

Junior Behaviors and Group Dynamics

One of the greatest challenges in leading a troop is effectively managing the behavior of the girls. This article for troop leaders discusses the typical behaviors of Girl Scout Juniors (grades 4-5).

Energy Levels and Sociability

Girls at the Junior age level are experiencing a lot of activity, intellectual growth, new friendships, deepening relationships, and discoveries about the world and the inner self. While family is still very important to these girls, their friends and interests become increasingly important.

Juniors love to act in plays, create music, and dance. Your junior girls might like to try playwriting, playing an instrument, or choreographing a dance. Girls this age are very social and enjoy doing things in groups, so allow girls to team up in small or large groups for art projects, performances, and activities.

Fine Motor Skills

Juniors have strong fine and gross motor skills and coordination. This means you can engage girls in moving their minds and their bodies. Encourage girls to express themselves through the writing, choreography, and other types of outlets.

Cognition Levels

Junior girls are beginning to think critically. They are able to understand that people can have varying perspectives, feelings, and attitudes. Try asking girls to explain why they made a decision, share their visions of their roles in the future, and challenge their own and others' perspective.

Decisions and Opinions

Girls this age want to make decisions and express their opinions. Whenever possible, encourage girls to make decisions and express their opinions in guided discussions and reflection activities. Try having the girls set rules for listening to others opinions and offering assistance in decision-making. Juniors are concerned about equality and fairness, so don't shy away from discussing why rules are in place.

Expectations

Your troop will be aware of expectations but sensitive to judgment from others. It's okay to have expectations, but the expectation should not be perfection. Share your own

mistakes and what you've learned from them. Be sure to create an environment where the girls could be comfortable sharing their mistakes when they want to.

Self-Esteem, Self-Confidence, and Physical Changes

Juniors might be starting puberty—physical development, skin changes, and weight changes. It's important to be sensitive to girls changing bodies, possible discomfort over these changes, and their desire for more information. Create an environment that acknowledges and celebrates this transition as healthy and normal for girls.

Studies show by about age 11, many girls start to lose self-esteem and self-confidence. You may notice girls in your troop becoming more cautious, quieter, or less likely to say what's on her mind. As their leader, you play an important role in helping girls stay confident. Be sure to provide an atmosphere where they feel safe to speak their mind and take risks.

Every girl wants to be viewed as unique. Girls mature at different rates. Consider each girl as a unique individual with her own talents, gifts, personality, and intellectual strengths. Expect a wide biological, social, and emotional difference amongst the girls in your Junior troop.

Leadership

Juniors are able to participate in all steps of planning activities and carrying out tasks. Give girls plenty of opportunities to take the lead and help plan—otherwise, girls at this age tend to lose interest fast.

Girl-Led for Juniors (Grades 4-5)

As the troop leader of a Junior troop, you will step back even more and will start to advise and facilitate. You'll want to let the girls take turns moderating discussions, decide how they want to plan sessions and activities, begin and end meetings, and even try leading meetings.

Girls at the Junior Age

Girls this age can participate in all steps of planning activities and carrying out tasks. Even if planning activities for the girls would be easier, girls will learn much more from the planning process than from doing the activity. Girls that are not helping with the planning tend to lose interest fast. Juniors should also be able to set goals with some guidance.

The **patrol system, executive board, and town meeting system** (forms of troop government) are great ways for girls at this age to have discussion and make decisions.

Girl-led Examples

Here some ways to ensure girls are taking the lead in your Junior troop:

- ⊗ Brainstorm possible ways of doing suggested activities or offer substitutions to make activities more to their taste.
- ⊗ Let girls look at the meeting plans and make substitutions.
- ⊗ Let girls choose their own Take Action Project (one they really care about) and call, interview, and email prospective community members to be their project guides. Let girls act alongside other adults in the community who have come forward to assist the girls in their action plans and develop additional ways to research community needs.
- ⊗ Let girls select **field trips** to enrich their leadership Journey.