

Working with Girls



One of the greatest challenges in leading a troop of girls is behavior management. Behavior management is a key tool in preventing future problems, like girls leaving others out of activities or bullying. By putting the following suggestions into action, you can prevent behavior problems.

You can learn many things from children. How much patience you have, for instance.
-Franklin P. Jones

Be Prepared: Prepare in advance for your meetings. Talk with co-leaders and other helpers about everyone's responsibilities. If you are prepared and keep the meeting moving along, the girls will not have time to find other activities that may cause problems.

Get There Early: Have everything ready before the first girl walks through the door. This will allow you to greet the girls as they arrive, talk to them and make them feel welcome.

Get to Know Your Girls: Make time to spend with the girls at meetings and learn their names, their likes and dislikes. This will help you to build a positive relationship with each of them, especially since many leaders know at least one girl very well already (their daughter).

Provide Positive Praise: According to Abraham Maslow (American psychologist 1908-1970), people need 11 emotionally positive compliments to make up for one criticism in their lives. Focus on what girls are doing right and when they improve their skills. Praise must be specific and sincere.

Establish Ground Rules: To help the meetings run smoothly, have the girls establish ground rules for behavior. It is important that the girls establish the ground rules with the leaders. You want girls to have ownership of the troop rules and hold one another accountable if rules are broken. You will need to give them examples and guide them in discussion. Post the rules at each meeting and ensure that all the leaders are consistent in enforcing the rules.

Establish an Order for Your Meetings: By establishing an order, you are creating a routine for the girls. After several weeks, the girls will understand what is expected of them and know the flow of each meeting. When they understand, they are more likely to cooperate and take initiative.

Use Five- and One-Minute Warnings: Girls need to know when an activity is ending and another is about to begin. This helps them to learn to plan and not feel rushed. The warning signal can be a bell, a song or any appropriate signal you choose.

Have Reasonable Expectations: As you get to know girls, you will better understand the skill sets that each of them possess. Your expectations will shape their performance. Help them set realistic, but challenging goals based on their skills that they have and what they want to do. This includes keeping in mind girls' different physical abilities and choosing activities that allow all girls to succeed.

Provide a Snack: Snack time allows the girls to share and relax and gives them responsibility. Use a Kaper chart (see examples in the resource section) to distribute responsibility for snack time. Snack time should be simple and planned appropriately based on when your troop meets. For example, if it is close to dinnertime, you may serve juice instead of cookies and juice.

Managing Your Own Reactions

When it comes to managing the behavior of the troop, sometimes our own reactions can help or hinder our efforts. Here are a few things to remember when it comes to managing your own reactions.

1. Do not feel that you must react instantly to a situation if you are not sure what to do or if you realize you are angry and may overreact. Take a minute or two to collect your thoughts and say, "I'll get back to you in a minute. I am going to take a time-out from this situation."
2. It is also ok to walk away briefly if you are really angry. Make sure another adult is nearby. Find another adult and ask her to supervise your group while you cool down.
3. Remember that while it is easier to dole out punishment, it is much more beneficial to give thoughtful consequences for undesirable behavior. The use of good consequences is much more effective and creates a positive, cooperative atmosphere for everyone.
4. Start fresh every meeting. Avoid having consequences carry over to the next meeting. Be aware of and resist building up resentment toward a "problem" child.

But She's My Daughter!

Surprisingly, it may be the leader's own daughter that displays disruptive behavior during troop activities! It is important to remember how difficult it can be for girls to share their mom with so many others girls, all seeking their leader's attention. Sometimes leaders, trying not to show favoritism toward their daughters, may inadvertently go to the other extreme and never choose their daughters for special jobs.

Below are some tips for avoiding this type of problem:

- Have the girls assist in picking camp names or nicknames for the troop leaders that all the girls, including your own daughter, can call you during troop activities. This removes "Mom" from the picture.
- Employ the "in" and "out" bag to pick girls for special tasks and treats. Put the names of all troop members in the "in" bag at the beginning of the year and have the girls take turns pulling out a name whenever the need arises. The names are then put in the "out" bag.
- Make a deal with your co-leader to "trade" daughters during troop activities.
- Never use your daughter to practice crafts or other troop activities prior to the troop meeting. Let her be surprised, too.
- Take advantage of service unit leader/daughter events where you can spend special time with your daughter during a Girl Scout event.