Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan

Frequently Asked Questions About Gender-Expansive Youth

Q. Why does Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan need a Gender-Expansive Youth Policy?

A. For 13 years, Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan has proudly served girls and families in our region. We are proud of the work we've done and the ways in which our programming benefits all girls. For much of that existence, we understood girlhood to look and engage in specific ways. As we continue to deepen our commitment to an equitable and inclusive future, it is incumbent upon us to better understand and support young people who see value in what we do beyond the binary idea of gender—that all people are either male or female. Experts across many fields and those with lived experience are building consensus around the notion that sex and gender identity exist along a spectrum and that for some of us, where we are on that spectrum can change. This also includes people in our council footprint (both adult and youth members), some who we already serve. Thus, it's vitally important that we at GSSEM cultivate an environment where all young people can thrive, so long as the Girl Scouts experience serves their needs.

Q. Does this mean that GSSEM now accepts boys?

A. Not necessarily. Our programming is built to support and elevate the leadership experience of girls. The options for similar experiences for cis-gender (those whose sex assigned at birth is male, identify as male, and prefer others see them as male) boys are strong and we believe that those options are more appealing and appropriate. As such, Girl Scouts probably isn't a good fit. We also recognize that there are young people whose gender identity and expression may be different than what we would expect based on their sex assigned at birth. We believe that Girl Scouts may be a fit for them and will work with them, their families, and their troop to make sure that is true.

Q. What about camp? Will boys and girls sleep in the same cabins? Change in front of each other? Use the same bathrooms?

A. Bearing in mind that Girl Scouts isn't a fit for cis-gender boys, it is unlikely that boys and girls will sleep in the same cabin. Our camp facilities do include a single-stall restroom and changing stalls. If the availability of single-stall restrooms or changing spaces presents a problem in certain parts of camp, or at certain times, multi-stall bathrooms and changing stalls may be re-designated as single occupant stalls temporarily. Generally, kids are pretty modest and have been changing privately at camp for years – in bathroom stalls, pool house changing areas or under their covers. We don't expect this to present problems at camp and will rely on the respect, modesty and civility of campers and examples set by staff and troop leaders. In the event a camper needs or desires any accommodations, our camp staff are always ready to support and meet that need.

Q. What about pronouns?

A. At GSSEM, we respect the pronouns of staff, leaders, and our members. Leaders and staff seeking to live into our commitment to inclusivity can model that behavior by sharing their own pronouns and creating space for others to share theirs. We can show that we respect each other by honoring those pronouns. Those who use wrong pronouns to antagonize and harm are engaging in bullying behavior that will be addressed by our leadership.

Q. Does my child have to disclose their gender identity to be in Girl Scouts?

A. No. We don't require anyone to disclose their gender identity to others to be a Girl Scout. We recognize that sharing that information with others can be a challenging process for many reasons. If it's something a member seeks to keep confidential, we'll do our best to honor that. We also recognize that young people communicate frequently, so we can't guarantee it remains confidential over the course of their Girl Scout experience. Our hope is—at the troop level and at GSSEM in general—we foster an environment where they feel safe to share this important aspect of who they are and see it as a space united by our principles, including the Girl Scout Promise and Girl Scout Law.

Q. What happens if my child transitions during their Girl Scout experience? Do we have to leave Girl Scouts?

A. Not necessarily. When we learn of a member's transition, our approach is to address each situation individually. We will consult with the member and their family to determine if the Girl Scouts experience aligns with their identity and lived experience and continue to do so each membership year. If it any point Girl Scouts is no longer a fit, we encourage that member to seek options that better speak to who they are and how they want to live. In the case that the transition has been shared with troop leadership, we invite troop leaders to be a part of those conversations as well.

Q. My child disclosed their gender identity to their troop and no longer feel welcome. What do we do?

A. Our hope is that our troops will accept and respect all members, but it is not something we can guarantee. In a situation when the troop environment is no longer a welcoming and comfortable space for your child, we encourage you to contact your member support specialist or customer care to begin the process of finding a new troop. In the interim, your child is always welcome to participate in council programming as a Juliette.

Q. A policy on Gender-Expansive youth is different for GSSEM. Do you expect to lose some membership as a result of this approach?

A. Yes. We recognize that there are families for which a gender inclusive Girl Scouts is no longer a fit. We strongly believe that a more inclusive Girl Scouts will lead to growth in our membership in number, but also in conscientiousness, kindness, and preparation for a changing world. In reality, we are and have been serving Gender-Expansive youth for many years. This policy acknowledges their existence and affirms our desire to support them in ways that align with Girl Scouts' commitment to inclusion. We hope that on the whole, our membership joins us in that acknowledgment and support.

Q. What about everything else?

A. This policy does not aspire to address all scenarios, both imaginable and unimaginable, that may arise. We are confident that our existing policies for addressing conflict and solving problems will help address many of those scenarios. In cases where that existing policy does not address a scenario, our staff and leadership are prepared to work to find solutions that meet the needs of our membership and leaders to the best of our ability. If you find yourself in a space where you have questions or need support, we encourage you to contact us via customer care or member support.