

Working with Girl Assistants

Guider Support Document

Who are Girl Assistants?

Girl Assistants are girl members (Guide, Pathfinder, or Ranger-aged girls) who assist Guiders in units at least two branches below them. For example, a Guide-aged assistant can only assist a Spark Unit; a Ranger-aged assistant can assist in a Guide, Brownie, or Spark unit.



Girl Assistants may be:

- Registered as Guides, Pathfinders or Rangers;
- Girls 9 to 17 years old who are not registered with a unit in their branch. They are registered in the unit in which they are assisting. They can participate in all Guiding activities (camps, international trips, etc.) suitable for their age group;
- Bridging members who work with a unit until they become of age in their province, at which time they register as an adult member and complete the screening process.

Girl Assistants under 16 are counted as girls for ratio purposes. For Green Level activities, Girl Assistants 16 years of age or older (but under the provincial/territorial age of majority) who are assisting with Sparks, Brownies, or Guides, count as a supervisor for the calculation of ratios in addition to the two adult supervisors who must be present.

Meeting Girl Assistants Where They Are At

Adolescence is a time of transition and is one of the most rapid phases of human development. This period of life is associated with specific physical, cognitive, emotional, and social change. It is also a time for girls to build their skills and knowledge, learn to manage emotions and relationships, and develop attributes and abilities that will be important for navigating the adolescent years and transitioning into adult roles.

When you are working with girls who are taking on leadership roles it's helpful to be aware of some features of these developmental phases, while recognizing that every girl is different.

If the Girl Assistant is

- aged 9-11, check out **All About the Branch: Guides**
- aged 12-14, check out **All About the Branch: Pathfinders**
- aged 15-17, check out **All About the Branch: Rangers**

Supporting a Girl Assistant

Getting Started

A girl wants to become a Girl Assistant with your unit – now what? Here are some suggested first steps:

- Confirm: Is she a member of Girl Guides?
- Have an initial conversation** to make sure you have heard and understood what she wants to get out of the Girl Assistant role and let her know how she can best support the unit. Discuss your expectations about number of meetings she will attend and general responsibilities. Ongoing conversations will help ensure the Girl Assistant is feeling challenged, included, and that she is

contributing in a meaningful way. They will also help identify any areas that she may need support with.

- Make sure she is registered with your unit as the Girl Assistant.
- Does she participate in a unit at her own branch level? If so (and if it's okay with her), contact her Unit Guider. It's great if you can be in touch throughout the year to support the Girl Assistant in ways that are meaningful to her.

Tips for a Successful Year

- Introduce the Girl Assistant to your unit – reinforce that she is an important part of the leadership team. Help the girls in your unit understand her role and purpose in the group.
- Schedule regular check-ins to reflect on how things are going and your future plans.
- Keep practicing the five pillars of the girl-driven approach and support your Girl Assistant in learning them too! Read below to learn about how to be a girl-driven unit and check out the *Girl-Driven Guiding Checklist* for more helpful information.

Creating a Safe Space

Creating a safe space in your unit can help a Girl Assistant learn and grow, explore her identity, and practice using her voice. Safe space enables all girls to feel included and provides a sense of belonging.

When in a safe space, girls:

- Feel supported, respected, and able to be themselves
- Can be silly and have fun without feeling self-conscious
- Explore their values and perspectives knowing they will be taken seriously
- Share personal stories and emotional experiences without feeling judged
- Are willing to try new things, make mistakes and take risks

Safe space is about more than what we say and do – it is our way of being that matters most. In the end, safe space is about trustworthy relationships. As a Guider, you can work to create a safe space by developing certain capacities and skills. Take the *Safe and Inclusive Space* online training course to learn more.

Here are some important practices to keep in mind:

Practices	
Listen with empathy	Girls learn best in welcoming spaces. Listening with openness and compassion helps girls feel understood and cared for.
Ask open, honest questions	Open, honest questions are open-ended and don't contain hidden advice. Instead of jumping to advising, fixing or correcting, ask questions that help girls explore their own perspectives and choices more deeply.
Make participation voluntary	It's hard to feel safe if your participation is coerced. We can offer encouragement and support to ensure all girls have the space to participate, but ultimately, we are wise to remember that every girl grows and learns in a different way.
Challenge stereotypes	Guiders need to challenge stereotypes and step in whenever inappropriate remarks and behaviours occur. They should always strive to speak and act from a neutral perspective without bias, judgment or prejudice.
Observe confidentiality	Outside of safety concerns, all girls should trust that their stories and experiences stay with the people with whom they chose to share them.

From *Creating a Safe Space*, Guider Resource on Member Zone

Encouraging Growth Mindset

When girls have a growth mindset, they believe their abilities can be developed through hard work and dedication. They embrace challenges and are totally up for learning new things. Promote growth mindset in Girl Assistants by:

- helping them to step out of their comfort zone, take risks, explore new skills, and focus on process versus achievement;
- giving positive feedback that focuses on their effort, choices, and strategies rather than their abilities and talents;
- praising them for their passion, grit, determination, and hard work instead of personal attributes (like how good at something they are);
- offering constructive feedback to help them grow and improve in ways that matter to them.

Developing Positive Identity

Positive identity is about challenging stereotypes of what girls and young women can and can't do. Guiders play a critical role in helping girls explore their interests, overcome barriers, and find their unique voices. Support a positive identity in Girl Assistants by:

- helping them feel that they matter and their ideas matter. Recognize that girls are the experts on their own lives; they bring valuable and unique expertise and perspectives to the table;
- giving opportunities to take on leadership tasks that stretch their abilities and confidence. Respect the opinions, ideas, and skills that Girl Assistants have to offer;
- seeing yourself as a role model – Girl Assistants can learn a lot from watching how you work with younger girls and demonstrate your skills in facilitation and leadership. Working with you will help strengthen positive identity.



Sharing Leadership

Shared leadership means Girl Assistants are active members of the leadership team – they make decisions, help plan unit meetings, and lead activities. Shared leadership is also about working as a team and sharing responsibilities with the other girls and Guiders in the unit. The first step to sharing leadership is building authentic, supportive relationships.

What are some ways to build shared leadership practices with co-Guiders and the Girl Assistant?

Get to know each other:

Everyone has unique strengths, skills and lived experiences. Take time to get to know your unit's Girl Assistant and ensure she has opportunities to work with girls in ways that draw on her areas of strength and interest while also balancing opportunities for her to develop and grow.

Discuss how you'll share responsibilities:

At the beginning of the Guiding year, include Girl Assistants when you connect with co-Guiders to discuss how you will divide responsibilities throughout the year. Sharing duties can reduce stress and help everyone to feel included. For instance, once you or a co-Guider creates a meeting on the platform, ask the Girl Assistant to build the meeting plan using favourites from your unit!

Plan ahead for how you'll facilitate together:

Decide who will do what when facilitating activities in the unit meeting. For example, who will prepare the materials, introduce and explain the activity, keep an eye on time, and respond to girls who are disengaged? Talking about this ahead of time will keep you from stepping on each other's toes.

Think about when to step in and when to step back:

Sometimes it's hard to know when to step in and support a Girl Assistant (or even a co-Guider), and when to step back and let her have a learning experience, even when it's hard. A good guideline is to communicate clearly and ask: "Do you need anything? What can I help with?" instead of assuming she needs you to take over. Even with the best of intentions, stepping in can sometimes communicate that it isn't a safe space to try new things, take risks and (sometimes) make mistakes.

Here are a few scenarios – think about how you might respond to each one and *ask the Girl Assistant* how she would like you to respond.

- The Girl Assistant is leading an activity and it's not exactly going as planned. The experiment isn't really working, and girls are starting to get frustrated or lose their focus.
- The Girl Assistant is responsible for planning an upcoming unit meeting and preparing all the materials. She hasn't mentioned how it's going and you're not sure if she has had time to do all the required tasks. You're a bit worried she might not be prepared for the meeting.
- A Spark in the unit meeting is not paying attention to the activity, she's chatting with her neighbours while others are sharing, and keeps leaning and sitting on her friend. The Girl Assistant is sitting nearby and is trying to intervene to help the Spark follow the unit guidelines and re-engage in the activity, but the Spark is not listening to her.

Sharing leadership isn't away easy, but it's totally worth it when we can build and improve on skills for working collaboratively!

Engaging with Community

Guiding encourages girls to care about and meaningfully engage with their communities – within and beyond Guiding. You can support Girl Assistants with this by respecting them as an important part of the Guiding community and encouraging them to apply for other leadership opportunities—like joining committees and councils—if they are interested. For older Girl Assistants, be open and willing to support their bridging into adult membership.



Giving Feedback and Encouraging Reflection

Ongoing communication plays a major role in developing a growth mindset and leadership skills. The leadership team, including the Girl Assistant, should regularly reflect on what’s happening in the unit meetings – both future planning and reflecting on past accomplishments and progress.

As a group, you might discuss:

- ✓ What were some successes? What went well?
- ✓ What can I/we do differently next time?
- ✓ What is one thing I/we can learn from today?
- ✓ What are some questions I/we have?

Asking open questions and giving constructive feedback are both ways to promote growth and learning. When giving feedback, it should be done with compassion, respect, and with the goal of helping the recipient improve.

Tips for Giving Feedback¹

Be descriptive, not judgemental:

Refer to what happened, not whether it was right or wrong or good or bad. You might say “At times, you were speaking so softly it was hard to hear what you were saying” rather than “you’re a poor public speaker”.

Give feedback on actions in a specific situation, not in the abstract:

You might say “When we were trying to plan just now, you were looking out the window and seemed to be thinking of something else” rather than “You do not listen to other people”.

Focus feedback on the “here and now” not the “there and then”:

The more immediate the feedback, the more helpful it is. Instead of saying “last week, you didn’t answer my question”, you might say “I just asked a question and you didn’t respond. Is something wrong?”

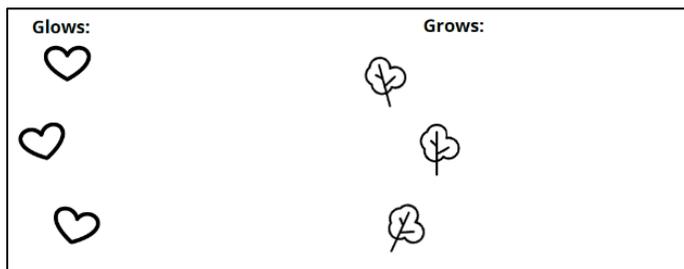
Give feedback at appropriate times:

Don’t force feedback on people – feedback should help the receiver not the giver. If someone isn’t ready to hear it—if they’re upset, distracted, or defensive—it’s not the right time.

Focus feedback on actions that the person can change:

Make sure you’re giving feedback about actions or behaviours that can be changed rather than an aspect of who they are as a person.

Verbal reflection and feedback don’t work for everyone all the time, so think of different ways you can help a Girl Assistant reflect and set goals.



Here’s one example: invite a Girl Assistant to write down for herself some “Glows” (things that went well) and “Grows” (areas for growth or improvement in the future):

Reflection and communication lead to improved skills and stronger relationships and team dynamics, so make sure to create time for this!

¹Reference: Johnson, D. W. (2014). *Reaching out: Interpersonal effectiveness and self-actualization* (1st ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.

Recognizing Girl Assistant Experience

Girl Assistants can earn the ***Girl Assistant Certificate of Appreciation*** which recognizes her commitment to the leadership of a unit over the course of a year. To qualify, she must actively assist in at least 50% of the unit's meetings and be actively involved in planning meetings. You can find this certificate on Member Zone.

Awards

Girl Assistants can use their experience to earn awards:

Guides

The Lady Baden-Powell Award

- Part C involves taking on a leadership role in the delivery of a unit meeting, event, outing, or special project with your own or a younger branch.
- Part D invites girls to share their experiences and memories of Guides with their own unit, a younger branch, or a group of friends from outside Guiding.

Pathfinders

Community Service Award

- Girls can complete these projects with the younger unit they volunteer with.

Canada Cord Award

- Part 4 involves girls participating in bridging activities with Rangers and younger girls.
- Part 5 invites girls to learn about first aid. This part of the award can be completed through running activities with younger girls.

Rangers

Ranger Service Project

- This project can be completed with the younger unit they volunteer with.

Cookie Campaign

- Girls can earn this award by supporting the cookie sales of their own unit or the younger unit they volunteer with.

Resources for Guiders and Girl Assistants

Here are some resources that may help you and the Girl Assistant navigate your year together!

- [The Guider Handbook](#)
- Youth Leadership information at www.girlguides.ca/GirlsLead
- [Girl Engagement Training \(working with girls on Committees and Councils\)](#)

You can also find a number of useful resources and e-courses related to safe space, inclusion, girls' development, and girl-driven engagement strategies in [Member Zone under Training](#).