
Suggestions for Leading Middle School Aged Girl Scouts

While many scientists and engineers may be accomplished teachers in a university setting, they may not have experience interacting with middle school aged children. There are some key differences in how to successfully interact with this age group as opposed to adults or even high-school aged students. Below you will find some useful tips, as well as some specific points to consider when working with Girl Scouts.

1. Whenever possible, engage the students by encouraging their participation in the activities. Make it an interactive experience by asking them questions, involving them in demonstrations, etc. We find that some willingness to be silly sometimes helps.
2. Do NOT lecture. You will lose their interest almost immediately. If you feel the material calls for a lecture, see the previous point and try to involve the students as much as possible. The limit for how long girls should be sitting still listening to you is only a few minutes.
3. Get them up and moving around whenever there's an opportunity. Things as simple as calling a volunteer come up for a minute to demonstrate something or asking the group to get up occasionally, even if it's just to pick up a piece of paper and sit down again, will keep them more involved and therefore more engaged.
4. Girl Scout culture has an established method of quieting a noisy room that can be used to your advantage. Raising the right hand over the head to signal for attention is known as the quiet sign. The key part of this is that when someone holds their hand in the air in this manner, no one is allowed to speak. **THIS INCLUDES THE PRESENTER**, so do not hold your hand up and continue speaking. As each person in the room sees this, they too will hold their hand in the air until the entire room has caught on. Once the entire room is silent and all hands are in the air, you may lower your hand and speak to the group. In some areas you may see the Girl Scout sign (3 fingers up, as pictured to the right), used in this manner instead of just a hand in the air.
5. Girl Scouts frequently come with parents who will attend such events with the girls. This can be very useful in maintaining order among the girls, and you should feel free to use parents for that purpose. The downside of having adults present is that girls may feel more intimidated, and the adults can feel the need to jump in with answers if the girls are shy or uncertain, or if they are taking a while to come up with a response to a general question. You should gently discourage this, as the activities are designed for the girls' benefit rather than their parents. It is sometimes helpful to have alternate activities for adults to be engaged in rather than mixing with the girls.
6. Girl Scouts frequently want to know what badge requirements they might be able to complete as they do activities, so you should be forewarned that such questions might come up. Whether you choose to address these questions or discourage them entirely is up to you. However, badge requirements evolve, therefore if you wish to open this door, you can talk to your area council, or even the girls themselves, about what the requirements might be.