

# More Levels, More Fun: Tips for Running a Multi-Level Troop

More girls, more fun? In a multi-level Girl Scout troop, the answer is a resounding yes!

A multi-level troop is exactly what it sounds like: one unified troop with multiple grade levels within it. Some are close in age, like a combined Brownie and Junior troop, while others may be very large with nearly all Girl Scout levels joining forces.

There's no one single model for what a successful multi-level troop looks like; what's most important is that you, your girls, and their families find ways to foster a space where your girls can bond and thrive! Our volunteer experts weighed in on what new leaders need to know about managing a multi-level troop—and why it might be a great fit for them and their girls.

## Why start a multi-level troop to begin with?

Moment of truth—not all our volunteer experts set out to lead a multi-level troop initially. But for those who live in a small community where girls attend the same K–12 school, a multi-level troop just makes sense. Other leaders feel that opening up opportunities to more girls was the best way to show off the spirit of Girl Scout sisterhood!

“Having a multi-level troop was not something we planned as co-leaders,” shares Jen Quaranta of Girl Scouts Spirit of Nebraska. “It started when we had a girl in our troop who skipped a grade in the middle of the school year. Council staff explained what multi-level troops were and gave us a few ideas about what that could look like.”

“We began as a troop of Daisies, but then we decided to make a concerted effort to reach out to the autism community to let those parents know that Girl Scouts is for everyone,” says Bridgette McNeal of Girl Scouts of Greater Atlanta. “We had an overwhelming response, all the way up to 12th grade. At that point, we decided we'd just be a multi-level troop and figure out how to make it work!”

## What do we do as a troop?

The options are endless here! But most of our volunteer experts agree: You can break up activities by age as needed, but there are plenty of activities that work for the whole troop, whether or not there's a badge or award at that grade level. “The girls might have different criteria to fulfill, but if you don't concentrate on the differences—and doing twice as much



badge work—you'll find the girls just like learning new things together!" says Rebecca Deitzer of Girl Scouts of Western New York.

"We start our meetings together with snack, group bathroom break, and clean up," explains Amy Lothrop of Girl Scouts of the Green and White Mountains. "Together, we say the Pledge of Allegiance, the Girl Scout Promise and Law, and then we break apart by level for 45 minutes for badge or higher award work twice per month. The other two meetings are group work like community service, outdoor hikes, or knot tying. It allows the girls to bond together and have some time apart. We always come back together for the closing friendship circle."

### How do I make it all work?

A strong troop committee, co-leaders at each grade level, or some dedicated volunteers among the girls' families are key to keeping the troop running smoothly. Your fellow volunteers will have different interests—some may be excited about the cookie program, while others may look forward to taking girls on their first hike—and that variety benefits the entire troop!

You won't necessarily meet everyone's needs at once—and most of our volunteer experts learned that's OK! "We decided to hold a meeting every week: one week for those working on Silver Awards, one week to do community service, one week for the younger girls to work on badges or Journeys that the older girls had already completed, and one week with everyone," shares Nancy Fink of Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana. "The girls came to the meetings that applied to them and to the all-troop meeting. It worked well and kept us from trying to meet everyone's needs at the same meeting."

Consider how your meeting space might impact group work. "I recommend two different rooms when possible," says Sheila Morris of Girl Scouts of the Green and White Mountains. "I found it's hard to do two different activities in a smaller room, as each group tends to try and see what the other does. The other arrangement we have used is that the younger group leaves 30 minutes prior to the older group. For instance, Brownies meet from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m., Juniors from 5:00 to 7 p.m."

Just as you would in a single-level troop, get the girls involved in planning their troop year from the start. "In order to help us as co-leaders and help the girls take charge of badges, we did a two-year outlook for planning purposes," says Jen. "We often have girls who want to earn badges on their own, so it helps them see what we'll do as a troop and what they could work on at home. We revisit the plan each year, but it helps with pacing."



**Are your girls having fun? You're doing it right!**

“Our collective goal in my troop is to inspire girls to dream big, learn important life skills—tenacity, critical thinking, compassion—and make the world a better place,” says Amy.

“Badges are simply a starting point.”

“We find that doing things together most of the time is the best fit,” says Bridgette. “Our troop seems to enjoy working together as a group more. We'd rather go slow and promote sisterhood in our troop than split up and move faster.”