



## Sensitive Issues Consent Form: Best Practices for GSNEO Volunteers

The [Sensitive Issues Consent Form](#) should be signed by parents/caregivers and girls BEFORE engaging in planned programs/discussions that may be considered sensitive in nature. We recommend erring on the side of caution- if you have to ask yourself “should we use this form?” the answer is most likely “yes!”

The Sensitive Issues Consent Form was developed for use with any socially/emotionally charged topics, which may be polarizing, for example:

- Adolescent pregnancy
  - Animal abuse
  - Bullying/cyberbullying
  - Child abuse
  - Cultural family values
  - Eating disorders
  - Emotional and physical safety
  - Girls’ access to education
  - Grief/loss
  - LGBTQ+ identity/issues
  - Mental health/self-harm/suicide
  - Politics
  - Puberty/menstruation
  - Racism/discrimination
  - Religious beliefs
  - Reproductive health
  - Sex/human trafficking
  - Sexting/internet safety
  - Sexually transmitted infections
  - Substance abuse
  - Violence against girls and women
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- Consider inviting an expert in the field to be a guest speaker (e.g., a medical professional to lead a discussion with girls about puberty/menstruation).
  - Use unbiased resources and avoid advocating a particular position- gather information from credible sources such as health departments, universities, hospices, and Girl Scouts’ [Raising Awesome Girls](#) blog. Contact your Community Membership Executive (CME) for assistance in identifying resources.
  - Both parent/caregiver AND girl should provide their consent to this discussion. Let girls lead the conversation when appropriate, and check in frequently to ensure that girls feel safe and comfortable.
  - Consult [Volunteer Essentials](#) “Understanding Healthy Development in Girls” for guidance on age appropriateness of topics (starting on page 13).For multi-level troops, exercise additional caution and consider breaking into smaller groups with caring adults facilitating discussion for each level.
  - Invite your service team to the program/discussion or ask for their help with preparation- you are not in this alone!
  - Parents/caregivers have a right to be informed and engaged in making decisions about

their Girl Scouts' participation- consider scheduling a family meeting to discuss the plan prior to distributing the form.

- If a parent/caregiver or girl does not provide consent to participate, consider what accommodations can be made so the girl does not feel excluded or different. Ask the parent/caregiver for suggestions- would a slight change in the proposed activity be acceptable? Does the parent/caregiver feel that they need to be present for the discussion? Could you schedule an extra meeting for the program, rather than asking the girl not to attend a regular meeting time?
- Per Volunteer Policies, if a sensitive topic is timely and volunteers find it crucial to address for the health and well-being of the troop (e.g., a girl starts her period at camp, and some of the girls are expressing fear or concern, or are sharing information), they may engage in a limited conversation and inform parents/caregivers as soon as possible. There is no black and white rule about when a conversation becomes too advanced and requires parent/caregiver permission, however, volunteers are expected to use their best judgement considering their relationship with the families, girls, and the context.
- Sometimes you will have foresight (for example, the troop has selected a sensitive issue for their Silver Award project and will be conducting research) and can prepare information in advance, distribute the Sensitive Issues Consent Form, etc. Other times, topics may come up organically, and you might find yourself unprepared to engage in the discussion or feel uncomfortable moving forward without parent/caregiver's being informed. Tone of voice (girls are hesitant or becoming hostile) and body language (girls are withdrawing or taking an aggressive stance) might be indicators that you should take a "pause" and reconvene after checking in with families. Here is some language that you can use if you find yourself in that situation:
  - Girls, I can see that some of you are more comfortable than others with this topic...
  - This topic has certainly made headline news, and people have strong feelings about it...
  - We all have different opinions and that is okay, we don't always have to agree, but we can still follow the Girl Scout Promise and Law...
  - Let's take a break and I will talk to your families before our next meeting- we can continue the discussion once I make sure they are okay with it.

### **Volunteer Policies: [Sensitive Issues](#)**

*Girl Scouts of the USA is a nonpartisan, nonpolitical organization, and does not take a position on or develop materials pertaining to sex education. Our role is to equip girls with the self-confidence and decision-making skills that will help them make wise choices in all areas of their lives. Parents/caregivers make all decisions regarding Girl Scout program participation that may be of a sensitive nature.*

*Volunteers agree to seek written parent/caregiver permission through the Sensitive Issues Consent Form prior to engaging in planned discussions or programs with girl members that may be considered sensitive (e.g. reproductive health, religious beliefs). If unplanned discussions of a potentially sensitive nature are brought up by girls, volunteers are encouraged to use their best judgement in determining whether the discussion can be postponed until parent/caregiver permission is received. If the topic is timely and volunteers find it crucial to address for the health and well-being of the troop (e.g. a girl starts her period at camp, and some of the girls are expressing fear or concern, or are sharing information), they may engage in a limited conversation and inform parents/caregivers as soon as possible.*

