

Leading Difficult Conversations With Confidence

A Resource Guide for Girl Scout Staff, Troop Leaders, and Volunteers

Recent events—including threats of violence, brutal attacks, charged rhetoric, and general unrest—have been upsetting to both children and adults. At Girl Scouts, we recognize our girls are members of the diverse communities affected by such challenges and that they may seek guidance or support from their troop leaders and other volunteers. Given our focus on identifying community needs and creating positive change, it's important that you feel comfortable creating an environment where girls have the freedom and security to ask difficult questions and to air views and concerns in respectful conversations. This guide will help you do just that.

Get Girls Talking

6 simple steps to create a respectful, safe, and helpful experience

1 *Create Ground Rules*

Ask your girls what would help the conversation go smoothly. Helpful suggestions might include not interrupting, listening without laughing or teasing, using respectful language, avoiding labels that stereotype groups, and welcoming all questions, comments, and feelings. Additionally, since girls may be sharing personal information or experiences, everyone must agree that what is said in this space would never be repeated outside the group without permission.

2 *Listen Carefully*

Don't make assumptions about the girls' understanding of or feelings on a topic. Really think about what your girls are asking or sharing when serious subjects arise. Ask questions or for a specific example if you are unclear.

3 *Start with the Facts*

If she feels comfortable, the girl who raised the subject can start by offering what she knows—either what she's experienced, or what she's heard or read. Otherwise, you can briefly introduce the topic and then go around the room asking each girl to share what she knows about it. Writing key information—the who, what, when, where, why of the issue—on the board can help keep the talk on track.

4 **Welcome and Acknowledge All Feelings**

Girls often apologize for or gloss over feelings of sadness, anger, or frustration—but those are legitimate emotions, and expressing them in healthy, constructive ways is important. Encourage girls to share feelings freely, and also to listen and support each other with empathy—even if they have different reactions to an issue. It’s often validating for girls to hear their feelings reflected back to them. Listening and then saying “*you seem frustrated.*” or “*I can tell you’re really sad*” can go a long way.

5 **Find Balance in the Conversation**

While ensuring each girl has the time to voice any anger or concerns, it’s also important to help girls see hope in the situation. Lift up the conversation by asking girls questions like: “*What strengths do you still see in your community?*,” “*Are people working to solve the problem you’ve been discussing?*,” and “*Have similar situations been resolved in a positive way?*” Noting the positive can help lessen feelings of helplessness.

6 **Embrace Her Urge to Take Action**

If your troop is interested in getting involved through a Girl Scout Take Action project, be supportive. Acting can help girls feel calm in overwhelming situations, develop a sense of belonging, and allows them take pride in being part of the solution. Be honest, however, about safety concerns and timing. Like all Take Action projects, issues should be researched and considered from different sides, and community experts should be called on to guide girls in developing sustainable solutions. As always, keep in touch with parents and caregivers about girls’ interests in Take Action or other service projects.

SIMPLE WAYS YOU CAN HELP GIRLS COPE IN STRESSFUL TIMES

Try these activities before or after a difficult talk to help girls feel more capable of handling current and future challenges.

1. Getting Some Air

Taking deep breaths tells your brain it’s time to slow down and relax. Practice slow inhales and exhales with your troop. Spending time outdoors in nature also helps bring calm.

2. Physical Exercise

Get moving. Whether your girls play sports, do yoga, or go running, their bodies will release feel-good chemicals that can help them stay positive when life gets tough.

3. Creative Expression

A 2016 study found that 45 minutes of creative activity—like crafting, drawing, or collaging—can reduce stress hormones in your body. Plus, it’s a good way for girls to share sometimes-hard-to-explain feelings.

It’s OK to say you don’t have all the answers or to admit that you’re sad or frustrated, too. Being open and sharing your own feelings gives girls the language and some comfort to do the same.

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