



Girl Scout Council of Northwest Georgia, Inc.

SENSITIVE ISSUES GUIDELINES

Girl Scouts of the USA defines sensitive issues as “Topics highly personal in nature or rooted in beliefs and values, e.g., AIDS, child abuse, human sexuality and religion.” (*Safety-Wise*, page 155)

Safety-Wise states (pages 40-43) that in order to be contemporary and responsive to girls’ needs, some Girl Scout activities focus on subjects that may be considered sensitive or controversial. There is no definitive list of sensitive issues, although *Safety-Wise* mentions human sexuality, religious beliefs, cultural and family values, AIDS, child abuse, suicide and teenage pregnancy as examples. However, what is considered a sensitive issue in one community may not be in others, so leaders must use good judgment about parent/guardian permission and involvement.

Many subjects can become controversial if handled inappropriately, so it is important for leaders to follow the Girl Scout Council of Northwest Georgia Guidelines for Sensitive Issues below (which basically follow the guidelines in *Safety-Wise*.) Any time a leader is unsure about how to approach a topic, she should contact her Regional Program Specialist.

COUNCIL GUIDELINES FOR SENSITIVE ISSUES

- Before covering any sensitive issue *beyond* the scope of the Girl Scout program resources (handbooks, award books*, Issues for Girl Scouts, etc.) leaders should obtain council support and approval; usually the most appropriate person to provide this is your Regional Program Specialist. ***Special Note:** The STUDIO 2B *Focus TAKE CHARGE* booklet covers the topics of rape (including date rape,) sexual molestation, sexual harassment, dating violence, family violence, and school violence. The Girl Scout Council of Northwest Georgia strongly recommends using the Parent Information and Permission Form for Sensitive Issues before girls begin work on this *Focus* booklet.
- When sensitive or controversial issues are involved, the leader’s role is never that of an advocate for any particular position. Her role is that of a caring and supportive adult who helps girls gain knowledge and skills.
- Since most sensitive topics are rooted in people’s values, the leader’s role is to help parents understand and support the quality and value of these activities. When appropriate, involve parents and guardians in the sensitive issues activities the girls do at their meetings or at home. (For example: a parent-daughter viewing of a video about puberty.)
- When using outside consultants to deliver programs on sensitive issues, the leader’s role is to be sure consultants understand and are willing to follow Girl Scouts of the USA’s position on human sexuality and related topics.

- When discussing sensitive issues related to values, leaders should encourage girls to talk with resource people such as family members, religious leaders, and appropriate experts.
 - Girls should be guided by parents or guardians and religious teachings before making a value-related decision.
 - Leaders should encourage girls to see that each family has its own way of doing things based on family customs, religion, cultural backgrounds and so forth. They should encourage girls to try to understand parental decisions by considering their parents' point of view.
 - Leaders should help girls consider the possible consequences of an action they are considering.

As noted in the *Council Guide for Volunteers*, Georgia law requires personnel with child service organizations (which includes, by definition, volunteer youth leaders) to report suspected child abuse. When a Girl Scout volunteer observes physical injuries of a suspicious nature, receives a report or accusation of sexual abuse, learns that a child is fearful of returning home, and/or has been abandoned by the parents or guardians, the volunteer must call the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) in the county where the abuse occurs or the child resides (see telephone numbers below). Reporters may remain anonymous.

If a child is in immediate danger, call 911 or the local police. Keep the child in your care until appropriate assistance arrives.

Bartow County 770.387.3710
 Cherokee County 770.720.3610
 Clayton County 770.603.4602
 Cobb County 770.528.5015
 DeKalb County 404.370.5066
 Douglas County 770.489.3000
 Fannin County 706.632.2296
 Floyd County 706.295.6500
 Fulton County 404.657.5219
 Gilmer County 706.635.2361

Gordon County 706-624.1200
 Gwinnett County 770.995.2122
 Murray County 706.695.7315
 Newton County 770.784.2490
 Paulding County 770.443.7810
 Pickens County 706.692.4701
 Polk County, GA 770.749.2232
 Polk County, TN 1.877.237.0004
 Rockdale County 770.338.5025
 Whitfield County 706.272.2331

Once a report has been made to DFCS, notify the council by contacting the Volunteer Services Manager or your membership staff person. This information is considered confidential, and you will not be asked for details regarding the incident you have reported. To ensure privacy, volunteers are encouraged to call DFCS or 1-800-CHILDREN before contacting the council.

When a child reports what *could* be child abuse or when a situation exists where the child may be subjected to abuse, negligence, or other harm, volunteers are encouraged to contact Prevent Child Abuse Georgia at 1-800-CHILDREN for guidance. This advice line is available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. You can also e-mail questions or concerns to help.line@preventchildabusega.org. Counselors there can help determine whether a situation presents enough of a concern to require a report, and they can also create the report for the volunteer. Any signs of substance abuse, suicidal behavior, or eating disorders (anorexia nervosa and bulimia), should also be handled by contacting 1-800-CHILDREN.

General tips on how to handle specific sensitive situations are found on pages 41-43 of *Safety-Wise*. There is also a helpful series of booklets called *Staying Safe* for specific age groups that provides information regarding child abuse prevention and reporting.

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PARENT INFORMATION AND PERMISSION FORM FOR SENSITIVE ISSUES

Girl Scouts of the USA defines **sensitive issues** as “Topics highly personal in nature or rooted in beliefs and values, e.g., AIDS, child abuse, human sexuality and religion.” (*Safety-Wise*, page 155)

Dear Girl Scout Parent or Guardian:

Girl Scout guidelines state that if information about sensitive issues or topics will be part of an activity, parents must be notified if the material to be covered is *beyond the scope of what is in the girls’ handbooks or other Girl Scout publications* and must give written permission for their daughter or ward to participate. The troop leader must also obtain approval from the Girl Scout council if the information is outside the scope of Girl Scouts of the USA’s program resource materials. Our group will be using age-appropriate activities and/or information to learn about the topic(s) checked below:

- Substance abuse:** Drug awareness activities and education, including tobacco and alcohol.
- Child abuse:** Information about types of abuse, including sexual abuse or molestation; danger awareness and personal safety.
- Growing up female/puberty:** Information about the physical and emotional changes that come with puberty; personal hygiene; fitness and nutrition; eating disorders; cliques.
- Growing up female/violence:** Rape/date rape; sexual harassment; school violence; family violence.
- Youth suicide:** Recognizing the warning signs of plans for suicide; how to react/what to do; suicide prevention activities; dealing with depression.
- Teen pregnancy:** Girl Scouts ages 11 and older are helped to develop the skills, values and attitudes they need to make decisions that prevent early sexual activity and teen pregnancy.
- HIV/AIDS/STDs/Hepatitis:** Helps girls learn about healthy behaviors and decisions to avoid HIV or other infections.
- Family crises:** Activities to help girls understand and cope with their own or other’s family crises, such as death, divorce, job loss, or homelessness.

If you have any questions, please call me. Your written permission is required for your daughter’s participation in these activities. You may preview any program materials that are to be used. Please note your approval OR disapproval for your daughter’s participation by filling in and signing the form below and returning it to me.

Thank you,

_____ Troop Leader (Date) _____

PARENT PERMISSION PART ONE – INFORMATION

Troop # _____ Troop/group Leader _____

Leader's Day Phone # _____ Evening _____

Leader's E-mail _____

Our activities will take place on these dates: _____

The specific topics we will be covering and the major program resources or consultant(s) we will use include:

PARENT PERMISSION PART TWO – APPROVAL

My daughter, _____

() may () may **not** participate in the program(s) indicated above.

Parent/Guardian Signature _____

Parent/Guardian comments or questions:

Parent's Day Phone # _____ Evening _____

Parent's E-mail _____