

KEEPING GIRLS IN SCOUTS

A Compilation on keeping 7/8/9th graders happy and convincing 11/12/13 year olds to stay in Girl Scouts

- Plan a trip for the end of the following year, something that will just knock their socks off, then they will have to stay!
- Have the older girls (14+) come and talk about the fun they have, what they have done, and the opportunities available.
- Almost all women I talk to who stayed in GS to the end, at some point they were encouraged by their parents to remain active even though they wanted to quit. Once they get over the middle school ickies, they come back to earth and are very happy staying in GS. Others have said that they wish their parents had encouraged them to stay in it longer and they regret dropping out. I am encouraging all my parents to be a guiding force here.
- Plan a summer bridging (or year kick off) event with other girls the same age. Once they see they aren't the only ones (and they are very likely to find friends who they didn't know were GS), they are more likely to stay
- They are stuck in between being a little girl and being a more mature teen. Give them a bit of slack and really push the idea that they are in charge. Also, approach the conversation like you would with any adult. They will notice the change in tone and they will notice that you are trusting them to know what they want. No, they are not adults yet, and no, they won't start acting like it for many years, BUT they crave the respect, the opportunities, and the trust. Tell them you completely understand how they feel (validate) and that others all over the US feel the

same way (inclusiveness). Ask them what are their ideas for solving this dilemma? Maybe someone wants to go by a code word instead of GS (Gamma Sigma, "music lessons", etc) so others won't know that was what you were talking about. Maybe they want to back off and only meet twice a month or even once per month. ACCEPT all the ideas that they give you and try to put many into practice. This proves to them that you want to give them what they want.

- Really kick up the FUN factor. Tell them we are taking a break from badges, awards, and service for a few months. Ask them what strictly fun things they might want to do. This is OK - spending time together and building relationships is just as important as earning badges. Schedule as many as you can, maybe even doing one or two over the summer (no meetings, just a fun activity) to keep them interested. Half the time, for my troop, the conversations we have in the car going to and from an activity are more worthwhile than the activity itself!!
- Blend your troop with another in the SU, neighborhood, region, or even Council. Either for everything (troops meetings, cookies) or just for ongoing trips/activities. Have a planning board or something to help plan events for the larger group. This uses the best of all your combined resources, allows you to provide a program that is a step up from the Br and Jr regular one-leader-show program, and the more girls involved with each other, the better! It is much more fun to have a swim party and sleepover with 35 girls instead of just 10.
- Simple crafts, thrown together service projects, and lectured badge activities are not going to hold them. They need more complicated and in depth stuff. They need details, explanations, and hands on activities. Instead of making tray favors for meals on

wheels, offer them to go and help deliver the meals or visit at meal time at a nursing home. Get them sewing, crocheting, throwing pottery, painting ceramics, making their own jewelry. Have them attend as many hands on, expert run programs as you can. Think quality, quality, quality. As Brownies, whatever you gave them was just terrific, now they need more substance to keep them interested. Call in the experts... you are not expected to know everything!

- Have an occasional alternate meeting place – like a coffee house, diner, pizza place, ice cream parlor, etc. Feels more like a club and a bit more grown up. Since they are older and in a new age level, maybe they are ready for a change of scenery.
- Find out what events you could attend that Boy Scouts will also be present. No, we don't want to totally give in to the boy crazy attitude many of the girls this age have, but if preparing for a camping competition against the Boy Scouts gets them excited, then go for it.
- We have Monday morning donuts. Because all mine go to the same school, they come to a classroom as the bus drops them off and we have donuts and juice...keeps them connected.
- Does your local Middle School, Junior High, or High School now have a certain numbers of service required? If so, GS is the perfect way to take care of that requirement with no problem. Most years, a Brownie troop could easily make 20 hours per year if they tried a little bit. Think of how many older girls could do. This is a perfect match to the Bronze, Silver, and Gold awards.
- Get them connected with older ladies that used to be Girl Scouts, maybe through your local Red Hat Society or Senior Activity Center. Have them do a

simply activity or craft together and just allow them to chat. Discuss what it used to be like as a Girl Scout when they were girls. Ask them if they felt the same way about GS not being cool.

- Being a Girl Scout looks good on resumes (part-time AND full-time jobs), college applications, scholarship applications, and more. Even if you don't earn the Silver or Gold – employers know that being a Girl Scout MEANS something. They will get an employee who understands the basic values of being an employee – hard work, honesty, etc. I know that if I had to choose between two resumes, one GS and one without, I would choose the GS in a heartbeat.

- Did you know that girls who earn their Gold Award and enter the military, not only start at a higher rank (similar to the BS Eagle) but also at a higher PAY rate. It may only be a bit more pay than their peers for a few months, but that extra money adds up!

- Drill this idea into them – Never waste your time imitating someone else. You were born a unique individual, why die a copy? Acknowledge and talk about the peer pressure to NOT be in Scouting. We spent an entire meeting talking about stereotypes of Scouts and why they are, or are not true, and finally, talked about what Scouting can give a girl, and asked if the stereotypes mattered to them. My girls said that stereotypes DO matter to them, very much! But they still

wanted to stay in, if they could find a way to work this out. One way we dealt with this (and some will cringe at this!!) was to allow our girls to choose a code word for Scouts so that they didn't have to broadcast to their non-Scouting friends what they were talking about. They call themselves the FBI, and just say, "Oh, its a club," when asked about it. I know all the reasons why some will say that is terrible-- but my goal is to keep them in

Scouting!!! They can be proud of being a Scout later in life when being in the right social group isn't such an all-consuming thing!!

- Find a group of Campus GS in your area. Have the girls attend an event or activity on campus with these girls. What is cooler than hanging out on a college campus?
- Create some traditions for your group. Even if they are as small as a special decorated stick for a camp names ceremony, a special song you sing at every meeting, or a photo album of past adventures. The more connections, feelings of inclusiveness, and history they feel, the more likely they will stay.
- Have the girls pick a few IPA or S2B activities and have them plan them for the group. They CAN do it. At first, their presentations will be short and lacking detail. Have a lessons learned after each one and have the girls in the troop give positive feedback and constructive criticism. Eventually, their activities will have more substance and they will learn so much from picking, planning, and running an activity on a topic THEY care about.
- Flexibility! These girls so used to over planned, multitasked lives we can't always expect that they will make it to every meeting or event and sometimes other things will take priority. I have a few girls each year that drop during soccer season but are strong attendees before and after that time. I've had some parents complain that I had offered too much for the girls to do - but pointed out that they don't have to do all the events. I told them that nothing is required as long as they understand they may or may not get the same patches and awards as other girls. Expect to have Girl Scouting come last, or near bottom of the list of priorities and graciously schedule your meetings around sports, music, etc. when you can.

- Progression & respect! Not be treated as inferior: I see this all the time by leaders automatically saying, "My girls can't do that" They never tried, they never talk to them about it, they never begin progression, because it is automatically assumed that they can't do it. I have seen event planners and troop leaders do so much ahead of time that the girls basically step in and pick up an item and it is done... Kids know more than we think they do- I know I'm surprised a lot- but it can be degrading to them to have people constantly assuming they can't do something. It makes them not want to try.

- Allow more time for socializing. In the early years, I was pretty intent on making sure that meeting time was tightly scheduled. We had activities planned out and went from one thing to another. In Cadettes, the girls told us that they wanted more free time. Time to get to know one another better, to catch up on what was going on in each others lives, to just talk and have fun together. We listened, though I wasn't sure this was the way to go (sounded like goofing off to me!). Now we have at least a half hour for gabbing/goofing off together at the start of each meeting (usually while eating something), then get down to business. When we get down to business it is quick and intense. We decide what we want to do, divide up the tasks, and move on. No dragging things out. Then back to socializing! We take trips and go on outings that are intentionally loose, not highly scheduled. A wonderful side benefit of this is that by being present when they are gabbing, my co-leader and I have learned SO MUCH about what is important to them, what makes the adolescent tick, what makes them angry, what gives them joy, who is doing what at school, etc. It is really eye-opening for us sometimes! By observing these conversations-- indeed by being ALLOWED to be a part of these conversations, I feel I know my daughter and her

friends on a level that most parents don't even get close to! What a privilege!

- Crowd Control is different for older girls than brownies! One of the things I use is a "counter". They are told that if I, or one of the co-leaders, start counting that is the clue to be quiet. If we get to 5 then they lose their incentives during the meeting - a tag break or a gossip break. The other thing we use is the "quiet leader syndrome". If we're leading a discussion or trying to get input/feedback for a project and they get off topic - talking to each other about unrelated stuff, too many talking at once, unnecessary silliness - the leaders immediately stop talking and wait. The longer it takes for them to be quiet and get back on task, the more time they lose from their fun break. We've only had to completely eliminate the "5 minute banshee time" once. They'll get the picture.

- Be sure to let them know ahead of time what the meetings and trips will be about! Schedule enough items to appeal to a wide variety of girls and calendars to ensure everyone can participate in something to stay connected with the troop. One leader runs on meeting types –

Planning – planning camping, events, sleepovers, badge activities, whatever

Training – First Aid/CPR, how earn your gold, how to organize your paperwork, how to make an agenda and run a meeting, etc

Field Trip – to meet and go to an interesting place together

Business – to do troop business such as making decisions, craft/service projects, sign up for events, work in small groups on IPA work

IPA meeting - to work on a specific Interest Project Award

Awards work meeting - for individual girls to work on awards of all types with leaders around for advice

Service project meeting - To get together and do a service project (could be with other troops or groups)

Sleepover meeting - On a weekend night - could be at the school, at someone' s home, at a beach chalet or ??? Activities could be any number of things

Restaurant meeting - Probably a business or planning meeting but located at a restaurant (can you think of other things we could do at a restaurant meeting?)

Speakers meeting - invite several speakers to come and speak to our troop about some topic

Crafts meeting - Devoted to fun craft projects with no particular award in mind

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