

**Keeping 7/8/9th graders happy
And convincing 11/12/13 year olds to stay
In Girl Scouts**

- ◆ Plan a trip for the end of the following year, something that will just knock their socks off, then they will have to stay
- ◆ Have the older girls (14+) come and talk about the fun they have, what they have done, and the opportunities available.
- ◆ Almost all women I talk to who stayed in GS to the end, at some point they were encouraged by their parents to remain active even though they wanted to quit. Once they get over the middle school ickies, they come back to earth and are very happy staying in GS. Others have said that they wish their parents had encouraged them to stay in it longer and they regret dropping out. I am encouraging all my parents to be a guiding force here.
- ◆ Plan a summer bridging (or year kick off) event with other girls the same age. Once they see they aren't the only ones (and they are very likely to find friends who they didn't know were GS), they are more likely to stay
- ◆ They are stuck in between being a little girl and being a more mature teen. Give them a bit of slack and really push the idea that they are in charge. Also, approach the conversation like you would with any adult. They will notice the change in tone and they will notice that you are trusting them to know what they want. No, they are not adults yet, and no, they won't start acting like it for many years, BUT they crave the respect, the opportunities, and the trust. Tell them you completely understand how they feel (validate) and that others all over the US feel the same way (inclusiveness). Ask them what are their ideas for solving this dilemma? Maybe someone wants to go by a code word instead of GS (Gamma Sigma, "music lessons", etc) so others won't know that was what you were talking about. Maybe they want to back off and only meet twice a month or even once per month. ACCEPT all the ideas that they give you and try to put many into practice. This proves to them that you want to give them what they want.
- ◆ Really kick up the FUN factor. Tell them we are taking a break from badges, awards, and service for a few months. Ask them what strictly fun things they might want to do. This is OK - spending time together and building relationships is just as important as earning badges. Schedule as many as you can, maybe even doing one or two over the summer (no meetings, just a fun activity) to keep them interested. Half the time, for my troop, the conversations we have in the car going to and from an activity are more worthwhile than the activity itself!
- ◆ Blend your troop with another in the SU, neighborhood, region, or even Council. Either for everything (troops meetings, cookies) or just for ongoing trips/activities. Have a planning board or something to help plan events for the larger group. This uses the best of all your combined resources, allows you to provide a program that is

a step up from the Br and Jr regular one-leader-show program, and the more girls involved with each other, the better! It is much more fun to have a swim party and sleepover with 35 girls instead of just 10.

- ◆ Simple crafts, thrown together service projects, and lectured badge activities are not going to hold them. They need fun. They need more complicated and in depth stuff. They need details, explanations, and hand on activities. Instead of making tray favors for meals on wheels, offer them to go and help deliver the meals or visit at meal time at a nursing home. Get them sewing, crocheting, throwing pottery, painting ceramics, making their own jewelry. Have them attend as many hands on, expert run programs as you can. Think quality, quality, quality. As Brownies, whatever you gave them was just terrific. Now they need more substance to keep them interested.
- ◆ Have an alternate meeting place – like a coffee house or diner. Feels more like a club and a bit more grown up. Since they are older and in a new age level, maybe they are ready for a change of scenery.
- ◆ Find out what events you could attend that Boy Scouts will also be present. No, we don't want to totally give in to the boy crazy attitude many of the girls this age have, but if preparing for a camping competition against the Boy Scouts gets them excited, then go for it.
- ◆ We have Monday morning donuts. Because all mine go to the same school, they come to a classroom as the bus drops them off and we have donuts and juice...keeps them connected.
- ◆ Does your local Middle School, Junior High, or High School now have a certain numbers of service required? If so, GS is the perfect way to take care of that requirement with no problem. Most years, a Brownie troop could easily make 20 hours per year if they tried a little bit. Think of how many older girls could do. This is a perfect match to the Bronze, Silver, and Gold awards.
- ◆ Get them connected with older ladies that used to be Girl Scouts, maybe through your local Red Hat Society or Senior Activity Center. Have them do a simple activity or craft together and just allow them to chat. Discuss what it used to be like as a Girl Scout when they were girls. Ask them if they felt the same way about GS not being cool.
- ◆ Being a Girl Scout looks good on resumes (part-time AND full-time jobs), college applications, scholarship applications, and more. Even if you don't earn the Silver or Gold – employers know that being a Girl Scout MEANS something. They will get an employee who understands the basic values of being an employee – hard work, honesty, etc. I know that if I had to choose between two resumes, one GS and one without, I would choose the GS in a heartbeat.

- ◆ Did you know that girls who earn their Gold Award and enter the military, not only start at a higher rank (similar to the BS Eagle) but also at a higher PAY rate. It may only be a bit more pay than their peers for a few months, but that extra money adds up!
- ◆ Drill this idea into them – Never waste your time imitating someone else. You were born a unique individual, why die a copy?
- ◆ Find a group of Campus GS in your area. Have the girls attend an event or activity on campus with these girls. What is cooler than hanging out on a college campus?
- ◆ Create some traditions for your group. Even if they are as small as a special decorated stick for a camp names ceremony, a special song you sing at every meeting, or a photo album of past adventures. The more connections, feelings of inclusiveness, and history they feel, the more likely they will stay.
- ◆ Have the girls pick a few IPA or S2B activities and have them plan them for the group. They CAN do it. At first, their presentations will be short and lacking detail. Have a lessons learned after each one and have the girls in the troop give positive feedback and constructive criticism. Eventually, their activities will have more substance and they will learn so much from picking, planning, and running an activity on a topic THEY care about.