



## INCLUSIVITY – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Q. What does inclusivity mean for Guiding?

**A.** Inclusivity doesn't just mean that any girl or woman is allowed to participate in Guiding. It means that we create an environment where girls and women from all walks of life, identities, and lived experiences feel a sense of belonging and can participate fully. This means that we need to reflect on our own biases, the language we use, and the customs we practice to ensure that we aren't unintentionally creating barriers to full participation.

### Q. Can we still sing songs that use the word "God"?

**A.** Being inclusive does not mean that we have to stop singing the songs we enjoy. But it does mean that we have to be flexible and open to adapting songs with specific spiritual references or references that may be offensive. Take a look at your unit's current practices and consider songs and activities that allow the girls and leaders to have a variety of different experiences and understanding.

Before choosing a song to sing, take a moment to ask the [inclusivity assurance questions](#) found in the [Guidelines to Achieving Inclusivity](#) document in order ensure the song is appropriate for all the girls in your unit.

The Brownie program book for example, already has a more inclusive version of the Brownie closing. If you work with older girls, try singing "good night" at the end of Taps, instead of the traditional "God is nigh." As long as you are respectful of the beliefs and values of all your unit members, you should continue to enjoy the Guiding tradition of music and song.

### Q. Can we still have graces, Guides' Own, and reflections?

**A.** For some members spirituality is an important part of their lives. However, in a multicultural

country like Canada, spirituality is an extremely individual concept observed differently from individual to individual, family to family and community to community.

Like our songs, graces, Guides' Own, and reflections are all traditions within Guiding. If you enjoy these traditions, it is important to ensure that they are inclusive – references to spirituality should be generic and not exclusive to one religion. For example, if there is a tradition to say grace before a meal you can focus on being thankful for the food instead of thanking a spiritual being. If you are at a camp or function, you can explore different ideas of giving thanks other than saying grace before a meal or say grace at one or two of the meals but not all to ensure girls and leaders attending feel comfortable and included.

Another option is when planning unit meetings, celebrations, or other activities, ask each of the girls to choose passages, poems, or songs that speak to their own sense of spirituality. Then, take the time to share everyone's unique selections. It's also important to remember that not everyone identifies as a spiritual person. Be sure to include an option that girls can select anything that they feel represents them, not just spiritually.

#### **Q. Can we still hold meetings/events in churches?**

**A.** Yes. More and more today, community groups are facing difficulties in finding space to hold meetings and events, and Guiding is no exception. Our organization has a long tradition of meeting in religious facilities, and if this is the most inexpensive and accessible place in which to hold your meetings, you should continue to do so.

However, we need to recognize that we may unintentionally create barriers for some members of the community when we hold meetings in religious facilities. Girls who practice other religions, or those who do not have any religious affiliations, may feel uncertain about entering a religious facility to attend a meeting or event. Meeting in a religious facility may also lead some to wrongly believing that Guiding is only open to girls and women of one religious affiliation. We also need to be cognizant that not all religious facilities are accessible to those with physical disabilities.

The best way to overcome this is to ensure everyone understands you are only using the religious facility as a meeting place, and not for religious purposes. Many other community groups use these facilities for their activities without the worry of being viewed as religious activities. You could brainstorm with your girls when planning meetings, and challenge them to come up with activities or events that take them outside of the meeting hall. This will increase your visibility in the community and help demonstrate to non-members that your unit is inclusive and welcoming to girls from all backgrounds.

Over the long term, Unit Guiders should consider opportunities to move their units to new, non- religious, affordable, and accessible locations, when they arise.

#### **Q. Can we still celebrate holidays, like Valentine's Day, Halloween, and Christmas in our units?**

**A.** Of course you can, but it is important that you are being respectful and inclusive of the special holidays and religious celebrations observed by all of our girl and adult members. Holidays and special celebrations are a great time for members of different cultures and

religions to share their traditions with others, and for others to show their appreciation and respect for those traditions. It is also a chance to reaffirm the Guide Law of respecting others.

Here are some suggested activities your unit could do to celebrate these special times in the year:

- Ask the girls to plan a holiday party in December, and have them showcase their cultures and traditions through food, song, dance, etc.
- Have a winter carnival. Play games outside in the snow, do winter-themed crafts, and celebrate our chilly country!
- Celebrate spring! Go to a local farm and check out all the new spring arrivals. From new seedlings and buds to baby animals, there's so much to see and learn about!

### **Q. All the girls in my unit are the same. Why do I need to be more inclusive?**

**A.** While your girls may appear to come from similar backgrounds, you might be surprised to find out how unique each of their experiences and interests are. While one girl might be loud and boisterous, another might be shy and quiet. While one girl might have to take care of her younger siblings after school every day, another might be an only child and is alone until her parents come home. While one girl gets to eat out at a fancy restaurant, another girl might wonder if there will be any dinner at all tonight. Some girls may go to mosque or church or temple or another religious institution and others may have no religious affiliation whatsoever.

Through GGC programming, we have a great opportunity to teach girls to be welcoming of others, and to take the time to appreciate our differences while learning more about our own personal interests.

The best way to ensure inclusivity in the short term is to have a balanced program that includes outings into the community. Brainstorm with your girls when planning meetings, and challenge them to come up with activities or events outside of the meeting hall. As you increase your visibility in the community you may attract more members and it will also demonstrate to non-members that your unit is inclusive and welcoming to girls from all backgrounds.

It's also important to remember what the image of a homogenous unit projects to potential members. Girls or women from diverse backgrounds may perceive this as a barrier to their participation in Guiding.

### **Q. My city is very diverse; however, my unit is not. How can I get more girls interested in Guiding?**

**A.** There are several different things you can do to create awareness for your unit.

- Is your unit meeting location accessible? Is it a location used mainly by a specific group or demographic? Could you move to a location with less of an affiliation?
- Contact your Commissioner – she can provide you with pamphlets that you can leave at local schools and use for reaching out to girls.

- Find out what cultural associations/groups are you in your community and ask them if you can do a presentation on opportunities for girls in Guiding.
- Hold 'Bring a Friend Event' and give girls 'visitors' badges and pamphlets for their parents. Try to follow up with the parents as quickly as possible.
- Attend community events and bring some girls with you so they can speak about guiding.
- Take the unit on excursions or do activities like tree planting or participation in a park clean up where people will see the girls being active and doing community service. Have information pamphlets on GGC with you.

**Q. How can I find out more information to help me develop a more inclusive Guiding program and calendar?**

**A.** Girl Guides of Canada continuously monitors and updates its resources to assist Guiders in developing more inclusive programming and practices. For example, on our [Inclusivity and Accessibility](#) page you can find Guideability, a resource which provides advice and guidelines on how to make Guiding accessible to individual of varying abilities. In addition, we have a National Diversity/Inclusivity Specialist who can assist Guiding members with their questions and provide expert advice on inclusivity and accessibility. GGC welcomes input and sharing from all Unit Guiders. If you or your unit has developed best practices, please share them with others. Let's work together to be more inclusive! Send your ideas to [inclusivity@girlguides.ca](mailto:inclusivity@girlguides.ca).

## Glossary

As we begin this transformation to a more inclusive Guiding experience, a number of key terms need clarification. Below are the definitions of words according to Girl Guides of Canada:

**Discrimination:** The denial of opportunity to an individual or a group to fully participate in an activity, event, program, or service on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, citizenship, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability, political beliefs, socio-economic status, health related status, sexual orientation, marital status or any other grounds enumerated in the human rights legislation of the jurisdiction in which the individuals are located. In GGC, this may take the form of assumptions regarding religious beliefs that result in imposing certain prayers or readings, or holding activities in particular religious locations.

**Equity:** Treating all girls and women with respect, acknowledging that individual differences exist, and that both are considered and accommodated. For GGC, this may require you to explore the personal situations of each girl or woman to ensure that you are giving consideration to heritage, culture, or any life circumstances, and making appropriate accommodations.

**Diversity:** Inclusion of all girls and women regardless of colour, culture, beliefs, disability, religious practices (or not), socio-economic status, or any other life or personal circumstance where the individual is valued for their contribution. For GGC this will mean reconsidering the continuation of traditional practices or ways of doing things and thinking somewhat differently about how you might offer a more open and inclusive program that is welcoming to all.

**Inclusive:** Taking alternative actions that will ensure Girl Guides of Canada provides a welcoming environment where all girls and women will feel safe, valued, and welcomed for who they are and for what they can contribute.