

## Conflict Resolution Guidelines for Volunteers

### **INTRODUCTION TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

Girl Scouts Nation's Capital staff and volunteers strive to provide the highest quality Girl Scout Leadership Experience to youth members, while ensuring safety and well-being for everyone. Volunteers are instrumental in instilling the values that are clearly conveyed in the Girl Scout Promise, Law, and Mission and are expected to uphold them at all times.

One key aspect of leadership is the ability to work with others, effectively communicate and collaborate to achieve the desired goals and outcomes.

- Differences of opinion, disagreements, and conflicts are natural parts of life and inevitably happen in all relationships.
- Not all conflict is bad - it can lead to new ideas and approaches; it can bring important issues to light; and it can provide an opportunity for people to come together to create a solution.
- All adults in our organization should first try to resolve problems by talking directly to one another in brave, respectful conversations.

Guidance for having a courageous conversation is included in **Volunteer Essentials**, using the LUTE method. If you are involved in conflict, and **there is no clear breach of a Girl Scout policy or guideline\***, specifically the 14 Safety and Health Guidelines published in Chapter 3 of Volunteer Essentials, follow the guidelines below.

*\* If the situation poses a safety concern for any Girl Scouts, contact [customercare@qscnc.org](mailto:customercare@qscnc.org) or 1-888-288-1784 immediately.*

### **Conflict Resolution Essentials**

- **Try to talk it out directly (Self Resolution)**  
Parties involved are encouraged to sit down together and talk in a calm, nonjudgmental manner to resolve a disagreement. This can be uncomfortable and difficult, yet it lays the groundwork for working well together in the future. Direct communication results in a better outcome than email and text messages, which should be avoided.
- **Refrain from posting about conflict on social media**  
Parties should refrain from posting comments to maintain confidentiality and respect the dignity and rights of the individuals involved.
- **Keep it confidential**  
Confidentiality is an important part of any resolution process. Discussing the situation with others who are not in a position to assist in resolving the issue can end up being a source of embarrassment and anger for those involved. Also, involving third parties could result in significant delay in working past the issue and affect the potential of ensuring future interactions are productive.
- **Remain respectful and private**  
Shouting, verbal abuse, or physical confrontations are never warranted and will not be tolerated in the Girl Scout environment. Youth should not be present at adult resolution meetings.

## Conflict Resolution Process

### **LEVEL 1: Member-Led Conflict Resolution Process**

The Council encourages members to self-resolve conflict that **doesn't involve Girl Scout policy or guideline violation**. When you experience a conflict in Girl Scouts, be it caregiver/volunteer, volunteer/volunteer, or caregiver/caregiver, the parties involved should make an appointment to talk and work out a solution using these three steps:

#### **1. Attempt Self-Resolution**

The Council recommends the individuals involved in the conflict have a face-to-face conversation during which each party expresses their perspective of the conflict and how it impacted them. It is very important and beneficial to address conflict in person. Many times, one party is unaware of the concern or its affect on the other person.

#### **2. Invite an Unbiased Third Party to Join**

Invite your Service Unit Manager or other relevant member of the Service Unit or Association volunteer team to join you at the face-to-face discussion. This person may lend new perspective or ask questions not previously explored that may help all parties reach a solution. (Not sure who to contact? Email [customercare@gscnc.org](mailto:customercare@gscnc.org).)

The Service Unit team member will hear both parties out separately prior to the meeting and then bring them together. If you are one of the parties involved, try to put yourself in the other person's shoes and work together to uncover solutions that could result in mutual gain and have the best possible outcome for everyone. At this point, the staff Membership Specialist for your area should also be informed of the conflict. Involving a Service Unit team member is a required part of the process, prior to escalating the conflict to Level 2 and staff intervention.

#### **3. Decide on a Solution**

Explore a mutually agreeable solution to the issue(s) contributing to the conflict. It will be up to the individuals involved to determine if and how they continue working together. That agreement should be put in writing and signed by all parties involved. If the conflict is between co-leaders of the same troop, and they decide to no longer work together, it will be up to the volunteers to decide who will continue to lead and who may need to embark on a new journey. If leaders cannot agree who will stay, the Council encourages whomever is no longer interested in working with the other consider forming a new troop or joining another troop. Contact your Service Unit Registrar to update troop roles, if a change is made. The remaining troop leader is responsible for updating all troop information including the bank account.

*\*If a volunteer refuses to attend a face-to-face conflict resolution meeting, a decision may be made without their input in order to move forward towards a solution.*

## **LEVEL 2: Staff-Led Conflict Resolution Process**

If all previous steps above have been taken to resolve the situation informally, but the matter is still unresolved, the member or volunteer may escalate the conflict to the Council staff for intervention. Please note that although members are strongly urged to self-resolve conflict that doesn't involve Girl Scout policy violation, a conflict may be escalated to staff at any point in the process, if necessary. Staff also retain discretion to refer the conflict to the Service Unit Manager or appropriate Service Unit or Association Team Member.

You should either involve the Membership Manager responsible for volunteers in your community, or another staff Manager whose position is relevant to the specific type of conflict. (Not sure who to involve? Email [customercare@gscnc.org](mailto:customercare@gscnc.org).)

1. When escalating a conflict to the appropriate staff manager, you must first complete the “**Level 2 Conflict Report.**” This form will require you to describe, in detail, the nature of the problem, all youth and adult members who have been impacted and the attempts you have already made to resolve the issue. This report will be assigned to the appropriate manager to begin the review process.
2. If an acceptable solution is still not found, the case will escalate to the DEIA Manager who oversees Conflict Resolution. A final decision about the conflict should be made during this step. It is the DEIA Manager’s responsibility to ensure that any decisions or follow up steps are implemented. To begin this process, email [deia@gscnc.org](mailto:deia@gscnc.org).
3. If the problem you’re having concerns a staff member, email [deia@gscnc.org](mailto:deia@gscnc.org) directly to submit at case.

## **Conflict Resolution Cases**

Council staff's primary concern is to ensure the safety and well-being of members. Within two business days of a Level 2 Conflict Report being received, the relevant staff manager or DEIA manager will begin the resolution/mediation process. Staff will first ensure that no parties involved in the conflict have violated Girl Scout policy or procedures.

- **Discovery Conversations**

The DEIA Manager will contact involved parties by phone with the goal of allowing each party to share their perspective on the situation. During these communications, the staff person will inquire about each party's desired outcome.

- **Face-To-Face Mediation**

If appropriate and agreed upon by both parties, the DEIA Manager may arrange a face-to-face mediation. The goal of mediation is to encourage the two primary parties to sit down together with a staff mediator to discuss how they will work together moving forward. Following the mediation, the staff person will provide to both parties a written summary of the agreed upon outcome.

- **Recommended Course of Action**

If mediation does not occur or fails, the Council staff will recommend a course of action. The recommended course of action will take into account information learned during the discovery conversations, as well as which actions will minimize negative impacts to adult and youth.

## **Possible Outcome**

In rare cases, volunteer(s) may be released from their position(s) if determined to be the best course of action. Youth members cannot be removed from a troop without due process

## **Confidentiality**

As Council staff seeks to resolve issues brought to our attention, we ask the member(s) who submitted the form to respect the privacy of all involved by not communicating to parties not involved and not using social media to discuss the issue(s). In adherence with the Girl Scout Law, a member should also not need to be concerned about retribution, as all volunteers should “be a sister to every Girl Scout,” even in the midst of conflict.

Appropriate time will be needed for staff to gather information and speak with necessary parties to aid in the resolution process. This process may include:

- phone calls
- emails
- in-person meetings with parties involved
- interviewing witnessing parties
- involvement of other Council departments, such as Membership, Finance or Product Program, as needed.

The Council staff member investigating the conflict will act as an impartial mediator. They will support all parties in creating a mutually-agreed upon plan of action that outlines expectations for each party's future behavior with regard to the source of conflict. In the absence of a mutual agreement, the Council staff member will work to establish a fair and balanced course of action. Should resolution fail after Council staff mediation, other actions may be considered including the release from volunteer appointment of one or both parties involved. This decision will not be made lightly and due process will be followed to inform and prepare the volunteer for that outcome.

A volunteer may have their appointment terminated by the Council because of, but not limited to:

- Refusal to comply with Girl Scouts Nation’s Capital or GSUSA policies
- Conduct inconsistent with the principles of the Girl Scout Movement as indicated by the Girl Scout Promise and Law
- Inability to perform or fulfill duties of the position as outlined in the Volunteer Position Description
- Unsatisfactory completion of objectives and corrective action regarding their role
- Refusal or failure to adhere to Council financial guidelines
- Status as a registered sex offender or convicted of crimes against a child

Council staff will focus on defined resolution actions that are specific, achievable, comprehensive, and final. The solution will include an evaluation process and subsequent actions for non-compliance. In all resolutions, Girl Scouts Nation’s Capital will keep our youth members in the forefront of the decision-making process.