

Camp Culture Code

Girl Scouts of Northern California's council-run resident camps adhere to GSNorCal's Policy for Building Equitable Community for All. We ask that you review this document in its entirety. All members of the camp community are part of GSNorCal's commitment to inclusive and engaging experiences for Girl Scouts and their adult allies.

- **Please review the full “Policy for Building Equitable Community for All” [HERE](#).**

In addition to GSNorCal's Policy, the GSNorCal Camp Team has prepared the following Camp Culture Code & FAQ to help better prepare campers, families, and staff for some of the unique questions, concerns, and opportunities for inclusion that come up in the residential space of camp.

Camp Culture: What to Expect

Camp is a community. The community of camp is unique; it is shaped by the physical, outdoor space of camp, the teambuilding nature of our activities, and the welcoming environment that we strive to create. This means that camp has its own distinct culture. Your camper should expect to be immersed in an environment that:

- Encourages personal responsibility: campers take care of themselves, camp, and one another.
- Takes place in nature: campers learn environmental stewardship and share space with bugs and critters.
- Is "unplugged" and focused on being present: campers will not have access to electronics.
- Encourages self-exploration: campers try new things, explore their identity, and gain confidence.
- Relies on teamwork: campers work together as part of a team.
- Is respectful and inclusive: campers and staff strive to create a safe space and respect one another's identities.
- Nurtures belonging and the active practice of allyship: Allyship is the active way of life that allows campers to keep an open mind and heart about the lived experiences of others so that they can learn how to nurture equity, opportunity and inclusion for everyone.

What topics are included in the Camp Culture Code?

The Camp Culture Code is intended to set expectations for campers, camp staff, and families ahead of their time at camp. Together, we can create a safe and inclusive environment that celebrates who we are as individuals. In an effort to help us all come to camp informed and empowered to be a part of that safe space, we've included the following content in the Culture Code:

- Section 1: Key Terms
- Section 2: Gender and Identity
- Section 3: Sexual Orientation
- Section 4: Disabilities, Neurodivergence, and Accessibility
- Section 5: Race and Ethnic Diversity
- Section 6: Faith and Spirituality

Why is the Culture Code important?

Camp is a place where everyone should feel comfortable being their authentic self. As the youth mental health crisis grows increasingly urgent, GSNorCal dedicates ourselves to making all youth feel seen, heard, and safe. In the residential space of camp, this culture is especially empowering for youth. Our campers develop the confidence to love who they are, to feel that they are valued, and to experience the warmth and kindness of peers and mentors. The Culture Code is a pledge to ensure all campers and staff feel valued and safe at camp.

How does the Culture Code affect me and my camper?

At Girl Scout Camp, we all commit to actively building a sense of belonging for all of our community members. We ask all staff, volunteers, parents, caregivers, and youth to commit to working towards the practices of LGBTQIA+ Allyship, Antiracism, and Anti-Oppression. The Girl Scout Movement strives to be a safe place to stand against hate and discuss issues that are dividing our nation. If you have any questions or concerns about what this commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging means, please do not hesitate to reach out to info@gsnorcal.org. We would be more than happy to discuss this Culture Code with you.

Section 1: Key Terms

- **Diversity** - Psychological, physical, and social differences that occur among any, and all individuals; including but not limited to race, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, religion, language, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, mental or physical ability, perspectives, learning styles, etc.
- **Inclusion** - The act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate and bring their full authentic selves. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in the words/actions/thoughts of all people.
- **Equity** - The guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups.
- **Belonging** - Feeling accepted as a member or part. Acceptance does not mean you agree on everything with everyone around you. Sharing your differences and still accepting a person creates peace. Belonging focuses on our connections, rather than our differences.
- **Discrimination** - The unfair or prejudicial treatment of people and groups based on characteristics such as race, gender, age or sexual orientation.
 - **Racism**- Prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a minority or marginalized racial or ethnic group
 - **Homophobia**- Fear, hatred, discomfort with, or mistrust of people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual.
 - **Transphobia** - Fear, hatred, disbelief, or mistrust of people who are transgender, thought to be transgender, or whose gender expression doesn't conform to traditional gender roles.
 - **Ableism**- The discrimination of and social prejudice against people with disabilities based on the belief that typical abilities are superior. Ableism is rooted in the assumption that disabled people require 'fixing' and defines people by their disability.
 - **Religious Discrimination**- Opposition or hostility towards another because of their religious beliefs or lack of religious beliefs.

- **Classism**- The systematic oppression of subordinated class groups to advantage and strengthen the dominant class groups, assigning characteristics of worth and ability based on social class.
- **Privilege**- Refers to certain social advantages, benefits, or degrees of prestige and respect that an individual has by virtue of belonging to certain social identity groups. These privileged social identities correlate to people who have historically occupied positions of dominance over others.
- **Intersectionality**- The acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression and we must consider everything and anything that can marginalize people – gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, etc.
- **Allyship**- The role of a person who advocates and actively works for the inclusion of a marginalized or politicized group in all areas of society, not as a member of that group but in solidarity with its struggle and point of view and under its leadership.

Section 2: Gender and Identity

Who will be at camp?

Girl Scouts of Northern California’s camps serve campers who have been historically marginalized and systemically excluded from outdoor spaces. We center the voices and experiences of girls and women, and welcome all campers and staff who identify with the girl experience. This can and does include cisgender girls, gender-expansive youth/ non-binary youth, and trans-female and trans-male youth.

Key Terms

- **Gender Identity** – A person’s psychological sense of self. This is how a person has come to understand themselves to be. This may or may not align with their sex assigned at birth.
- **Sex assigned at birth** – A term that a medical professional uses to describe a child at birth based on their external anatomy.
- **Gender Expression** – How someone presents themselves on the outside. This may be expressed by the way someone acts or their clothing, and is typically associated with presenting either masculine or feminine.
- **Gender-Expansive** – A person who may have a more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the gender binary.
- **Non-binary** – Describes a person who identifies outside of the gender binary. Non-binary people may identify as being neither a man or a woman, male or female, boy or girl, both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories entirely.
- **Cisgender** – A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned to them at birth.
- **Transgender** – A term used to describe people whose gender identity and/or expression differs from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation.
 - Trans-Female: a trans female is a woman/girl who was assigned male at birth
 - Trans-Male: a trans male is a man/boy who was assigned female at birth
- **Queer** - An umbrella identity term used by people who do not conform to norms of heterosexuality and/or the gender binary.

It is critical to note the important differences between definitions of identity, expression, sex, attraction, and other key vocabulary. For more information, go to [The Genderbread Person | A free online resource for understanding gender identity, gender expression, and anatomical sex.](#)

Is Girl Scout camp for “girls only”?

No. Our camps serve cisgender girls, gender-expansive youth, non-binary youth, and trans-female and trans-male youth. Our camps are staffed with youth development professionals of all gender identities.

At GSNorCal, we recognize that gender is not binary, and we reject the notion that everyone must be exclusively male or exclusively female. As members of the Girl Scout community, we embrace a youth-centered approach to notions of sex and gender. We have expanded our understanding of who belongs at Girl Scout camp, and are committed to serving all youth who identify with the girl experience.

Camp is a space where identities and pronouns are respected and celebrated. Some kids who attend camp have come to understand their gender identity does not align with female. Children should not have to keep their identity a secret to retain a place in our program. If a camper identifies as gender-expansive, non-binary, or trans, they will be welcomed at GSNorCal’s camps.

Girl Scouts is committed to providing brave spaces that empower girls and marginalized groups through a break from dominant culture. Camp works to provide safety, care, and confidence-building opportunities where our campers can thrive. In an effort to establish this break from dominant culture, GSNorCal does not enroll cisgender boys at our council-run resident camps. Cisgender boys may enroll in family camp programs.

Will my camper be asked to share their pronouns?

Yes. However, we will never force anyone to disclose or discuss these aspects of their identity. We will ask how your camper would like us to refer to them during their time at camp and to share their pronouns if they are comfortable doing so. As with everything at camp, sharing pronouns is challenge-by-choice; campers who would prefer not to share will not be pushed to. Counselors will model this by sharing their pronouns with groups.

It is the camper’s decision who they disclose information about their identity to. We value the relationships and trust we build with campers while at camp. For this reason, we will not break the trust and confidentiality of the camper unless it pertains to their or others’ safety. This includes, but is not limited to, anything the camper discloses with regards to their gender identity or sexual orientation. We encourage campers to share their identities with people at home if and when they feel safe doing so.

Are all of the camp staff women?

No. Applicants are encouraged to apply without regard to gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation. Our staff reflect a spectrum of gender identities and have a wide range of lived experiences. It is important to us that our staff reflect the diverse groups of campers we serve. We believe that our campers should have the benefit of a diverse group of role models.

What about bathrooms and showers?

Privacy is an essential and fundamental right of everyone at camp. This includes toilets, changing areas, and showers, which are single use and all-gender. Staff members have separate spaces to shower and use the restroom that they do not share with campers. At no point are bathrooms occupied by staff and campers at the same time. Campers and staff members can also utilize lockable bathroom stalls as private changing spaces.

What about bunks?

There is only one body per bed at camp. Beds are considered private spaces that are not shared with others. Campers have separate sleeping spaces from staff members. If a camper needs the attention of a staff member during the night, they will have access to the staff member cabin/ sleeping area.

Campers are grouped in living units by age and not by gender identity.

What is the Swimsuit Policy?

For the emotional safety and equity of all our campers, our swimsuit policy for camp includes both a top and a bottom covering for all campers and staff members, regardless of gender identity. Some examples of this may look like a rash-guard and boardshorts, a bathing suit top and bottom (navels do not need to be covered, but chests do), or some combination of the two. This policy is also extended to camp staff.

What if gender identity topics are raised at camp?

We respect and nurture belonging and safe spaces for every camper by respecting their gender identity. While we invite every camper and staff member to share their pronouns, we will only discuss gender identity with campers if questions are raised organically. If questions or issues about gender identity arise among campers, staff are trained to address the questions or issues with respect and in an age-appropriate manner. We do not discuss camper or staff bodies or sex assigned at birth.

This is in alignment with GS NorCal's commitment as outlined in our *Culture Code for Equity & Belonging* and *Volunteer Policy for Building Equitable Community for All*.

Section 3: Sexual Orientation

Sometimes, families and campers may be confused about how gender identity and sexual orientation differ. It's important that this is clear to all, since Gender Identity is a topic we openly discuss at camp, and Sexual Orientation is a topic we do not actively discuss.

- **Gender Identity** is about how *you* feel about *yourself*. It doesn't involve anyone else and should be respected at all times.
- **Sexual Orientation** is about how you feel about others, referring to who someone feels romantically and/ or emotionally attracted to. Unlike Gender Identity, it is a topic that is largely irrelevant to most youth programming.
 - **About Key Terms:** There are many identifiers that correspond to people's individual romantic or sexual orientations. Examples include straight, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, pan-sexual, etc. What identifier suits an individual is a personal choice.
 - **Queer** is an umbrella identity term used by people who do not conform to norms of heterosexuality and/or the gender binary.

What if sexual orientation topics are raised at camp?

There is no need to "out" or discuss a camper's (or staff member's) sexual orientation, and we do not initiate discussions about sexual orientation or sexuality at camp. We know that questions and conversations sometimes arise organically at camp about "crushes" or attraction, and we are respectful and non-judgmental regarding everyone's romantic and sexual orientations.

Although sexual orientation can be a part of someone's identity, conversations surrounding romantic intimacy are not appropriate at camp, and staff are trained to intervene in these instances with respect and in an age-appropriate manner.

Section 4: Disabilities, Neurodivergence, and Accessibility

Our Camp Directors work directly with families to identify accommodations that can be made in order to meet the needs of every camper, focusing on their strengths, gifts and assets. We are dedicated to meeting each child's needs without excluding or stigmatizing anyone for their differences.

What is an accommodation?

Accommodations are modifications or adjustments made for an individual with a disability on an as-needed basis.

We strive to be an inclusive community - one that provides equitable access for all, including those who require additional physical, mental, social, or emotional support. Providing access is our ultimate goal, and we use a combination of accommodations and accessibility to create a culture of inclusion.

What is the camp environment like?

We have three council-run resident camp sites in Soquel, Arnold, and Fairfax, CA. All locations are in rustic environments and while some parts of camp are ADA accessible, not all parts are. You can explore our sites [HERE](#) to determine which would be the best fit for you and your camper.

In addition to the physical environment, camp is often a busy and loud place. At times, it may be overwhelming for kids who are neurodivergent or have sensory issues. We will gladly talk through what to expect at camp with you and your child, and can discuss accommodations to set them up for success.

If you have any questions or concerns about the accessibility of our camp properties due to physical, mental, social, or emotional needs of your camper, please contact the respective Camp Director.

Section 5: Racial and Ethnic Diversity

GSNorCal strives to promote equity by centering our attention on our Black people, Indigenous people, and People of Color-identified (BIPOC) community members who are furthest from racial justice. Girl Scouts can be catalysts for change, promoting equitable outcomes for all members as they strive to make the world a better place. This is outlined in GSNorCal's Culture Code for Equity and Belonging, which we have included below.

The ongoing violence that is occurring against countless BIPOC reaffirms that racism is not a thing of the past. GSNorCal has made a continued commitment to becoming an antiracist organization. Antiracism is the practice of proactively working towards dismantling racist views, cultures, and systemic practices that have historically oppressed, and continue to prevent BIPOC from participating, prospering, and reaching their full potential in our society. Systemic racism affects everyone, including our campers, and requires care and commitment to dismantle.

At GSNorCal, we are part of a movement to build equity, inclusion, diversity, and belonging. We work to end all forms of oppression. As a leader, that means I...

DISCOVER myself in a racist and unjust world

1. I understand our world was built on structural racism.
2. I recognize there are intersections between racism and all forms of oppression.
3. I acknowledge that white people benefit from unearned privileges based on skin color.
4. I honor the legacy of Freedom Fighters who came before me.
5. I learn key terms to empower myself as a student of social justice.

CONNECT with my heart wide-open

6. I value relationships with people who are different from me.
7. I know hurting hurts, even if I didn't mean to do it.
8. I believe you if you tell me you've been harmed.
9. I can tolerate feeling uncomfortable while I learn.
10. I take the risk and have courageous conversations.

TAKE ACTION to make the world better for all people.

11. I center and nurture the leadership of people of color.
12. I listen and take in feedback as a gift
13. I speak up about racism and all forms of oppression.
14. I work to change policies to be racially equitable.
15. I take responsibility for things I say and do.

Section 6: Spirituality and Faith

Campers and staff are welcome to express their full selves. For some, religion may be a big part of their personal identity. All personal identities are welcomed and celebrated at camp. While we invite every camper and staff member to share their feelings about the world around them, religion is only discussed at camp if the topic comes up organically. Staff are trained to supervise these conversations between campers and ensure that they remain respectful.

It is an expectation of everyone in the camp community to respect one another. Respecting one another's beliefs means making space for them to believe what they do, without judgement. It does not mean that someone else needs to adjust their lifestyle or beliefs to align with someone else's.

We reject the idea that one person's belief can invalidate another's identity. Invalidating one's experience or identity causes harm, which is not conducive to a positive community culture. Regardless of a camper's belief system, this means we do not tolerate:

- Passing any type of judgement about another's religious or spiritual beliefs.
- Telling anyone that their beliefs, gender identity, sexual orientation, pronouns, etc. are "wrong".
- Failing to acknowledge one another's pronouns.
- Using personal beliefs as a reason to exclude or bully one another.
- Promoting one's personal religion or spiritual beliefs as "superior" to others.

Thank you.

Thank you for taking the time to read our Camp Culture Code and discuss it with your camper. We sincerely hope that this document reflects a community that you and your camper are excited about being a part of. If you've decided it's not what you're looking for, we'll be happy to talk to you about refunding your camp registration fee. We look forward to seeing your camper at camp this summer.