

Multi-level Troops

A unique challenge with unique advantages

Volunteers become engaged with multi-level troops (troops with a combination of Girl Scouts of different grade-levels) for many reasons. Perhaps the troop leader has one daughter who is a second year Brownie and another that is a first year Daisy; or perhaps the community/school is so small that it will not support two troops. Many older girls (Cadettes, Seniors and Ambassadors) choose to form a single troop because of their individual troops would be very small. Whatever the reason the multi-level troop forms, it serves a purpose that meets the needs of the volunteers and girls. It also presents benefits and challenges that single-level troops often do not.

Benefits

- Younger girls look up to older girls, and bringing them together in a multi-level troop setting provides younger girls with role models of every age (as long as everyone is modeling the GS Promise and Law!).
- Older girls have the opportunity to put their leadership skills into action as they mentor younger girls. Many badge and Journey activities suggest that older girls (even Brownies) work with younger ones on service projects, to teach skills, to play games, etc.
- Girls are grouped by grade level nearly everywhere – school, sports, even Sunday school. A multi-level environment allows girls to interact with a more diverse group - and make new friends!
- If a parent or volunteer has daughters of different levels, this allows them all to spend time together (as well as simplifying their schedule).

Challenges (and how to overcome them!)

The National Program Portfolio materials (National Leadership Journeys and *The Girl's Guide to Girl Scouting*) differ at every level. A leader of a multilevel troop would need to become familiar with the materials for each level represented in the troop and would have to plan activities accordingly.

To meet this challenge...

Ask one or two parent volunteers to become your resident 'experts' in the materials for a particular grade level. When planning activities, bring the volunteers together so they can discuss the similarities and differences. For example, Juniors and Cadettes may both earn a Digital Arts badge; Juniors earn Digital Photography and Cadettes try out digital moviemaking. When do the five steps crisscross? Are there certain steps that can be done as a larger group? Is there one step where the

Cadettes and use the Juniors as subjects for their work and vice versa? Use your (and the girls') imagination to think outside of the box!

Note: Some activities that are appropriate for eight year olds simply aren't possible for five year olds (such as activities involving fine motor skill). Activities would need to be adapted for the different ages or facilitated separately.

To meet this challenge...

Allow the older girls to teach or assist the younger ones. If it is a craft, consider pairing an older girl with a younger one and having them work toward the end result together. 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.

Girls identify strongly with their age and grade level, and they will most likely have close friends of their own age that they stick by.

To meet this challenge...

Incorporate activities that bring all girls together, such as opening and closing ceremonies, songs, games, and outings. Remind the girls that, although they may be Daisies/Juniors/Seniors, they are all part of the sisterhood of Girl Scouting!

Many troop leaders take on their volunteer role because they know they have the skills to successfully lead a troop, and multi-level troop leaders are no exception. However, a multi-level troop can become a bigger responsibility than anticipated very quickly.

To meet this challenge...

Ask for help! If the leader of the troop is willing to be responsible for overall organization and planning, other parents are often willing to step up and assist with facilitating activities. Try to secure two or more parent helpers for each grade level and let them witness the girl-planning process at the start of the year. This way, all volunteers share an understanding of what the troop as a whole would like to achieve and can work with their individual grade levels toward that end when necessary. Ensure that all volunteers for the troop understand the GSLE Girl Processes (Girl-Led, Learning by Doing, Cooperative Learning) and adhere to all guidelines for the safety and well-being of girls.