



The Simple Sleepover

An Important Step in Trip Progression

Background

Some of the most memorable moments in a Girl Scout's life happen while taking trips. The first night away from home on a Girl Scout overnight is a big step and one that girls will remember for years to come. Before venturing farther from home, consider offering a simple troop sleepover or even an almost sleepover close to home. Local sleepovers and almost sleepovers provide valuable progression and learning for everyone involved—from the girls, to the troop leaders, and even the parents. Many girls have not had as many overnight opportunities over the last couple years and have not had the opportunity to build their confidence and comfort with sleeping away from home.

Learning how to plan a trip is a progressive experience, one that starts with a simple outing and builds with each progressive experience no matter the age of the girls. A simple sleepover or almost sleepover launches their travel progression, giving them the foundation to build on for other activities.

So, what is an **almost sleepover**? An almost sleepover is a chance for the girls to do everything leading up to the actual sleeping part of an overnight—they would even brush their teeth and get into their PJs—but they would go home to sleep. These can be a great opportunity for everyone to start the process and test the waters and recognize for themselves if they feel ready for a sleepover.

A **simple sleepover** then, is a one-night indoor overnight at a local location where you have access to indoor bathrooms and possibly even a kitchen. (Please note that if you are planning any sort of outdoor cooking or camping, including backyard camping or campfire, Troop Camp Training parts 1 and 2 are required for at least one of the adult volunteers.)

Why are almost sleepovers and simple sleepovers beneficial?

These experiences will help the girls:

- Experience sleeping in a different environment—new location, sleeping outside of their own bed, and with people other than their own family;
- Test their own comfort levels and gain a better appreciation of the comfort levels of their troop members;
- Enhance trust and bonds among girls (and adults) as they build friendships and teamwork skills;
- Develop their confidence to sleep away from their own homes within the safety of their trusted troop and feel good about their accomplishments.

They help the troop leaders:

- Gain a deeper understanding of the limitations, needs, and comfort levels of the girls in the troop;
- Take small steps in the planning process and develop the knowledge and skills for planning a successful overnight for all girls (and adults) before venturing farther from home; it is much easier to grab something you may have forgotten or call a parent to help out when you are not far from home.

Are your girls, and their families, ready for a simple sleepover? Here are some aspects to consider before thinking about offering a simple sleepover:

- Emotional readiness
- Physical readiness
- Skills/knowledge
- Relevant experiences

The parents benefit by:

- Establishing a network of trust and understanding of expectations so that they can feel more comfortable with their daughter sleeping away from home.

If there are reservations for any reason, take ample time to plan the experience with the girls and their families, practice and build everyone's skills during troop meetings, and build trust. Starting with an almost sleepover would be a great step in this process as you develop readiness for a simple sleepover.

Keeping it girl-led

Girl-led simply means that they are playing an active part in figuring out the “what,” “when,” “where,” “why,” and “how” of their activities. For simple sleepovers and almost sleepovers, it means that girls will help determine if they want to have a sleepover, where this will take place, what they want to eat, what they want to do, and other similar details. Since the girls may still be quite young, it is the leader's role to guide them in these conversations, help set reasonable limits and expectations, and help the girls through the process. We talk about progression throughout all aspects of Girl Scouting, girl-led is one of them. Think of planning a simple sleepover as the initial steps in travel and planning progression. As the girls practice new skills and become comfortable with planning, your role, as the leader, will adapt as the girls become more prepared to increase their role. The more they do it and reflect on their experiences afterwards, the more confident they will become.

Planning a simple sleepover

When planning any activity with your Girl Scout troop, be sure to check Safety Activity Checkpoints and other safety guidelines. Here are six steps to planning a simple sleepover or almost sleepover:

- 1. Step 1: Think ahead**—Since the girls are new to planning troop trips, come to the conversation having reviewed travel progression and safety standards, possible facilities for a local simple sleepover, and with a basic understanding of the girls' experience level. This will help the overall planning by being able to easily determine what might work for a first trip and what might go farther out in the planning bullseye for a future trip. **This would be a good time to check in with parents on their comfort level with a simple sleepover or almost sleepover before mentioning it to the girls. **
- 2. Step 2: Get ideas from the girls**—Share some of your thoughts and research with the girls from Step 1, but spend most of the time listening to their ideas. Brainstorm as many ideas as the girls come up with, inviting all girls to be heard in the process. Here are some basic questions to think about with the girls:
 - Where are we going?
 - When are we going?
 - How will we get there?
 - What do we want to do while we are there?
 - What will we eat?
 - What do we need to pack?

3. **Step 3: Sift through ideas and come up with a plan**—As a group, come up with a plan for the trip by thinking through more of the details. You may need to come back to some of the planning after doing more research or including the parents in the conversation. Remind everyone that looping back in the planning process is normal and helpful to make sure you've included everything you all want to.
4. **Step 4: Communicate**—Loop parents in with more of the details and ways they can support their girls leading up to the trip with general preparation and their encouragement. What needs do you have? What will the girls need to prepare? Submit your Troop Activity Form for approval.
5. **Step 5: Have a great overnight**—Follow your plan, adapt as needed, and have a great time. Be sure to write down any thoughts or notes for the future while they are still fresh in your mind.
6. **Step 6: Reflect and evaluate**—As a group, review the experience both during the simple sleepover as well as after. During the activity, ask the girls open-ended questions about what they see, how they feel, what they like so far, and so on. Afterwards, continue to review by asking questions to help the girls reflect on their experience: What went well? What was your favorite thing? What were the surprises? What could we do better next time and how? Here are some strategies to help the girls think about their experiences and share their ideas:
 - **Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down:** This is a great tool to use in the moment to quickly assess how girls are feeling about their experiences. How do you think dinner went? Did we work well together? Then ask probing questions based on how they rated their experience.
 - **On A Scale of 1 to 10:** This is another quick tool, and you can have them hold up the number of fingers for how they are feeling if you want everyone to answer at the same time. 1 = the worst experience in my whole life, 10 = the best experience ever (or whatever words you want to use – make it funny!).
 - **Name One Thing:** This can be done as a reflection at the end of the day or at the end of an activity. “Name one thing that went well with getting ready for bed.” Or “Name one thing you liked about today.” After they have shared their one thing, they can share why they liked it or thought the way they did or what they might change to make it better.
 - **Bullseye:** While we often think about this as a planning and brainstorming tool, we might not always think about it as a reflection tool. This is a good tool to use after the event for girls to vote on whether they felt the event was “on target” or “way off” by putting stickers on a drawn bullseye. Use this as a conversation starter to think about what went well and what they would change for their next overnight.
 - **Mural:** If the girls enjoy drawing, invite them to draw pictures to represent their reflections for “what have we learned about planning an overnight?,” “What was a happy surprise for you from this experience?,” and other similar questions.



Recommendations

- As a troop, brainstorm the packing list for what each girl should bring and what they need as a troop. Encourage the girls to be part of the packing process at home, so they know what they have in their bags.
- Think about simple, healthy, yummy food options so you don't have to spend a great deal of time that day/night cooking. Take that time as a troop. The less you need to think about food and what needs to happen to ensure everyone is fed by a specific time, the better. Rushing to try to get a meal ready is no fun for anyone!
- Plan to have easy fillers that the girls can do on their own if needed.
- Think about where everyone will sleep; there will be girls who are ready to go to bed earlier than others. Make sure you have a plan for accommodating these needs.
- Create a visual schedule so everyone knows what to expect. Go over the schedule with the girls and have them be part of the process.
- Keep it simple! There will a lot to try to remember and learn—don't overcomplicate the process. And remember, there is always a next time to try other things!
- Practice skills ahead of time! Turn learning to roll/unroll or stuff their sleeping bags into their storage bags into a running game or relay race so that when it comes time to sleepover, you are not needing to help 15 girls with their sleeping bags!

Check your understanding

Reflect on what you have learned by considering the questions below. They will not be submitted to anyone but will assist you in your planning.

- Why are almost sleepovers and simple sleepovers an important part of trip progression?

- Thinking about the girls in your troop, what three things do you want to discuss and practice prior to your first almost sleepover or simple sleepover that will help develop their skills?
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____

- Evaluating with your girls throughout the experience is important in the learning process. What are some evaluation techniques you will use:
 - o Before the simple sleepover/almost sleepover
 - o During the simple sleepover/almost sleepover
 - o After the simple sleepover/almost sleepover