

Multi-Level Troop Behaviors and Group Dynamics

One of the greatest challenges in leading a troop is effectively managing the behavior of the girls. Today, we'll discuss the typical behaviors of a Multi-Level troop (a troop with two or more grade levels.)

Girl Scout troops come in all shapes and sizes. The general rule of thumb is that troops should have enough girls to provide a cooperative learning environment and still be small enough to allow for development of individual girls. With planning, a supportive team of adults, and adaptive management skills, you can do these with girls at all age levels.

Multi-level Troop Benefits

Younger girls typically look up to older girls, and bringing them together in a multi-level troop setting can provide younger girls with positive role models.

Older girls have an opportunity to put their leadership skills into action as they mentor younger girls. Many badge and Journey activities suggest that older girls (even Brownies) assist younger girls with service projects, teach them new skills, lead songs and games, and more.

Girls are grouped by grade level nearly everywhere – school, sports, after school programs – so a multi-level environment allows girls to interact with a diverse group of girls and make new friends!

If parents or volunteers have daughters of different levels, this allows them all to spend time together - as well as simplify their schedule.

Important Considerations When Managing a Multi-Level Troop

Make a plan to ensure activities are appropriate for each age level. The Volunteer Toolkit (VTK) has multi-level Journey and badge resources that provide activities for multi-level troops. This allows you to do activities together without the need to break out into age level groups.

If safety is a concern or there is no way to adapt the activity in an appropriate way, leverage the help of other troop volunteers and ask that they physically separate the group for that portion of the meeting. Remember, there must always be two adults with any group of girls.

Always follow the girl/adult ratio based on the youngest girls in your troop. This means if you have a troop of 12 Daisy/Brownie girls, you should meet the required Daisy ratios.

When registering girls for council programs, be mindful of grade level requirements. There may be some programs that are not open to all troop members.

Leader Tips and Tricks for Multi-Level Troops

- ⚙️ **Establish structure.** Start your troop off with a basic routine and then take that one step further with another troop tradition: troop government.

This is a simple and structured way of managing group decisions and discussions as girls begin to take the lead in helping plan their activities. Patrols are one of our favorites for Multi-Level troops because they have girls participate in smaller group discussions and then choose a “patrol leader” to represent their group.

- ⚙️ **Share the load!** The most successful Multi-Level troops are supported by a team of dedicated volunteers who take on different roles and responsibilities.
- ⚙️ **Be specific when asking for help.** Caregivers are more likely to volunteer if you share clear and specific roles that need to be filled. Not asking for help is one of the regrets we hear frequently from new leaders. Don’t wait until you’re in the middle of the year—make the ask now!
- ⚙️ **Set limits.** You have responsibilities outside of Girl Scouts that are very important. Consider your responsibilities and schedule, figure out what’s doable within that framework, and share that with volunteers and families in your troop. Encourage other volunteers to set some limits as well.
- ⚙️ **Be flexible!** Even the best plans need room for adaptation. Thriving troops have volunteers who can take a situation and improvise. This may mean switching around the schedule, or having a few back up simple activities and games ready just in case the girls finish early. It can even mean changing the activity entirely to fit the girls’ behavior or needs on that day.
- ⚙️ **Keep it girl-led.** Girl Scouts should provide girls with a safe and nurturing setting to make decisions and learn from their mistakes. To make this possible, activities and meetings should be girl-led. This is the first step toward developing girls’ leadership abilities.