



## INCLUSIVITY IN CANADIAN GUIDING

**Girl Guides of Canada-Guides du Canada (GGC) recognizes and values the richness of human diversity in its many forms, and therefore strives to ensure environments where girls and women from all walks of life, identities, and lived experiences feel a sense of belonging and can participate fully. This commitment to inclusion means GGC’s culture, programming, and practices encourage self-awareness and awareness of others; room for difference; and environments where girls and women feel safe, respected, supported, and inspired to reach their potential.**

Canada is a multicultural society. We are a mosaic of cultures, appearances, ages, economic and social status, religions, races, abilities, sexual orientations, and family compositions. As a Guider, Commissioner, or Council or Committee Member of Girl Guides of Canada-Guides du Canada (GGC), or if you have influence in any way on how GGC will interact with girls, women or your communities, you have a responsibility and obligation to ensure that *every* girl and woman feels welcomed, safe, and valued for who she is and for what she can contribute.

This document is intended to assist GGC Members and staff in considering approaches to activities, events, and programming that are more inclusive.

### **Robert Baden-Powell’s Vision**

From 1909, as Guiding spread around the world, girls and women of a rich diversity of faiths, cultures, and nationalities became a part of the movement. Robert Baden-Powell’s vision was to include all races and nations and to unite them with a common framework of activities and attitudes. Over 100 years of history, the Guiding global community has embraced many faiths and cultures, empowering Members to explore their own beliefs in a safe, informed, and welcoming environment just as Baden Powell intended.

To be true to Baden-Powell’s vision, it is important that each Member of GGC be continually aware of all that is involved in providing a welcoming space for all girls and women.

## A Commitment to Inclusion Through Our Promise, Program And Practices

Over many years, GGC has undertaken various degrees of research and implemented multiple strategies to reduce barriers to membership development and growth. All recent directions have led to actions that are reflective of GGCs commitment to inclusion, including the renewal of our Promise, conducting a programming audit and providing resources for Guiders to consider alternatives to traditional practices that would be more inclusive.

### Promise

At the national launch of our 100th anniversary celebrations in 2010, the renewed Girl Guides of Canada Promise was made for the very first time:

*I promise to do my best,  
To be true to myself, my beliefs, and Canada.  
I will take action for a better world  
And respect the Guiding Law.*

### Program

An inclusive program has the same characteristics as any other GGC program. Providers of an inclusive program, have learned to recognize that each girl and woman in their Unit is a distinct individual with special strengths, needs and perceptions. Being inclusive means recognizing that every girl or woman may not be who we initially perceive them to be. It also means giving second thought to our embedded beliefs and practices.

It is important to remember that the values of Guiding transcend cultures and faiths. As we move to consider alternatives to what we traditionally do as adult Members, each of us will be doing our part to welcome new Members who might have otherwise felt uncomfortable, while maintaining our values of service, caring, citizenship, leadership, kindness, adventure, and growth.

Guiding has a rich history in our country. This history has been shaped by GGC Members who continue to be responsive to the changing world around us. Below are examples of how Guiding has become responsive to the changing activities and cultural norms of its membership:

**Allergies, Special Needs and Medical Conditions:** GGC has developed a strong risk management program to ensure the safety of girls participating in activities, including those who have special needs, medical conditions and allergies.

**Uniform:** One of the most visible and outward signs of such change has been our uniform. We have moved from tams, stockings and skirts to versatile shirts and pants and included uniform accommodations for Muslim girls and women.

**Code of Conduct:** Girl Guides of Canada has entrenched its commitment to inclusivity through the revision of the Code of Conduct, which now clearly states that GGC “does not tolerate unlawful discrimination 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.”

**Programming Audit:** An audit has been conducted resulting in recommendations that will help GGC embrace more inclusivity in its programming. These recommendations are currently being reviewed.

**Activities, Badges, Challenges:** GGC is currently examining program segments, emblems, badges and challenges to ensure they are non-exclusionary to Members or potential members. As an adult Member, you must also do your part to be sensitive to what is chosen in delivering the girls’ program. Oftentimes, we continue to do what we’ve always done. In considering program choices, such as badges, most girls will choose to do what most interests them. In selecting choices for group work, you will need to consider that bias may very well be present in the activity, challenge, or badge. For example, activities/badges involving food may not be overtly obvious, but for girls whose families might be seeking help from a food bank or who are struggling financially, it would be important to recognize that eating well might be difficult for them. In addition, you may need to expand your examples to include foods favoured by various ethnicities and lifestyles. Similarly, a group activity involving expensive sports, i.e. dance, hockey, snowboarding, etc., may be financially prohibitive for some and could signal elitism in programming choices.

**Songs:** Being inclusive does not mean that we have to stop singing many of the songs we enjoy. It simply means that we have to ask ourselves some important questions beforehand, such as, are the words in the song discriminatory/exclusionary based on faith, race, class, sexual orientation, culture or disability. Taking a moment to apply an “inclusivity lens” before choosing a song will help ensure its appropriateness for the girls in any Unit.

**Ceremonies:** Ceremonies are most often held for enrolment, advancement, Thinking Day and year end events. These ceremonies are often celebratory or traditional and for the most part are inclusive, but you may need to give some extra thought to some of the particulars of the event. For instance, are you aware of the food preferences of those attending? Does the planned ceremony allow for the accommodation of all participants or guests? Is the location accessible? Does the location afford comfort to all parents/guardians? Are all girls given equal involvement? Do you need to make any language accommodations for parents/guests?

**Horseshoe Formation:** Perhaps reconsider our traditional use of the horseshoe formation. This is a long standing practice of opening a meeting, coming together and acknowledging who is present. It involves a call to attention and the marching of the individual patrols into the formation of a horseshoe. Some of our Members may come from war-torn and military-run countries. Their exposure to the military may have been fraught with pain and suffering. Having the girls and women participate in a military-based formation could be insensitive to the realities of many families. There are other ways of having the girls assemble into a group arrangement while still creating a sense of community and cohesiveness.

**Saying Grace:** Meals at guiding events are often preceded by a blessing or saying grace. As an alternative, consider having the program begin with introductions and a more

appropriate non-religious reflection. Or, consider having the Guider ask the girls and their parents/guests to have a moment of quiet reflection in accordance with their personal beliefs before the commencement of the meal. Moments of silence and quiet reflection are not uncommon in meetings or other gatherings, so the introduction of such into a girls' assembly would be perfectly acceptable in recognizing multiple beliefs.

## Practices

Our practices have a historical foundation in GGC and have potential to involve personal beliefs and values. Our practices will probably cause us the most consternation in changing the way we approach becoming more inclusive. Alternatives to saying grace and singing certain songs are among the easiest changes to accommodate. It is making changes to our *traditional* practices, such as holding meetings in religious locations and celebrating special holidays that will cause us the most uncertainty.

The guidelines that follow will help you consider these practices and offer alternatives to assist you in providing a more inclusive Guiding experience for all girls and women.

**Meetings in Religious Locations:** GGC recognizes that meeting spaces are at a premium and that Units do not have a lot of revenue to pay for space rental. We also acknowledge that some Units are sponsored by a religious organization through the provision of space. To be more inclusive, GGC suggests that Unit Guiders consider alternative locations in their communities, and if these are available consider using non-religious affiliated space. However, if a religious organization provides the only space available to your Unit in your community, consider advertising the location by posting the street address instead of using the name. It will be important that you ensure potential members know that your meeting location is based on logistics and availability only and does not indicate any particular religious affiliation.

**Celebrating Special Holidays:** Units should continue to celebrate the special holidays and seasons of the year to which they are accustomed. However, to be fully appreciative of the beliefs, (including non-religious beliefs), and the customs of all Members of your Unit and their families, an inclusive organization considers alternative and additional celebrations to include other faith and cultural celebrations.

Unit Guiding is the face of our organization. As a Unit Guider, you have huge influence on ensuring that every girl and every woman feels welcomed, safe and valued for who she is and for what she can contribute. If we are to remain true to Baden-Powell's vision, we must all continually be aware that what we do on a regular basis will be what girls and women will see, and consequently will create their understanding of what GGC is. With some changes, we can each make Girl Guides of Canada the most inclusive and welcoming place for all girls and women.