

Multi-level Troops

A unique challenge with unique advantages.

Volunteers become engaged with multi-level troops – Troops with combination of girl scouts of different grade levels – for many reasons. Perhaps the troop administrator has one daughter who is second year brownie and another that is first year daisy, or perhaps the community/ school is so small that it can't support two troops. Many older girls (Cadettes, Senior, and Ambassador) choose to form a single troop because their individual troops would be very small. Whatever the reason the multi-level troop forms, it serves a purpose that meets the needs of the volunteers and girls. It also presents benefits and challenges that single-level troops often don't.

Benefits

- Younger girls look up to older girls and bringing them together in multi-level setting provides younger girls with role models of every age (as long as everyone is modeling the Girl Scout promise and law).
- Older girls have the opportunity to put their leadership skills into action as they mentor younger girls. Many badge and journey activities suggest that older girls (even Brownies) work with younger ones on service projects, to teach skills, to play games, etc.
- Girls are grouped by grade level nearly everywhere – school, sports, even Sunday school. A multi-level environment allows girls to interact with more diverse group and make new friends!
- If a parent or volunteer has daughters of different grade levels, this allows them all to spend time together (as well as simplifies their schedule).

Challenges (and how to overcome them!)

The National program portfolio materials (Leadership Journeys and The Girl's guide to girl scouting) differ at every level. A volunteer with multi-level troop would need to become familiar with materials for each level represented in the troop and would have to plan activities accordingly. **To meet this challenge...**recruit girl program mentors for each grade level represented in the troop. These volunteers will become resistant "experts" in the materials for particular grade level. When planning activities, bring the volunteers together, so they can discuss the similarities and differences. For example, Juniors and Cadettes may both earn a digital arts badge – Juniors earn digital photography and Cadettes try out digital movie maker. When do the five steps intersect? Are there certain steps that can be done as a larger group? Is there one step where the Cadettes can serve as the subjects of the juniors' photos and vice

versa? Use your (and the girls') imagination to think outside the box! Also, take advantage of the volunteer toolkit. Build your meetings in a collaborative way (girls and volunteers) and add in activities that are appropriate (and fun) for girls of all ages.

Some activities that are appropriate for eight-year-olds simply aren't possible for five-year-olds, such as activities involving fine motor skills. Activities would need to be adapted for different ages or facilitated separately. **To meet these challenges...** allow the older girls to teach or assist the younger one. If it's a craft, consider pairing an older girl with a younger one and having them work toward the end result together. If safety is a concern, or if there's no way to adapt the activity in an appropriate way, leverage the help of their troop volunteers and ask that they physically separate the group for that portion of the meeting.

Girls identify strongly with their age and grade level, and they'll most likely have friends of their own age that they stick by. **To meet this challenge...** incorporate activities that bring all girls together, such as opening and closing ceremonies, songs, games, and outings. Remind the girls that although they may be Daisies/Juniors/Seniors, they're all part of the sisterhood of Girl Scouting!

Many troop administrators take on their volunteer role because they know they have the skills to successfully guide a troop, and multi-level troop volunteers are no exception. However, a multi-level troop can become a bigger responsibility than anticipated very quickly. **To meet this challenge...** Ask for help! If the administrator of the troop is willing to be responsible for overall organization and planning, other parents are often willing to step up as girl program mentors and assist with facilitating activities. Try to secure two or more parent helpers for each grade level and let them witness the girl- planning process at the start of the year. This way, all volunteers share an understanding of what the troop as a whole would like to achieve and can work with their individual grade levels toward that end when necessary. Ensure that all volunteers for the troop understand the girl scout processes (girl led, learning by doing, cooperative learning) and adhere to all guidelines for the safety and well-being of girls.