

Waiting for the Ask

Knowing when to help and when to let girls “do.”

Throughout life we struggle with imperfection. As we empower girls to challenge themselves, they may begin to struggle with difficult tasks. Girl Scouts is a safe space to try new things and deal with flawed results. We want the girls to discover themselves: who they are, what they like or dislike, and what they are capable of. Allowing the girls to be independent and solve their own problems is an important step. What this means to a volunteer is that they must be patient and wait to be asked for help.

For instance, a Daisy is trying to tie her shoe. She is obviously frustrated with her shoe and making an audible fuss over her struggle.

Typical Reactions:

- **Volunteer approaches the girl and ties her shoe for her.**

This Daisy is no closer to knowing how to tie her own shoe. The idea is then enforced that she doesn't know how to tie shoes, that if she fusses she doesn't have to do something herself, and that causing a scene will get an adult's attention.

- **Volunteer gets frustrated at the girl for expressing her feelings in a disruptive way.**

While you as an adult know how to tie a shoe, this is still a very difficult concept for a young girl who has not completely developed her fine motor skills. Have patience; it will get you farther in building a relationship with the girl.

- **Volunteer demonstrates how to tie a shoe, but doesn't give the girl a chance to practice.**

While this is an improvement, it's still not quite the desired response.

What's a more constructive way to approach this situation?

- **Volunteer waits for the girl to ask for help.**
- **Volunteer then asks what the young girl has tried so far or asks where she is having trouble.**
- **Volunteer can then demonstrate how to tie one shoe as the girl mimics her actions on the other shoe.**

In this response, the volunteer empowers the girl to know it is okay to ask for help. The volunteer also acknowledges that the girl has exerted effort and has tried to tie her shoe on her own. The demonstration helps the girl develop her skill without her efforts being diminished.

This may seem quite simple, but often, in favor of time, we as adults glaze over these opportunities to empower girls. We love to swoop in and do things for the girls, to feel needed, important, or to just hurry things along. However, by allowing activities to unfold and allow for coaching moments, we can encourage the girls more effectively.

Learning by doing is one of the three processes essential to the Girl Scout Leadership Experience. “Waiting for the ask” is one of the most effective (and hardest) ways to let the girls learn from their actions. By allowing girls to struggle and possibly fail, we allow them to learn a lesson in a unique way, in an environment that is safe. Girls develop the leadership skills to handle these situations in Girl Scouts, then apply them to challenges they face elsewhere.