

Leave No Trace

In general, the idea of Leave No Trace is to sustain the environment for generations to come. We can do **this by being aware of how we're interacting with the environment** and making conscious decisions that serve to lessen our impact on nature.

There are seven principles of Leave No Trace. It's important that Girl Scouts are familiar with these principles, considering so many of our activities happen in the outdoors. Let's go through each one and think about how the principles apply to Girl Scouts.

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare

Before you start your outdoor adventure (no matter how small!), make sure you're prepared. Make sure you're familiar with regulations and special concerns about the area(s) you'll be visiting, and keep in mind high-traffic times. Avoiding crowds will not only prevent protected wildlife from getting trampled, it will also make it a more enjoyable experience for the girls!

Depending on the size of your troop, consider splitting up into smaller groups. If there are too many people in one given spot, there might not be enough room on the trail for everyone to listen, talk, and **share with each other. Smaller groups help us foster conversation while we're mindful** of the environment around us.

2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces

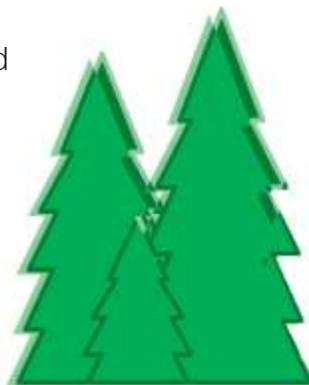
Whether you're visiting for a day or overnight, it's important to stick to durable surfaces, like established trails and campsites, rock, gravel, dry grass, or snow. This is for the safety of everyone in your group as well as the safety of the environment. When we walk beyond established paths, we risk damaging vegetation and other organisms that can be damaged beyond recovery.

If your troop is staying overnight, remember that campsites **are found, not made! You don't need to alter** an existing site to meet your needs. Try to find a site that is so highly impacted that further careful use will cause no noticeable impact.

3. Dispose of Waste Properly

One of the easiest ways to Leave No Trace **is to dispose of any waste you've brought with you.** If there are trash cans available, excellent! Use them for anything you no longer need, separating recyclable and **compostable items if necessary.** If there aren't any trash cans, **bring it all with you.** This includes **packaging, leftover food, and other litter.** And if you're camping overnight, **don't forget to check that you've grabbed all of your clothing, camping gear, and anything else non-edible you may have left behind.**

And when nature calls, find a spot at least 200 feet from water, your camp, and trails, and dig a hole 6 to 8 inches deep for solid human waste. When finished, cover and disguise **the hole. It's not glamorous, but it helps protect the environment!**





4. Leave What You Find

Girl Scouts love souvenirs as much as the next person, but during your outdoor adventure, the only souvenirs you should take are pictures! Leave rocks, plants, and other natural objects where you find them, and avoid building structures like forts or makeshift furniture. Leave those projects for your backyard.

5. Minimize Campfire Impact

While you may not be in wildfire country, it's still incredibly important to minimize the impact of your campfire. Keep in mind regulations for where you're visiting (which you should've already researched as part of principle 1!), as fires might not be allowed.

When and where fires are permitted, keep them as small as possible. Only use sticks that can be broken **by hand, no tools required**. **Once you're done, make sure all wood and coals have burned to ash. Put out the fires completely, then scatter the ashes once they've cooled.**

6. Respect Wildlife

One of the best parts of spending time outdoors is seeing all the amazing wildlife. But as exciting as it is to see animals in the wild, remember that they should be observed from a distance and should never be fed. It damages their health, alters natural behaviors, and exposes them to predators and other dangers.

Similarly, make sure food (including food waste!) is stored securely. Whether they're fed intentionally or find your food on accident, wildlife can be very negatively impacted by human food.

7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors

Finally, remember to be considerate toward others, including those in your group. Ask questions courteously, avoid making loud noises, and yield to others on the trail. In short, be a sister to every Girl Scout—as well as every non-Girl Scout!

