



Kickstart Your Troop Year with Tried-and-True Tips for Your First Parent Meeting

Whether you're greeting a group of old friends or friendly new faces, your first parent/caregiver meeting is your opportunity to deepen the bonds among all members of your troop.

It takes a village to lift up the next generation of leaders, and to set the stage for a successful troop year for your girls, you need to set the tone for parents and caregivers. By helping the adults understand the roles they play in the troop, you'll empower them to stay engaged and enhance the entire group's Girl Scout experience.

What's the best way to launch this initial meeting? Here's how our Volunteer Experts have run their first parent meetings:

Give a Girl Scout welcome

Kick off your meeting by introducing yourself and any co-leaders you'll be working with, and have each parent/caregiver introduce themselves. Depending on the size of your group, you might also have the parents say what they hope their girl will gain through Girl Scouting. It's an opportunity for you to not only get to know the adults in your troop, but to also get a sense of the kinds of activities that excite the larger group.

One of the best parts about Girl Scouting is the inclusive, welcoming environment, and as the troop's leader, you can set that tone for parents. "As we went around the room with introductions, the parents fell into a pattern of leading off with whether they had been a Girl Scout, and we observed some shyness or hesitation among some parents who were unfamiliar with Girl Scouts," shares Denise Montgomery of Girl Scouts of San Diego. "We now proactively emphasize that it doesn't matter whether or not parents were involved in Girl Scouts growing up. My co-leader, who is new to Girl Scouts, tells parents that she did not have the opportunity to be a Girl Scout growing up and that she feels very much a part of the organization now and is so glad that her daughter is having the experience."

Introduce the world of Girl Scouts

Explaining the Girl Scout mission and the breadth of experiences the girls will enjoy is a great way to get all adults on the same page. "At our parent meetings we make sure to discuss that Girl Scouts is a leadership development program," says Denise. "We meet in our school's

library, which we prearrange with the librarian, and show a short video by GSUSA on the three Girl Scouts processes: girl led, learning by doing, and cooperative learning. We share that over time, the girls will take on increasing responsibility for making decisions and for running the troop.”

Lila Barlow, a troop leader with the Girl Scouts of Wisconsin Badgerland council, draws on volunteer training materials like the *Volunteer Essentials* handbook to explain Leadership Journeys to parents who aren’t as familiar with the programming. “It has been helpful to show parents how troop meetings are organized and how the girls earn badges,” she says.

Set aside time for paperwork

You’ll want to have enough copies of the Girl Health History & Emergency Medical Authorization, Meet My Daughter, Girl Membership Registration, and Photo Release forms for caregivers to complete at the meeting. Some experienced troop leaders have also found success in sharing a “troop contract” or “troop year charter” that tells parents exactly what to expect during the year. “I share a document that covers meeting dates, fees, supplies, parent involvement, year plan, and our Facebook share site,” says Kara Johnson of Girl Scouts of Western Ohio. “I also give instructions for how to register as an adult Girl Scout or volunteer, because registered adult members can attend meetings or help with transportation, overnights, or field trips. Parents are usually very grateful for the information and impressed with the organization and planning.

Parents and caregivers will inevitably ask about dues, so have a list of costs ready, including dues, sash or vest, handbooks, and any other materials the girls may need during their troop year. If your troop is participating in the cookie program, let parents know how cookie sales work and how sales can help fund troop activities. “Once we reassure the parents that cookie sales are fun and the troop works together, everyone seems to relax,” says Lila.

For Denise, the dues conversation connects back to the inclusivity Girl Scouts is known for, and she’s happy to make arrangements as needed. “We state that dues should never get in the way of a girl participating in Girl Scouts and that we are happy to talk with a family and work something out together,” she says.

Set expectations

Teamwork makes the dream work, and your parent volunteers can help your troop dream big. Be prepared to share a list of specific tasks that you’ll need help with throughout the year—troop snacks, carpooling, managing the troop’s social media and communications—and note the time required for each so parents know what to expect. Some may be surprised that some

recurring tasks will only take about 15 minutes of their time each week! “It seems that when we can outline things three to four months out, parents feel more [confident] that they can manage the time commitment,” says Lila.

You can also take this opportunity to specify how parents can use their unique skills and strengths to pitch in. “If you’re a money person, a craft person, an outdoor person, there’s always something a parent can do,” says Tanya Schwab of Girl Scouts Western Pennsylvania. “I tell people that everyone brings their gift to the troop; the leader can’t do everything and that’s OK. Girls will get a variety of experiences if everyone pitches in.”

“We ask everyone to consider ways that they might want to contribute to the troop, and we ask for specific skills, so: ‘we are looking for someone who can help us with the geocaching badge,’” says Denise. “Later we follow up by email to get people to sign up for specific tasks such as helping plan and lead a badge or bring snacks for a field trip.”

And while you might not go as far as setting up a Kaper chart for the caregivers in your troop, the principle is the same. “Rotating volunteer tasks eases the burden on specific people and spreads the work evenly,” adds Cheryl Lentsch of Girl Scouts Spirit of Nebraska.

Close your meeting, with intention

Leave time for any questions before you officially close the meeting, and let parents and caregivers know how you’ll stay in touch. Remind the group that by actively sharing in troop life, they’re also modeling what leadership looks like for their girls!

More troop leader pro tips

Need a few more tips for meeting success? Our Volunteer Experts have you covered!

- **Decide when to hold your meeting.** Sound too obvious? Not so! “I prefer to hold the parent meeting *after* the girls have selected their badges, Journey, and council events,” says Cheryl. “Then I can let the parents know what the girls selected so they get excited about the upcoming Girl Scout year.”
- **Explain adult membership to the caregivers in your group.** “I think the biggest discrepancy occurs when parents don’t understand that they also have to register for Girl Scouts if they want to attend meetings and events,” says Kara.
- **Make individual troop policies clear.** “I encourage parents to be on time when picking up their daughters and to escort them into and out of the meeting location for safety,” says Cheryl. “I also discuss our illness policy: if a girl or adult is too sick to attend school or work, then they are kindly asked to miss the meeting that day so that the others can stay healthy.”