

How I Make Virtual Meetings Work for My Troop

When her troop couldn't meet in person, Jen Quaranta, a multi-level troop leader from Girl Scouts Spirit of Nebraska, brought the meeting to her girls instead. She shared with us her tips and best practices for keeping virtual meetings running smoothly.

Last year, a snowstorm shut down our town, but we had an important meeting related to cookie sales that needed to take place. I decided that because the girls were in fifth and sixth grades, we could have the meeting virtually. I was already familiar with Zoom because I use it for work, so we used it for our troop meeting.

Fast forward to the present, when we learned our school district was closing due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. My co-leader and I started talking about the fact that we already had several plans in place to continue our Girl Scout year.

I held a virtual meeting with my third-grade Brownies recently, and it was so healthy for the girls to see one another again. Even the parents talked about how good it was to have something normal in their lives again. The girls even asked to meet more frequently because everything else that usually keeps them busy was canceled.

Here's how I make virtual meetings work for my troop.

Consider your tech specs.

- Access to your chosen conferencing or meeting platform may be blocked because of the restrictions on school-provided tablets, so girls may need to log on using a family device. Be sure to have them download and test the platform on their device before the meeting.
- Look for features that allow you to call in to the meeting using a phone only, which is important because not all girls have access to the internet. Be sure to send families the URL for the meeting as well as the directions for calling in.
- We liked Zoom because families don't need to download any type of program on their computer; they can simply click on the link at the appropriate time or call in to join the meeting. Families did let me know they appreciated not having to download anything.

Think about your meeting logistics.

- Keeping the same meeting time as your in-person meetings may be best. Although it might be tempting to hold a meeting or activity during the day, remember that girls

could have schoolwork and their caregivers may be working from home or helping their other children.

- Treat the first virtual meeting as you would with any first meeting; set up expectations and ground rules, such as not using the chat log for side conversations during the meeting—something that was hard for my middle school girls to resist!
- Although I use Zoom regularly for work, I had to remember that the technology was new to the girls and their families. It took twice as long to cover content during the first virtual meeting because everyone was trying to figure out how to use it. You'll need to show them some of the features, such as how to mute their microphones.
- Depending on the ages of your girls, you may want to ask their caregivers to stay in the virtual room to meet safety guidelines.

Adapt meeting traditions when possible.

- With my Brownies, I created a PowerPoint presentation to help lead the meeting and keep them focused. Zoom and other platforms allow the meeting host to share their screen.
- Know that audio can sometimes be delayed from the video, especially now that more people are using online platforms to meet. This can be hard if you have your troop reciting the Girl Scout Promise together or the closing circle. When I was able to incorporate a YouTube video for the closing “Make New Friends” song, it really helped.
- For our closing circle, my Brownies decided to virtually high-five the girl whose picture was next to them until everyone had done it. To help facilitate, I called the girls' names as they gave a high five. "Ellajean-Stefania" then "Stefania-Avery" until it came back to the first girl, who then said, "Good night, Girl Scouts." It was a creative way to do the closing circle.

Keep troop activities moving forward.

- If you had field trips or similar activities planned with your troop, see if virtual tours or a virtual guest speaker is possible. With my Brownie troop, we had an in-person visit scheduled with a local wildlife agency, and now we're seeing if it can do a virtual meeting with us instead.
- Check with your council or service unit about any remote programs it may offer. Our council offers a "program on demand" kit that provides materials to complete badge activities. Our troop ordered a kit several weeks ago that we had planned to use later in the spring.

- As Brownies, we found many badges have a practical home application. Badges that Brownie leaders might consider for girls to work on from home include Household Elf, Making Games, My Family Story, My Great Day, and Home Scientist.
- My co-leader and I are going to encourage families to look at the safety awards at their girl's level. Most focus on being prepared. Chances are they can apply the things they have been doing lately toward these requirements. For example, part of the Cadette requirements say, "With your family, make sure you have enough food, water, and medical supplies on hand to last at least three days in case of a natural disaster."

In the days ahead, I'll create digital ways for my girls to receive activity information. I plan to reach out to other leaders too, so perhaps all our girls can collaborate. And I'll be working on ways for the girls to prepare for bridging. Our troop will be moving forward.