Leadership Tips for Troop Leaders

Brought to you by LeanIn.Org & Girl Scouts of the USA
When it comes to girls and ambition, the pattern is clear: girls are discouraged from leading. When a little boy asserts himself, he’s called a “leader.” Yet when a little girl does the same, she risks being branded “bossy”—a precursor to words like “aggressive,” “angry,” and “too ambitious” that plague strong female leaders. Calling girls bossy is one of many things we do to discourage them from leading. It’s no wonder that by middle school, girls are less interested in leadership roles than boys, a trend that continues into adulthood.

LeanIn.Org and Girl Scouts of the USA are kicking off Ban Bossy, a public service campaign to encourage leadership and achievement in girls. With the help of Girls Leadership Institute co-founder Rachel Simmons and the Girl Scout Research Institute, we’ve developed practical tips to help all young women flex their leadership muscles, in ways big and small.

The girl with the courage to raise her hand becomes the woman with the confidence to assert herself at work. As troop leaders, there are small changes each of us can make that will have a big impact on girls’ confidence and ambitions.

The time to start building female leaders is now. We hope you’ll join us to Ban Bossy—and encourage girls to lead.

By middle school, girls are 25% less likely than boys to say they like taking the lead.

JOIN US TO BAN BOSSY

Post “I will #banbossy” to your social media channels and visit banbossy.com to take the pledge and learn more.
Far too many girls are backing away from leadership opportunities, and many who do want to lead don’t believe they have what it takes. Fortunately, through Girl Scouting, girls hone their leadership skills every day. They’re able to work to achieve their goals surrounded by people who want to see them succeed.

When I meet with girls, it’s clear they’re watching the women in their lives to learn who they themselves can become. Girl Scout troop leaders are some of girls’ earliest role models. Through your guidance and role modeling, you play a special—and at times a daunting—part in helping girls become strong, capable leaders.

Research suggests that all-girl environments like Girl Scouts can be beneficial for girls’ self-esteem and performance at home, school, and beyond. In all-girl spaces, girls are free to learn and thrive in an environment where they feel safe to speak freely, take healthy risks, take on challenges, and be themselves.2

Together, we can make Girl Scouts the place where girls experience trust with one another, the fun of teaming up to try something new, and the freedom to speak directly and confidently to their peers. And when girls can speak up and lean in without the fear of being called bossy, they practice leadership skills that will serve them throughout their lives.

—Andrea Bastiani Archibald, Ph.D.
Chief Girl Expert, GSUSA

For more ideas for supporting the girls in your life, we recommend you read our Leadership Tips for Girls at banbossy.com/girls-tips.
1. Develop Relationships with Your Girls

**THE SITUATION >**
Relationships empower girls. When they feel connected to the adults in their life, they are more resilient and courageous. Younger girls in particular are likely to look up to their Girl Scout leaders, so make your interactions with them count!

**THE SOLUTION >**
Build personal connections with the girls in your troop. Ask them how school is going or what they’re listening to, reading, or watching. Use girls’ names when acknowledging their ideas. When girls feel comfortable and connected in a group, they are more likely to take healthy risks and try new things.

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**DID YOU KNOW?**
Nearly two-thirds of elementary school girls say they want an adult to help them learn to be a better leader.

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**92%**
Ninety-two percent of girls believe they can learn the skills required to lead—yet only twenty-one percent believe they already possess them.

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**21%**
Ninety-two percent of girls believe they can learn the skills required to lead—yet only twenty-one percent believe they already possess them.
2. Be Conscious of the Way You and They Talk

THE SITUATION >
Girls learn early that too much confidence can get them ostracized, and you often hear the proof in the way they communicate. Many girls start sentences with apologies (“I’m not sure this is right, but...”) or turn powerful sentences into questions (“Martin Luther King was a civil rights leader?”). Some cock their heads, play with their hair, or cover their mouths while speaking, using phrases like “kind of” and “sort of” to weaken their convictions. These phrases can become habits and hinder a girl’s ability to speak in a direct manner later on.

THE SOLUTION >
Notice how you communicate with your troop and avoid hedging or softening your opinions with disclaimers or apologies. Be conscious of how your girls speak as well. If you observe a girl falling into one of these communication pitfalls, privately point it out and explain how it undermines the point she’s making.

DID YOU KNOW?
The confidence gap starts young: Between elementary school and high school, girls’ self-esteem drops 3.5 times more than boys’.
3. Teach Girls to Respect Their Feelings

**THE SITUATION >**
Girls learn early on that being liked and avoiding conflict—even when they’re upset—can win social status and rewards. Many girls are told to “get over” their feelings or to stop being “so sensitive.” A girl’s ability to recognize and respect her feelings, and to speak up about them, is a vital ingredient to developing healthy personal authority and confidence.

**THE SOLUTION >**
Teach your girls to respect themselves by letting them know it’s okay to feel whatever it is they feel. They may not like all their feelings, but they’re an important part of who they are; just as we have to take care of our bodies, we also have to take care of our feelings. Show them by example: avoid denying, second-guessing, or questioning their feelings with phrases like “It’s not a big deal” or “Don’t overreact.” When they’re ready to share with others, be realistic with them about the challenges of speaking up in a world that still expects girls to be nice above all. Sometimes we have to speak up just to show we believe we should be heard, even if the result isn’t what we hoped for.

4. Teach Girls to Handle Conflict

**THE SITUATION >**
Girls learn from watching the ways women communicate and resolve conflict. As girls navigate challenges in the troop, they look to their leaders for cues on how to handle difficult relationships. The power of our example can be both exciting and intimidating.

**THE SOLUTION >**
Avoid indirect communication like gossip or texting as a way to resolve your own conflicts. Instead, model direct and honest communication with your peers and the girls. Remember, your troop is watching and learning. Explain to the girls that conflict is an inevitable part of relationships and teamwork—it’s the way we handle it that matters. And remind them that Girl Scouting is about uplifting and supporting one another, not bringing others down.

**ACTIVITY**

**Use I-Statements to Resolve Conflicts**
Help girls learn how to resolve conflict by teaching them to use I-Statements. See the attached troop activity for an introduction to I-Statements and step-by-step exercises for practicing them.
5. Avoid Language That Holds Girls Back

**THE SITUATION >**

Sometimes the words we use, even unintentionally, can make it harder for girls to take risks or try something new. For example, calling a girl “bossy”—a word we rarely use for boys—sends the message that girls should not speak up. These words can silence a girl during her most formative years.

**THE SOLUTION >**

Constructive criticism is a vital part of learning and growing, but the way it’s delivered can make the difference between motivating and shaming a girl. Take care to avoid references to gender in any of your feedback, and avoid using words that disproportionately label or stereotype girls or other groups. Girls use language that reinforces gender stereotypes, too (“Girls aren’t good at math.” “All girls care about are makeup and clothes.”). When they do, steer the conversation toward a teachable moment for your group: explain what a stereotype is, how it limits us, and what evidence exists to challenge it. For example, ask your girls to give you an example of someone who defies the stereotype (“Who here knows a girl who’s good at math?” “Do you know girls who care about school more than how they look?”).

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Girls are twice as likely as boys to worry that leadership roles will make them seem “bossy.”

#BANBOSSY  banbossy.com  girlscouts.org/banbossy
6. Encourage Girls to Speak Up

THE SITUATION >
Research shows that women often underestimate their abilities, while men often overestimate theirs. In the same vein, girls often fear being wrong. As a result, some girls don't speak up unless they're 100 percent sure they have the right answer, while others ruminate over the perfect answer. Unfortunately, the time spent figuring out the right thing to say—or a response that will be popular with others—can delay or even suppress their true feelings.

THE SOLUTION >
After you ask a question, pause for a few moments, even if it's awkward, to give girls more time to contribute. Help girls find their voice by starting discussions that don't require factual responses. Ask the girls in your troop to adopt and hold a position or wrestle with an idea together. Start your question with “There’s no right answer,” and remind the girls that discussion leads to important questions and insights. If there are quieter girls in the group, privately take them each aside and encourage them to contribute.

ACTIVITY
Encourage Girls to Speak Up
Divide the girls into pairs. Have each pair designate an “A” and “B” person, and give each pair a tennis ball. Ask A’s to throw the ball and say a word that names something they’re interested in—say, dogs or music or cooking. When B catches the ball, she has to throw it back and ask a question about that word. It could be anything, like “What’s your favorite breed of dog?” or “Who’s your favorite artist?” After a few times, switch the A and B roles. This exercise works particularly well for an opening ceremony for a Girl Scout meeting. It warms girls up and challenges them to develop the capacity to think on their feet and ask questions. BONUS EXERCISE: Try the same activity, but ask the girls to express an opinion about the word instead of asking a question about it.

DID YOU KNOW?
Girls are typically called on less in class than boys—so it’s important teach them to get their hands up!10
ACTIVITY

Develop Guidelines for Troop Discussion
Warm up your group with two questions: What do we need in order to work together successfully on group projects? What makes working together in a group uncomfortable or unsuccessful? Then divide your troop into small groups and ask, “What do you need from me, and one another, to make sure all voices are heard when we work on a group project?” Have each group make a list and report out. Use their feedback to create a master document that you post and/or refer back to during group projects. Some sample ideas:

- We will watch our body language when we talk or listen—no eye rolling.
- Girl Scouts is a gossip-free zone.
- Use I-Statements to resolve conflicts and work toward resolution.

7. Foster Effective Collaboration

THE SITUATION >
Research shows that both girls and boys learn best when they collaborate effectively. Working together encourages girls to feel powerful and allows them to flex their collaboration and team-building muscles.

THE SOLUTION >
Lay the groundwork for effective collaboration. Help girls establish guidelines for their team like taking turns talking, building on one another’s ideas, and listening actively without interruption. Then encourage the group to check in on what’s going well and what isn’t. Mix up the teams so that the same girls are not always working together—that way they all gain experience in working with a range of personalities and styles. Promoting cooperation and team building is key to a successful Girl Scout experience.
8. Get Media Literate—Together

THE SITUATION >
What girls read and watch often sends the wrong messages. Children’s books are almost twice as likely to feature a male hero as a heroine,\(^\text{12}\) and male characters outnumber female characters by almost three to one in family films. Even more discouraging, female characters are almost four times as likely to be shown in sexy attire.\(^\text{13}\)

THE SOLUTION >
Take the time to talk to girls about what they’re reading and watching and why they like it. Pick a movie or television show and ask: What kinds of messages about girls and women does it send? How are girls and women portrayed, and what do they do and talk about? How are girls’ and women’s relationships portrayed? Are the relationships built on trust and caring? Have a discussion, not a lecture. Weigh in on your concerns, but remember that they’ll take you more seriously when you can all enjoy—and criticize—media together.

DID YOU KNOW?
Heroes outnumber heroines: Children’s books are almost twice as likely to feature a male hero.\(^\text{14}\)

ACTIVITY

Take the Bechdel Test
Shape the way your girls understand media by putting their favorite movies through the Bechdel test. Popularized by writer and cartoonist Alison Bechdel, the test challenges you to ask three questions of your favorite films to test for gender parity:

1. Does the film have at least two named female characters?
2. Do the female characters talk to each other?
3. Do they talk to each other about something other than a boy or man?

You’ll be surprised by how few movies pass the test—and you’ll give your girls a fun, easy way to critically analyze the media they’re consuming.
9. Let Them Solve Problems on Their Own

**THE SITUATION >**
Resilience, the ability to overcome obstacles, is a cornerstone of confidence. When adults step in to solve problems, girls don’t develop the coping skills they need to handle difficult situations on their own.

**THE SOLUTION >**
When a girl shares a problem, pause and ask, “What do you want to do about it?” If she says, “I don’t know,” push her gently to consider strategies she might use to deal with the situation, and then ask her about the possible outcomes. Let her decide what she wants to do (within reason). Even if you disagree with her, give her the chance to own her decision and learn a lesson if it doesn’t work out the way she wants. Your confidence in her ability to solve problems on her own will build hers.

**DID YOU KNOW?**
It pays to be gritty: One of the most common attributes in successful women is resilience.
10. Encourage Girls to Step Outside Their Comfort Zones

**THE SITUATION >**
We feel braver when we prove to ourselves that we can leave our comfort zones, overcome barriers, and master challenging tasks. Many girls struggle to take risks because they worry about failing or disappointing others.

**THE SOLUTION >**
Encourage your girls to try new things, whether it’s going to an event where they don’t know anyone or taking up a sport they’ve never played. Push the group just slightly beyond their comfort zones and have them try out new activities together. Being brave is rarely about dramatic moments: it’s a skill acquired, little by little, over time. Let the girls know they don’t have to be perfect the first time they try something. They just have to try.

**DID YOU KNOW?**
Many girls gain leadership skills by participating in extracurricular activities that stick with them throughout life. Encourage girls to try something new and work to develop those skills!
Girl Scouts of the USA gives every girl access to life-changing experiences that inspire and motivate her to do something big for herself, her community, and the world. Visit them online to learn more about how the Girl Scouts are building girls of courage, confidence, and character.
girlscouts.org
girlscouts.org/banbossy

Rachel Simmons
Rachel is co-founder of the Girls Leadership Institute, a national nonprofit that teaches girls the skills to know who they are, what they believe, and how to express it, empowering them to make change in their world. She is the author of two best-selling books, Odd Girl Out and The Curse of the Good Girl, and develops leadership programs for students at Smith College.
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LeanIn.Org
LeanIn.Org is the nonprofit organization founded by Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg to empower all women to achieve their ambitions. LeanIn.Org offers inspiration and support through an online community, free expert lectures, and Lean In Circles, small peer groups who meet regularly to share and learn together.
leanin.org

JOIN US TO BAN BOSSY
Post “I will #banbossy” to your social media channels and visit banbossy.com to take the pledge and learn more.
Endnotes

1 Barbara Schneider, *Sloan Study of Youth and Social Development*, 1992–1997, ICPSR04551-v2, Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies/4551/version/2. When asked whether the statement “I like to take the lead when a group does things together” applied to them, 72 percent of sixth grade boys reported yes, versus 54 percent of sixth grade girls.


5 Girl Scout Research Institute, *Change It Up*.

6 Ibid.


8 Girl Scout Research Institute, *Change It Up*.


16 Girl Scout Research Institute, *Change It Up*. 
I-Statements: The Key to Resolving Conflicts

Adapted from Girl Scouts of the USA’s award-winning BFF (Be a Friend First) Program, this activity teaches girls how to use I-Statements to resolve conflicts and speak directly with others about their feelings—important leadership skills they can use throughout their lives!

GOALS FOR GIRLS
• Learn what I-Statements are and how to use them to resolve conflicts
• Commit to using I-Statements in their own lives

MATERIALS
• Step-by-step instructions
• Sample talking points (but feel free to use your own words!)
• Troop handout

ESTIMATED TIME: 45–60 minutes

Visit banbossy.com to download our leadership tips and activities for girls, parents, teachers, and troop leaders.
Step 1: Discuss conflict in relationships
ESTIMATED TIME: 5–7 minutes

Lead a discussion on the importance of working through conflicts in personal relationships. Before you begin, remind the girls about our guidelines for troop discussions:

1. We don’t use anyone’s name to avoid hurt feelings
2. What we share within the group stays within the group

You can use these questions as conversation starters:

"Does anyone have an example of a time when you decided to let a conflict go or pretend it didn’t happen? How did it feel?

Have you ever tried talking through a conflict with a friend only to have your effort backfire? How did it feel?

Have you ever shifted your point of view on a conflict—really looked at it from the other person's point of view? How did it feel?"

Step 2: Introduce the activity
ESTIMATED TIME: 3–5 minutes

The goal of this activity is to help girls use I-Statements to practice and work through conflicts that are common in their own lives. Take a few minutes to introduce the activity and link it back to the girls’ thoughts and feelings about difficult conversations. Here’s some language to use as a starting point:

"We’ve all had experiences where our feelings are hurt. Perhaps you blurted out your point of view in an angry way that didn’t solve the problem and made it even worse. Or maybe you kept your real feelings bottled up, which only made you feel more resentful.

Choosing to resolve a conflict usually means committing to talk through it openly. I-Statements can be a powerful tool for letting people know how you are feeling—and what you need—in a thoughtful way.

We’re going to practice using I-Statements so you become more confident communicating difficult feelings—and doing it with sensitivity and respect for others. You’ll see that you can speak up in a way that’s powerful and respectful, instead of keeping your feelings inside or communicating in a hurtful way."
Step 3: Explain how I-Statements work

ESTIMATED TIME: 5–7 minutes

Before you get started:

Distribute the attached handout to your troop or write out the formula for a good I-Statement on a large piece of paper or blackboard where the girls can see it.

Explain that a good I-Statement focuses on a specific behavior and how it affects you instead of accusing or attacking the person for who they are and how they act. Then walk them through the Formula for Good I-Statements.

Formula for Good I-Statements

When you ___________________ (describe a specific action that hurt you)

I feel ___________________ (say your feeling)

Because ___________________ (why the action makes you feel that way)

You can use this example to illustrate the point:

Example of I-Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Not-so-good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When you make fun of the way I dress, I feel hurt because your opinion is important to me.</td>
<td>You are a jerk.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ask the girls to explain the difference between the two statements to you. If they don’t quite see it, you may need to explain how it works:

“In the good example, a specific behavior causes the hurt feelings. In the not-so-good example, the person is the problem and will likely feel attacked for being called a jerk and will get defensive. This will probably make the conflict worse.”
Not-so-good
You only think about yourself.

Make sure the girls understand the difference between talking about a behavior versus talking about a person’s character. Then spend a few minutes talking about how it feels to be on the receiving end of comments like the second one—and why starting with what feels like an attack doesn’t work very well.

Step 4: Have the girls identify potential conflicts in their own lives

ESTIMATED TIME: 10–15 minutes

Before you get started:

1. If the girls have a hard time brainstorming possible conflicts, or if you’re concerned about time, you’ll find several scenarios developed for our BFF program at www.girlscouts.org/banbossy/I-Statements.pdf.
2. You can have the girls write down possible conflicts on a piece of paper, or if you’re using the attached handout, there’s space for them there.

Depending on how many girls are participating, ask them to break into pairs or small groups and work together to come up with a list of conflicts they might encounter at home, at school, or in their community.

Once everyone is ready, have each team read their scenarios to the larger group. Then work with the girls to identify the two to four most common conflicts across the troop, and write them down where everyone can see them. (There’s also space for the girls to write them down on the activity handout.)

ANOTHER I-STATEMENT EXAMPLE:

Good
When you make plans for us without asking me what I want to do, I feel like you don’t value my opinions.

Not-so-good
You only think about yourself.

The not-so-good example implies the speaker’s friend only has selfish traits. This likely isn’t true and will hurt her feelings. It would be more accurate and effective to use the good example.

QUICK TIP:
Remind the girls to avoid using anyone’s name so feelings aren’t hurt.
Step 5: Have the girls brainstorm I-Statements for their conflicts
ESTIMATED TIME: 15–20 minutes

Before you get started:

In addition to the conflicts you brainstormed with your troop, we recommend the “Ban Bossy scenario” in the call-out box below.

Work with the girls to brainstorm a few good I-Statements for each type of conflict. Let them take the lead, but make sure they follow the formula. Look for opportunities to talk with them about what’s working (and why) and what’s not working (and why).

Write down the group’s favorite I-Statement for each scenario (or have them do it on their handouts).

QUICK TIP:

Acknowledge that it’s not always easy to speak up, but it’s worth it! You might need to coach them a bit until they get the hang of it. While you’re coaching them, ask the girls to consider different possible reactions to an I-Statement. When and where might I-Statements work better (or worse)? How can they set up their conversations so they succeed?

BAN BOSSY SCENARIO:

PRACTICE RESPONDING TO “BOSSY”

Have the girls imagine this situation: You are working on a history project with a group in your class. You feel frustrated that the group keeps talking about a TV show that has nothing to do with the project, so you suggest that everyone gets back to work. Someone you consider a close friend rolls her eyes and tells you to stop being so bossy.

Ask the girls to begin their I-Statement with “When you call me bossy, I feel...”
Step 6: Talk about the activity

ESTIMATED TIME: 5–7 minutes

When the girls are finished working through their I-Statements, ask the group to share their thoughts on the following questions:

• How are I-Statements different from other ways of responding to conflict?

• How do you feel when you use an I-Statement?

• How will you use I-Statements in your own life?

We recommend you close by emphasizing the value of I-Statements while recognizing that they don’t always work and can feel a little odd at first. You should say what feels natural to you, but here’s an idea:

I-Statements can help you have honest conversations and resolve your conflicts, but there are no guarantees. Remember, you can only control your actions, not the other person’s. You’re not responsible for how other people act in a conflict; you’re only responsible for you. If you use an I-Statement and try to be as thoughtful as possible, you know you’ve done your best.

I-Statements may feel a little weird at first—like anything new. That’s okay. The more you practice, the easier it will get. And I can almost guarantee you’ll be amazed by the difference they make!

Finally, ask the girls to commit to using one I-Statement before your next meeting—and commit to it yourself. Then during your next get-together, you can all share how it went.

Commit to using at least one I-Statement before your next meeting. The more you use them, the easier it will get!
BFF

BFF (Be a Friend First) is Girl Scouts’ bully-prevention initiative to help girls speak up IN and FOR friendships. Girls tell us that they want to feel safe and protected and want to help others feel the same. Through BFF, girls build meaningful friendships and resolve conflicts peacefully and constructively. And by empowering girls to educate others and create more peace— in their schools, communities, and who knows where else?—BFF inspires girls to lead one another with friendship!

girlscouts.org/bff

LeanIn.Org

LeanIn.Org is proud to partner with Girl Scouts of the USA to bring you Ban Bossy, a public service campaign to encourage leadership and achievement in girls. We’ve developed practical tips and activities to help girls flex their leadership muscles and to offer parents, teachers, troop leaders, and managers hands-on strategies for supporting female leadership.

banbossy.com

JOIN US TO BAN BOSSY

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I-Statement Handout

Good I-Statements focus on a specific behavior and how it affects you, instead of accusing or attacking the person for who they are or the way they act.

Formula for Good I-Statements

When you ____________________________
(describe a specific action that hurt you)

I feel ____________________________
(say your feeling)

Because ____________________________
(why the action makes you feel that way)

Examples of I-Statements

Good

When you make fun of the way I dress, I feel hurt because your opinion is important to me.

When you make plans for us without asking me what I want to do, I feel like you don’t value my opinions.

Not-so-good

You are a jerk.

You only think about yourself.
What types of conflicts could you encounter at home, at school, or in your community?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.
Choose the most common conflicts you came up with as a group and write an I-Statement for each.

1. **Conflict:**
   
   **I-Statement:**
   
   When you ________________________________
   
   I feel ________________________________
   
   Because ________________________________

2. **Conflict:**
   
   **I-Statement:**
   
   When you ________________________________
   
   I feel ________________________________
   
   Because ________________________________
3. Conflict:

I-Statement:
When you [describe a specific action that hurt you]
I feel [say your feeling]
Because [why the action makes you feel that way]

4. Conflict:

I-Statement:
When you [describe a specific action that hurt you]
I feel [say your feeling]
Because [why the action makes you feel that way]
Problem Solving with G.I.R.L.

Adapted from the Girls Leadership Institute’s summer camp curriculum, this activity cultivates the skills girls need for effective problem solving; it’s designed for parents, teachers, and other caretakers to use with individual or groups of girls seven years old and up.

Girls are introduced to a sequence called G.I.R.L. to help them organize their thoughts, weigh their options, and strategize effectively. Knowing how to navigate life’s social, academic, and extracurricular challenges will help girls build resilience—a crucial leadership skill.

GOALS FOR GIRLS:
• Learn and practice a problem-solving sequence
• Reflect on what is gained from a failed problem-solving attempt

MATERIALS:
• Step-by-step instructions
• Sample talking points (but feel free to use your own words!)
• G.I.R.L. handout

ESTIMATED TIME: 20–25 minutes

Visit banbossy.com to download our leadership tips and activities for girls, parents, teachers, and troop leaders.
Introduction to G.I.R.L.

G.I.R.L. is a problem-solving sequence that helps girls generate multiple strategies to address a problem and feel more in control. It also pushes girls to think two moves ahead and be strategic about the outcome they want. When they explain why they’re making a certain choice, girls become more accountable for their decisions. Best of all, when they imagine the end result of a strategy before choosing it, they get the chance to change their minds before doing something they regret.

We encourage you to use G.I.R.L. every time the girl in your life faces a challenge. Through repetition and practice, she will eventually learn to do the steps in her head—and even in the moment itself!

Step 1: Talk about the importance of problem-solving

ESTIMATED TIME: 3–5 minutes

When a girl is facing a challenge, take a moment to recognize her feelings by empathizing. For example, you can say:

• I know this must be really hard...
• I’m sorry you’re hurting...
• You must feel so [insert emotion]...

Find out how she wants to handle the problem by asking:

• What do you want to do about this?

If she says, “I don’t know,” explain why you’re asking by saying something like:

• I know you’re having a hard time right now, and I know you feel confused about what to do. In the long run, it won’t help you if I just give you the answer or tell you what to do. The only way we learn to solve our own problems is through practice. That’s why we’re going to work together on this—you and me.
Step 2: Practice the G.I.R.L. problem-solving protocol
ESTIMATED TIME: 15 minutes

Start by introducing G.I.R.L. You can use the attached handout or just list out the four parts of G.I.R.L on a piece of paper.

Here’s some language to help you describe G.I.R.L. and how it works:

“When you have a problem and don’t know what to do, it helps to map out all your choices so you can come up with the best strategy. We’re going to practice a special way of doing that right now.

It starts with the word girl—G.I.R.L.

G (Gather Your Choices)
Write about all the possible choices you could make.

I (I Choose)
Pick one choice out of all the possibilities you just listed and decide what you want to do.

R (Reasons Are)
Write in the reasons why you made your choice.

L (List the Outcomes)
List all the things that could happen if you make this choice.

Now, complete G.I.R.L. together. You can use a problem she is currently facing or try the sample in the sidebar.

SAMPLE PROBLEM:
Ask her to imagine this situation:
You keep hearing that one of your friends is talking about you behind your back.

Then walk her through the sample responses:

G (Gather Your Choices)
- Stop speaking to my friend
- Tell her to stop
- Ask her if she’s mad at me
- Ask her why she’s doing it
- Ask my friends if they know what’s going on
- Talk to an adult
- Talk about her behind her back

I (I Choose)
Ask her why she’s doing it

R (Reasons Are)
Because I want to give her a chance to tell me how she’s feeling

L (List the Outcomes)
- She might apologize and stop
- She might deny it
- She might get mad at me
- She might apologize and keep doing it

QUICK TIP:
When she makes a decision about what to do, brainstorm together about a day, time, and place she can try it.
Step 3: After she tries her strategy, talk about how it went
ESTIMATED TIME: 3–5 minutes

Start by giving her lots of praise for taking a risk and going for it! Then talk together about what happened. Avoid passing judgment about the end result. Instead, ask her to consider what worked well and what could have gone better—both with the approach she chose to take and the G.I.R.L. process as a whole.

If the outcome didn’t turn out as well as she had hoped, acknowledge her disappointment, then ask her what she learned. For example, you might say:

“I know you’re disappointed, and I would be too. But even when things don’t go your way, you still learn new things that will help you the next time you’re in a jam. Let’s think together about what you got out of this experience and how it might help you in the future.”

It pays for girls to be gritty: One of the most common attributes of successful women is resilience.
Girls Leadership Institute
Girls Leadership Institute teaches girls the skills to know who they are, what they believe, and how to express it, empowering them to create change in their world. We work with girls, parents and caregivers, and educators to ensure lasting impact.

girlsleadership.org

Ban Bossy
LeanIn.Org is proud to partner with Girl Scouts of the USA to bring you Ban Bossy, a public service campaign to encourage leadership and achievement in girls. We’ve developed practical tips and activities to help girls flex their leadership muscles and to offer parents, teachers, troop leaders, and managers hands-on strategies for supporting female leadership.

banbossy.com

JOIN US TO BAN BOSSY
Post “I will #banbossy” to your social media channels and visit banbossy.com to take the pledge and learn more.

Write down your problem:

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I'm a Leader

#BANBOSSY banbossy.com girlscouts.org/banbossy
Now use G.I.R.L. to help solve it:

**G**
Gather Your Choices

**R**
Reasons Are

**I**
I Choose

**L**
List the Outcomes