Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan

Safety Activity Checkpoints for Virtual Troop Meetings



Council Approval: Not Required
Activity Permitted for: D, B, J, C, S, A
Includes:

- About virtual troop meetings
- Tips for a successful troop meeting
- Privacy and Safety

ABOUT VIRTUAL TROOP MEETINGS

Holding virtual troop meetings creates an array of new challenges and exciting opportunities to deliver a powerful Girl Scout experience into girls' lives. As with all the special experiences that Girl Scouts offers, meeting virtually creates not only the ability for girls to get comfortable and tech savvy but to gain courage, confidence, and character by expressing themselves and learning leadership skills to take them into the virtual world.

There are so many ways to encourage girls to learn, grow, and experience life virtually. For every adventure that can be done in person, another can be shared, taught, and experienced virtually. Adult volunteers will find it exciting and challenging to bring new experiences to girls through video troop meetings. Whether it be community service projects, outdoor adventures, cookie sales, badge work, or STEM, there's a way for Girl Scouts to meet girls where they are and keep them connected.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL TROOP MEETING

You may have girls in your troop or group who are facing unique issues due to living in remote areas without internet access—or with limited access to technology or other economic circumstances. Make certain you're able to accommodate and include all girls, regardless of their issues, before moving forward with plans to go virtual.

Ensure that your troop utilizes a video conferencing service that's accessible on all types of devices. For example, you may need to stay away from FaceTime because not everyone has an Apple brand phone, laptop, or tablet (FaceTime is only available for Apple products). The conferencing app should work the same on a cell phone as it does on a laptop or tablet, considering that girls may or may not have the same devices.

You may wish to prepare some fun and respectful protocols for girls to agree upon for their virtual meeting, and this is encouraged. For example, speaking in turn and not speaking over each other. Think through your meeting and make some notes for the agenda of what you aim to accomplish during the time; a virtual meeting may flow differently than an in-person meeting.

Consider if your girls would like to dress a certain way to encourage and strengthen their sense of belonging. Some troops wear uniforms to their meetings and others may not. You may want to suggest having girls wear their vests for the virtual meeting to reinforce their camaraderie or have the girls vote on how they'd like to show their Girl Scout pride when meeting online.

Consider the grade level and age groups of the girls when planning virtual meetings. Be mindful of the meeting time(s) that are set or any other factors that may differentiate the context of a virtual meeting between younger and older girls.

PRIVACY AND SAFETY

As with all aspects of technology, it's important to keep in mind that virtual troop meetings can be the target of unwanted intruders. This can mean either directly by interrupting or lurking in a live virtual meeting or, more covertly, using data behind the scenes in a manner that has not been authorized or made transparent. Do all that's possible to

learn about the platforms being used to host virtual troop meetings. Choose platforms that are publicly recognized, reported about by others as favorable, or transparent about the issues they may have experienced and the steps they may be taking to protect users. Become knowledgeable about the terms of use and don't choose a company that you're unsure about, for any reason, without consulting your council for advice.

It's imperative to protect both adult volunteers and girls while holding virtual meetings and communications online. This can mean keeping personal background space invisible or obscured, keeping photos and images of girls secured from public viewing, keeping meeting lines set to private, and making sure to protect personal email addresses or passwords and other situations that could compromise girl privacy or safety. Operate in a manner that anything recorded, photographed, or "saved" to a particular site may be misused in the future and stay away from that sort of situation by making educated choices. There's more on specific safety steps to follow below under Safety Activity Checkpoints.

LEARN MORE

There are many choices when it comes to free video conferencing services, and countless skills one can learn online ranging from protecting your troop meeting to creating fun ways to interact with girls. Explore blogs and news articles to stay current and to enable you to make the best and safest selections for your virtual troop meetings. If you're unsure about something, always consult your council. Some examples are below:

- Protect Your Zoom Meeting from Hackers
- 10 Best Video Conferencing Tools to Choose From
- Tips for Chatting with Young Children Online

INCLUDE GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

Hosting or leading virtual meetings provides a unique opportunity to increase inclusion in new ways. Communicate with girls with disabilities and their caregivers on how to best manage their participation in virtual meetings. Once underway, virtual meetings can provide a new way for all girls to have a voice and have input in the meeting, potentially drawing in those girls who are shy, hesitant, or less apt to either attend in person or speak up in a face-to-face meeting. Some girls may enjoy the chat feature, for example, where they can become more comfortable expressing themselves.

SAFETY ACTIVITY CHECKPOINTS

Have girls take the Internet Safety Pledge to teach, encourage and support web safety and respectful "net-iquette" while online. Review the Computer and Internet Use safety activity checkpoints Computer and Internet Use with girls.

Make sure that the adult volunteer troop leader(s) are still co-leading the virtual meeting and are the person(s) initiating and doing the inviting to the virtual troop meeting. This is especially important for girls under the age of 13, however should be practiced always, with all girls in Girl Scouts.

Be sure to research the video conference service prior to selecting and implementing an appropriate video conference service provider as a virtual troop meeting host. Be sure to read and understand the Terms of Use of the selected platform. Also, learn about the privacy guidelines and precautions that are available concerning the platform prior to implementing your virtual troop meeting.

Make sure the virtual lines are set to private so that only invitees can attend (not a public meeting space). Do not share signup links so that anyone can join. Instead, invite people individually.

Make sure that there's nothing on the virtual stream that identifies a girl or volunteer personally or reveals a personal address, home address, or a person's physical location. To further protect privacy of personal space, there's typically an option to obscure the background of the room, if that's helpful. Girls can also pick fun nicknames to identify themselves on the meeting attendee list or use their first name only. Let girls know about these options so that they can learn about them.

Continue to adhere to the two unrelated adult volunteer rule when gathering with girls virtually, whenever possible. It's important that girls understand they're in the same safe Girl Scout space as they are with in-person meetings. They're cared for and they still have two dedicated unrelated adults who they can count on.

Maintain control of images shared. Set meeting controls so that you can mute or disable screen sharing by any participant. Make sure your co-leader knows how to do the same. If an unauthorized person enters your meeting space, take action to remove them immediately.

Do not record troop meetings and ask that girls do not record troop meetings. Some virtual meeting platforms offer a consent option for all participating members prior to activating the recording feature; however, the majority of girls are minors and aren't of the age to legally consent, **so recording of regular recurring troop meetings isn't permitted.** If girls want to prepare a special recording session, make sure to obtain permission slips from each girl's legal guardian, as with any special activity, as well as council staff approval to record the session. Also, please be aware that some virtual meeting platforms have the capability to save, store, and can potentially re-use, recordings on their technology.

Make sure that girls know that screen shots taken of the group, particularly when all the girls involved are not aware that it is happening, are strongly discouraged. Girls love to take pictures and share them on social media. When done in the right manner, this is a fun and safe thing to do. However, parents, guardians, and caregivers have their own feelings and personal rules in their homes about photographs and social media, particularly with younger girls, so it's very important to be respectful of that. Also similar to recording meetings, note that some virtual meeting applications will save, and can potentially re-use, photographs taken on their technology.

When sharing any material developed by a third party, be mindful that third party products and services may have their own Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. The user should always read through, understand, and abide third party terms of use.

Be sure that any girl emails are not available to anyone but the troop leader. It's important to protect against unauthorized, uncleared individuals having access to a girl's email or be able to contact her outside of the meeting in any manner.

Keep up with developments on online meeting safety.