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## Sensitive Issues Guidelines GSUSA and GSWRC Position Statement

Girl Scouting provides a wide variety of informal, educational activities for girls. In order to remain contemporary and responsive to the needs and interests of girls, some of the activities in the Girl Scout program focus on subjects that may be considered sensitive or controversial in nature. Sensitive issues are subjects that are of a highly personal nature or that may relate to religious beliefs and cultural and family values. Some examples are AIDS, child abuse, family crises, human sexuality, racism, substance abuse, suicide and teen pregnancy.

Girl Scouts of Kentucky's Wilderness Road Council supports and encourages leaders to provide programs that are educational and preventative.

The following guidelines have been developed by Girl Scouts of Kentucky's Wilderness Road Council for use by leaders and consultants when planning any type of program, event or activity addressing sensitive issues.

1. Leaders, adults and consultants working with sensitive issues must understand and be willing to adhere to GSUSA policies as stated in the *Safety Activity Checkpoints in the Volunteer Essentials*.
2. Leaders working with sensitive issues are encouraged to attend appropriate adult workshops offered by the Council.
3. Consultants are to be qualified professionals, which may include health educators, social workers, psychologists and counselors.
4. The role of the leader is to be a caring adult who can help girls to acquire their own skills and knowledge in a supportive atmosphere.
5. When a leader or adult decides to cover any sensitive issue beyond the scope of the materials in the Girl Scout program resources, they must have the support and approval of the Council
6. Leaders and consultants should be sensitive to the needs and concerns of the local community where the programs will be presented. All sides of an issue must be recognized and presented.

7. Leaders and consultants must provide educational facts and information on sensitive issues rather than just voicing personal opinions and points of view.
8. Leaders should involve parents when planning sensitive issue activities when possible. An outline of sensitive subjects to be covered should be furnished to parents ahead of time.
9. Girls who attend these activities should have written parental approval for participating in the activity and attendance should be optional for all or part of the activities.
10. Information should always be age appropriate.
11. All information shared during programs is considered confidential and is not to be discussed afterward. (Exceptions are instances in which a leader or other adult would be legally responsible to report cases of child abuse or when an adult notices signs of substance abuse, suicide or eating disorders in a girl and feels her to be in danger.) Be familiar with the Council's procedure for handling and reporting situations of this nature.
12. Parents are encouraged to participate in the Contemporary Issues projects and to reinforce at home.
13. All materials, including audio-visuials, from outside sources must be previewed by leaders and adults before they are presented to a group to make sure they are factual and unbiased.
14. Activities that develop decision making, problem solving, assertiveness, better communication and self-esteem should be the primary focus of sensitive issues programs.

## Girl Scouts of Kentucky's Wilderness Road Council

### Help for Leaders who are planning to Present Sensitive Issue Programs to Girls

#### **Selecting Consultants:**

- ◆ Leaders are not expected to become experts on any or all of these issues and consultant can be obtained to help educate girls and their parents.
- ◆ Consultants can be health educators, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, physicians, counselors, clergy, educators, historians, university personnel, attorneys, teachers, civic leaders or other community leaders. Pick someone appropriate for the subject you want discussed.
- ◆ A consultant must be willing to follow GSUSA and Council policies, standards, guidelines and procedures.
- ◆ A consultant must be willing to present facts and information in a non-biased manner with no hidden agenda or motives beyond what she has been asked to do.
- ◆ A consultant should have a reputable background and references that are easily verified.
- ◆ A consultant should be sensitive to attitudes and emotions relating to sensitive issues.
- ◆ A consultant should have personal emotional stability and have the skill to be non-judgmental and supportive to **all** participants.

#### **Developing Parental Support:**

Since most sensitive issues are based on values, parental support and understanding are crucial to the success of your program. Parents may be concerned about the following:

- ◆ Who is the consultant and what are her credentials?
- ◆ What will be covered in the presentation?
- ◆ Will I be able to preview the materials, video or outline before the presentation?
- ◆ What is the point of view of the presenters or the materials to be used? Is it different from mine?
- ◆ Are there other organizations or agencies involved? What is their point of view?

### **Build Support By:**

- ◆ Getting input in the planning stages from parents. Those that help plan will be the best promoters.
- ◆ Be honest with parents on all aspects of the program.
- ◆ Allow parents to preview all materials and meet presenters, if possible.
- ◆ Send an outline of the content, resume of all presenters with a notification letter, and a permission slip.

### **Presentation:**

Ground rules need to be established before the program begins.

- ◆ Girls need to understand that each family has its own value system upon which many parental decisions may be based. Girls should be encouraged to try to understand parental decisions by examining parent's point of view.
- ◆ Establish an atmosphere of trust and caring.
- ◆ There are no "dumb" questions.
- ◆ Everyone has the right not to answer questions or participate in discussions.

### **Leading Discussions:**

A discussion is an easy technique to use with a group. Help all girls to participate by encouraging the quiet, shy girl and gently divert the girl who monopolizes every conversation. Everyone may have differences of opinion because of their cultural background, or values. All can learn to respect others' beliefs, if the leader remains calm, firm and open and helps girls find answers and compromises. Each girl needs to feel valued and important in a supportive atmosphere. Praise the girls and encourage them to praise each other.

If a girl begins to share information that is a bit too personal, suggest she talk to you after the meeting. Remember, as the adult in the group, what you say can make a strong impression on the girls. Be careful your personal opinions don't become the dominant ones. By listening carefully and watching for tone of voice and body language you may find out more about the girls that you need to know. By listening you are also demonstrating to the girls that you think their opinions are important and worth hearing.

### **Role-Playing Techniques:**

Role-playing is not like acting because role-play involves a realistic situation that needs a positive solution. Role-play builds empathy, which is projecting one's own personality into the personality of another in order to understand her better. This helps the role-players to share in another's emotions and feelings.

### **Some tips to remember:**

- ◆ Don't use this technique until the girls in the troop feel comfortable with each other.
- ◆ Role-play situations should have some meaning for the girls, but not necessarily a problem of one of the girls that would embarrass her.
- ◆ Ask for volunteers for role-play. A girl should not be forced to play but might be coaxed if a little shy.
- ◆ Give the girls some down time that isn't involved in solving the problem or if someone gets too emotional.
- ◆ Discussion should always follow role-play. Talk about how participants felt and how they reached a solution. Observers need to comment positively and discuss their solution or other solutions. This is a problem solving technique.
- ◆ If a role-play flops, it's okay. The group may not have been ready. The situation was too easy or too hard or the girls didn't feel comfortable. Girls, sometimes, need to role-play a few times before they catch on to the technique.

### **Brainstorming Discussion Technique:**

State a problem, ask a question, bring up an issue or try to resolve a particular situation. Everyone then gives suggestions, solutions and ideas.

- ◆ All ideas are welcome without judgment.
- ◆ The more incentive, the better.
- ◆ Quantity is what is needed, quality comes later

After brainstorming ideas, the group evaluates and decides which ideas are practical, helpful and suitable.

### **Conflict Resolution Techniques:**

Whenever people get together, conflict can arise. Girls can disagree over the simplest things. People from different backgrounds and cultures can differ over behavior; dress, how to speak or even eat and the differences can develop into conflicts.

### **Tips for Resolving Conflicts:**

- ◆ Girls need to feel secure, capable, and accepted by the group. Conflicts are less likely to happen when they do.
- ◆ Girls will empathize with others and have more understanding about differences in others if each girl feels accepted.
- ◆ When girls are making the decisions and plans for their activities, they take ownership and probably will not do things that will risk destroying the projects.

### **When a Problem Arises, Here are Some Solutions:**

- ◆ **Mediation** - A third person listens to both sides and then tries to help each girl think of possible solutions to the problem and helps them choose one.
- ◆ **Time Out** – Girls are sent to a quiet spot for a set time to work out their problems and come back with a solution. If they return with no answer, you may have to become a mediator.
- ◆ **Role-Playing** - This must be used carefully because the participants could be so emotionally involved in the "real-life" conflict that it becomes worse. If in doubt, don't use it.
- ◆ **Contracts** - This can be used if there is a continuing problem. Work out a compromise, decide on a solution and write up a contract that the participants can sign. The contract must be reasonable and realistic and can be renegotiated at a later date.
- ◆ **Ranking Solutions** - Brainstorm a list of solutions, or causes of conflict. Rank them from the best to the worst.

Be flexible. When a new idea comes up, do not automatically say "no", or "we always do it this way". A new or different way might work just as well. A conflict may be avoided by not automatically saying no, and a girl's self-esteem may be increased at the same time.

Sometimes, as a leader, we treat girls differently in a troop. Reasons can be some girls may be easier to like; they may be helpful or dependable; you may be unfamiliar with a girl's culture; her manners may be peculiar, or her behavior different. It is easier to like people who seem the most like us. Think about how you relate to girls in your troop. You are a role model and girls will treat each other by observing you.



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Dear Parents,

Troop # \_\_\_\_\_ is planning to have a (some) meeting(s) on a sensitive issue, Subject: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date/Dates \_\_\_\_\_.

GSUSA and Girl Scouts of Kentucky's Wilderness Road Council feel girls need to be aware of how to cope with problems they may be faced with in today's world. We will have the following Consultant / Agency while we work on this program:

Consultant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Agency's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

We encourage you to attend and participate in the meeting/meetings with your daughter.

Sincerely,  
Troop Leader

***Detach and Return***

I give my permission

I do not give my permission

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Date of Girl Scout Meeting Attending

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent or Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Meeting Topic



## **Guidelines for Program Delivery of Contemporary Issues**

The Program Passages are based on the contemporary issue series booklets from GSUSA which includes:

- ◆ **All About Me** – Personal Power
- ◆ **Our Extended Family** – Homelessness and Poverty
- ◆ **Lemons to Lemonade** – Child Abuse
- ◆ **Building Rainbows** – Welcoming All
- ◆ **Family Matters** – Family Stresses
- ◆ **Life Savers** – Preventing Youth Suicide
- ◆ **Common Threads** – Promoting Pluralism
- ◆ **Wise Lives** - Wellness
- ◆ **T.A.G.S. – The Action Girl Scouts** – Focus on a Healthy Body
- ◆ **Pickles** – Non-Violence
- ◆ **Her Story** – Leadership Skills

(For copies of the above booklets, contact the Program Department in the Lexington Office.)

Because of the problems girls are facing today and recognizing that Contemporary Issues deal with current concerns, Girl Scouts of Kentucky's Wilderness Road Council feels that troop leaders need to learn how to deal with these subjects on the troop level.

### **Guidelines for troops**

1. Leaders and consultants need to be willing to adhere to Girl Scout National Policies.
2. Leaders presenting Contemporary Issues to their troops may attend Council training. Parents may also participate in the training.
3. Consultants are to be qualified professionals, which included health educators, social workers, psychologists and counselors.
4. Leaders are required to use the Girl Scouts of the USA Contemporary Issues Publications.
5. Leaders are encouraged to utilize supplementary Contemporary Issues materials from other sources.
6. Participants must have written parental approval to attend Contemporary Issues Programs on sensitive issues.
7. Outline of subjects to be covered should be furnished to parents.
8. Parents are encouraged to participate in the Contemporary Issue projects and to reinforce at home.
9. Care should be taken to insure that information is factual and unbiased.
10. Troop activities should include the development of self esteem, assertiveness, awareness and decision making.