



## Three Common Troop Communication Issues and How to Resolve Them

Encouraging girls to step out of their comfort zone, building their confidence, inspiring them to take action: when first-time Girl Scout troop leaders sign up to volunteer, they have a sense of the joys—and struggles—that come with shaping young leaders.

But keeping these girls' parents engaged throughout the year? That's a different challenge that sometimes takes new troop leaders by surprise.

A troop is as strong as its members, and the adults in your troop might not realize that their support is paramount to your success as a troop leader, especially with seemingly simple tasks, like troop communication. But being proactive and clear about troop communications can avert a number of issues that may pop up with parents and caregivers. Our volunteer experts weighed in with some of their most common communication issues and how they resolved them.

**Problem: I worry a parent/caregiver doesn't respect my time.**

We juggle work, picking the kids up from school and shuttling them to extracurriculars, getting dinner on the table, scheduling doctor appointments; we all do our best to multitask and make it all work. And for some Girl Scout volunteers, it can feel incredibly frustrating when others forget that you've got a to-do list as well! In some instances, according to Chrissy Schaffer, a troop leader in the Girl Scouts Western Pennsylvania council, "parents will email, text, or Facebook message me and get upset when they do not get an immediate response, but when I reach out to them, they take as long as they want to respond."

**Solution: Set communication boundaries early on and stick to them.**

"At the start of each year, we provide each parent with a copy of our troop policies and procedures, which the parents sign to confirm they've read and understand the document," explains Chrissy. "We also clearly state that our leaders have full-time commitments outside of the troop. We ask that parents give us 48 hours to respond to all communication, unless it is an emergency. I am very frank with the parents about our leaders' commitments outside of the troop. I ask the parents to be respectful of our leaders' time. Throughout the year, if parents get pushy, I gently remind them about our troop policies and procedures."

**Problem: A parent/caregiver doesn't respond to my emails or texts.**

Sometimes it seems you can't get ahold of certain adult members of your troop no matter which or how many communication channels you use. Moving troop business forward shouldn't be overly time-consuming, and having to constantly follow up with parents/caregivers is a pain point for many troop leaders.

**Solution: Outline exactly which communication channels you will use and how often parents can expect to hear from you.**

Make everyone in the troop aware of how key information will be circulated—for one, by noting the communication tools you'll use in a troop policy document shared at the beginning of the troop year. “For the most part our main form of communication has always been email. We recently introduced a troop Shutterfly share site that has an updated calendar and can send emails directly to the groups. These methods have proven to be very effective for most parents in our troop,” says Lisa Lamb, a troop leader in the Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan council.

“We also try to encourage parents not to use Facebook Messenger to communicate with us, simply because it is really hard to archive those communication threads,” adds Chrissy.

And if a caregiver consistently doesn't respond to your emails? Get more info. “In one family, the email we had was for the mother, but the dad was usually picking the girl up,” recalls Lisa. “When approached about the best form of communication for them, [we learned that] the dad is simply a better communicator. So we added him to the email list and, *voila*, we started getting responses.”

**Problem: I'm constantly following up on late RSVPs.**

You spend months planning an event your girls are psyched to attend, send the invite through several of your caregivers' communication channels, and...crickets. What gives? You knew that booking a venue and arranging transportation was part of the planning process, but being the RSVP police wasn't on your to-do list. “While it is usually only one or two parents operating this way, it does cause frustration on our end of things,” admits Lisa.

**Solution: Connect with the parent/caregiver directly about the issue.**

We all have busy schedules and daily distractions. Some troop leaders give parents the benefit of the doubt with RSVPs, and as needed they'll reach out. “Sometimes just a personal text or email stating that I was waiting for their reply to schedule the outing does the job,” says Lisa. “I believe that being straightforward, direct, and honest about my communication concerns has always served me well.”



There are bound to be a few communications gaps that emerge during your troop year, and that's OK! Your communication process will evolve over time, and you'll find what works best for you and the adults in your troop. As you connect with parents and caregivers, remember to remind them just how important they are to ensuring the girls have a fun and meaningful Girl Scout experience---this will go a long way.