



Girl Scouts of Southwest Indiana Guidelines for Volunteers & Child Protection 2026-2027

Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place.

girl scouts of southwest indiana

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Council Structure

Policy Making –Council Board of Directors:

Girl Scouts of Southwest Indiana, Inc.'s (GSSI's) volunteer board of directors consists of elected officers and directors-at-large from various areas within the GSSI service area. Elected delegates from GSSI's service units give input to the board of directors to aid them in policy and decision-making. The board performs long-range planning on an annual basis and evaluates and reviews the results of those plans. The board of directors has authority to make policy decisions in the areas of: Membership Services (Program, Adult Learning, and Membership), Finance, Public Relations, Community Relations, and Management of the organization. The board of directors shall have the right, in its sole discretion, from time to time, to amend the policies and standards.

A. GSSI adheres to the policies of Girl Scouts of the USA and is guided by the standards of Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA). Policies of Girl Scouts of the USA are found in the *Leader's Digest Blue Book of Basic Documents*, as updated by GSUSA. Standards of Girl Scouts of the USA are found in *Safety Activity Checkpoints* (accessible at **www.girlscouts-gssi.org**).

B. GSSI adheres to the policies of Girl Scouts of the USA and is guided by the standards of Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA). Policies of Girl Scouts of the USA are found in the *Leader's Digest Blue Book of Basic Documents*, as updated by GSUSA. Standards of Girl Scouts of the USA are found in *Safety Activity Checkpoints* (accessible at **www.girlscouts-gssi.org**).

C. The policies and standards of GSSI supplement Girl Scouts of the USA policies and standards and must be used together to determine actions for Girl Scout Member Groups, i.e. troops, series or event groups, clusters, camps, service units, travel, etc..

Policy Acknowledgement and Compliance Requirement

All girl caregivers and adult volunteers are required to read, acknowledge, and agree to the Policy Acknowledgement and Compliance section of the Annual Permission Form. Completion of this form is mandatory each program year and is a condition of participation in Girl Scouts activities. By signing the form, individuals affirm their understanding of and agreement to comply with all applicable Girl Scouts of Southwest Indiana policies, procedures, and guidelines.

Policy Acknowledgment and Compliance:
All members shall read, understand, and adhere to all official Girl Scouts of Southwest Indiana (GSSI) documents, including but not limited to:

- GSSI's Guidelines for Volunteers and Child Protection,
- Volunteer Essentials, and
- Safety Activity Checkpoints

By participating in any GSSI-related activities, members acknowledge their responsibility to comply with the requirements, standards, and procedures outlined in these documents. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action, up to and including release from volunteer duties and/or membership.

GSSI Adult Volunteer Guidelines

Volunteer Philosophy

All volunteers are expected to support and promote the *Girl Scout Promise and Law*, and the ideals, principles, policies, and standards of Girl Scouts of the USA and GSSI. We maintain that the strength of the Girl Scout movement rests in the voluntary leadership of its adult members who strive to build girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place. It is through voluntary leadership that the Girl Scout movement serves girls. To ensure volunteer satisfaction and to utilize the skills and talents of volunteers effectively, it is essential that the following guidelines be established and maintained for all volunteers.

A volunteer is defined as: Any adult who willingly gives their service without concern for monetary compensation. **No information in these guidelines is intended to create an employment relationship and nothing in these guidelines shall be deemed to create any additional rights for volunteers or create additional obligations or liabilities for GSSI.**

All volunteers are expected to maintain high standards of productivity, cooperation, attendance, efficiency, and economy in their volunteer role for GSSI.

Volunteer Wellness

Volunteer service can involve multiple commitments. Enthusiasm, energy and positive attitudes are essential to providing girls and adults with worthwhile and enjoyable leadership experiences. To this end, it is vital that adult volunteers not overextend themselves by volunteering for too many overlapping roles. Building a broader base of adult support by encouraging others to participate increases and expands the opportunities for everyone to grow and share. GSSI is committed to providing enriching quality experiences to both girls and adults.

ADVANTAGES OF VOLUNTEERING WITH GIRL SCOUTS

Volunteers receive:

- Resources and support available to ensure success in their volunteer position(s)
- Training and other learning opportunities
- Opportunities to contribute to the community through Girl Scout service
- Opportunities to gain marketable skills and experience
- Social contacts and peer recognition
- Accident and liability insurance coverage during Girl Scout activities.

Volunteers are encouraged to enhance and develop their skills while serving with the council. When appropriate, GSSI will help volunteers broaden their skills through assignment to new volunteer positions involving additional and/or greater responsibilities.

Equal Opportunity for Volunteers

There shall be no discrimination against an otherwise qualified adult volunteer on the basis of disability, age, race, color, ethnicity, gender identity or expression, creed, national origin, sexual orientation, religion, citizenship, ancestry, marital status, veteran status, socioeconomic status, or other characteristic protected by applicable federal, state or local law.

To ensure that the membership and volunteers of GSSI reflect the diversity of the population groups within its jurisdiction, GSSI is committed to equal opportunity in:

- The recruitment, selection, placement, development, and recognition of volunteers and members
- The extension of Girl Scouting to girls and adults in all communities within the council's jurisdiction

Membership Registration

All adult volunteers participating in the Girl Scout Movement shall be registered as members with Girl Scouts of the USA and individually pay the annual membership dues, except those adults who are lifetime members or who are working in a temporary advisory or consultative capacity. The Girl Scout membership year is October 1 through September 30.

Any adult handling money, driving girls to/on Girl Scout outings, or participating with the troop on a regular basis must register with Girl Scouts of the USA. Accident insurance is provided for every registered girl and adult member while engaged in Girl Scout activities. The cost of insurance is covered by membership dues paid to Girl Scouts of the USA. The Basic Accident Insurance is secondary medical coverage to each family's primary medical insurance carrier. Lifetime membership is available in Girl Scouting for members 18 years of age and older who are post-high school. Reduced lifetime membership fees are offered to graduating Girl Scout Ambassadors and volunteers with 10+ years in a role.

Recruitment

The recruitment process consists of a number of methods to attract qualified volunteers, who will be matched to appropriate open or newly created positions.

Written position descriptions that define specific responsibilities and expectations will be used in the search to identify the most qualified candidate. Prospective volunteers will be provided a position description for each position for which they are being considered or that matches their interests.

Selection

Each volunteer is selected based on:

- Ability to perform the volunteer position (experience, knowledge, skills)
- Volunteer and council need
- Ability and willingness to attend training
- Ability to work as a team member with other Girl Scout adults
- Phone screen and criminal background check outcomes, when applicable
- Ability and willingness to abide by all volunteer policies and requirements

- Expressed commitment to the Girl Scout Promise and Law and willingness to become a registered member of Girl Scouts of the USA.

The safety of girl members is a top priority. It is therefore essential that GSSI take specific steps to ensure the integrity and suitability of its adult volunteers. Depending on position, a volunteer may be required to complete an application, provide references, sign position description(s), and undergo a phone screen and criminal background check prior to being selected. Volunteering is a privilege and is not guaranteed to all applicants. It is GSSI's sole discretion whether to accept an individual as a volunteer.

Criminal Background Checks

Criminal background checks will be conducted for all applicants prior to appointment. GSSI may request a criminal background check on any volunteer at any time during the volunteer's appointment.

Any criminal background check will be conducted in accordance with the Federal Fair Credit Reporting Act. The council may extend an offer of appointment contingent upon the successful completion of a criminal background check.

The Federal Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) promotes the accuracy, fairness, and privacy of information in the files of consumer reporting agencies. Each prospective volunteer will consent to a criminal background check by completing the request on the online portal provided by GSSI before or after member registration. The background check is valid for three (3) years.

Grounds for Disqualification or Restrictions

Disqualification or restrictions may be imposed at any time, either prior to placement or during a volunteer's active service, at GSSI's full discretion to ensure the safety of all participating girl and adult members.

Grounds for disqualification include:

- Refusal to submit to background screening through GSSI's provider, regardless of whether the individual has a current background screening from another organization
- Registered sex offender status*
- Any felony offense
- Crimes against a child
- Crimes involving the use of weapons
- Crimes involving violence
- Crimes involving arson
- Crimes involving public indecency
- Misdemeanors involving DUI, DWI or possession of any controlled substance within the last five years
- Other misdemeanors as GSSI may determine, including but not limited to theft, fraud, forgery or traffic violations
- Other matters that GSSI believes, in its sole discretion, are in the best interest of GSSI and its members

***Registered sex offenders are not eligible for membership in Girl Scouts of the USA and may not participate in any capacity with Girl Scout programs, activity or business. Volunteers shall not knowingly hold meetings or associate with Girl Scout members with a registered sex offender present.**

If GSSI learns (via criminal background check or otherwise) that a prospective or current volunteer has been convicted of one of these crimes under Indiana or other U.S. state laws, or it is otherwise not in the best interest of GSSI for an individual to serve as a volunteer, a volunteer's participation may be denied, revoked or limited at any time at GSSI's discretion.

Limitations on handling money: For misdemeanor crimes involving theft, fraud, forgery or dishonesty of any kind, the applicant may be accepted as a volunteer but will be restricted from management of Girl Scout or troop money. At GSSI's sole discretion, volunteers may also be prohibited from handling money if there are concerns that funds have been mismanaged during their service.

Limitations on transporting girls: Applicants may be accepted as volunteers, but based on their driving record, they may be restricted from transporting Girl Scouts other than their own girl to and from meetings or activities.

Unresolved situations: If there is an open warrant for the arrest of the applicant, or if there is a pending charge with no disposition, the application will not be approved. The volunteer will not be placed unless and until the situation has been satisfactorily resolved and the criminal background check has been updated and approved. It shall be the applicant's obligation to notify GSSI of the resolution of the outstanding matter. After six (6) months, an individual shall be required to restart the application process. If the volunteer is already serving in a volunteer position, their participation will be suspended pending disposition of the case or resolution of the open warrant.

Other circumstances: For all other criminal offenses GSSI shall review the applicant's situation on a case-by-case basis.

Placement

Every attempt will be made to place the volunteer in positions that meet both their needs and the needs of the council. In instances where this is not possible, the needs of GSSI will take precedence over the needs of the individual. An individual not placed in a position for which they applied may be recommended for other positions, and they may request reassignment.

Volunteers will be contacted after the submission of their background check authorization. Adults selected for volunteer positions will be placed, nominated, or appointed based on qualifications including but not limited to:

- Willingness to become a Girl Scout member
- Ability to perform the volunteer position
- Availability to participate in training
- Willingness to carry out the responsibilities of the position

Appointment and Confirmation

Upon successful completion of the application process, the prospective volunteer will be asked to sign "GSSI's Expectations of a Co-Leader" or any other agreement to confirm their appointment. The agreement will state the responsibilities and seasonal commitment of the position. It will also include a statement that a volunteer may be

released at any time due to failure to fulfill the requirements of the position, a change in needs of GSSI, or any reason that GSSI deems it in the best interest of GSSI and its members.

Every volunteer must agree to abide by the policies, procedures, and principles of GSSI and of Girl Scouts of the USA. An authorized service team member, volunteer supervisor, or staff member will notify the volunteer of appointment, at which time the volunteer should receive information regarding orientation for the position as applicable.

Orientation

A service team member, volunteer supervisor, or staff member shall provide general orientation information to volunteers at the time of joining or when assuming a new volunteer role and remain available for ongoing questions and support throughout their service. GSSI also ensures that volunteers have access to the resources necessary for success, including guidance on how to access volunteer guidelines and digital materials shared with all GSSI volunteers.

Training

Volunteers may be required to complete onboarding training based on their position. GSSI staff will provide notification of required training and completion deadlines as outlined in the volunteer role description. Training ensures volunteers have the knowledge and skills needed for their role. Guidelines for child protection training are provided in this document under the section "GSSI Child Protection Guidelines."

All volunteers must complete the required training applicable to their role. Volunteers may be removed from the position if the required orientation is not completed.

Additional training may be required for safety purposes for certain activities, as outlined in **Safety Activity Checkpoints**. Volunteers must complete and remain current on any required activity-specific training, or the activity will not be approved, to ensure the safety of all participants.

Volunteers will also receive opportunities to participate in optional self-paced training, online training, training classes and events, conferences, and workshops to enhance their performance in their position and to allow further skill development.

Supervision and Assessment

Volunteer supervisors or staff will coach and mentor volunteers in each position served. Supervisors or staff will help the volunteer assess whether a position is a satisfactory fit and identify potential changes or alternative roles as needed to support volunteer success. Throughout their relationship with GSSI, a volunteer will receive coaching on volunteer development plans, to inspire them as a good role model, and to help build the leadership qualities inherent in Girl Scout programming for girls.

Volunteer supervisors or staff will maintain regular contact—via in-person meetings, phone, or email—to resolve concerns proactively and to provide feedback and recommendations. Near the end of each term, or at any time a supervisor, staff, or volunteer deems necessary, a performance assessment may be conducted to review accomplishments, provide feedback, address any concerns, and, if appropriate, discuss reappointment or alternative positions.

Recognition

Volunteers serve in Girl Scouting because they believe in the goals of the Movement. Volunteers achieve personal growth and satisfaction from serving others. Recognition awards are available at many levels to express appreciation for volunteer efforts. The council's formal recognition system is consistent with the Girl Scouts of the USA adult recognition system.

Volunteers, staff, and parents may nominate any volunteer for a service recognition award. Nomination forms may vary and are available online. Nominations for national awards are reviewed and approved by staff and board members, while local awards are reviewed and approved by a team of volunteers at the council or service unit level.

Succession Planning and Reappointment

Succession planning is a process whereby GSSI ensures that volunteers are recruited and developed to fill each key role within the organization. GSSI matches and nurtures the skills of each volunteer, allowing them to take on new or broader roles within the organization. Reappointment is an integral part of this process.

Reappointment is based on:

- Past position performance
- Adherence to council and GSUSA policies and standards
- Support of the Girl Scout purpose, values, and council goals
- Positive relationships with the community, parents, other volunteers, and employed staff
- The volunteer needs of GSSI, as determined in its discretion

Reappointment takes place only after completion of a satisfactory performance assessment. If reappointed, the volunteer and an authorized volunteer supervisor or staff must confirm acceptance of position accountabilities, expectations, and time commitments.

In some cases, a volunteer may not be reappointed to their current position. However, they may be appointed to a new or different position. Council may limit or extend the term of any volunteer position on a case-by-case basis.

A volunteer may request reassignment to another position at any time. A volunteer who is not reappointed to their position or disagrees with the reassignment has the right to utilize GSSI's Conflict or Complaint Resolution procedure outlined in this document.

In the case of non-reappointment after an unsatisfactory performance assessment, a volunteer will receive documentation confirming the reason for their non-reappointment. A volunteer who disagrees with the non-reappointment may submit written documentation to the membership representative for their area to request an alternate resolution. The council will then implement the Conflict or Complaint Resolution procedure.

Release or Termination

Situations may arise whereby GSSI may release or terminate a volunteer from one or all positions prior to the end of the assignment term. Any action to release a volunteer will receive careful and detailed consideration.

GSSI may release or terminate an individual because of, but not limited to:

- Restriction of positions or elimination of the volunteer's position
- Inability or failure to complete the requirements or meet the competencies and expectations of the position, including inconsistent communication with GSSI staff
- Conduct inconsistent with the principles of the Girl Scout Movement as indicated by the Girl Scout Promise and Law
- Misappropriation of funds; co-mingling of council, service unit and/or troop funds with personal funds; or debt incurred to the council, service unit or troop
- Refusal to comply with GSSI or Girl Scouts of the USA policies
- Failure to support or abide by GSSI's policies, activities, and/or goals
- Refusal or failure to adhere to financial guidelines of GSSI
- Any reason GSSI deems to be in its best interest or that of its members

Release or termination from the position does not cancel membership with Girl Scouts of the USA unless it is determined that the volunteer is no longer able to meet the membership requirement.

Step 1: When the possibility of release or termination is indicated, one or more GSSI representatives will be designated to gather and evaluate the facts.

Step 2: A designated GSSI representative will discuss the situation with the individual concerned and explain why there is concern about the volunteer's performance. The council representative will indicate in writing the outcome of the meeting and of any further action necessary, if there is any.

Step 3: When the facts indicate that release or termination is necessary, as determined in GSSI's sole discretion, the individual may be given the opportunity to resign or withdraw voluntarily by submitting their immediate resignation in writing.

Information regarding volunteer release and terminations shall be limited to individuals deemed by GSSI to be necessary to have such information. However, GSSI reserves the right to notify relevant GSSI and GSUSA staff and volunteers, and/or the proper authority (including appropriate law enforcement), if the situation warrants. A current record of terminated volunteers will be kept on file at all times for reference during volunteer selection and appointment.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, GSSI reserves the right at any time to release or terminate a volunteer, in its sole discretion, in the interest of GSSI.

Resignation

A volunteer may choose to resign at any time. A volunteer is encouraged to give as much notice as possible when resigning, or a minimum of two weeks. Resignations should be submitted to their volunteer mentor or GSSI staff in writing when possible. Resignation from a position does not cancel membership with Girl Scouts of the USA.

The volunteer mentor or staff will acknowledge any resignation submitted either verbally or in writing. At that time, the volunteer mentor or membership support staff will request any additional paperwork or supplies that are required from the volunteer. The resignation letter will be kept in the volunteer file.

Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest exists when the interests or concerns of any volunteer (or any member of their family or any party, group or organization in which the volunteer is actively involved) may be seen as competing with the interests or concerns of GSSI. A volunteer and their family members cannot utilize their connections to GSSI for personal, professional, political, or monetary gain. They may not act for GSSI on behalf of any group, organization, or business to which they have allegiance or obligation.

A volunteer cannot use, for personal advantage or for the advantage of any private business or other organization, confidential information, or material acquired in the discharge of their duties (such as rosters, mailing lists, telephone directories, email distribution and Girl Scout gatherings). Neither a volunteer nor any member of their family may accept any gift, entertainment, services, loans, or promises of future benefits from any person who personally or whose employer might benefit or appear to benefit because of the volunteer's connection to GSSI.

Any matter of question or interpretation that arises relating to this policy should be brought to the volunteer mentor or staff for consideration. Each volunteer must promptly and fully disclose to a volunteer mentor or staff member when engaging in a potential conflict of interest situation. The volunteer will be asked to ameliorate or cease any conflicting activity. Further corrective or disciplinary action may be taken.

Role Models

Girl Scouts exist for girls. The female role model is essential to fulfilling the purpose of Girl Scouting. Interaction with women in leadership positions is of particular importance in developing the self-image of young girls. Therefore, Girl Scouts of the USA and GSSI require that men serving in group leadership roles do so with women. At least one member of the leadership team must be an adult female, 18 years of age or older that has graduated high school and is an adult in the girl scout system, and must be unrelated to the male leader. An unrelated female adult must be present at all group gatherings/events for the duration of the gathering/event.

Group leadership teams shall be made up of at least two unrelated adults, one of which must an adult female, 18 years of age or older that has graduated high school and is an adult in the girl scout system.

Uniforms

The Girl Scout uniform is a symbol and mark of distinction in the organization. While a uniform is not required for participation in Girl Scouting, it may be required for some official functions (e.g., national convention, flag ceremonies, community events). Volunteers are encouraged to purchase a uniform and/or components. Wearing the Girl Scout uniform is suitable for almost all Girl Scout functions. Wearing a Girl Scout pin is always appropriate.

The individual and collective appearance directly reflects the organization's image. Behavior while in uniform or Girl Scout apparel should honor the organization. GSSI reserves the right to discuss inappropriate attire choices with individuals when they arise.

The official Girl Scout adult uniform consists of a membership pin. The official adult navy vest is optional for volunteers but recommended to display insignia and awards. The dress/business uniform includes the addition of navy-blue business attire. All pieces, including casual adult Girl Scout attire, are available at council stores.

Conflict and Complaint Resolution

All volunteers shall have the opportunity to present concerns and resolve issues and conflicts. GSSI recognizes the importance of resolving issues and conflicts promptly and efficiently. The initiation of these procedures will not restrict GSSI from taking immediate and appropriate action with respect to the volunteer, when necessary.

Definitions:

- *A "conflict" is any kind of disagreement between two or more people.*
- *A "complaint" may be submitted if there is a dispute over the interpretation or application of a council policy, practice or procedure.*

Conflict Resolution for Volunteers

GSSI desires to provide individuals with a neutral process to resolve issues and conflicts. Recognizing that each individual has personal interest in and a share of the responsibility for resolving an issue or conflict in which they are involved, the council favors a collaborative adult resolution process whenever possible.

Step 1: Volunteers should discuss concerns directly with the individuals involved, in a problem-solving tone. If this does not resolve the issue or conflict, the volunteers should proceed to Step Two.

Step 2: The parties should jointly discuss the situation with volunteer leadership or staff for support or guidance. If one or more parties do not feel comfortable meeting together, they may instead share their concerns individually with GSSI staff, who will work to understand all perspectives and guide next steps. If this does not resolve the issue, the volunteers should proceed to Step Three.

Step 3: The volunteers participate in negotiation and dialogue facilitated by a GSSI staff member or designee. In situations where joint dialogue is not appropriate, the staff member may mediate separately with the parties and provide recommendations. If this does not resolve the issue, the volunteers should proceed to Step Four.

Step 4: The chief executive officer or designee will make a final decision.

Complaint procedure for volunteers

Step 1: The volunteer should discuss the complaint with the local service unit chair/volunteer support organizer or appropriate staff member. If this does not resolve the issue, the volunteer should proceed to Step Two.

Step 2: The person must submit the complaint in writing to the service unit chair/volunteer support organizer or appropriate staff member. The signed and dated document must be specifically titled "Complaint

Resolution Request," identify the person with whom the compliant is registered (if applicable) and cite the policy or procedure that has allegedly been misapplied.

Step 3: The service unit chair/volunteer support organizer or appropriate staff member will review the submission and offer direction. Additional written documentation may be requested. If this does not resolve the issue, the volunteer should proceed to Step Four.

Step 4: The volunteer shall submit the "Complaint Resolution Request" to the appropriate GSSI department head. The appropriate department head will become involved to offer direction and resolution. If this does not resolve the issue, the volunteer should proceed to Step Five.

Step 5: The volunteer shall submit the "Complaint Resolution Request" to the GSSI chief executive officer. The chief executive officer or their designee will assist in resolving the complaint and upon reaching a final decision and will document the outcome in writing.

Step 6: If the Complaint Resolution Request involves the chief executive officer, then it shall instead be submitted to the 2nd vice chair of the board (for volunteers) or the chair of the board if they are not available or involves the chief executive offider, who will assist in resolving the complaint and upon reaching a final decision will document the outcome in writing.

It is the responsibility of the chief executive officer or designee to implement the decision in either procedure. The council reserves the right to deviate from these steps, in its sole discretion.

Bullying

GSSI will not tolerate bullying behavior and prohibits volunteers from participating in bullying behavior, intentional and unintentional. GSSI considers the following types of behavior examples of bullying:

Verbal Bullying: slandering, ridiculing, or maligning a person or their family; persistent name calling that is hurtful, insulting or humiliating; joking at another's expense; abusive and offensive remarks; spreading rumors or gossip

Physical Bullying: engaging in unwanted physical contact or aggression toward another person, including but not limited to pushing, shoving, kicking, poking, tripping, hitting, threat of physical assault or attempted assault. Physical bullying may also include damaging, taking, or threatening to damage another person's property.

Cyber Bullying: using digital communication via email, text, or social media platforms to harm or harass others. This includes but is not limited to sending hurtful messages, spreading rumors, sharing embarrassing content without consent, or creating fake accounts to target someone.

Gesture Bullying: non-verbal threatening gestures, glances which can convey threatening messages

Exclusion: intentionally ignoring, isolating, or leaving someone out of Girl Scout-related activities.

In addition, the following examples may constitute or contribute to evidence of bullying:

- **Targeting**: Persistently singling out or constantly criticizing someone.
- **Aggression**: Yelling, raising one's voice, or publicly humiliating someone.

- **Exclusion**: Consistently ignoring, interrupting, or encouraging others to disregard someone.
- **Sabotage:** Deliberately interfering with communications or making baseless accusations of errors.

If a volunteer believes they have been the subject of bullying behavior involving a GSSI activity, program, function or business, the individual should immediately inform GSSI's senior director or the chief executive officer (or designee). If the complaint involves the chief executive officer, then the complaint should be reported to the board chair. The individual should report the facts of the incident, including what happened, how often, and where the incident(s) took place, as well as the names of the individuals and witnesses involved. All complaints received will be reported directly to the senior director or the chief executive officer (or designee).

GSSI will investigate all bullying complaints promptly and thoroughly. If it is determined that bullying has occurred, GSSI will take appropriate corrective action up to and including dismissal of the offending volunteer (or other appropriate action).

Harassment

GSSI supports an environment in which relationships are characterized by the Girl Scout Promise and Law. GSSI prohibits volunteers from participating in any form of harassment on the basis of disability, age, race, color, ethnicity, gender identity or expression, creed, national origin, sexual orientation, religion, citizenship, ancestry, marital status, veteran status, socioeconomic status, or other characteristics protected by federal, state or local law.

Harassment refers to a wide spectrum of offensive behavior and sometimes refers to behavior intended to disturb, threaten, or upset.

Any volunteer who believes they have been subjected to, or witnessed, harassment of any kind – whether by another volunteer, council staff member, or any agent of the organization—should promptly report the incident to their volunteer mentor, membership support staff, or to the chief executive officer. The volunteer mentor or membership support staff, upon receiving such a complaint, must report the matter to the chief executive officer, who will conduct an investigation and, depending on the findings, take appropriate corrective action or report the matter to the proper authorities.

GSSI reserves the right to refuse a volunteer opportunity, membership, or reappointment, and to release or terminate from affiliation with GSSI any volunteer who, in conducting or participating in Girl Scout activities, harasses another volunteer, GSSI employee, Girl Scout member or other individual.

Sexual Harassment

GSSI prohibits volunteers, male or female, from participating in any form of sexual harassment of another volunteer, employee, or Girl Scout member, regardless of sex or gender. GSSI reserves the right to refuse membership or reappointment, and to release or terminate from affiliation with GSSI any volunteer who, in conducting or participating in Girl Scout activities, sexually harasses another volunteer, employee or Girl Scout member.

Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to, unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual acts or favors, or any conduct that abuses the dignity of another through insulting, degrading, or offensive sexual remarks or behavior. Sexual harassment also includes threats or suggestions that a volunteer's status is contingent upon tolerating or acquiescing to sexual advances.

Examples of sexual harassment behaviors that could create a hostile environment include:

- **Verbal:** Sexual jokes, innuendoes, or intrusive questions about someone's private life.
- **Visual:** Displaying sexually explicit materials, images, or photographs.
- **Non-verbal:** Staring, leering, or making suggestive sexual gestures.
- **Targeted:** Making comments about another person's body or appearance.

Any volunteer who feels they have been sexually harassed should promptly report such behavior to the volunteer mentor, membership support staff, or the chief executive officer. Upon receiving a complaint, the volunteer mentor or staff person will report the matter to the chief executive officer who will conduct an investigation and, depending on the findings, take appropriate corrective action or report the matter to the proper authorities.

Child Abuse

GSSI supports, requires, and maintains environments that are free of child abuse and neglect as defined by the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act ("the Act"). Child abuse and neglect are unlawful acts. It is strictly against GSSI's policy for any volunteer to physically, sexually, mentally, emotionally, or verbally abuse or neglect any girl member. GSSI reserves the right to refuse membership or reappointment, and to release or terminate from affiliation with GSSI, any volunteer implementing, conducting, or participating in Girl Scout activities, programs or business who is found guilty of child abuse and/or neglect or has been convicted of child abuse and/or neglect.

See **GSSI Child Protection Guidelines** below for more specific information.

Substance Abuse

Possession or use of alcohol or intoxicants or the illegal use of drugs at any time on GSSI premises, when implementing, conducting, or participating in Girl Scout activities, programs or business, or in the presence of girl members is strictly prohibited. Any such suspected use or possession will be reported to the appropriate authorities.

Exception: Alcohol may be served at adult fundraising/donor events or adult-only gatherings with prior authorization from the chief executive officer.

Information Technology and Individual Privacy

GSSI encourages the use of electronic communications for legitimate and authorized Girl Scout program purposes. Electronic communication is defined as any communication that is broadcasted, created, sent, forwarded, replied to, transmitted, stored, held, copied, downloaded, displayed, viewed, read, or printed by any electronic communications service, including e-mail and telephone.

Contents of all electronic communications shall conform to laws and GSSI policies, including regarding protection of intellectual property, copyright, patents, and trademarks. The Girl Scout brand is the sole property of GSSI and GSUSA, and its use must be pre-approved by a member of the GSSI Marketing Department.

Prohibited uses of GSSI electronic resources include, but are not limited to:

- **Inappropriate Content:** Accessing or displaying sexually explicit documents or images.
- **Commercial/Personal Use:** Using resources for personal gain or unauthorized commercial activity.
- **False Representation:** Making unauthorized statements on behalf of GSSI GSI Technology.
- **Identity & Access Fraud:** Using false identities, forging headers, or bypassing security controls.
- **Privacy Violations:** Distributing members' personal information without authorization.
- **System Disruption:** Sending spam, chain letters, or interfering with system availability.

GSSI prohibits the use of computers, e-mail systems, and other technology in ways that are disruptive, offensive to others, or harmful to morale. Volunteers should be aware that electronic communications sent or received using GSSI systems may be monitored to ensure compliance with organizational policies and security standards.

Policy Violation

Notwithstanding anything specifically set forth in these Guidelines, GSSI reserves the right to refuse membership, appointment, or reappointment, and to release or terminate from affiliation with GSSI, any volunteer who violates GSSI, GSUSA, or volunteer policies. Violations may also result in additional actions as permitted by law, including being reported to the appropriate law enforcement authorities.



GSSI Child Protection Guidelines

Girl Scouts of Southwest Indiana (GSSI) is committed to the safety and well-being of the youth we serve. Activities are planned and carried out in accordance with national safety guidelines established by Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA). GSUSA documents safety guidelines in **Volunteer Essentials** and **Safety Activity Checkpoints** which are updated annually. Co-leaders are notified of these guidelines during their initial onboarding, and guidelines are posted on the GSSI website.

Definitions of Child Abuse and Neglect

The definitions provided usually pertain to child abuse from adults and caregivers. Within GSSI, child-on-child abuse can take the form of bullying or other types of abuse. We are committed to preventing abuse from occurring at all levels by educating youth and adults within our organization.

Child Abuse Defined

Abuse can be physical, sexual, or emotional, or it can be any form of neglect. The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) defines abuse as "any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm." This applies to any person 17 years or younger.

Abuse may result from excessive discipline or punishment. The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) prohibits the use of the following types of discipline or punishment: corporal punishment; physical exercise (e.g., push-ups, running, etc.); requiring or using force to make a child take an uncomfortable position; verbal remarks that ridicule a child; denial of an emotional response; denial of essential services (e.g., health care, food, clothing, bedding, sleep, etc.); placement in a locked room; and holding with physical, mechanical or chemical restraints.

- **Physical Abuse Defined**
  Physical abuse is any physical injury caused by hitting, beating, punching, shaking, kicking, biting, burning – or any other physical harm to a child. The injury may or may not be intentional, could be the result of a single episode or repeated episodes, and can range in severity.
- **Sexual Abuse Defined**
  Sexual abuse involves engaging in or assisting any other person to engage in any sexual activity with a child. This includes sexual contact that is accompanied by enticement, force, or threat of force, regardless of the age of the participants. It includes any sexual contact between an adult and a child, regardless of deception or if the child understands the sexual nature of the activity. Sexual contact between an older and a younger child can be abusive if there is a significant disparity in age, development, or physical size. Sexually abusive acts may include sexual penetration, sexual touching, or non-contact sexual acts such as exposure or pornography.
- **Emotional Abuse Defined**
  Emotional abuse involves injury to the mental or psychological capacity or emotional stability of a child. It includes acts or omissions by parents or other caregivers that have caused, or could cause, serious behavioral, cognitive, emotional, or mental disorders. Emotional abuse may also include extreme or severe acts of punishment. Children who are physically or sexually abused are usually emotionally abused as well.

- **Neglect Defined**
  While there are several forms of neglect, including educational, emotional, environmental, medical, and developmental, child protection agencies usually use the term to mean physical neglect. Physical neglect is the failure to meet a child's basic physical needs such as food, shelter, clothing, and hygiene. Neglect is a form of abuse.

Child Abuse Prevention

All GSSI staff and volunteers are annually provided GSSI's Child Protection Guidelines and required to abide by them. Guidelines on child abuse prevention methods are outlined to ensure youth participating in GSSI programming are protected from incidents of abuse. These guidelines empower staff members and volunteers to recognize, prevent, and react responsibly to all forms of child abuse, and ensure GSSI programming takes place in safe, nurturing environments that foster healthy relationship building. All youth served by GSSI, their parents and caregivers, GSSI staff members, and GSSI volunteers must be confident that such a positive environment exists.

To prevent child abuse from taking place, GSSI requires the following: effective screening of all staff and volunteers; formal child protection training for staff and volunteers providing direct services to youth; clear guidelines on appropriate interactions between youth, staff, and volunteers; strategies for establishing safe environments; and written directives for responding to inappropriate behavior, breaches in policy, and allegations and suspicions of child abuse if they should occur. These directives include state-mandated reporting of child abuse if it is suspected, witnessed, or reported by a child, regardless of whether the abuse may be occurring inside or outside of the GSSI program environment.

Child Abuse Prevention Guidelines

GSSI follows **GSUSA's Child Abuse Prevention Policies and Procedures** to help ensure the safety and well-being of all youth participating in Girl Scout activities. The following policies and procedures outline GSSI's practices for preventing, recognizing, and responding to concerns of child abuse and neglect.

1. **Staff and Volunteer Screening and Selection**
   GSSI adheres to the information outlined in GSUSA's Child Abuse Prevention Policies and Procedures. All GSSI staff and volunteers will be screened through background checks prior to appointment; screenings are conducted in accordance with the **Federal Fair Credit Reporting Act**. (Please reference **GSSI Adult Volunteer Guidelines** above for more information on screening and qualifications.) In addition, staff references are checked prior to their work for the organization. Staff and volunteers providing direct services to youth will be trained in child protection issues before beginning their regular involvement with youth.

2. **Child Abuse Prevention Training**
   All GSSI staff and volunteers providing direct services to youth are required to complete the following training within the first year of appointment (training takes place in January) and update this training every three years.

   Required Training

   - **Step 1: Review GSSI's Child Protection Guidelines.** Read pages 17-22 of this manual.
   - **Step 2: Complete Indiana DCS Training.** Complete the 10-minute online course, **Reporting Abuse and Neglect**, provided by the Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS). This course

covers state-mandated responsibilities and procedures for reporting abuse and neglect. Save the digital certificate of completion provided at the end of the course.

- **Step 3: Submit Training Documentation.** Complete **GSSI's Child Abuse Prevention Training Form** and upload your digital certificate of completion for the Indiana DCS course, *Reporting Abuse and Neglect*. GSSI uses this form to document training completion.

Recommended Training

In addition to the required training, GSSI recommends the following training and resources to further develop knowledge of child abuse prevention, recognition, response, and reporting.

- **Girl Scouts of the USA Training: Girl Scouts Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention** is a 50-minute online course covering the prevention, recognition, response, and reporting of child abuse and neglect. If you are unable to access the video through the direct link above, email **support@girlscouts-gssi.org** for assistance setting up your gsLearn account
- **Indiana DCS Resource:** Review the **Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline Process** for additional information about the reporting process. More information about the Indiana Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline is available **HERE**.

3. **Guidelines on Interactions between Youth, Staff, and Volunteers**
GSSI provides a nurturing environment by supporting positive child development, helping children feel valued, and providing caring connections that serve as protective factors. To promote and ensure positive interactions between youth, staff, and volunteers, clear examples of appropriate and inappropriate interactions are provided.

Verbal Interactions

- Appropriate: praise; positive reinforcement for good work or behavior.
- Inappropriate: sexually provocative or degrading comments or put downs; risqué jokes; or use of obscene language.

Physical Interactions

- Appropriate: pats on the back or shoulder, high fives, side hugs verbally or physically initiated by youth. Note that the use of any physical contact should be used with discretion.
- Inappropriate: hugs verbally or physically initiated by staff or volunteers, patting the buttocks, intimate/romantic/sexual contact; corporal punishment (involving physical contact or inflicting pain or discomfort); or involving youth in any pornographic activities.

Additional Interaction Guidelines

- Staff, volunteers, and youth must utilize **Safety Activity Checkpoints** and **GSSI Child Protection Guidelines** to ensure positive interactions and what constitutes inappropriate or harmful interactions.
- GSSI requires that more than one adult is always present with one or more children. One-on-one interactions are not allowed, unless with direct family members (i.e., mother and daughter). Male volunteers are welcome, but at least one female volunteer must always be present.

- If one of the two adults temporarily leaves a room in which children are present, the door must be fully open and, when possible, an extra floater adult will be made available. Appropriate choices will vary and will depend on the location of the activity.
- GSSI incorporates a buddy system to help prevent isolation of children with staff or volunteers. (Please reference **Safety Activity Checkpoints** for buddy system guidance.) Additionally, this system is monitored by staff and/or volunteers to prevent child-on-child abuse.
- As with all GSSI programming, adults (including staff, volunteers, and parents or guardians), are encouraged to drop in unannounced. Unscheduled visits are known to help safeguard youth from all types of inappropriate situations. If drop-in adults want to assist with activities, as a helping hand, background screening and membership should be obtained for consistent participation.

4. **Ensuring Safe Environments**

GSSI evaluates the level of risk by considering the location and time of day of each activity. Whenever possible, activities and programs will take place in open, visible, and well-lit buildings and outside areas in which multiple people can view activities.

Critical Strategies for Ensuring Safe Environments

- Girl Scouts' adult-to-girl ratios show the minimum number of registered adult volunteers with current, approved background checks needed to supervise a specific number of girls. This information is provided in **Safety Activity Checkpoints** under "Standard Safety Guidelines."
- If the class or program is in an isolated location designated solely for the staff, volunteers, and children participating with GSSI, ensure that individuals from outside the program are excluded or monitored.
    - Staff and volunteers will establish access control for admitting and releasing youth when reasonable.
- Troops/groups must receive advanced approval from GSSI to hold an activity at a private residence; the private residence must also meet the safety requirements outlined in **Safety Activity Checkpoints** under "Troop Meeting Space."
- Privacy is essential when youth, volunteers, and staff are toileting, showering, and changing clothes, unless individuals require special supervision for such activities. Special supervision for youth participants should be authorized by the legal guardian in writing to the lead adult.
- Lighting is available in all areas.
- When carpooling, one adult and one child are not permitted to ride together unless with direct family members. Specific directives for transporting youth to and from activities and events are provided in **Safety Activity Checkpoints** under "Transporting Girls."

Internet Safety

- If youth are engaged in an activity which requires use of the internet, staff and volunteers will closely monitor internet usage. All youth, as well as their parents or guardians, must read, agree to, and abide by the Girl Scout Internet Safety Pledge when online. The pledge is provided in **Safety Activity Checkpoints** under "Computer Internet Safety Pledge" and outlines specific internet safety guidelines for children, including but not limited to:

- Use only first names, and never include last names. Do not give out personal information such as your address, telephone number, email address, or Girl Scout meeting locations and times without the permission of a parent or guardian.
- Notify an adult immediately if you notice any information that makes you feel uncomfortable.
- Never agree to meet with someone you have met online without first checking with a parent or guardian. If the parent or guardian agrees to the meeting, make sure that it is in a public place and never go alone.

- GSSI follows the guidelines of the **Children's Online Privacy Protection Act** (COPPA), which protects the personal information of children under the age of 13. This applies to individually identifiable information about a child that is collected online, such as full name, home address, email address, telephone number or any other information that would allow someone to identify or contact the child. The Act and Rule also cover other types of information, hobbies, interests, and information collected through cookies or other types of tracking mechanisms—when they are tied to individually identifiable information. Staff, volunteers, and parents and guardians are all encouraged to read and understand **COPPA**.

5. **Monitoring Behavior**
   GSSI uses formal and informal supervision to observe, monitor, and document staff and volunteer interactions with youth. For such supervision and documentation to take place, staff and volunteers are made aware of their defined roles and responsibilities. Staff and volunteers will follow GSSI's protocol in promptly responding to, and reporting of, inappropriate or harmful behavior, potential risk situations, and boundary violations. Alleged or suspected child abuse or neglect must be reported to Indiana's Child Protective Services (CPS) as outlined in the next section, "Allegations and Suspicions of Child Abuse."

6. **Allegations and Suspicions of Child Abuse**
   GSSI staff and volunteers providing direct services to youth are required to know the GSSI Child Protection Guidelines and Indiana State Law for reporting suspected abuse, including to whom, and in what format, reports are made. This is covered in the required **Child Abuse Prevention Training**.

Indiana is a mandatory reporting state; anyone who suspects a child has been neglected or abused must by state law make a report.

To Report Alleged Abuse: CPS operates a **toll-free hotline (1-800-800-5556)** for people to call and report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. Although reports can be made in person or by correspondence, most of the child abuse and neglect reports are made via telephone. ***CPS receives and initiates investigations of child maltreatment on a 24-hour basis.***

What will you need to provide when making a report?

- If you call to make a report, an intake specialist will ask for information about the circumstances creating a risk of harm to the child including:
  - who was involved
  - what occurred
  - when and where it occurred
  - the extent of any injuries sustained
  - any other relevant information

- You may be asked for detailed information including names, addresses and phone numbers for the child, parent or guardian, or alleged perpetrator. Even if you are unable to provide all the information, please contact the hotline to make a report if you suspect a child is a victim of abuse or neglect.
- **Indiana's Child Protective Services** (CPS), protects Indiana's children from further abuse or neglect and prevents, remedies, or assists in solving problems that may result in abuse, neglect, exploitation, or delinquency of children. The Family Preservation Program carries out the agency's goals to prevent unnecessary separation from their families by identifying family problems and assisting families in resolving them.

GSSI Required Internal Documentation Once Report is Made

- A GSSI **Incident Report** form must be filed within 24 hours by the staff or volunteer who first learned of the abuse or suspected abuse. The staff member or volunteer will not investigate allegations or conduct their own investigations. The Incident Report must include the nature and extent of the abuse, the alleged perpetrator, and other relevant information required in the Incident Report as well as when the report was made to the proper authorities. The staff member or volunteer reporting the initial allegation will submit the Incident Report.
- The **Incident Report** and related documentation will be kept confidential and maintained in GSSI's council headquarters with limited access. CONFIDENTIALITY is crucial in cases of allegations of child abuse. GSSI's confidentiality policy is consistent with state legal requirements which includes withholding the names of potential victims, the accused perpetrator, the individual who made the report to authorities, and reporting the case only on a need-to-know basis to the appropriate individuals. This shall hold true for staff and volunteers regarding an allegation of abuse.

Responses to Cases of Child Abuse

- An allegation does not equate guilt; however, GSSI must take steps to protect the children in its care. If the alleged offender is a staff member or a volunteer, the alleged offender will be placed on suspension immediately after the report of the case to external authorities. The suspension will remain until the case is resolved legally. GSSI holds an appeal process in which individuals found not guilty of abusive behaviors may apply to return to their former program/position. The volunteer suspension and appeal processes are outlined in the *GSSI Policies, Standards and Volunteer Guidelines*.

7. **Guideline Violation**
   Notwithstanding anything specifically set forth in these Guidelines, GSSI reserves the right to refuse membership, appointment, reappointment, and to release or terminate from affiliation with GSSI, any volunteer who violates any volunteer, GSSI, or GSUSA policy/guideline, as stated in the **GSSI Adult Volunteer Guidelines** above. Further, violation of any volunteer policy may result in such other actions as may be permitted by law, including being reported to the appropriate law enforcement authorities.

Summary

Child abuse is a complex issue that can have long-term consequences. GSSI is privileged in the role of nurturing and caretaking of youth. In that role, we strive for healthy environments for every young person in our care and beyond.

Responding to Challenging Situations

GSSI enforces these guidelines to ensure staff and volunteers are prepared to respond appropriately when a sensitive topic arises during a Girl Scout activity and requires immediate attention. Following these guidelines is essential for the safety and well-being of all participants, and helps staff and volunteers address challenging situations with care, confidence, and consistency.

Handling Sensitive Topics and Reporting Concerns

In **Volunteer Essentials** under "Creating a Safe Space," review recommendations for building trust, effectively communicating with girls of any age, and addressing the needs of older girls. The subsections "When Sensitive Topics Come Up" and "Report Concerns" are essential for risk management. A brief summary of these subsections is included below:

When Sensitive Topics Come Up

Girl Scouts welcomes and serves girls and families from a wide spectrum of faiths and cultures. When girls wish to participate in discussions or activities that could be considered sensitive—even for some—put the topic on hold until you have spoken with the parent/guardian and received guidance from GSSI. When Girl Scout activities involve sensitive issues, the role of staff and volunteers is of a caring adult who can help girls acquire skills and knowledge in a supportive atmosphere, not someone who advocates a particular position.

GSSI believes that parents/guardians make all decisions regarding their girl's participation in Girl Scout programming that may be of a sensitive nature. As a volunteer leader, you must get **written caregiver permission** via the **Sensitive Issues Permission Form** for any locally planned activity or discussion that could be considered sensitive. This form contains a summary of topics that may be considered sensitive in nature.

Report Concerns

There may be times when staff or adults are concerned about the health and well-being of girls in their group. Alcohol, drugs, sex, bullying, abuse, depression, and eating disorders are some of the issues girls may encounter. Staff and volunteers are on the frontlines of girls' lives which places them in a unique position to identify a situation in which a girl may need help. If a staff member or volunteer believes a girl is at risk of hurting herself or others, their role is to promptly bring that information to their parent/guardian or the council so she can get the expert assistance she needs. Concern about a girl's well-being and safety is taken seriously. **Volunteer Essentials** provides a detailed list of signs that could indicate a girl needs expert help.

- Contact a staff member at GSSI and find out how to refer the girl and her parent/guardian to experts at her school or in the community.
- Share your concern with the girl's family, if this is feasible.

Suicide Prevention

The **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** lists the following warning signs for suicide risk:

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill themselves
- Looking for a way to kill themselves, like searching online or buying a gun

- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or isolating themselves
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Extreme mood swings

If a staff member or volunteer has concerns that a youth may be at risk of suicide, speak with the youth 1-on-1 separate from the group; ensure you are still visible by the group. Follow the recommendations below from **the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network's *Behavior Health Toolkit***:

- **DO:**
  - Be yourself and actively listen
  - Show empathy without judgment
  - Offer hope
  - Take the youth seriously
- **DON'T:**
  - Argue with the suicidal person
  - Act shocked or lecture about life
  - Promise confidentiality
  - Fix the problem
- **Start the conversation:**
  - "I have been feeling concerned about you lately."
  - "Recently, I've noticed some differences in you and wondered how you are doing."
  - "I wanted to check in with you because you haven't seemed yourself lately."
  - "I have noticed…(name the behavior)…"
- **Assess for risk of suicide:**
  - "Are you thinking about suicide?"
  - "Do you have a plan? Do you know how you would do it?"
  - "When was the last time you thought about suicide?"
  - "When did you begin feeling like this?"
  - "Did something happen to make you start feeling this way?"
  - "How can I best support you right now?"
- **Identify the level of risk:**
  - Low – Some suicidal thoughts. Not suicide plan. The person says they won't attempt suicide.
  - Moderate – Suicidal thoughts. Vague plan that isn't very lethal.
  - High – Suicidal thoughts. Specific plan that is highly lethal.
  - Severe – Suicidal thoughts. Specific plan that is highly lethal. The intent is imminent.

- **<u>If the risk is severe:</u>**
  - Remove potential means such as weapons and medications to reduce the risk
  - Call 911
  - Designate another staff or volunteer to contact the parent or guardian while you and the youth call the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (provides free, confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in the United States).
  - **DON'T LEAVE THE YOUTH ALONE**
  - Respond to youth:
    - "You are not along in this. I'm here for you."
    - "You may not believe it now, but the way you're feeling will change."
    - "I may not be able to understand exactly how you feel, but I care about you and want to help."
    - "You are important to me; we will get through this together."
  - Submit an Incident Report to GSSI immediately and include the parent/guardian in the email.
  - The next time you meet with the youth, if the youth does not feel they have received sufficient help, call 988 together and submit a second Incident Report immediately.

- **<u>If the risk is low, moderate, or high:</u>**
  - Respond to youth:
    - "You are not along in this. I'm here for you."
    - "You may not believe it now, but the way you're feeling will change."
    - "I may not be able to understand exactly how you feel, but I care about you and want to help."
    - "You are important to me; we will get through this together."
  - Inform the youth that the two of you need to speak with their parent or guardian. Ask if you need to call the parent/guardian immediately or if the youth would like to wait until the end of the meeting/event. Ask when the two of you speak with the parent/guardian if the youth wants to lead the conversation themselves or have you lead the conversation.
  - Update parent/guardian on the situation. Inform the parent/guardian of the 988 line and state that you are happy to make the call together right now. If the parent/guardian prefers to call privately, inform the parent/guardian and youth that you will follow up with the youth at the next meeting/event to see how the youth is doing.
  - Share the Safety Plan worksheet on page 36 of **the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network's *Behavior Health Toolkit*** for youth and parent/guardian to complete together later.
  - Submit an Incident Report to GSSI immediately and include the parent/guardian in the email.
  - The next time you meet with the youth, if the youth does not feel they have received sufficient help, call 988 together and submit a second Incident Report immediately.

Following the Girl Scout Safety Guidelines

Every adult in Girl Scouting is responsible for the physical and emotional safety of girls, and we all demonstrate that by agreeing to follow these guidelines at all times.

1. **Follow the Safety Activity Checkpoints.** Instructions for staying safe while participating in activities are detailed in the Safety Activity Checkpoints, available from GSSI. Read the checkpoints, follow them, and share them with other volunteers, parents, and girls before engaging in activities with Girl Scouts.

2. **Arrange for proper adult supervision of Girl Scouts.** The adult supervision rule at Girl Scouts is a strict standard that requires that whenever girls meet, either in person or virtually, there must be *at least* two registered, screened and approved adult volunteers who are unrelated (for example: not a sibling, spouse, domestic partner, parent, child, or anyone who would be considered a family member) and who do not live in the same residence, with a minimum of one who is female. Troop leaders must always be adults. Youth or youth members are not permitted to substitute for adult supervision. This rule applies to every Girl Scout gathering including troop meetings (in person and virtual), day trips, camp, sleep away travel, events, activities, and projects. There are no exceptions to this rule.

3. **Adult-to-Girl Ratios.** There are specific adult-to-girl ratio requirements for Girl Scout troop meetings as compared to events outside of the regular Girl Scout troop meeting, such as outings, activities, camping, and travel. Activities and travel outside of the regular troop meeting require more adult supervision.

4. **Get parent/guardian permission.** Annual Permission Forms are required for Girl Scouts to attend troop meetings and basic troop outings. Topics discussed that could be considered sensitive require an additional Sensitive Issues Permission Form. Overnights and trips (1 or more nights) require Overnights or Extended Trips Permission Form. All can be found under Forms and Documents on the website.

5. **Report abuse.** Sexual advances, improper touching, and sexual activity of any kind with girl members are forbidden. Physical, verbal, and emotional abuse of girls is also forbidden. Follow GSSI's guidelines for reporting concerns about abuse or neglect that may be occurring inside or outside of Girl Scouting.

6. **Be prepared for emergencies.** Work with girls and other volunteers to establish and practice procedures for emergencies related to weather, fire, lost girls/volunteers, and site security. Always keep handy a well-stocked first-aid kit, girl health histories, and contact information for Girl Scouts' families.

7. **Travel safely.** When transporting Girl Scouts to planned field trips and other activities that are outside the normal time and place, every driver must be an approved adult volunteer, over the age of 21 and have a good driving record, a valid license, and a registered/insured vehicle. Insist that everyone is in a legal seat and wears their seat belt at all times and adhere to state laws regarding booster seats and requirements for children in rear seats.

8. **Ensure safe overnight outings.** Prepare Girl Scouts to be away from home by involving them in planning, so they know what to expect. Avoid having men sleep in the same space as girls and women. During family or parent-daughter overnights, one family unit may sleep in the same sleeping quarters in program areas. When parents are staffing events, daughters should remain in quarters with other girls rather than in staff areas.

9. **Role-model the right behavior.** Never use illegal drugs. Don't consume alcohol, smoke, or use foul language in the presence of girls. Do not carry ammunition or firearms in the presence of Girl Scouts unless given special permission by your council for group marksmanship activities.

10. **Create an emotionally safe space.** Adults and volunteers are responsible for making Girl Scouting a place where girls are as safe emotionally as they are physically. Protect the emotional safety of Girl Scouts by creating a team agreement and coaching girls to honor it. Agreements typically encourage behaviors like respecting a diversity of feelings and opinions; resolving conflicts constructively; and avoiding physical and verbal bullying, clique behavior, and discrimination.

11. **Ensure that no Girl Scout is treated differently.** Girl Scouts welcomes all members, regardless of race, ethnicity, background, disability, family structure, religious beliefs, and socioeconomic status. When scheduling, helping plan, and carrying out activities, carefully consider the needs of all girls involved, including school schedules, family needs, financial constraints, religious holidays, and the accessibility of appropriate transportation and meeting places.

12. **Promote online safety.** Instruct Girl Scouts never to put their full names or contact information online or engage in virtual conversation with strangers. Girls should never arrange in-person meetings with online contacts, other than to deliver cookies and only with the approval and accompaniment of a parent or designated adult. On group websites, publish girls' first names only and never divulge their contact information. Teach girls the **Girl Scout Online Safety Pledge** and have them commit to it.

13. **Keep Girl Scouts safe during money-earning activities.** Girl Scout cookies and other council-sponsored product programs are an integral part of the program. During Girl Scout product sale, you are responsible for the safety of girls, money, and products. In addition, a wide variety of organizations, causes, and fundraisers may appeal to Girl Scouts to be their labor force. When representing Girl Scouts, girls cannot participate in money-earning activities that represent partisan politics or that are not Girl Scout–approved product program and efforts.

