

Girl Scouts of Northern New Jersey Conflict Resolution Policy and Procedure

Purpose

Girl Scouts of Northern New Jersey (GSNNJ) is committed to fostering an environment where all members feel emotionally and physically safe, are treated with dignity and respect, and are able to express themselves without fear of bullying, exclusion, or intimidation.

Conflicts and disagreements are a normal part of youth development and of working together in a volunteer-led organization. When handled constructively, they can help Girl Scouts practice diplomacy, strengthen communication skills, and build respectful relationships, while also helping volunteers model collaboration, problem-solving, and mutual respect. This policy and procedure establish expectations for addressing conflicts and disagreements among girls, parents/caregivers, and volunteers fairly, respectfully, and promptly, with the emotional and physical safety of Girl Scouts as the primary concern in all decisions.

This policy also formalizes GSNNJ's alignment with school guidelines, procedures, and protocols regarding supervision and the separation of girls when a school has determined such action is necessary following a HIB (Harassment, Intimidation, Bullying) investigation or the school's safety protocol.

Commitment to Emotional and Physical Safety

Girl Scouts environments must support positive, constructive conflict resolution. All members should:

- Feel emotionally and physically safe
- Be treated with dignity and respect
- Be able to express themselves without fear of bullying or exclusion
- Experience positive, constructive conflict resolution

Shouting, verbal abuse, intimidation, physical confrontation, inappropriate touching, bullying, clique behavior, and exclusion are not tolerated in any Girl Scout setting. Adults, including volunteers and caregivers, are responsible for maintaining an environment where Girl Scouts feel comfortable, seen, supported, and valued.

Youth violence or bullying is not tolerated in Girl Scouts. Youth violence occurs when young people intentionally use physical force or power to threaten or harm others. Bullying is a form of youth violence. Volunteers should become familiar with the signs, risk factors, and preventive measures related to this behavior, and should notify the appropriate council staff member for guidance if they witness or experience behavior of this nature.

Team Agreements

Each troop must establish a Team Agreement at the beginning of the membership year. The agreement should be created collaboratively with girls and reinforced throughout the year.

Team Agreements should include expectations such as:

- Respecting diverse opinions and feelings
- Practicing fairness and inclusion
- Using positive and respectful communication
- Resolving disagreements constructively
- Avoiding verbal, physical, or relational bullying
- Supporting one another as Girl Scout sisters

Leaders are responsible for coaching girls to honor the agreement and for addressing behavior that violates it.

Codes of Conduct

The following Code of Conduct forms must be reviewed and implemented annually:

- Girl Code of Conduct
- Parent/Guardian Code of Conduct
- Leader Code of Conduct
- Leader Agreement

These forms should be introduced and discussed during the annual family meeting.

- Girl and Parent/Guardian forms must be signed annually and retained by the Troop Leader.
- Leader forms must be completed annually and retained by the Service Unit Manager.
- All Codes of Conduct apply regardless of whether a form is signed.

Guiding Principles

- All discussions should be respectful, confidential, and youth-free, unless a girl's participation is specifically needed as part of a developmentally appropriate support process.
- Concerns involving safety, finances, policy violations, criminal matters, mandatory reporting obligations, or legal issues must be escalated to council staff.
- Digital communication, including email, text, and social media, should not be used for intense, emotionally charged exchanges or for public discussion of conflicts.
- Adults must address concerns promptly, objectively, and in a manner that avoids conflicts of interest.
- Volunteers, caregivers, and staff are expected to model respectful communication and constructive problem-solving for girls.
- Leaders and volunteers must maintain confidentiality and seek Service Unit or Council guidance when needed.
- At all times, decisions will prioritize:
 - The emotional and physical safety of girls
 - Fairness and impartiality
 - Preservation of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience
 - The well-being of the troop as a whole

Constructive Conflict Resolution

When conflict occurs, GSNNJ encourages the use of constructive conflict resolution strategies, including the LUTE Method:

- **Listen** actively and respectfully
- **Understand** the other person's perspective
- **Tolerate** differences
- **Empathize** with others' feelings

Leaders, volunteers, and caregivers should use respectful communication strategies such as "I" statements to clarify misunderstandings, express needs, and work toward resolution.

Additional guidance can be found in the "Creating a Safe Space for Girl Scouts" section of Volunteer Essentials.

Policy Alignment Statement: Youth Separation Procedures

In the event that GSNNJ is notified that a school has completed a bullying or HIB investigation and determined a need for girls to be separated:

1. An Incident Report must be completed and submitted to council.
2. GSNNJ must be provided with a copy of the school's determination.

GSNNJ will follow the same guidelines, policies, and procedures as the school regarding the supervision and separation of girls. The physical and emotional safety of all members is the primary concern in all decisions.

Leader and Volunteer Responsibilities

Leaders and volunteers must:

- Model respectful conflict resolution
- Address issues promptly and objectively
- Maintain confidentiality
- Avoid conflicts of interest
- Reinforce Team Agreements and annual Codes of Conduct
- Submit Incident Reports when appropriate
- Seek Service Unit or Council guidance when needed

- Help ensure that adult disagreements do not negatively affect girls or the troop environment

Failure to uphold emotional safety standards may result in volunteer review under council policies.

Conflict Resolution Procedure

The following procedure outlines the steps for addressing conflicts and disagreements among girls, parents/caregivers, and volunteers in a fair, respectful, and timely manner, while prioritizing the emotional and physical safety of Girl Scouts and the well-being of the troop as a whole.

LEVEL 1 – Volunteer-Led Resolution

Goal: Resolve issues using troop-level conflict resolution strategies and Service Unit support when needed.

Applicable to:

- Girl-to-girl conflicts
- Parent concerns
- Volunteer disagreements that do not involve safety, legal, financial, or mandatory reporting concerns
- Allegations not involving criminal or mandatory reporting issues
- Situations not involving a leader's child
- Interpersonal conflicts that may affect troop climate but can reasonably be addressed through volunteer-led resolution

Step 1 – Troop-Level Resolution (Suggested within 7–10 days)

- Leader(s) and/or the parties involved should meet with the genuine intention of solving the issue to everyone's satisfaction.
- This meeting should preferably be held in person or via video communication within 7–10 days of the conflict.
- Use the LUTE Method and "I" statements to clarify misunderstandings and express needs.
- Strive to agree on a resolution or next steps.

- When appropriate, an Incident Report should be completed and submitted to council.
- When conflict involves adults, the focus should remain on resolving the issue in a way that protects troop functioning and preserves a positive environment for girls.

Step 2 – Service Unit Manager (SUM) or Service Unit Team Member Mediation (Within 14 days of escalation to Step 2)

- If the issue is not resolved at the troop level, the matter is referred to the Service Unit Manager (SUM) or Service Unit Team Member for facilitation, discussion, or mediation.
- In the event that the conflict involves the Service Unit Manager or Service Unit Team Member, please see Level 2 process.
- The Service Unit Team Member may speak with each person individually, then jointly, to guide discussion toward resolution using constructive strategies.
- The Service Unit Team Member will document agreed-upon outcomes in writing, such as a summary email or brief statement, and send a summary to all parties involved.

Outcomes

- a. If an agreement is reached, the Service Unit Team Member and parties confirm the resolution in writing and follow up if needed.
- b. If unresolved after Level 1 efforts, the conflict should escalate to Level 2 by submitting the GSNNJ Conflict Report Form.

LEVEL 2 – Council Staff Escalation

Goal: Ensure timely, fair, and impartial resolution of conflicts that could not be resolved at Level 1, or that involve safety, finances, policy violations, legal issues, conflicts of interest, or significant impacts to troop functioning.

Applicable when:

- Level 1 resolution efforts are unsuccessful
- The issue involves a leader's daughter

- There is a perceived conflict of interest
- The situation significantly impacts troop functioning or safety
- The Service Unit requests escalation
- Concerns involve safety, finances, policy violations, criminal matters, mandatory reporting obligations, or legal issues
- Volunteer disagreements have escalated to the point that they interfere with troop operations, member experience, or emotional safety

Step 1 – Submission (Within 3–5 business days of Level 1 conclusion)

- The Service Unit Manager or Service Unit Team Member completes and submits the [GSNNJ Level 2 Conflict Report](#).
- Upon submission, a case will be created.

Step 2 – Acknowledgment & Assignment

- An auto-reply email is sent to the initiating party stating the form has been received and a council staff member will be in contact.

Step 3 – Troop Support Manager Review (Within 10 business days)

- The Troop Support Manager conducts a fact-finding review that may include:
 - Speaking separately with each involved party
 - Reviewing documents, emails, or reports
 - Consulting relevant GSNNJ policies

Step 4 – Resolution & Council Determination (Within 15 business days of submission)

- The Troop Support Manager provides a written summary of findings to the Conflict Resolution Lead.
- If the resolution involves next steps or monitoring, the Conflict Resolution Lead will outline timelines and expectations clearly in writing.
- All parties are expected to uphold confidentiality and comply with any directives or follow-up actions.
- Decisions made at this level are final unless escalated to Step 5.

Step 5 – Final Resolution

- If the Conflict Resolution Lead cannot come to an agreeable resolution, the case is escalated to the Senior Leadership Team for final decision.
- In some cases, the volunteer or girl may be released from the position or the troop if determined to be the best course of action by the Senior Leadership Team.

Closing Statement

Girl Scouts is a place where every member should feel safe, supported, and empowered to grow. GSNNJ is committed to handling conflict in ways that protect girls, support healthy relationships, promote respectful adult partnership, and preserve the integrity of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.