

What Girl Scout Leadership Looks Like in Times of Disaster

The Girl Scout Leadership Experience is all about helping girls be leaders in their daily lives while preparing them for future leadership roles in every walk of life.

These tips are for Girl Scout staff and volunteers. Use them to appropriately guide girls who want to know how they can help after a disaster.

Share the girl-friendly tip sheet, “What Can a Girl Scout Do When Disaster Strikes?,” which you can download from www.girlscouts.org/support/disaster_relief.asp

Talk About the Framework

Three Categories of Effort

Help girls understand that there are three basic things they can do to assist locally or globally:

1. Offer a thoughtful, immediate response
2. Prepare for disasters and help others prepare, too
3. Change the world

Offer a Thoughtful, Immediate Response

We all want to be helpful when we hear about emergencies, and sometimes that gets us racing to collect material items and food and drop them off somewhere. If you have ever been on the other end of “somewhere,” you know the added work that can be caused by sorting, organizing, and distributing loads of “stuff” that may or may not be useful. Emergency and relief workers say that managing the “stuff” can sometimes get in the way of higher-priority efforts.

Offer a Thoughtful, Immediate Response (cont'd)

Learning and Leading Tips

When girls are interested in how they can help in times of disaster, let them know they are acting like philanthropists! Take the opportunity to make it a “learning and leading” experience by talking girls through these tips:

- Tip 1:** A “philanthropist” always knows why help is needed and can communicate the need to others! Ask girls to start by imagining a girl their age who lives in an area affected by the disaster. Maybe her family no longer has a home, or her Girl Scout group has no place to meet right now, or the camp she loves has been damaged. What would that feel like? This exercise helps girls build empathy and visualize what a girl in that situation would need.
- Tip 2:** Read newspaper articles, go online, or watch television reports about the disaster. Why do people need help—have they lost homes, power, heat? This exercise helps girls learn to assess community needs.
- Tip 3:** Check out www.girlscouts.org and ForGirls.girlscouts.org. What is the Girl Scout mission? How does Girl Scouting encourage a sense of sisterhood?
- Tip 4:** Finally, brainstorm ways to thank people who pitched in to help. Let girls know that philanthropists always do that, too!

Prepare for Disasters and Help Others Prepare, Too

No matter where your council is located, you can help girls from Daisy through Ambassador realize how they can develop thoughtful preparedness efforts specific to their region and share them with others.

This is what it means when we talk about girls achieving outcomes like identifying community needs, resourceful problem solving, and educating and inspiring others.

Practicing these skills and educating others can even offer girls a sense of security and power in the face of what might be feeling like an uncertain future.

Change the World

Think about it: We are creating the next generation of leaders, who will be stewards of our fragile planet and can use their skills to change our world for the better! Get girls thinking big; that's the first step to changing the world. But a big idea is not enough. Girls need to develop thoughtful plans, network with others, and take action to make their big ideas a reality. When girls think big, they learn to identify needs, network with others, and develop plans to address them in smart and sustainable ways.

Hearing about disasters can spur girls' concerns and interests in making a real difference.

Unsure how to start with the girls? Use the following table of *Select Examples from the National Leadership Program Portfolio* to see how girls' experiences in Girl Scouting can be channeled toward disaster relief and preparedness efforts in times of disaster and otherwise.

Select Examples from the National Leadership Program Portfolio (NPP)*

NPP Resource

Leadership Journeys

Girls earn leadership awards while identifying community needs, connecting with others, and developing a thoughtful plan to address one aspect of an issue of concern to them.

While each of the Leadership Journey series will help girls learn to Take Action, the *It's Your Planet—Love It!* series is particularly geared toward helping girls protect the planet and its precious resources.

Highest Awards

Think of Journeys as girls' "training wheels" for Taking Action. Once girls have taken a Journey, they can go for their Bronze, Silver, or Gold awards and learn the process of developing a Highest Award plan. This process allows girls to select a topic they care deeply about and lead their community forward in a sustainable way.

Preparedness and Education

Start a Brownie Brainstorm and get girls thinking about places in their community that might need the Brownie Action Team's preparedness efforts (*Brownie Quest Girl Book*, page 66). Use the "Flying into Action" Checklist (*Brownie Quest Adult Guide*, page 71) to identify situations in which their help is most needed and a plan to educate others. Brownies could:

- Put on a play for their schools about staying safe during a storm.
- Make a list for a local animal shelter of food supplies that are needed for pets during a natural disaster.

A Bronze Award Project Plan could focus on:

- Helping a local nursery school develop student identification cards for use in an evacuation plan.

A Silver Award Project Plan could focus on:

- Delivering family education workshops to help families in the community develop their emergency-response plans.

Changing the World

Cadettes on the *Breathe* Leadership Journey could earn their Alert Award by educating and inspiring their community on the impacts of changes in air quality that occur following a local or global natural disaster. Use the tips in the *Breathe* Adult Guide (page 64) to help girls identify who they need to mobilize to become more aware of air-quality issues and an action step they can give to others that will have a significant impact on their community.

A Gold Award Project Plan could focus on:

- Developing a sustainable plan for repairing a coastline in their community or region that is eroding due to weather-related disaster or climate change.

*These are just some examples. Encourage the girls to come up with their own.

Select Examples from the National Leadership Program Portfolio (NPP)*

NPP Resource

Make Your Own Badges

Make Your Own Badges offer girls the unique opportunity to develop their own plan for learning a specific skill. When the news raises an issue to national concern, girls can respond by creating their own plan to learn a skill they think will be helpful.

Safety Awards

These awards help girls stay safe in their daily lives and anywhere along their adventures in Girl Scouting.

Global Action Awards

Disasters can strike near or far from home. The Global Action Awards, including the World Thinking Day Award, give girls the opportunity to learn about serious issues, like natural disasters, and consider how they affect girls, women, and communities. In earning these awards, girls are joining an international movement of 10 million girls who will change the world.

Preparedness and Education

Help girls brainstorm how they can learn the skill they want to by identifying:

- Local experts to talk with
- Books to read
- Classes to take

Then, help girls network within the community to develop a solid learning plan.

Brownies could:

- Develop plans with their families to make sure they have enough food, water, and medical supplies on hand to last at least three days in case of a natural disaster.

Cadettes could:

- Identify the natural disasters that are most common in their area and develop plans to prepare their community.

For the World Thinking Day Award, a Junior could:

- Investigate how childhood illnesses can develop and spread from contaminated water following a natural disaster. She could then develop an online fact and tip sheet about water safety and disease prevention to share.

For the Global Action Award, a Senior could:

- Explore the various causes and effects of hurricanes around the world and educate other girls about useful region-specific preparedness efforts.

Changing the World

Encourage girls to use the skills gained through their Make Your Own Badges activities when they are developing Take Action projects.

Encourage girls to use the skills gained through their Safety Award activities when they are developing Take Action projects.

Encourage girls to use the skills gained through their Global Action Award activities when they are developing Take Action projects.

*These are just some examples. Encourage the girls to come up with their own.

No matter how you are engaging girls in the aftermath of a disaster, here are some things to keep in mind:

- Know the difference between Community Service and Take Action projects. Some people think of it this way. Community Service is helping others... it comes from our hearts. Take Action projects involve understanding and addressing the roots of a problem...it comes from our hearts *and* our heads. The world needs both! Learn more at ForGirls.girlscouts.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/VTEE-D-4_CommunityAndServiceLearning.pdf.
- Remember to keep girls' experiences Girl Led! When girls lead a project, they develop confidence, satisfaction, pride, and skills they can apply when leading in the future. For more information on how to engage girls, go to bit.ly/XZQ3De.
- Encourage girls to share their Take Action projects on Map It! This interactive online tool allows girls to share their stories and be inspired by others. For more information, visit ForGirls.girlscouts.org/map-it-girls-changing-the-world.
- Educate, don't decorate! We know girls love getting badges and patches, but that's not the end goal of Girl Scouting. It can take the focus off of helping girls understand how to be a true leader in the time of disaster—developing empathetic, thoughtful, and effective responses. Girl Scouting already has a whole ladder of leadership awards. There is no need to create new activities tied to new awards in the face of disaster.

Program departments across the country can help girls and their volunteers understand how their leadership efforts and community projects tie in to the National Leadership Experience—girls acting together to change the world.