

## **USA Girl Scouts Overseas Inclusion Guidance Regarding Gender and Sexuality**

### **Introduction**

*USA Girl Scouts Overseas* (USAGSO) believes all Girl Scout members should be able to have a safe and welcoming experience, and this belief is deeply rooted in the Girl Scout Promise and Law. This guidance document is designed to support and celebrate the work USAGSO volunteers do every day to create inclusive and welcoming spaces. It provides language and guidance for creating safe and inclusive spaces, and we hope it makes clear our stance on gender inclusion. We believe all members thrive when they feel a sense of belonging, and we know how important the Girl Scout experience is to so many young people. It is important to our organization that our members feel they can bring their best and authentic selves to Girl Scouts-- knowing they will be welcomed by everyone who carries the Promise and Law in their hearts. This guidance is inspired by the amazing youth and adults throughout our overseas Girl Scout community, with the intent to help our members and partners as we continue making the world a better, more inclusive, place.

### **Program Eligibility**

Girl Scouts was created as a space where girls can learn to work together, learn together, and grow together in ways that historically had been reserved for men and boys. Our understanding of gender has evolved and will continue to shift, but we also wish to honor the integrity of the space we have built to help our members become the leaders of tomorrow. To achieve this goal, we acknowledge that not all people will be eligible for membership. We do not make this decision lightly, and our program eligibility is deeply rooted in our mission.

- Youth Membership
  - USAGSO welcomes all girls to join the Girl Scout movement regardless of gender assigned at birth or sexual orientation. Additionally, there will be no rules that single out girls based on their gender assigned at birth, gender identity or sexuality.
  - While the focus of the organization will remain centered on girls and women, we also know non-binary adults and young people may find belonging at

USAGSO. In the case that a non-binary youth wishes to join USAGSO, every attempt will be made to:

- place them in a troop that will welcome them or
- connect them to our Worldwide Juliette Network so they can join as an Individually Registered Member (IRM).
- When hosting Girl Scout events that are open to non-member participants, participation should be open to the local community regardless of gender identity.
- Some youth members may begin to explore or question their gender identity after joining Girl Scouts. We honor these members by allowing them to choose whether their participation in USAGSO is still a good fit. At no time will we disallow a current member to continue based on gender identity if they still feel USAGSO is a safe space where they can grow.
- Adult participation
  - Eligible adults, regardless of gender identity, sexuality, race, religion or creed, who agree to uphold the promise and law of Girl Scouts can join.
  - Volunteer roles are subject to background checks and training.

## **Caregiver Communication**

### *Non-disclosure of troop members' gender identity or sexuality*

In keeping with our values of safety and respect, we will honor everyone's right to privacy as it pertains to their gender identity and/or sexuality. Caregivers will not be notified if a transgender or non-binary Girl Scout or troop leader is placed in a troop or group with their child. Private information of any kind must be shared only when relevant or necessary (i.e., It is inappropriate to share sensitive information from a Girl Scout's health form with anyone other than those who need to know the information for the safety and wellbeing of that Girl Scout.)

As troop leaders and community volunteers work to create a safe, inclusive space for all members, youth members may begin to feel comfortable sharing sensitive information about their own gender or sexuality. If a member feels their troop or community is a safe space for declarations regarding gender identity or sexual orientation, it is USAGSO's expectation that this type of personal information will remain within that safe space. At no time should the troop leader or staff member report such sensitive information to individuals or entities outside that safe space including, but not limited to, other volunteers or members, parents, caregivers, schools, etc.

### *Reporting of Safety Concerns*

All attempts or declarations of self-harm, abuse or harm to others will be reported, along with the specific details of the incident, in accordance with USAGSO's mandated reporting requirements, which can be found within [Volunteer Essentials](#) (page 42). However, if this disclosure is made alongside a discussion regarding gender or sexuality, we always will honor the privacy of the individual regarding their gender identity or sexuality, and that information remains confidential.

## **Facilities, Trips and Overnights**

USAGSO understands the need for privacy for all our members and community participants regardless of their gender assigned at birth or gender identity. We know when Girl Scouts are respectful of others' boundaries and have appropriate supervision, they can be safe in any space.

- USAGSO has curated this list of best practices to keep vulnerable spaces (i.e., shower stall, toilets and changing areas) safe for all members of all ages:
  - Members and community participants will be allowed to use the vulnerable space that best aligns with their gender identity without question.
  - Public nudity is prohibited. (Exceptions may be made for family members in private family quarters.)
  - Vulnerable spaces will be designated as single occupancy. For spaces with only a single toilet and/or shower stall, each group will be responsible for making a schedule that maintains privacy and single occupancy of the space.
  - All members and community participants should have an orientation to the space that outlines these practices.
  - A suggested space orientation for your troop is [linked here](#).

### **Sleeping for Overnight Trips:**

- On overnight trips, all members and community participants will have their own sleeping bag or bedding, bed, mattress, cot, etc. If individual youth are to share a bed, caregiver permission must be obtained in advance.
- Youth and adults should never share a bed. (Exceptions may be made for family members in private sleeping quarters.)
- Any member who is eligible for the program (see Program Eligibility) will not be subject to unique restrictions when it comes to overnight trips.
  - All youth members of USAGSO and eligible program participants regardless of gender, gender assigned at birth, sexuality, race etc) may share sleeping quarters. Division and organization of sleeping areas should be based on program level, troop, or program group, not gender, race, or any protected class.

- It is not mandatory that an adult sleep in the sleeping area (tent, cabin, or designated area) with the youth members as adult volunteers can monitor safety by patrolling the sleeping areas in shifts. It is the recommendation of USAGSO that whenever possible, youth and adults should have separate sleeping areas.
  - If an adult woman (regardless of gender assigned at birth or sexuality) does share a sleeping area with youth members, there always should be two unrelated adult women assigned to the sleeping area, and both adults must have an active USAGSO membership and a current background check on record.
  - An adult man (regardless of gender assigned at birth or sexuality) or non-binary adults will have a separate sleeping area from youth members. (Exceptions may be made for family camping when using single family sleeping quarters.)
- All adult women will follow the same sleeping procedures determined by a troop or community, and those procedures should be consistent with the guidelines for safe sleeping arrangements outlined in this document.
- All Girl Scouts should have an orientation to their sleeping space that includes respecting others' privacy and boundaries.

## **Gender Expression**

USAGSO believes there is no "right way" to be a girl and encourages all members to be themselves. Girl Scouts generally may wear whatever makes them comfortable, and for uniformed events, members always will be allowed creativity within the GSUSA uniform standards, which have been created to maximize individual expression. For fancy or formal events, members should always be allowed non-dress options that make them feel like their best self. USAGSO believes when members can express themselves in ways that make them feel good, they are more likely to be successful.

## **Names and Pronouns**

USAGSO adult members who engage in frontline work with Girl Scouts should provide a space for them to share the names and pronouns that make them feel the safest.

No members—adult or youth—will ever be required to share their pronouns if they feel unsafe to do so. Members will be expected to respect and use the names and pronouns that correspond with how each Girl Scout introduces themselves to the best of their ability.

Girl Scouts has a long history of allowing youth members to choose a nickname that makes them feel like their best self, and although chosen names are not the same as nicknames, we do believe calling someone by the name they prefer to be called is an important sign of respect. All Girl Scouts will be allowed to use the name and pronouns they determine while in the Girl Scout program. [The Trevor Project National Survey](#) on mental health shows that transgender and non-binary youths' likelihood of suicide is nearly cut in half when their pronouns are respected by adults in their lives.

All members of the USAGSO community are expected to make every effort to use the correct name and pronoun for each member of the community. Direct, intentional disregard of someone's name or pronouns will be addressed as bullying and will not be tolerated as this is a breach of the Girl Scout Promise and Law.

### **Addressing Bullying**

Bullying based on sexuality or gender identity will be handled in alignment with USAGSO guidance on bullying. In no case will a Girl Scout be allowed to intentionally misgender or speak disparagingly about other Girl Scouts' gender or sexuality.

### **Conflict Surrounding These Guidelines**

Through the establishment of these guidelines, it should be clear that actions of USAGSO staff, volunteers and adult members must be girl centered and support the safety and mental health of our youth members. Interventions taken to address conflict must be in line with the youth members' wishes and preserve their mental and physical safety.

If there are questions about the ways to safely implement these guidelines, we encourage you to reach out to your membership manager. It is the responsibility of volunteers on the ground to create the safe, inclusive space detailed in this document, and your USAGSO team is here to provide the support and resources you need. Inclusion is an essential part of the Girl Scout Promise and Law, and we see this set of guidelines as the operationalization of our long-standing values.

### **Addendum**

Resource Information

<https://welcomingschools.org/?fbclid=IwAR2eA-70JjBCpjVWVX214COV0khwmvLsKOz8LlnnQgqhyzTEU83Nn1rQ-5Q>