How to Facilitate Complex Conversations with Your Troop

Before the meeting

Get on the same page with your co-leader or assistant leader. Complex conversations work best when you have a clear plan and direction. Solidify your plans together in advance.

You don’t have to have the same views. But you can work together as a team determine the topics you’ll address and decide on the desired outcome. Is the goal to invite girls to explore and discuss a particular issue? Teach girls how to form an educated opinion and find their voice? Will you be encouraging the girls to take action? Will you have one meeting on the topic or a series of meetings?

Determine what resources you will share with the troop to guide your conversation. Consider these options:

- See GSUSA’s Help Your Kids Take Action Against Racism article, which also contains links to helpful resources.
- View the introductory and intermediate resources on our Equity and Social Justice webpage.
- Consider consulting troop parents. Some may be especially knowledgeable or have resources to recommend regarding your chosen topic.
- Suggest that older Girl Scouts (Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors) find and share resources with the troop.

Share your meeting plan with troop parents. Use the Complex Conversations email template to provide parents with a general meeting agenda and links to your chosen resources. It’s important that parents have an opportunity to review the materials on their own (or with their girl) ahead of time.

Be OK with those who opt out. Though troop leaders do what they feel is best for the troop, parents decide what’s best for their girl. It is fine if they don’t want their girl joining in. Parents may have a number of reasons for having their daughter opt out. It’s best not to make assumptions.

Consider whether permission from parents is needed. Formal, signed permission from parents is not required unless troop leaders wish to confirm in writing that parents are aware of the topics being discussed. Have parents complete a Parental Notification for Sensitive Issues form, if needed. Not sure? Contact Girl Scouts San Diego’s Volunteer Relations team to talk it through.

During the meeting

Introduce the Conversation Code of Conduct. Allow the girls to ask questions about the code and make sure that they all understand and agree before starting.

Find out what girls know. Ask girls what they’ve heard, seen, read, or experienced to gauge how much each girl knows about the topic.
Provide resources (video clip, online excerpt, etc.) that present different perspectives in order to encourage conversation and introduce girls to viewpoints that may not be their own.

Facilitate the discussion. Ask everyone to follow the Conversation Code of Conduct. Make sure each girl has a chance to speak. Ask for clarification, correct misinformation, and repeat questions back to make sure everyone understands.

Ask more questions than you give answers. This will help girls develop their own thoughts and conclusions, and is a foundation for taking action. Examples to try: “How did that make you feel?” “Why do you think that happens?” or “What could we do about that problem?”

Be prepared for strong emotions. Girls may get angry or upset. If they do, remain calm. Remind all girls that their feelings are valid. If a girl is having a strong emotional reaction, agree as a group to come back to the topic another time and redirect the meeting.

Bring it back to the G.I.R.L. Agenda. Girl Scouts encourages troops to have complex conversations because we believe in the G.I.R.L. Agenda. At the end of the discussion, ask girls, “what’s next?” They may want to schedule time to discuss more, speak with an expert, or take action in their communities.

Share the Civic Action Toolkit with girls who are interested in taking action. This resource has a variety of age-appropriate tools to help girls make a difference.

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