

Be yourself at camp.

Camp Culture Code

Since our founding more than 110 years ago, Girl Scouts has been, and will continue to be, an organization rooted in activism and advocacy—to make the world a better place. As we reflect on this core value, we are reminded that our world is made up of many different people with unique cultures, values, and traditions, and experiences. Our commitment to DEI/RJ (diversity, equity, inclusion and racial justice) reflects this.

It's with this “one world” mentality that we work to build a truly anti-racist organization for everyone to feel that they belong and have a voice. But it's not enough to say it. We need to educate, support, and provide ways for our Girl Scouts, volunteers, and staff to become lifelong advocates and allies for change.

Girl Scouts of Eastern Massachusetts has prepared the following Camp Culture Code to help better prepare campers, families, and staff for some of the unique questions, concerns, and opportunities for inclusion that come up in the space of camp.

Camp Culture: What to Expect

Camp is a community. The community of camp is unique; it is shaped by the physical, outdoor space of camp, the teambuilding nature of our activities, and the welcoming environment that we strive to create. This means that camp has its own distinct culture. Your camper should expect to be immersed in an environment that:

- Encourages personal responsibility: campers take care of themselves, one another, and camp.
- Takes place in nature: campers learn environmental stewardship and share space with bugs and critters.
- Is "unplugged" and focused on being present: campers will not have access to electronics.
- Encourages self-exploration: campers try new things, explore their identity, and gain confidence.
- Relies on teamwork: campers work together as part of a team.

- Is respectful and inclusive: campers and staff strive to create safe spaces around camp and respect and celebrate one another's identities.
- Nurtures belonging and the active practice of allyship: Allyship is the decision one makes to keep an open mind and heart about the lived experiences of others so that they can learn how to nurture accessible and inclusive environments for all.

What topics are included in the Camp Culture Code?

The Camp Culture Code is intended to set expectations for campers, families and camp staff ahead of their time at camp. Together, we can create a safe and inclusive environment that celebrates who we are as individuals and members of a community. In an effort to help us all come to camp informed and empowered to be a part of that safe space, we've included the following content in the Camp Culture Code:

- Section 1: Key Terms
- Section 2: Gender and Identity
- Section 3: Sexual Orientation
- Section 4: Accessibility
- Section 5: Race and Ethnic Diversity
- Section 6: Faith and Spirituality

Why is the Camp Culture Code important?

We believe camp is a place where everyone feels comfortable being their authentic self. As the youth mental health crisis grows increasingly urgent, GSEMA dedicates ourselves to making all youth feel seen, heard, and safe—psychologically and physically. In a camp environment, this culture is especially empowering for youth. Our campers develop the confidence to love who they are, to feel that they are valued, and to experience the warmth and kindness of peers and mentors as they act as windows and mirrors to one another. The Camp Culture Code is a pledge to ensure all campers and staff feel valued and safe at camp.

How does the Camp Culture Code affect me and my camper?

At Girl Scout camp, our staff is committed to actively building a sense of inclusion for all of our community members. We ask all staff, volunteers, parents, caregivers, and youth commit to working towards LGBTQIA+ allyship, anti-racism, and anti-oppression. The Girl Scout Movement strives to be a safe place to stand against hate and discusses issues that divide our nation. If you are someone who is not open to participation in anti-racism and LGBTQIA+ allyship work, our camp programs are not a good fit for you and your child. If you have any questions or concerns about what this commitment to DEI/RJ means, please do not hesitate to reach out to customercare@gsema.org. We would be more than happy to discuss this Culture Code with you.

Thank you for taking the time to read our Camp Culture Code and discuss it with your camper. We sincerely hope that this document reflects a community that you and your camper are excited about being a part of. If you've decided it's not what you're looking for, we'll be happy to talk to you about refunding your camp registration fee. Please email customercare@gsema.org and a member of the camp team will reach out to you. We look forward to seeing your camper at camp this summer.

Section 1: Key Terms

Diversity: Psychological, physical, and social differences that occur among any, and all individuals; including but not limited to race, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, religion, language, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, mental or physical ability, perspectives, learning styles, etc.

Inclusion: The act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate and bring their full authentic selves. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in the words/actions/thoughts of all people.

Equity: The guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups.

Belonging: Belonging means feeling accepted as a member or part. Acceptance does not mean you agree on everything with everyone around you. Sharing out differences with acceptance for others creates peace. Belonging focuses on our connections, rather than our differences.

Discrimination: Discrimination is the unfair or prejudicial treatment of people and groups based on characteristics such as race, gender, age or sexual orientation.

- **Racism:** prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a minority or marginalized racial or ethnic group
- **Homophobia:** fear, hatred, discomfort with, or mistrust of people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual, or pansexual (to have an option off the binary)
- **Transphobia:** fear, hatred, disbelief, or mistrust of people who are transgender, thought to be transgender, or whose gender expression doesn't conform to what are understood to be traditional gender roles.
- **Ableism:** the discrimination of and social prejudice against people with disabilities based on the belief that typical abilities are superior. At its heart, ableism is rooted in the assumption that disabled people require 'fixing' and defines people by their disability.
- **Religious Discrimination:** opposition or hostility towards another because of their religious or spiritual beliefs or lack of religious or spiritual beliefs.
- **Classism and Caste Discrimination:** systematic oppression of subordinated class groups to advantage and strengthen the dominant class groups. It's the systemic assignment of characteristics of worth and ability based on social class.

Privilege: Privilege refers to certain social advantages, benefits, or degrees of prestige and respect that an individual has by virtue of belonging to certain social identity groups. These privileged social identities correlate to people who have historically occupied positions of dominance over others.

Intersectionality: Intersectionality is the acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression and we must consider everything and anything that can marginalize people – gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, etc., and the interconnected nature of such identities.

Allyship: Role of a person who advocates and actively works for the inclusion of a marginalized or politicized group in all areas of society, not as a member of that group but in solidarity with its struggle and point of view and under its leadership.

Section 2: Gender and Identity

Who will be at camp?

Camp extends opportunities to campers who identify with the girl experience. Girl Scouts serves campers who have been historically marginalized and systemically excluded from outdoor spaces. This can and does include cisgender girls, gender-expansive youth/ non-binary youth, and trans-female and trans-male youth.

Key Terms

Gender Identity: a person's psychological sense of self. This is how a person has come to understand themselves to be. This may or may not align with their sex assigned at birth.

Sex Assigned at Birth: a term that a medical professional uses to describe a child at birth based on their external anatomy and other biological characteristics.

Gender Expression: how someone presents themselves on the outside. This may be expressed by the way someone acts or dresses, and is typically associated with presenting either masculine or feminine.

Gender-Expansive: a person who may have a more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the gender binary.

Non-binary: Describes a person who identifies outside of the gender binary. Non-binary people may identify as being neither a man or a woman, male or female, boy or girl, both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories entirely.

Cisgender: A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned to them at birth.

Transgender: A term used to describe people whose gender identity and/or expression differs from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation.

- Trans-woman is a woman/girl who was assigned male at birth.
- Trans-man is a man/boy who was assigned female at birth.

Queer: An umbrella identity term used by people who do not conform to norms of heterosexuality and/or the gender binary.

It is critical to note the important differences between definitions of identity, expression, sex, attraction, and other key vocabulary. For more information, visit [The Genderbread Person | A free online resource for understanding gender identity, gender expression, and anatomical sex.](#)

Does this mean my Girl Scout is at camp with boys?

Our camps serve cisgender girls, gender-expansive youth, non-binary youth, and trans-girls and trans-boys. As Girl Scouts of Eastern Massachusetts staff, we embrace a youth-centered approach to notions of sex and gender. Some kids who attend camp have come to understand their gender identity does not align with their female assignment. Camp is a space where identities and pronouns are respected and celebrated and children should not have to keep their identity a secret to retain a place in our program. To this end, we have expanded our understanding of who belongs at Girl Scouts, as well as our commitment to serving all youth who identify with the girl experience.

Will my camper be asked to share their pronouns?

We will ask how your camper would like us to refer to them during their time at camp and to share their pronouns if they are comfortable doing so. We will never force anyone to disclose or discuss these aspects of their identity. As with everything at camp, sharing pronouns is challenge-by-choice; campers who would prefer not to share will not be pushed to. Counselors will model this by sharing their pronouns with groups.

It is the camper's decision who they disclose information about their identity to. We value the relationships and trust we build with campers while at camp. For this reason, we will not break the trust and confidentiality of the camper unless it pertains to their or others' safety. This includes, but is not limited to, anything the camper discloses with regards to their gender identity or sexual orientation. We encourage campers to share their identities with people at home if and when they feel safe doing so.

Are all of the camp staff women?

Our staff reflect a spectrum of gender identities and have a wide range of lived experiences. Applicants are encouraged to apply without regard to gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation. It is important to us that our staff reflect the diverse groups of campers we serve. We believe that our campers should have the benefit of a diverse group of role models.

What about bathrooms and showers?

Our single-use showers and bathroom stalls provide privacy; privacy is an essential and fundamental right to everyone at camp. This includes toilets, changing areas, and showers, which are gender-inclusive. Staff members have separate spaces to shower. At no point are bathrooms occupied by staff and campers at the same time. Campers and staff members can also utilize lockable bathroom stalls as private changing spaces.

What about bunks?

Beds are considered private spaces that are not shared with others. Campers have separate sleeping spaces from staff members. If a camper needs the attention of a staff member during the night, they will have access to the staff member cabin/sleeping area.

Campers are grouped in living units by age.

What is the swimwear policy?

For the emotional safety and equity of all our campers, our swimwear policy for camp includes both a top and a bottom covering for all campers and staff members. Some examples of this may look like a rash-guard and boardshorts, a bathing suit top and bottom (navels do not need to be covered, but chests do), or some combination of the two. This policy is also extended to camp staff.

What if gender identity topics are raised at camp?

We respect and nurture belonging and safe spaces for every camper by respecting their gender identity. While we invite every camper and staff member to share their pronouns, we will only discuss gender identity with campers if questions are raised organically. If questions or issues about gender identity arise among campers, staff are trained to address the questions or issues with respect and in an age-appropriate manner. We do not discuss camper or staff bodies or sex assigned at birth.

Section 3: Sexual Orientation

Sometimes, families and campers may be confused about how gender identity and sexual orientation differ. It's important that this is clear to all, since Gender Identity is a topic we openly discuss at camp, and Sexual Orientation is a topic we **do not** actively discuss.

Gender Identity is about how *you* feel about *yourself*. It doesn't involve anyone else and should be respected at all times.

Sexual Orientation is about how you feel about others, referring to who someone feels romantically and/ or emotionally attracted to. Unlike Gender Identity, it is a topic that is largely irrelevant to most youth programming.

- **About Key Terms:** There are many identifiers that correspond to people's individual romantic or sexual orientations. Examples include straight, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, pan-sexual, etc. What identifier suits an individual is personal.
 - **Queer** is an umbrella identity term used by people who do not conform to norms of heterosexuality and/or the gender binary.

What if sexual orientation topics are raised at camp?

There is no need to "out" or discuss a camper's (or staff member's) sexual orientation, and we do not initiate discussions about sexual orientation or sexuality at camp. We know that questions and conversations sometimes arise organically at camp about "crushes" or attraction, and we are respectful and non-judgmental regarding everyone's romantic and sexual orientations.

Although sexual orientation is part of someone's identity, conversations surrounding romantic intimacy are not appropriate at camp, and staff are trained to intervene in these instances with respect and in an age-appropriate manner.

Section 4: Accessibility

What is the camp environment like?

We have three overnight and four day camps throughout Massachusetts and New Hampshire. All locations are in rustic environments and while some parts of camp are ADA accessible, not all parts are. You can explore our sites [HERE](#) to determine which would be the best fit for you and your camper.

If you have any questions or concerns about the accessibility of our camp properties due to physical, mental, social, or emotional needs of your camper, please contact customercare@gsema.org. For a better understanding of what each resident site has to offer, please visit our [GSEMA Property Guide](#).

What is an accommodation?

Accommodations are modifications or adjustments made for an individual with a disability on an as-needed basis.

We strive to be an inclusive community - one that provides equitable access for all, including those with disabilities. Providing access is our ultimate goal, and we use a combination of accommodations and accessibility to create a culture of inclusion.

Please reach out to customercare@gsema.org to request an accommodation for your camper.

Section 5: Racial and Ethnic Diversity

GSEMA Girl Scouts can be catalysts for change, promoting equitable outcomes for all members as they strive to make the world a better place.

The ongoing violence that is occurring against countless Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), Asian, Pacific Islanders and countless others reaffirms that racism is not just a thing of the past. GSEMA has made a continued commitment to becoming an antiracist organization. Antiracism is the practice of proactively working towards dismantling racist views, cultures, and systemic practices that have historically oppressed, and continue to prevent BIPOC from participating, prospering, and reaching their full potential in our society. Systemic racism affects everyone, including our campers, and requires care and commitment to dismantle.

At GSEMA, we are part of a movement to build equity, inclusion, diversity, and belonging. We work to end all forms of oppression. As a leader, that means I...

DISCOVER myself in a racist and unjust world

1. I understand our world was built on structural racism.
2. I recognize there are intersections between racism and all forms of oppression.
3. I acknowledge that white people benefit from unearned privileges based on skin color.
4. I honor the legacy of Freedom Fighters who came before me.
5. I learn key terms to empower myself as a student of social justice.

CONNECT with my heart wide-open

6. I value relationships with people who are different from me.
7. I acknowledge mistakes I have made in the past and commit to doing better.
8. I believe you if you tell me you've been harmed.
9. I can tolerate feeling uncomfortable while I learn.
10. I take the risk and have courageous conversations.

TAKE ACTION to make the world better for all people.

11. I center and nurture the leadership of people of color.
12. I listen and take in feedback as a gift
13. I speak up about racism and all forms of oppression.
14. I work to change policies to be racially equitable.
15. I take responsibility for things I say and do.

Section 6: Spirituality and Faith

Campers and staff are welcome to express their full selves. For some, religion may be a big part of their personal identity. All personal identities are welcomed and celebrated at camp. While we invite every camper and staff member to share their feelings about the world around them, religion is only discussed at camp if the topic comes up organically. Staff are trained to supervise these conversations between campers and ensure that they remain respectful. Before meals at overnight camp, we give gratitude for the meal that was prepared for everyone at camp.

It is an expectation of everyone in the camp community to respect one another. Respecting one another's beliefs means making space for them to believe what they do, without judgement. It does not mean that someone else needs to adjust their lifestyle or beliefs to align with someone else's.

We reject the idea that one person's belief can invalidate another's identity. Invalidating one's experience or identity causes harm, which is not conducive to a positive community culture. Regardless of a camper's belief system, this means we do not tolerate:

- Passing any type of judgement about another's religious or spiritual beliefs.
- Telling anyone that their beliefs, gender identity, sexual orientation, pronouns, etc. are "wrong".
- Failing to acknowledge one another's pronouns.
- Using personal beliefs as a reason to exclude or bully one another.
- Promoting one's personal religion or spiritual beliefs as "superior" to others.