

Guiding Conversations



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Girlguiding

Challenging behaviour in girls

Every Leader will face challenging behaviour from girls in their unit at some time, and it can have a negative effect on others in the unit. This kind of behaviour - anything from playing on a mobile phone to rudeness and swearing - can make running a unit meeting very difficult.

We asked Leaders from across the UK to complete a confidential survey about girls' behaviour and explain the challenges they face in their unit meetings. This *Guiding Conversation* was compiled using Leaders' knowledge of grassroots guiding to help discuss the best ways to tackle challenging behaviour. It gives an overview of why girls behave in challenging ways, top tips from experienced Leaders, links to resources and a printable strategy sheet to help new Leaders (and those who want some more guidance).

Questions are dotted throughout the resource, so pick and choose the ones you want to answer and get the conversations flowing.

Icebreaker activity

Play a word association game starting with 'behaviour' - no names allowed!

Top tip

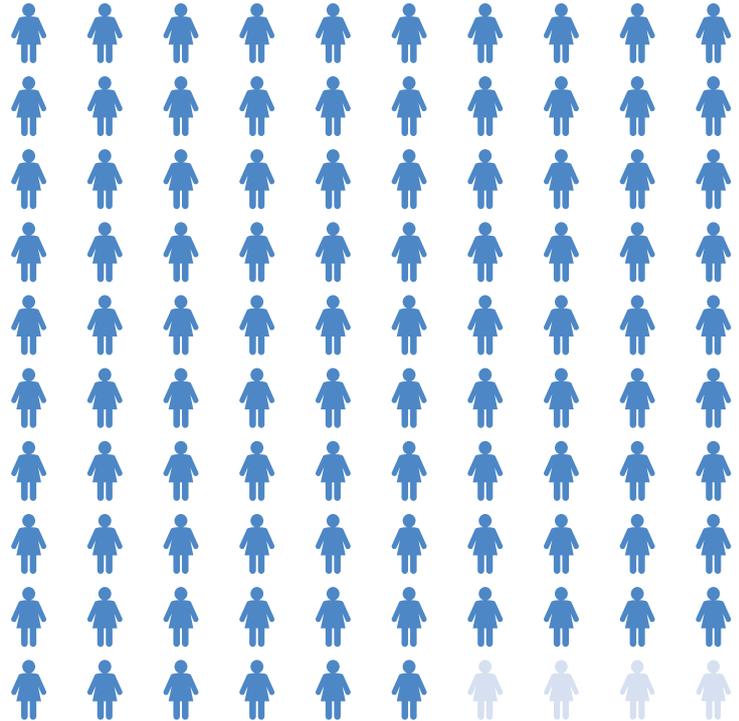
'Don't explain to (the girls) what is going to happen until everyone is listening... usually they tell each other to stop talking and listen!'

Top tip

'At the start of the year, have girls decide on some unit guidelines (make sure you include ones you want too). Write them on a large poster, get them to sign their names and display the poster somewhere all the girls can see it. Then, when a girl acts out, ask if she knows your unit guidelines (for example, no interrupting when a Leader talks) and give her a chance to stop. Keep these up to date and fresh in the girls' minds by reviewing regularly.'

Q) What forms of challenging behaviour can you think of? Remember to keep girls anonymous!

Of the Leaders who responded to our behaviour survey 96 per cent experienced girls not listening in the unit meeting.



Why do girls misbehave?

It is inevitable that some girls will misbehave from time to time, especially in a group environment, and this is a normal part of growing up. Factors outside guiding can have a big impact and you may notice that a girl's behaviour changes frequently. Although they're not always easy to spot, the following are just a few of the potential causes of challenging behaviour.

- Additional needs - some members with additional needs may find it difficult to cope with new or complicated situations.
- Problems outside guiding - a girl might exhibit challenging behaviour because of a lack of confidence or low self-esteem, caused by challenges at home or school.
- Confusion - girls may struggle to understand what is appropriate as they adapt to the different rules and expectations that exist in the unit, school and home.
- Boredom - girls may react negatively to activities they find less stimulating.

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- Phase of development (testing the boundaries) - as girls learn independence they may need to test the boundaries of acceptable behaviour.

Q) How would you manage problems with a girl who falls into each of these categories?

Top tip

'Make sure all the Leaders and helpers have the same expectations for the girls' behaviour - inconsistency can confuse the girls. Unit guidelines are a great way to do this.'

Top tip

'Make sure the girls always know who you're talking to by saying a name at the beginning of a sentence, rather than at the end.'

Ongoing challenging behaviours

Of course, sometimes you can try all the recommended techniques and still face challenging behaviour. It's a great idea to get advice from other Leaders at your District/Division meeting and share ideas and methods you might not have previously considered.

Q) Do you have any tips you can share on managing challenging behaviour in girls?

Top tip

'The key is to get the girls involved in the decision-making - if it's their idea they are more likely to participate.'

Top tip

'Invite an experienced Leader to join your unit for a couple of weeks - it's a great way to get to know new people and help you to learn more.'

Some Leaders will choose to talk to parents to help girls understand the behaviour expected at unit meetings, and look for ways to overcome challenges together. Others prefer to wait and watch.

Q) When do you choose to get parents involved with a girl's challenging behaviour?

Girlguiding provides a safe space for all members and therefore bullying is always unacceptable. To prevent or stop bullying, use the top tips throughout this *Guiding Conversation* and the extra resources on page 3. You could also invite a Peer Educator to your unit to run a session on this topic - find out more at www.girlguiding.org.uk > Members' area > Running your unit > Programme > Try a Peer Educator.

If you find yourself in a situation with extremely challenging girls, speak to your Commissioner. She can discuss with you the best way to address the behaviour and will also seek advice from Advisers if appropriate. There's more information at www.girlguiding.org.uk/guidingmanual.

Praising good behaviour

It's important to remember that most girls behave very well, so make sure you praise their good work - it'll take attention away from challenging behaviour and make you feel better too! Here are some ways Leaders have suggested.

- Reward girls with the responsibility of a job or helping you out.
- Give them the lead role in games.
- Point out girls who are behaving well.
- Let Rainbows take home Olivia, or Brownies take home Brownie Teddy, and explain why they deserve it.
- Give stickers to younger girls and Patrol points to older ones.
- Give girls leadership responsibility by making them Sixers or Patrol Leaders.

Q) How do you praise or reward good behaviour?

Challenging parents

Parents not paying subs or repeatedly picking a girl up late are behaviours that can make running a unit more challenging for Leaders. It's best to discuss these problems

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with your Commissioner as she can help you decide how to move forward.

Top tip

If you're talking to a parent who is upset:

- stay calm
- try active listening - listen to what they have to say and then respond by summarising and using 'I' language to start sentences (such as 'I understand that you're upset about...')
- offer to discuss it at a later date if you need to take a break from a conversation
- consult your Commissioner for further advice.

Girlguiding values its volunteers and wants to provide a safe space for all members, so you should not have to deal with shouting and/or abusive behaviour from parents. If you are concerned about a parent's behaviour and your personal safety, contact your local Commissioner.

Helpful resources

- Understanding people with additional needs: www.mencap.org.uk
- Girlguiding - supporting girls with additional needs: www.girlguiding.org.uk > Members' area > Running your unit > Members with additional needs
- Tackling bullying: www.beatbullying.org and www.kidscape.org.uk
- Processes for managing very difficult girls: www.girlguiding.org.uk/guidingmanual > Supporting info > Managing membership
- Resolving difficult situations: www.girlguiding.org.uk/guidingmanual > Policies > Membership and recruitment > Resolving difficult situations
- Peer education: www.girlguiding.org.uk > Members' area > Running your unit > Programme > Try a Peer Educator
- A Safe Space: www.girlguiding.org.uk > Members' area > Resource library > Trainers' resources > Trainers' materials > A Safe Space.

Help is here! If you are struggling with challenging behaviour then talk to your Commissioner, fellow Leaders or the staff at Girlguiding. Your Commissioner should always be your first point of call.

If you are concerned about the safety of a girl at any point, or if a girl makes a disclosure to you while you are addressing her behaviour, contact your Commissioner or email safeguarding@girlguiding.org.uk for further advice. If you believe a girl is in immediate danger you must report your concerns, in line with Girlguiding's safeguarding policy.

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Strategy sheet

Dealing with challenging behaviour - tackling the bad and praising the good.

This section is particularly aimed at new Leaders, or those who want some more guidance about good techniques for managing behaviour. Each situation is as different as the girls involved, but here are some suggestions from Girlguiding Leaders on how to deal with challenging behaviour.

Before the activity

- Agree/revise the guidelines and the consequences (think about your risk assessment).

At the start of an activity

- Give clear, simple instructions.
- Ignore unwanted behaviour and praise the girls who are doing well.
- Explain how the activity will be structured to help girls with additional needs.
- Agree when the activity will end.

When behaviour starts becoming challenging

- Intervene before a situation gets worse.
- Ask if anything is wrong - a girl might be talking because she doesn't understand or has an additional need (such as a hearing impairment) that you were unaware of.
- Calmly remind the relevant girl of the unit guidelines - don't talk about consequences yet. It's useful to ask 'What is the guideline?' so girls can show awareness of the unit guidelines.
- If it would help, distract the girl by asking her to help with something else - perhaps collecting something for you or taking a message.
- Keep the situation light with a little humour.

Top tip

'Give instructions in a quieter voice so the girls really have to listen.'

If it continues

- Tell the girl her behaviour is not acceptable.
- Remind her of the Promise and the unit guidelines.
- Let her know the consequences of not changing her behaviour (such as a 'time out' or being prevented from coming to an event) and give her a chance to correct it within a specified time limit.
- Exchange good for bad: 'When you've said you're sorry, you can join in again.'
- Acknowledge anger and frustration. Use 'I' language such as 'I can see you are feeling very cross/sad/angry' and offer an opportunity to discuss the feelings either immediately or later, away from the main group.

In the future

- Introduce a prompt (a non-verbal intervention) to make the girl aware of unacceptable behaviour. Secret ones are useful - perhaps a wink, a raised eyebrow or a coloured card.

If the behaviour gets really challenging

- Discuss the situation with your Commissioner.

Follow the guidelines laid out in *The Guiding Manual* at www.girlguiding.org.uk/guidingmanual > Supporting info > Managing membership.

Ask yourself: Why is this behaviour happening? Who is it happening with? When is it happening? Where is it happening? What is taking place? Why the defensive response?