

Making Meetings Work

Running a good meeting doesn't take magic, only preparation. There are two very basic tricks you can use to make meetings run smoothly.

1. Follow a Routine Meeting Plan

This may seem like a little thing, but following the same routine at each meeting helps:

- create a sense of order and security for the girls
- the girls to know what is expected of them
- make meeting planning easier

Create your routine meeting by including these pieces in each meeting:

Parts of a Meeting

- **Pre-opening.** Unless all your girls arrive at one time you will need to plan an activity for the few minutes before the meeting begins. Why? This time will set the tone for your entire meeting. If the tone is set by jumping on furniture, screeching, or creating havoc, you're sabotaging your meeting before it even begins. Pre-opening activities should be things the girls can do with little direction from you, leaving you free to talk with parents or get the last details set up for the meeting. Below are some pre-meeting activities you might try.

Pre-Opening Activity Suggestions

Art work. Crayons, markers, paper are on the table and girls are challenged to create a self-portrait, a picture of an activity they'd like the group to do, a group mural, something from the past week that they want to share with the group...



Prepare the Opening Ceremony. When girls have learned the basics of an opening ceremony they can prepare the opening themselves. Have available a flag, song or poetry books, other items that might be used in an opening. If you have a large group, divide them as they arrive (or work in patrols), letting one group plan the opening and the other plan the closing.

Play a game. Tag might not set the tone you want, but games like *Duck, Duck, Goose* or *Mother, May I?* allow new arrivals to join in and still contain the activity to a limited area.



Ten Minute Talk. Especially for older girls, time to talk about school or events of the past week may be all you need to plan.

Continuing Projects. In some troops girls create scrapbooks or journals. The pre-meeting time is a good opportunity to update these projects or record badge work.

Singing. Fun songs, action songs, traditional Girl Scout songs, camp songs, they're all a great way to welcome girls into the meeting. Let each girl lead a song, no one cares how well the group leader sings!

- **Opening.** The opening is a signal that it is time to focus on the meeting. It brings wandering minds--and bodies—together, creating a bonding event. The suggestions below are only a few of the things you might do as an opening.

Opening Activity Suggestions

Simple Flag Ceremony. Include the Pledge to the Flag, Girl Scout Promise, and possibly the Girl Scout Law or a song or poem.

Sing a Song. Perhaps there's a song that is special to your troop? Or a traditional Girl Scout song that the girls like.

Brownie Ring. The leader recites the following poem as she takes a girl's hand. Girls all run to hold hands as the leader guides the group into a circle.

Round and round, and round about
Join the hand of a Brownie Girl Scout.
Here we are in a Brownie Ring
Ready for 'most anything!

Once in the circle the girls could have sharing time or talk about what is to happen in today's meeting.

Recite the Girl Scout Promise and Law

Examine a Girl Scout Symbol. Girls discuss a symbol and its meaning.

- Membership Pin
- World Association symbol
- The Trefoil shape
- World Association Pin
- Three-finger hand sign



Talk about how Girl Scouts helps us “Be Prepared.”

Each girl shares an example of how she has done a “good turn” since the last meeting.

Paper Doll Ceremony: As each girl says her verse, she stretches her hand out to the next girl to speak until all the girls are standing across linked together like

Girl 1: Take my hand in friendship I give to you this day.

Remember all the good times we had along the way.

Girl 2: Take my hand in helping other people that we know.

The more we give to others, the more that we will grow

Girl 3: Take my hand in learning to camp on nature’s ground.

Enjoying trails and campfires with new friends we have found.

Girl 4: Take my hand in thanking our leaders and our guides

With sincere appreciation for standing by our sides.

Girl 5: Take my hand in eagerness to be an older Girl Scout.

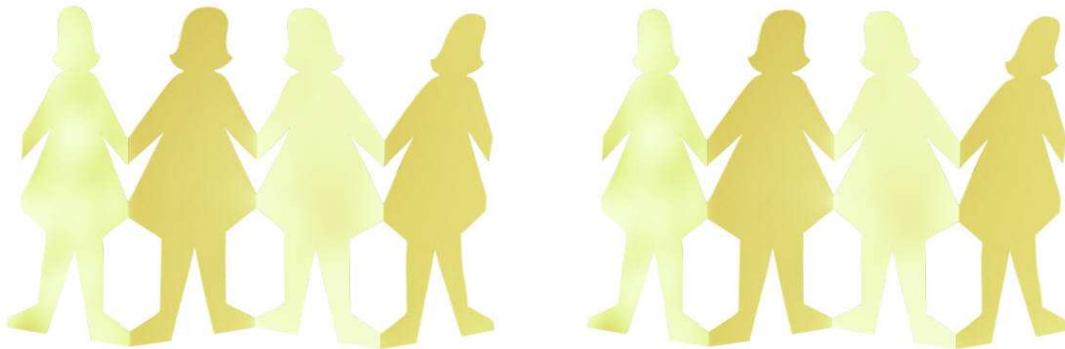
We’re proud to be (Juniors) is what we’re going to shout.

Girl 6: So take my hand to follow new Girl Scout paths in sight.

We’ll join hands to each other, in friendship we’ll unite.

All: We give our hands in promise to hold our country dear,

And abide by the Girl Scout Law each day throughout the year.



- **Business.** This is the girl's opportunity to decide on future projects or activities, to collect dues and examine the troop treasury balance, to create a kaper chart to share tasks, to set goals or choose an award to work on as a group. They might brainstorm new ideas or evaluate how a finished activity went and how to make it even better next time.

The key to the Business portion of the meeting is that the girls are making decisions. By letting girls determine the direction and focus of troop activities you're ensuring activities are girl-led, that girl leadership is a hands-on activity, and that girls work together, the three Girl Scout processes. You

also know that the activities meet girl's needs and interests as well as offer growth opportunities.

Each grade level has recommended forms of troop government, to offer girls more responsibility and opportunities to lead. For information see the downloadable course on Troop Government.

Older girls may be able to conduct this portion of the meeting without help. Younger girls will need an adult to at least direct the conversation and keep the girls on task.

Including Girls in Troop Business

Girls Vote. For younger girls, give them two or three items/activities and ask them to select one by voting. For instance, you might ask "Do we want to use our cookie sale profit to go to the zoo or to have a cookout with our families?"

Secretary/Treasurer. When girls are old enough your troop might have a secretary to record attendance and a treasurer to collect dues. Let each girl have a turn in one of the positions.

Brainstorming. An excellent way to gather the girl's ideas, brainstorming can be used for all grade levels. For more information, see the enrichment course "Brainstorming; How to keep ideas pouring."

Girls Guide. If your girls are mature enough, each girl might take a topic that needs to be covered with the troop and lead that discussion.

Finance 101. Let the girls track their troop treasury. Print copies of a check register (a local bank may even be able to provide these) for each girl. Begin with having girls write the troop bank account balance in the book. Each meeting let girls update their check register with troop expenses (10/6/09, check # 49, Michael's, craft supplies for Halloween, 36.71) and update the balance. What a great way to teach girls to balance a checkbook as well as stay on top of their troop treasury!

Wrap It Up. Ask the girls to tell you what they think about their last activity/project/ event. Can they tell you what they learned from the activity? Then challenge them to come up with ways to make a similar event even better the next time they go. Are there people who need thank-you notes? Can the girls write notes?

- **Major Activity.** This is the FUN part of your meeting when girls make, build, do, create, learn! It might involve guest speakers, crafts, cooking, learning to make a bedroll, any one of a thousand things.

How will you know what to do in this time? It's easy—ASK THE GIRLS! You can find lots of suggestions online, at the library, from friends or troop volunteers, from other troop leaders, in your community, at craft stores...

The activity portion of your meeting should take up the largest amount of meeting time.



- **Clean Up.** Too often parents arrive, girls go, and only the troop leader and her daughter are left to do all the clean up. When that happens an important lesson has been lost.

Helping to clean up after the troop's activity teaches the girls responsibility and makes them feel an important part of the group. Each girl should have the opportunity to help with cleaning up.



Kaper charts or other methods of rotating tasks are important in Girl Scouts. For more information on how to share the work, see the downloadable course on Kaper Charts.

Clean up Activity (good for young girls)

The children skip about the room arranging everything neatly, singing to the tune of "London Bridge."

Weave the magic in and out, in and out, in and out,
Weave the magic in and out, we are Girl Scouts.
We have tidied everything, everything, everything,
We have tidied everything, we are Girl Scouts.

Finally, the girls line up before the leader who asks, "Is everything finished?"

The children answer: "Everything."

The leader asks: "Is nothing left?"

The children answer: "Nothing!"

The leader says: "Then be gone!"

(Leader can wave a special "good-bye wand" as girls silently tiptoe out.)

- **Closing.** Believe it or not, the closing is a critical part of a troop meeting. Girls have the opportunity to gather together as a group one last time and say goodbye to their friends. It is time to reflect on what they've learned today or to remember what they need to do for the next meeting. It is an opportunity to praise girls' work, and to share your observations on how they are making the troop "theirs" with their decisions and plans.

Sometimes troop parents don't understand the importance of the closing ceremony. You need to let them know that the meeting isn't over—and their girls can't go—until after the closing ceremony. That said, it is your responsibility to make sure the meeting ends on time and that parents aren't kept waiting.

Closing Ceremonies

Friendship Circle. This is a traditional closing for Girl Scout meetings. In a circle, girls cross arms, right over left, and take hands of the girls on either side of them. While holding hands they may pass a hand squeeze, make a wish, sing a song (*Taps* is commonly sung), share a compliment... When ready to leave the friendship ring girls raise their arms and twist out of the circle.



Magic Tunnel - When hats and coats are on, the Girl Scouts stand in two lines facing each other, raising their arms and holding hands to make an arch. The two farthest from the door go under the arch, then the next two, etc. The tunnel diminishes until the last two go.

Native American Benediction

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| May the Great Spirit | - Extend right arm straight overhead |
| In the future | - Slant arm ahead |
| As in the past | - Slant arm behind |
| Be in our hearts | - Right hand on heart |
| As in our prayer | - Bring hands together at chest |
- Repeat, using only gestures, no words

Use the planning sheet on the next page to organize your troop meetings. It is a good tool for leaders of young girls. Older girls might take on the responsibility themselves!

PLANNING SHEET FOR TROOP MEETING

Main purpose of meeting _____ Date _____

	Approx. Time	Activity	Supplies	Who Responsible?
Pre-Meeting --As the girls are arriving				
Opening --songs, games, refreshments				
Business --attendance, dues, announcements, decisions, planning				
Major Activity --to match the meeting purpose				
Clean Up --for everyone!				
Closing --to send us on our way (song, Friendship Circle, reminders)				

What went well at this meeting?

What do we leaders to think about before the next meeting?

2. Always have a back-up plan!

Be prepared! Some days, things just fall apart. Perhaps you left an important piece of the craft project at home or a guest speaker doesn't show up. Or maybe the girls arrive needing something more active than what was planned. To keep the meeting from turning to chaos, ALWAYS have a back-up plan in your pocket!

Some leaders keep a box of simple game materials in the trunk of their car. Balls, jump rope, blindfolds can be used in many ways. Keep a sheet of instructions for games nearby.



Other leaders keep storybooks, a simple craft project, or songbooks on hand.

A team-building activity has the extra value of teaching cooperative skills.

Games or activities that require no equipment come in handy when there are a few minutes to fill before parents arrive or when the group has a lengthy wait in line.

Commonly Asked Questions

Troop parents stay throughout my meetings. They sit in the corner and talk, and are disruptive.

- Is there another room the parents can use to wait?
- Use those parents! Assign them to help with craft projects, helping girls serve refreshments, supervising clean up, assisting with dues collection. Some troops have even created kaper charts for parents!

My troop parents won't help at all! I'm left doing everything!

- This is an issue that may need more space than we have here. Try these suggestions:
- Many times parents just need to be asked and to know exactly what is expected. Create a list of 20-30 ways parents can help with your troop. (The Lets Get Started manual has a sample.) When girls register ask parents to

select X number of ways they can help. Be sure to include simple things—make phone calls, collect craft supplies.

- When an adult does volunteer make sure she knows what she's to do, when to do it, and that she receives thanks for her work.
- Examine how you relate to the parents. Are you hesitant to ask for help? Or do you come across as demanding and domineering?

My co-leader's younger child comes to troop meetings, and is disruptive.

- Does the co-leader realize her child is disruptive? If not you may need to talk with her. Be sure to phrase your comments tactfully: "Bobby requires a lot of your attention during meetings, but the girls need help, too. What can we do so that we can both focus our help and attention mostly on the girls?"
- This could be a task for those parents in the back of the room, or perhaps there is a troop parent who will be willing to keep the child during troop meetings.

Janelle always finishes her projects early and then gets into mischief.

- If you know this about Janelle, come prepared for her. Have a back-up plan just for her. Another small project, gathering supplies, carrying things to the car...

LaShay's parents always come early to pick her up and she misses her turn at clean-up.

- LaShay's parents may not know why LaShay should stay. Talk/write to all the parents about the importance of the girls staying for the full meeting. Explain the lessons the girls learn from sharing clean-up tasks and participating in the closing ceremony.
- If that doesn't work, you may need to talk to LaShay's parents separately. There may be a reason they must come early. Put your heads together to come up with a solution.
- Invite parents to stay and join in your closing ceremony.

Receiving Credit for this Course:

To complete this course try some of the girl activities with your group over a number of meetings.

When you feel you have been able to apply the above suggestions to improve your meetings send a brief evaluation of your experience to tramsey@girlscoutswnc.org.

Completion of the class will be credited to your personal training record.