

# Girl Scouts of Northern California

## VOLUNTEER POLICY

### for Building Equitable Community for All



## How to explore this Policy:

- 1. Keep an open mind and an open heart.** Some of the ideas we present may be new to you - that's a good thing! At Girl Scouts, we encourage everyone in our community to discover more about ourselves, connect with people who are different and take action to make the world a better place for all people. This Policy explains more about how we do that together.
- 2. Dig deeper.** This Policy, together with [Volunteer Essentials](#) and **Safety Activity Checkpoints**, may help you understand how we nurture belonging in Girl Scouts, how to be supportive adults and how to be active allies for youth. Our **Volunteer Essentials** document includes links to resources and a glossary of key terms to deepen your learning.
- 3. Ask for help.** Do you need this information translated into the language you speak? We're working to make all our materials translated-please ask if you don't see the best version for you. Have other questions about what you're reading? We're here for you! Contact [info@gsnorcal.org](mailto:info@gsnorcal.org) with questions and a member of our staff will reach out to you.
- 4. Notice gender pronouns.** Because the youth, volunteers and staff at Girl Scouts express their gender identities in different ways, you'll notice we use a variety of gender pronouns throughout this Policy including she/her, he/him and they/them. When we talk about "girls" in this Policy, we are referring to any girl-identified youth and any youth who participate in Girl Scout programs, including cisgender girls, transgender girls, and gender-expansive youth. When we talk about "you" in this Policy, we are referring to adults who volunteer with GSNorCal.

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## Our Mission

Our mission at the Girl Scouts of Northern California (GSNorCal) is to **build girls of courage, confidence and character who make the world a better place** for ALL people. To do this, we provide inclusive and engaging experiences for girls and youth who participate in Girl Scout troops, programs, and their adult allies. As volunteers, you play an important role in bringing this mission to life! This Policy is meant to help you understand what is expected of you in your role and how to be accountable for doing your part.

# Training and Learning Opportunities for Volunteers

As volunteers, your work, passion and commitment are vital to giving girls the best Girl Scout experience possible. We want to set you up for success in your role by offering what you need for on-going learning. In addition to this Volunteer Policy, you'll become very familiar with an online tool we call **Volunteer Essentials**. Think of **Volunteer Essentials** as your encyclopedia to Girl Scout volunteering! **Volunteer Essentials** is fully digital, and printable for your convenience and is updated throughout the year. It includes:

1. Creating the Essential Girl Scout Experience
2. Safety Activity Checkpoints
3. Information about online and in-person courses, including details on what's optional & required for every volunteer role
4. Conversation Starters to interrupt or process hurtful behavior
5. A glossary of key terms

Our training materials will support you to abide by the Girl Scout Promise and Law, and all of the practices that GSNorCal and GSUSA require. Our job is to make sure you are adequately prepared to offer engaging and inclusive experiences for girls and youth who participate in GSNorCal programs, from all races, ethnicities, gender identities and backgrounds. Your job is to learn the material, follow guidelines and ensure a welcoming and affirming space for all volunteers, kids and families. We'll hold ourselves and each other accountable to a high standard in this work together.

## Service Unit Leadership

Some volunteers will hold responsibility for [Service Unit leadership](#). While all volunteers are expected to uphold the practices in this Policy, these leaders must also sign a written agreement, which includes a term of appointment, specific leadership tasks, and the signature of a staff supervisor.

# Girl Scouts Community Values

## Nurturing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging

Girl Scouts of Northern California is committed to providing diverse, equitable and inclusive spaces where girls, youth who participate in GSNorCal programs, volunteers and staff know they belong. How can we live into these community values within our troops, service units, camps and events? Here are some good ways:

- Show care by learning each person's name with correct pronunciation (kids & parents!)
- Use a warm and friendly tone, and consistently greet each community member when they arrive. Say goodbye to each person by name as well.

- Learn about the cultures and identities of folks in your Girl Scout community by reading books & articles. Understand and respect cultural differences. Be sure not to put anyone on the spot or ask them to educate you.
- Occasionally ask the girls and youth who participate in Girl Scout programs if anything is worrying or bothering them. Be a trusted adult they can come to with their needs and emotions without judgment. You can still be a trusted and supportive adult even if you do not agree with youth by actively listening to their stories and experiences.
- Embrace diverse gender expression by inviting each community member to share their gender pronouns aloud or on name tags. Be sure to explain that no one has to share if they don't want to. Make this conversation matter-of-fact and use a positive tone.
- Welcome personal sharing about people's cultural traditions, languages they speak and diverse family structures. Make this kind of sharing a consistent, reliable part of your time together.
- Learn the most valuable ways to support individual children and adults with disabilities, learning differences and/or or neurodiversity. Ask parents, "What can I do to support your child to learn/participate/feel successful in our group?" Ask adults, "Is there anything we can do to make this space more accessible to you?" Often, tools like visual aids, small items to fidget with and regular breaks are examples of things that help create access. Don't assume what someone needs. Asking is the most respectful way.
- Provide a wide variety of activities for participants to engage in. Notice when children do not relate to an activity and get curious about why. (Not all kids are excited to earn badges, or engage in large group activities, for example). Find ways to connect with and relate to each child in your care.
- Allow, but don't require, participants to say the Pledge of Allegiance or the Girl Scout Promise and Law at meetings. We must understand if girls feel uncomfortable reciting pledges or participating in another tradition for any personal reason. We allow participants to refrain from participating or modify a pledge to meet their needs. Please see our [FAQ page](#) to learn more about the Girl Scout Promise, Law and Take Action Pledge.

## What to do About Bullying

While it is normal for young people to explore using their power in different ways, it is never okay for any of us to use our power to harm someone else. This is bullying and must be interrupted immediately in all Girl Scout troops and programs - including when harm is being done between adults. Any volunteer who engages in bullying behavior may be asked to step down from their volunteer position until an investigation has been thoroughly completed.

Hostile language and behaviors are unsafe, threatening, discriminating and humiliating. Examples of bullying behavior that damages community and belonging include:

- Expressions of uncontrolled anger like mean words, discriminatory language, hostile tone of voice or yelling at someone (Yelling to get help with a safety problem is okay!)
- Gossip or intentionally damaging someone's reputation, including negative postings on social media.

- Any unfair treatment that would make someone feel “othered,” excluded or stigmatized.
- Microaggressions cause people to feel ridiculed or targeted for an aspect of their identity. Painful examples of this might be implying that someone’s racial identity makes them exotic by asking “*what are you?*” or denying the significance of someone’s race by saying, “*I don’t see color.*” Other examples are showing surprise when a feminine woman identifies as a lesbian or confusion when a person identifies as gender non-conforming because of held stereotypes on gender expression and sexuality.
- Failure to accept responsibility and change behavior when someone has given you feedback about your harmful behavior.
- Failure to interrupt bullying, hateful speech or microaggressions. When no one in a community speaks up to interrupt these moments, it condones the behavior.
- Revealing a child’s transgender and gender identity without expressed permission from the child and their family. Do not allow other parents or children to “out” anyone’s gender identity or expression either. Each person is in charge of revealing their own gender identity how and when they choose.
- Encouraging others to engage in harmful behaviors against a person or a group of people because they harmed you first. There are respectful and healthy ways to work out our differences without perpetuating negative behaviors. Before reacting to harm, it is best practice to ask for help from a trusted adult ally or staff member.

## **Becoming an Antiracist Organization**

Volunteering with us is a commitment to the practice of antiracism. We are offering ongoing tools and training to all of our participants, volunteers (including Board members), and staff to participate effectively in this work, which takes a lifetime and is never done! Systemic racism affects everyone and requires care and commitment to dismantle. We ask volunteers to commit to practicing antiracism with us by following our *GSNorCal Culture Code for Equity and Belonging*, below.

## **GSNorCal Culture Code for Equity and Belonging**

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

### **DISCOVER** myself in a racist and unjust world

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

**CONNECT** with my heart wide-open

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

**TAKE ACTION** to make the world better for all people.

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

## **Equal Opportunity**

GSNorCal is committed to assuring equal opportunity for all volunteers. We seek fantastic volunteers ages 18 and up and value diversity regarding race, color, creed, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, ancestry, veteran status, citizenship, pregnancy, childbirth or other related medical condition, marital status, political persuasion or any other classification protected by federal, state or local laws or ordinances. In other words, we do not discriminate, and all folks are not only welcome, but are encouraged to join us.

Do you understand the benefits of empowering spaces for diverse groups of girls and gender-expansive youth to be together? Then we believe you can serve as a wonderful role model! GSNorCal welcomes adult volunteers who are female-identified, male-identified, gender non-conforming, transgender and gender queer to serve as troop leaders and co-leaders.

Part of our mission at Girl Scouts is to provide female-identified role models for girls. It is important that girls receive this mentoring for positive identity formation and self-concept as they grow. Girls also benefit from engaging in positive relationships with adults of all genders. Being in diverse community where non-binary genders are embraced models freedom of self-expression that is vital for all kids and volunteers in our programs. To ensure our girls and gender-expansive youth receive all the care and mentoring they need, when we have a volunteer who is not female-identified, they will be paired up with an adult volunteer who is female-identified.

## **Who Can Be a Girl Scout and Who Can Participate in Girl Scout Programs?**

Any girl-identified youth, including cisgender girls and transgender girls, can be a Girl Scout. Transgender girls in our programs are to receive equal access and opportunity to participate in every way without being stigmatized or "othered." Each child and their family is in charge of how they identify and their gender identities may change over time. For example, if a youth

who has previously been a Girl Scout begins to identify as gender non-conforming, gender creative, non-binary, or trans-male, they will continue to be welcomed at Girl Scouts. We are loyal to the children and families who participate in our programs and are evolving our inclusive practices all the time. In addition, youth who have not previously been a Girl Scout and who identify as non-binary or trans-male are welcome to participate in GSNorCal council-run resident camps, and in other programs that are designed to support inclusion of non-binary, gender expansive and trans-male youth. GSNorCal's [Camp Culture Code](#) explains our commitments and actions to build inclusive resident camp communities.

Girl Scouts is a program that honors and celebrates the evidence-based needs girls have to be together without boys present. These spaces provide safety, care, confidence-building opportunities and a break from dominant culture. These spaces also can nurture and support non-binary, gender expansive and trans-male youth. This need is a reflection of the way sexism, misogyny and transphobia intersect with racism to affect even young children. We are proud to offer brave spaces for Girl Scouts and gender-expansive youth to shine!

## **LGBTQIA+ Inclusion**

Family diversity will be embraced, respected and normalized at Girl Scouts, including representation of families with two dads, two moms, gender-diverse caregivers, and transgender kids and families. An important way to do this is to adapt Girl Scout events to use inclusive language. For example, a "Mom & Me" event could instead be for "Girls & Their Grown-Ups." Make an effort to connect with girls who may need help identifying an available grown-up to participate with. If there is no adult who can attend a particular event, allow the girl to choose a friend's parent or volunteer to go with them. Reinforce how every Girl Scout has adults in their lives who care and will show up for them because they are part of this supportive community.

A person's gender identity (how they express and identify) and sexual orientation (who they love) are two different things and are never up for debate. This means we never force anyone to disclose or discuss these parts of their identity. At the same time, we make room for children, adults and families to have the choice and opportunity to share their full selves with pride. LGBTQIA+ identified youth who participate in our programs are to receive equal access and opportunity to participate in every way without being stigmatized or "othered."

## **People with Disabilities and/or Neurodivergence.**

We celebrate, welcome and affirm people with disabilities and/or neurodivergence (such as people with learning differences, autism or mental health factors). We strive to make our programs accessible for kids and families with disabilities and/or neurodivergence. We work with troop leaders to identify accommodations that can be made in order to meet the needs of every girl, focusing on their strengths, gifts and assets. Troop leaders must be thoughtful to meet each child's needs without excluding or stigmatizing anyone for their difference.



## **If We Can't Meet a Child's Needs**

In the rare occasion that a troop leader is not able to meet the needs of one or more children in their troop, they should contact their Service Unit Leadership Support Manager (LSM) for further guidance, and the LSM may reach out to GSNorCal staff for support. A support plan may be coordinated to include added parent support, or structural changes to group activities. Every possible effort will be made to keep each child who wants to participate in the group. We must guard against the hurt and stigmatization of not being included.

In the unlikely event that a child's needs are unable to be met by the troop the child is in, GSNorCal staff will work with the child and their family to find an alternate troop that may be a better fit. The child can continue to participate as an individual member of Girl Scouts, or be issued a refund of membership dues and council service fees.

## **Harassment Policy**

In California, harassment is legally defined as:

- Unlawful violence, like assault or battery or stalking, OR
- A credible threat of violence, AND
- The violence or threats seriously scare, annoy, or harass someone

At GSNorCal, every youth, volunteer and employee is entitled to work in an environment free of harassment in all forms. Sexual, verbal and physical harassment of any kind are strictly prohibited and cause for immediate dismissal.

# **Taking Charge of Physical and Emotional Safety**

## **Checklist for Drivers**

In order to drive children as part of our Girl Scout program, you must...

1. Be 21 or older
2. Have a valid driver's license
3. Carry the minimum insurance required by law
4. Complete the GSNorCal Background Check Process
5. Be a registered member of GSNorCal

## **Before You Volunteer, You Must...**

Complete the GSNorCal Background Check Process and complete the Child Abuse and Mandated Reporter Training. The results of this Background Check will be shared with staff or volunteers as needed and disqualification will remain confidential. Until a clear Background Check has been submitted to Girl Scouts, adult members are prohibited from:

- Driving or supervising Girl Scouts
- Handling money on behalf of Girl Scouts



- Being responsible for products
- Obtaining personal information of members
- Attending a Girl Scout overnight activity

## **Mandated Reporting of Child Abuse**

Girl Scout volunteers are required to report known or suspected cases of **child abuse** to Child Protective Services. If a volunteer is told or suspects that a child has been abused, they must report this information to the assigned council staff member. Together, you are required by law to make a report with Child Protective Services. All GSNorCal staff are Mandated Reporters and receive training to make these reports. Failure to do so has legal ramifications.

California law defines an abused child as one who is any one or more of the following:

- Physically abused
- Sexually molested
- Emotionally neglected or abused
- Under constant verbal attack or torment
- Without proper food, clothing, or shelter
- Left alone for long periods of time

If any adult volunteering or working with GSNorCal suspects that another volunteer or staff is abusing children in any way, they are required by law to call Child Protective Services and make a report.

## **If a Volunteer is Suspected of Abuse**

If a Girl Scout volunteer is formally accused of, charged with, or under investigation by authorities for the crime of child abuse, the following procedures will be followed. A volunteer who has been accused is required to:

- Suspend all Girl Scouts activities and duties until the matter has been resolved.
- Turn over all monies, materials, and records to a designated representative of the council until the matter is resolved.

At GSNorCal, and in accordance with California law, we believe that the accused is considered innocent until proven guilty. At the same time, we take every precaution to ensure the safety of each and every child in our programs.

## **Policy on Registered Sex Offenders**

Registered sex offenders and adults living with registered sex offenders are expressly prohibited from serving as Girl Scout volunteers. Neither group will meet our Background Check qualifications. As a result, registered sex offenders will not have access to Girl Scouts in any way. These individuals will not be permitted to host children in their cars, homes, or engage in activities together at all.

## Holding Ourselves Accountable

The intention of this Policy is to clearly inform all volunteers on our stance as an organization striving to be antiracist, inclusive, diverse and equitable to all members and program participants. We are deepening our tools, training and policies to reflect these values and bring them into practice. As such, volunteers who are not actively practicing these same values and willing to follow our guidelines for physical and emotional safety, will not be a good fit for our organization. Girl Scouts of Northern California reserves the right to release any volunteer from service if their actions are inconsistent with our clearly named policies, principles and procedures.

### Managing Conflicts Together

While Girl Scouts of Northern California directly supports all adults in our community (parents, volunteers, staff) to understand this Policy, our Culture Code, safety policies, and expected behaviors, volunteers are responsible for reinforcing these practices when the need arises. This means reminding other adults of what is expected if their conduct is mildly inappropriate or out of bounds. Examples of this kind of conduct include using a harsh tone of voice, microaggressions, consistently arriving late or not following through on tasks, receiving feedback defensively or refusing to talk through problems together. These kinds of issues require courageous conversations and are part of being a responsible community member. The Conversation Starters in your **Volunteer Essentials** toolkit are there to help!

If you see no improvement in the behavior of the adult after a courageous conversation or need help to have the discussion, ask your Service Unit Leader Support Manager for support. In this way, conflicts can be managed directly, and the GSNorCal Culture Code for Equity and Belonging, along with other training tools, can be reinforced through everyday practice.

If the conflict is not resolved with the support of the Service Unit Leader Support Manager, you may use the *GSNorCal Grievance Process* (outlined below) to seek support from GSNorCal staff. Adults who continue behaving outside of our organizational values may receive coaching, a written warning, and temporary or permanent removal from their troop and/or service unit.

If a conflict arises in a troop that cannot be resolved through our GSNorCal Grievance Process, next steps may include a troop leadership change, splitting the troop into two groups, or disbanding the troop altogether. In this unlikely event, every effort will be made to reassign each Girl Scout to an alternative troop in order to meet everyone's needs more effectively.

### No Tolerance for Hate Speech or Actions

Hate speech or actions taken to harm any member of our community based on their race, color, creed, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, ancestry, veteran status, citizenship, pregnancy, childbirth or other related medical condition, marital status or political persuasion, is not tolerated at Girl Scouts.

GSNorCal staff will investigate any volunteer who has been accused of engaging in hate speech or actions taken to harm any member of our community. Pending the investigation, the volunteer will be required to:

- Suspend all Girl Scout activities and duties until the matter has been resolved.
- Turn over all monies, materials, and records to a designated representative of the council until the matter is resolved.

If the investigation finds that the volunteer has engaged in hate speech or actions with the intent to cause harm, consequences will include automatic dismissal. In addition, GSNorCal will file a police report if the event qualifies as a hate crime as defined by California law.

Youth who exhibit hate speech or actions will be guided to understand the depth of pain they've caused, required to apologize, repair harm and participate in a family meeting to deepen understanding of the issue with parents present.

## **Consequences for Safety Violations**

Violations of the following standards will result in immediate disciplinary action. GSNorCal holds the right to dismiss any volunteer from their duties for violating safety requirements. This may include prevention from all participation in Girl Scouts, including troops and activities. The following is expressly prohibited:

- Possession or distribution of alcohol, marijuana, or any controlled substance at a Girl Scouts event where girls are present
- Smoking and vaping around children (including in homes) and in non-smoking areas
- Bringing dangerous or unauthorized materials on Girl Scout property, including (but not limited to) explosives, fireworks and firearms.
- Unless prescribed by a personal physician, possession of marijuana or any controlled substance is not allowed on property that Girl Scouts owns and operates.
- Adults who are responsible for supervising girls or providing transportation must not be under the influence of alcohol, marijuana, any controlled substance, or prescription that alters your mental state.

Note: Alcohol may be served at an adult-only Girl Scouts event with prior written approval by GSNorCal.

Additional examples of unacceptable conduct, subject to disciplinary action, include:

- Failure to comply with California State Law that requires a driver and each passenger to be restrained by a separate safety belt in a passenger car, truck or van.
- Failure to comply with California State Law regarding the use of car seats for children. Children must be in a belt-positioning booster seat until they are at least 8 years old or 4 feet 9 inches tall.
- Failure to comply with the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration guidelines which prohibit children under 12 years of age from riding in the front seat of a car equipped with air-bags.
- Failure to comply with California State Law regarding the use of cell phones or other electronic devices without a hands-free device while driving.

- Falsifying or making material omissions in GSNorCal records.
- Misappropriation of any Girl Scout funds.
- Theft or inappropriate removal of property that belongs to or is in the possession of Girl Scouts of Northern California, GSNorCal employees, girl members, adult members, troops, service units, or visitors, and/or malicious or willful destruction or damage to such.
- Soliciting or accepting gratuities for personal gain or benefit.
- Violation of federal, state, or local laws.

As a reminder, any Girl Scout volunteer who is formally accused of, charged with, or under investigation by authorities for any automatically disqualifying offense will not be allowed to volunteer until disposition of the charge. This includes offenses which result in disqualification, such as hate speech or actions.

## How to File a Grievance

All adults in our organization should first try to resolve problems by talking directly to one another in brave, respectful conversations. Guidance for having a courageous conversation is included in your **Volunteer Essentials** toolkit. If it is not possible to come to a resolution that works for everyone, a volunteer may need to file a grievance.

A grievance is a complaint that another adult's behavior is in violation of this Policy, the Girl Scout safety protocols or Culture Code and is not improving with feedback. The *GSNorCal Grievance Process* works to handle these complaints in an orderly and fair manner. To file a grievance, you should:

1. Contact the Leader Support Manager for your Service Unit. Set up a meeting to share the adult behaviors you've witnessed that are outside the Girl Scouts Culture Code for Equity & Belonging, safety policies, and/or expected behaviors. This meeting may include the person with concerning behavior if you'd like help from your Leader Support Manager to have a courageous conversation.
2. If you are not able to resolve your grievance with your Leader Support Manager for your Service Unit, then reach out to the staff member responsible for volunteers in your community. Not clear who that is? Send an email to: [info@gsnorcal.org](mailto:info@gsnorcal.org).
3. If the problem you're having concerns a staff member or the staff member responsible for volunteers in your community is not able to support you to resolve your grievance, contact that person's supervisor. Not clear who that is? Send an email to: [info@gsnorcal.org](mailto:info@gsnorcal.org).
4. Describe both the nature of the problem and what attempts (if any) you have already made to resolve it.
5. If an acceptable solution is still not found, you may take the issue to GSNorCal's Chief Officer who oversees membership and volunteer support. A final decision about the conflict should be made during this step. It is the Chief Officer's responsibility to ensure that any decisions or follow up steps are implemented. Not clear who that is? Send an email to: [info@gsnorcal.org](mailto:info@gsnorcal.org).

6. Written documentation of the grievance along with the follow-up actions and agreements must be signed by all parties involved. A copy of this document will be kept on file by GSNorCal staff.

GSNorCal staff also are responsible for what they say and do. If you believe that a member of the GSNorCal staff has violated the standards articulated in this Policy, then you are encouraged to speak with that staff member directly to express your concern. You may want to include another staff person for support in this conversation. Working out problems directly increases trust, deepens relationships and strengthens our community. At the same time, if you are unable to have this conversation with the staff member, you may:

1. Notify the Director, Volunteer Support
2. Report violations to [info@gsnorcal.org](mailto:info@gsnorcal.org), OR
3. Use GSNorCal's anonymous whistleblower hotline - the procedures are included on our website: [www.gsnorcal.org](http://www.gsnorcal.org) (search for "whistleblower")

We are so happy to have your support and commitment to building an equitable, inclusive, safe community at Girl Scouts.

**By following this Volunteer Policy together, we are taking charge of the physical and emotional safety of our girls while making the world a better place for all people. Thank you for your commitment to this work!**