changing activities.
- Use simple calming strategies like breathing, stretching, or quiet time.

Participation and Accessibility Supports

Ensure all Girl Scouts can participate in ways that work for them.

- Offer adaptive tools (e.g., modified supplies, assistive devices).
- Allow extra time to complete tasks.
- Choose or adjust to accessible spaces.
- Provide flexible ways to participate (observe, assist, lead, or modify tasks).
- Use team-based formats to encourage shared participation.
- Incorporate hands-on, tactile, or multi-sensory activities.

Social and Emotional Supports

Build a positive troop culture where all Girl Scouts feel safe and supported.

- Use buddy systems to encourage connection and inclusion.
- Facilitate reflection or closing circles to process experiences.
- Reinforce expectations through positive, behavior-specific praise.
- Establish inclusive group norms rooted in the Girl Scout Promise and Law.
- Support repair after conflict through guided conversations.
- Encourage self-regulation by allowing breaks and offering choices.

Which Strategy Should I Use?

The Girl Scout seems confused or unsure of what to do

Try Communication Supports

- Break directions into 1–2 steps
- Show a visual example
- Ask: “Can you tell me what we’re doing first?”

The Girl Scout seems overwhelmed, distracted, or overstimulated

Try Sensory & Regulation Supports

- Offer a quiet space or short break
- Reduce noise or distractions
- Give a transition warning or calming activity

The Girl Scout wants to participate but is struggling to complete the task

Try Participation & Accessibility Supports

- Offer adaptive tools or modify the task
- Allow extra time
- Provide a different way to participate (help, observe, partner)

The Girl Scout is having a hard time socially or emotionally

Try Social & Emotional Supports

- Use a buddy system
- Check in privately: “How are you feeling?”
- Guide a quick reset or reflection

The behavior feels unexpected, big, or challenging

Try a Trauma-Informed Approach

- Stay calm and supportive
- “Call in” instead of calling out
- Give one clear direction
- Focus on connection before correction

Still Not Sure? Start Here:

- Ask: “How can I support you right now?”
- Offer choices (join, observe, take a break)
- Keep directions simple and clear
- Stay flexible and patient

Remember: You don’t need to get it perfect. Start with what you see, try a strategy, and adjust if needed. Supporting Girl Scouts is about meeting them where they are—not expecting them to fit one way of doing things.

Tips for Supporting All Girl Scouts

These are not checklists or one-size-fits-all solutions. Every Girl Scout is different, so start by asking what support is needed and refer back to your Core Principles and Practical Support Strategies.

Autism

- Use visual schedules or agendas to show what's coming next.
- Keep routines consistent and predictable.
- Give transition warnings before changing activities.
- Offer breaks or quiet space if overwhelmed.
- Keep directions short and clear.
- Reduce noise and distractions when possible.
- Allow flexible participation (observe, step away, rejoin).

ADHD

- Use structured routines and clear expectations.
- Keep instructions short and step-by-step.
- Allow movement breaks and active participation.
- Minimize distractions during directions.
- Use visual reminders or checklists.
- Redirect gently and frequently as needed.
- Highlight strengths like creativity and energy.

Physical Disabilities

- Ask before helping—respect independence.
- Ensure the space is accessible (paths, seating, restrooms).
- Allow extra time for movement or tasks.
- Use adaptive tools when needed.
- Choose inclusive activities that allow multiple ways to participate.
- Focus on participation, not speed or competition.

Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- Face the Girl Scout when speaking.
- Speak clearly and at a natural pace.
- Reduce background noise when possible.
- Use visual supports and written instructions.
- Get attention before speaking (visual cue or name).
- Speak directly to the Girl Scout—not the interpreter.
- Check for understanding.

Blind or Low Vision

- Identify yourself when speaking and say when you leave.
- Use clear, descriptive directions (e.g., “to your left”).
- Keep the environment consistent and uncluttered.
- Avoid moving personal items without telling them.
- Incorporate hands-on and tactile activities.
- Offer assistance but let the Girl Scout guide how to help.
- Be mindful of guide dogs—they are working.

Chronic Health Needs

- Partner with caregivers for specific care instructions.
- Ensure medications and forms are properly completed and accessible.
- Be aware of triggers (food, environment, activity level).
- Keep a first aid kit available.
- Plan for safe participation in all activities.
- Know when to seek emergency help.
- Maintain privacy and discretion.

LGBTQ+ Inclusion

- Use a Girl Scout’s name and pronouns as they share them.
- Avoid assumptions about family structure or identity.
- Use inclusive language (e.g., “families” instead of “mom and dad”).
- Address teasing or exclusion immediately and respectfully.
- Create a space where all Girl Scouts feel safe being themselves.
- Keep conversations age-appropriate and respectful.
- Partner with caregivers when appropriate, while respecting privacy.

Language & Communication Access

- Use clear, simple language when giving directions.
- Provide visual supports (charts, examples, demonstrations).
- Check for understanding in a supportive way.
- Be patient, processing and translation may take time.
- Use gestures, modeling, or visuals to support communication.
- When possible, share key information with caregivers in a way they can access.
- Encourage inclusion even when communication styles differ.

Awareness & Engagement Ideas

This section provides optional ways to incorporate awareness, learning, and reflection into your troop experience. These ideas are designed to support inclusion and understanding but are not required for troop meetings or activities.

Leaders can use these ideas to:

- Introduce topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion in age-appropriate ways
- Recognize important awareness days and months
- Connect Girl Scout activities to broader community and global conversations

Using Awareness Activities with Your Troop

You may choose to recognize awareness days or months as part of your troop programming or service projects. Awareness activities should always focus on respect and inclusion, not simulation or comparison. The goal is to build understanding, not to recreate someone else's experience.

When planning awareness activities:

- Keep conversations **age-appropriate and positive**
- Focus on **understanding, empathy, and respect**
- Avoid singling out any Girl Scout or making assumptions about personal experiences
- Emphasize that everyone has **different strengths, needs, and perspectives**

Activities can be simple and meaningful, such as:

- Reading a story or watching a short video and discussing it together
- Trying an activity that builds awareness (e.g., using non-dominant hands for a task)
- Creating posters, art, or projects that celebrate inclusion
- Practicing kindness, teamwork, and the Girl Scout Promise and Law in real-life situations

When in doubt, keep it simple:

- Encourage questions
- Model respect
- Focus on what Girl Scouts can learn and how they can support one another



Monthly Troop Planning Ideas

Use these ideas as inspiration to connect inclusion-focused topics with Girl Scout programming. Activities can be simple, flexible, and adapted to your troop's age level.

January – Accessibility & Inclusion

World Braille Day (Jan 4)

Girl Scout Connections:

- Promise & Law (respect for others)
- STEM and communication badges

Leadership Award Connections:

- Personal Leadership
- Community Advocacy

Activity Ideas:

- Create messages using raised dots or textured materials.
- Explore different ways people communicate.
- Practice giving clear, step-by-step directions.

February – Understanding Differences

Rare Disease Day (last day of February)

Girl Scout Connections:

- Inclusivity and kindness
- Community awareness

Leadership Award Connections:

- Personal Leadership
- Peer Leadership

Activity Ideas:

- “What makes me unique” sharing activity.
- Create a troop kindness pledge.
- Discuss how to support someone who may feel left out.

March – Celebrating Abilities

World Down Syndrome Day (Mar 21)

Girl Scout Connections:

- Confidence building
- Leadership and teamwork

Leadership Award Connections:

- Peer Leadership
- Personal Leadership

Activity Ideas:

- Team-building games with different roles.
- Share individual strengths.
- Create “I can...” posters.

April – Neurodiversity & Inclusion

World Autism Month

Girl Scout Connections:

- Inclusivity
- Social-emotional learning

Leadership Award Connections:

- Personal Leadership
- Peer Leadership

Activity Ideas:

- Discuss different ways people learn and communicate.
- Practice flexible thinking activities.
- Create a “What helps me learn” chart.

May – Accessibility in the Community

Global Accessibility Awareness Day

Girl Scout Connections:

- Take Action/community service
- Civic engagement

Leadership Award Connections:

- Community Advocacy

Activity Ideas:

- Observe your meeting space or community for accessibility.
- Identify barriers and brainstorm solutions.
- Plan a small Take Action-style project.

June – Health & Well-Being

Brain Awareness Month

Girl Scout Connections:

- Wellness
- Healthy habits

Leadership Award Connections:

- Personal Leadership

Activity Ideas:

- Learn about brain health (sleep, nutrition, movement).
- Practice mindfulness or relaxation techniques.
- Create a “healthy habits” tracker.

July – Disability Pride & Identity

Disability Pride Month

Girl Scout Connections:

- Identity and self-confidence
- Girl Scout values

Leadership Award Connections:

- Personal Leadership
- Peer Leadership

Activity Ideas:

- Celebrate what makes each Girl Scout unique
- Create a troop pride banner
- Learn about leaders and changemakers

August – Inclusion in Action

Community health and safety

Girl Scout Connections:

- Safety
- Responsibility
- [FARE patch](#) (food allergy research & education)

Leadership Award Connections:

- Teaching Leadership
- Community Advocacy

Activity Ideas:

- Discuss ways to keep yourself and others safe
- Review troop expectations and agreements
- Role-play helping others in different situations

September – Communication & Connection

International Day of Sign Languages (Sept 23)

Girl Scout Connections:

- Communication skills
- Global awareness
- [Speaking in sign](#)

Leadership Award Connections:

- Teaching Leadership
- Peer Leadership

Activity Ideas:

- Learn basic sign language (names, greetings).
- Practice non-verbal communication games.
- Explore different communication styles.

October – Mental Health Awareness

World Mental Health Day (Oct 10), ADHD Awareness Month

Girl Scout Connections:

- Emotional wellness
- Self-care

Leadership Award Connections:

- Personal Leadership
- Community Advocacy

Activity Ideas:

- Create a calm-down toolkit.
- Discuss emotions and coping strategies.
- Practice breathing or mindfulness activities.

November – Empathy & Understanding

Epilepsy Awareness Month

Girl Scout Connections:

- Respect and empathy
- Helping others

Leadership Award Connections:

- Peer Leadership
- Teaching Leadership

Activity Ideas:

- Discuss how to help in an emergency (age-appropriate).
- Practice being a supportive friend.
- Reflect on how to include others.

December – Inclusion & Belonging

International Day of Persons with Disabilities (Dec 3)

Girl Scout Connections:

- Reflection
- Community and belonging

Leadership Award Connections:

- Personal Leadership
- Community Advocacy

Activity Ideas:

- Reflect on how your troop practiced inclusion this year.
- Write appreciation notes.
- Set goals for being inclusive in the new year.

Thank You for Leading with Inclusion

Thank you for the time, care, and commitment you bring to your Girl Scout experience. By choosing to lead with inclusion, empathy, and flexibility, you are helping create a space where every Girl Scout feels safe, valued, and able to belong. You don't have to have all the answers. What matters most is your willingness to listen, learn, and adapt. The small choices you make each day, how you communicate, how you support, and how you show up make a lasting impact. Because of you, Girl Scouts is a place where every Girl Scout can grow, thrive, and be their full self. To continue learning and growing in this work, we encourage you to explore our [DEI Resource Hub](#) and review our [Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#). For additional support, questions, or guidance, please reach out to your Volunteer Engagement Specialist or contact MemberCare@cbgsc.org.

Additional Resources for Volunteers

The following organizations provide trusted, research-based information and practical tools to support inclusive practices.

Neurodiversity & Developmental Disabilities

- [Autism Speaks](#)
Resources on autism, communication strategies, and support tools for families and educators.
- [Child Mind Institute](#)
Practical guides on ADHD, anxiety, behavior, and supporting children in group settings.

Disability & Accessibility

- [Understood.org](#)
Easy-to-use resources for learning differences, attention challenges, and inclusive strategies.
- [National Disability Rights Network](#)
Information on disability rights, advocacy, and accessibility.

Mental Health & Trauma-Informed Support

- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#)
Guidance on trauma-informed care, mental health, and supporting youth.
- [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)
Resources on understanding trauma and supporting children and youth.

LGBTQ+ Inclusion

- [The Trevor Project](#)
Resources to support LGBTQ+ youth, including education and crisis support.
- [GLSEN](#)
Tools for creating inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ youth.

Language & Family Communication

- [Colorín Colorado](#)
Resources for supporting multilingual learners and engaging families.