

Conflict Resolution Guidelines for Volunteers

INTRODUCTION TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Girl Scouts of Southeastern New England (GSSNE) staff and volunteers strive to provide the highest quality Girl Scout Leadership Experience to girls, while ensuring safety and well-being for everyone. Our volunteers are considered active role models for our girls because girls witness and mirror our actions, attitudes, and behaviors. Volunteers are instrumental in instilling the values that are clearly conveyed in the Girl Scout promise, law, and mission and expected to uphold them at all times.

One key aspect of leadership is the ability to work with others and effectively use communication and teamwork to achieve the desired goals and outcomes. Differences of opinion, disagreements, and conflicts are natural parts of life and inevitably happen in all relationships. Not all conflict is bad - it can lead to new ideas and approaches, it can bring important issues to light, and it can provide an opportunity for people to come together to create a solution. If you are involved in conflict, and **there is no clear breach of a Girl Scout policy or guideline**, the below guidelines should be followed and also review our [Tips for Managing and Resolving Conflict](#):

Conflict Resolution Essentials

- **Try to talk it out directly (Self Resolution)**
When conflict arises, parties involved are encouraged to sit down together and talk in a calm, nonjudgmental manner to resolve the disagreement. Although talking in this way can be uncomfortable and difficult, it does lay the groundwork for working well together in the future. Direct communication results in a better outcome than email and text messages, which should be avoided.
- **Refrain from posting about conflict on social media**
Parties should refrain from posting comments on social media to maintain confidentiality and respect the dignity and rights of the individuals involved.
- **Keep it confidential**
Confidentiality is an important part of any resolution process. Discussing the situation with others who are not in a position to assist in resolving the issue can end up being a source of embarrassment and anger for those involved. Also, involving third parties could result in significant delay in working past the issue and focusing on ensuring future interactions are positive and productive.
- **Keep it positive and private**
Shouting, verbal abuse, or physical confrontations are never warranted and will not be tolerated in the Girl Scout environment. Children and youth should not be present at adult resolution meetings.

Member-Led Conflict Resolution Process

GSSNE encourages members to self-resolve conflict that **doesn't involve Girl Scout policy violation**. When you experience a conflict in Girl Scouts, be it parent/volunteer, volunteer/volunteer, or parent/parent, the parties involved should make an appointment to talk and work out a solution using these three steps:

1. **Attempt Self-Resolution**

If there is no clear breach of a Girl Scout policy or guideline, GSSNE recommends the individuals involved in the conflict have a face-to-face conversation during which each party expresses their perspective of the conflict and how it impacted them. It is very important and beneficial to address conflict in person – many times, one party is unaware of the concern or how it has impacted the other person. Resources:

- a. [A.C.T.I.V.E. Listening](#)

b. Conflict Self-Resolution Meetings

2. **Invite An Unbiased Third Party To Join**

Request insight from or invite a service unit manager, or other service unit team member, to join you at the face-to-face discussion. This person may lend new perspective or ask questions not previously explored that may help all parties reach a solution.

If you are mediating between two parties, hear both parties out separately prior to the meeting and then bring them together. If you are one of the parties involved, try to put yourself in the other person's shoes and work together to uncover solutions that could result in mutual gain and have the best possible outcome for everyone.

3 **Decide On A Solution**

Explore a mutually agreeable solution to the issue(s) contributing to the conflict. It will be up to the individuals involved to determine if and how they continue working together. That agreement should be put in writing and signed by all parties involved. If the conflict is between co-leaders of the same troop, and they decide to no longer work together, it will be up to the volunteers to decide who will continue to lead and who may need to embark on a new journey. If leaders cannot agree who will stay, GSSNE encourages whomever is no longer interested in working with the other consider forming a new troop or joining another troop. GSSNE should be informed if troop leadership changes at any time. The remaining troop leader is responsible for updating all troop information including the bank account.

Staff-Led Conflict Resolution Process

If all previous steps above have been taken to resolve the situation informally, but the matter is still unresolved, the member or volunteer may escalate the conflict to GSSNE for council intervention using the [*Conflict Resolution Escalation Form*](#). Please note that although members are strongly urged to self-resolve conflict that doesn't involve Girl Scout policy violation, a conflict may be escalated to GSSNE at any point in the process if necessary.

- **Conflict Resolution Case**

GSSNE staff's primary concern is to ensure the safety and well-being of members. Within 2 business days of the Conflict Resolution Escalation Form being received, a GSSNE team member will begin the resolution/mediation process. Staff will first ensure that no parties involved in the conflict have violated Girl Scout policy or procedures.

- **Discovery Conversations**

A GSSNE staff member will contact involved parties by phone with the goal of allowing each party to share their perspective on the situation. During these communications, the staff person will inquire about each party's desired outcome.

- **Face-To-Face Mediation**

If appropriate and agreed upon by both parties, the GSSNE staff person may arrange a face-to-face mediation. The goal of mediation is to encourage the two primary parties to sit down together with a staff mediator to discuss how they will work together moving forward. Post-mediation, the staff person will provide to both parties a written summary of the agreed upon outcome.

- **Recommended Course Of Action**

If mediation does not occur or fails, the GSSNE staff person will recommend a course of action. The recommended course of action will take into account information learned during the discovery conversations, as well as which actions will minimize negative impacts to adult and girl members.

- **Possible Outcome**

In rare cases, volunteer(s) may be released from their position(s) if determined to be the best course of action.

Confidentiality

As GSSNE seeks to resolve issues brought to our attention, we ask the member who submitted the form to respect the privacy of all involved by not communicating to parties not involved and not use social media to discuss the issue(s). Appropriate time will be needed for GSSNE to gather information and speak with necessary parties to aid in the resolution process. This process may include:

- phone calls
- emails
- in-person meetings with parties involved
- interviewing witnessing parties
- involvement of other GSSNE departments, such as Finance or Product Program, as needed.

The GSSNE team member investigating the conflict will act as an impartial mediator. She/he will support all parties in creating a mutually-agreed upon plan of action that outlines expectations for each party's future behavior with regard to the source of conflict. In the absence of a mutual agreement, the GSSNE team member will work to establish a fair and balanced course of action. Should resolution fail after council staff mediation, other actions may be considered including the release from volunteer appointment of one or both parties involved. This decision will not be made lightly.

A volunteer may have their appointment terminated by GSSNE because of, but not limited to:

- Refusal to comply with GSSNE or GSUSA policies
 - Conduct inconsistent with the principles of the Girl Scout Movement as indicated by the Girl Scout Promise and Law
 - Inability to perform or fulfill duties of the position as outlined in the Volunteer Position Description
 - Unsatisfactory completion of objectives and corrective action regarding their role
 - Refusal or failure to adhere to GSSNE financial guidelines
 - Status as a registered sex offender or convicted of crimes against a child
- GSSNE staff will focus on defined resolution actions that are specific, achievable, comprehensive, and final. The solution will include an evaluation process and subsequent actions for non-compliance. In all resolutions, GSSNE will keep the girl in the forefront of the decision-making process.