

GSDAOT values inclusiveness and is committed to serving a diverse membership that reflects the girl population of communities in the council's jurisdiction.

Girl Scouts embraces girls of all abilities, backgrounds, and heritage, with a specific and positive philosophy of inclusion that benefits everyone. Each girl—without regard to socioeconomic status, race, physical or cognitive ability, ethnicity, primary language, or religion—is an equal and valued member of the group, and groups reflect the diversity of the community.

### **What is “inclusion?”**

Inclusion is “an attitude and approach that seeks to ensure that every person regardless of ability or background can meaningfully participate in all aspects of life.” It also involves making reasonable or respectful accommodations that allow persons with disabilities access to learning, recreation, leisure and work.

### **Why is Inclusion important?**

- About 50 million Americans have some form of disability
- 75% of youth have hidden disabilities

### **In addition, inclusion:**

- Upholds civil rights
- Promotes acceptance
- Embraces differences
- Welcomes all
- Requires flexibility
- Facilitates relationships



Girls will learn about inclusion through the three keys to leadership present in every Girl Scout Leadership Experience: Discover, Connect, and Take Action.

### **What are “hidden disabilities?”**

Hidden, or invisible, disabilities are certain kinds of disabilities that are not immediately apparent to others. This definition encompasses neurological and mental disorders, as well as chronic illness. In children, this would include ADHD, epilepsy, severe food allergies, autism spectrum disorders, brain injuries, and more.

### Did you know...?

Juliette Gordon Low, founder of Girl Scouts, suffered from severe hearing loss.

An experimental treatment for a severe ear infection caused her to become deaf in one ear at age 25. When Juliette was 26, a grain of rice became lodged in her ear on her wedding day and the eardrum of her good ear was punctured when doctors removed it. However, she refused to be marginalized for this disability and her own experiences helped her frame Girl Scouts as an institution free from discrimination. This attitude of inclusion persists to this day.

### Inclusion Etiquette in Girl Scout Settings

- First and foremost, treat everyone with dignity and respect.
- Focus on the individual as a person first, regardless of ability, background, race, ethnicity or culture.
- Provide a welcoming attitude – children of all ages can sense whether they are welcome or not.
- Practice flexibility – acknowledge individual differences of the girls in our programs by considering the various energy levels, interests, skills, and plan activities accordingly.

The adult companions to almost every National Leadership Journey also include useful information on welcoming girls with disabilities under the heading “Health, Safety, and Well-Being.”

### Say

She has a learning disability.

She has a developmental delay.

She uses a wheelchair.

### Instead of

She is learning disabled.

She is mentally retarded; she is slow

She is wheelchair-bound.

When interacting with a girl (or parent/guardian) with a disability, consider these final tips:

- When talking to a girl with a disability, speak directly to her, not through a parent/guardian or friend.
- It's okay to offer assistance to a girl with a disability, but wait until your offer is accepted before you begin to help. Listen closely to any instructions the person may have.
- Leaning on a girl's wheelchair is invading her space and is considered annoying and rude.
- When speaking to a girl who is deaf and using an interpreter, speak to the girl, not to the interpreter.
- When speaking for more than a few minutes to a girl who uses a wheelchair, place yourself at eye level.
- When greeting a girl with a visual disability, always identify yourself and others. You might say, "Hi, it's Sheryl. Tara is on my right, and Chris is on my left."

### **Registering Girls with Cognitive Disabilities**

Girls with cognitive disabilities can be registered as closely as possible to their chronological ages. They wear the uniform of that grade level. Make any adaptations for the girl to ongoing activities of the grade level to which the group belongs. Young women with cognitive disorders may choose to retain their girl membership through their 21st year, and then move into an adult membership category.

**To learn more about disabilities and inclusion, visit:**

American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), <http://www.aapd.com>

American Disability Association (ADA), <http://www.adanet.org>

Kids Included Together (KIT), <http://kitonline.org>

**Want to read about how Girl Scouts across the country are working to include girls of all abilities? Visit:**

[http://www.girlscouts.org/news/stories/2005/gs\\_abilities\\_vary.asp](http://www.girlscouts.org/news/stories/2005/gs_abilities_vary.asp)