



How to Plan a Girl Scout Bridging Ceremony

As the end of the school year approaches, our troops start to wind down as we look forward to the end of the Girl Scout year as well. Though some Girl Scouts will just be finishing up the first year in their Girl Scout level, many girls are ready to take the next step in their Girl Scout careers—bridging to the next level!

What is “bridging” and Who is it for?

For girls who are already Girl Scouts, a “bridging” (or bridging ceremony) is a ceremony honoring and celebrating their graduation to the next Girl Scout level. Think Daisy to Brownie, Brownie to Junior, Junior to Cadette, Cadette to Senior, Senior to Ambassador, and even Ambassador to Adult! This progression marks important milestones in each girl’s journey through Girl Scouting and should be celebrated by the troop, family, and close friends.

When does Bridging Happen?

GSUSA and GSCI automatically recognize a girl’s level in Girl Scouting based on their year in school. As soon as one school year ends and another begins, she is considered having moved to the next grade level—but when *you* choose to host your official ceremony is really up to the troop. You might decide to follow the school year calendar and host your bridging ceremony in late May or early June to complement the last day of school. You might also choose to bridge during the summer, once all girls have had some free time to finish up the last of the badges or journeys they started. Another option is to wait and bridge at the start of the new Girl Scout year, in the Fall.

Why do we Bridge? And Why is it Important?

Think of it like this: A bridge is something that crosses a gap and gives us access to new and exciting things that wait to be discovered on the other side. A Girl Scout bridging ceremony does the same thing: it gives girls the opportunity to physically make the leap from one level to the next!

Bridging is an important transition in a Girl Scout’s life. It’s a defining moment when a girl becomes aware of her achievements and is ready for new adventures and responsibilities. Celebrating this change should be fun, personalized, and memorable for everyone involved. And most of all, it should be designed by the girls in true partnership with adults.

How to Plan a Girl-Led Bridging Ceremony

At its core, a bridging ceremony usually has three parts:

- **Opening:** Guests are welcomed and the tone is set.
- **Main section:** The ceremony is explained and the girls celebrate moving from one level to the next.
- **Closing:** Girls can participate in friendship circles and thank their guests.

Each of the ceremony's parts offers plenty of room for the girls' creativity and individuality, but it should always focus on paying tribute to Girl Scouts as they move forward.

Now, you're probably asking yourself, "*Okay, so how do I plan this bridging ceremony?*" To be completely honest, the answer is: **you don't**. This is a job for the girls! As a troop leader, your job is to guide your girls along as they plan their party and celebrate their accomplishments in their own unique way.

Of course, you aren't going to turn over the whole thing over to a group of Daisies and say "go ahead, make it happen." To keep things girl-led with younger Girl Scouts, you'll want to walk them through the ceremony step-by-step, listening to ideas that are important to them and giving them simple choices to make about what they want to do. If your troop wants every girl to hold a pink balloon (even though it has nothing to do with Girl Scouts or bridging) or serve PB&J sandwiches as hors d'oeuvres, honor their decision-making and include it in the ceremony.

When it comes to the actual preparation, call on your troop parents for support in making the celebration come to life and be sure to give your girls age appropriate duties. As your girls get older, you'll be able to loosen the reigns and give them more autonomy in the planning and execution of the ceremony-and their ideas for the party will definitely change overtime! For example, Brownies and Juniors can choose the location, make invitations, prepare a presentation about what they liked best about being a Brownie, etc. By the time your girls are in High School, you can pretty much just sit back and watch the process unfold. After all their years of engaging in girl-led experiences and learning-by-doing events, they'll be pros!

Tips, Hints, Ideas, & Resources for your next Bridging Ceremony

- **Devote sufficient time for planning the ceremony.** Good ceremonies have a clear purpose and enrich the meaning and mood of the event.
- **Take safety precautions** when using candles or fire, or when the girls construct bridges or platforms. Refer to Volunteer Essentials and the Safety Activity Checkpoints (available through your council) for specific advice.
- **Add personal elements** to traditional ceremonies. Use favorite poems, songs, stories, and sayings, or have the girls write something new.
- **Make it symbolic but keep it fun.** It can be sentimental but should also be fun for the girls. Including a flag ceremony, a poem recitation, girls saying what they've learned through the year are all great but if the girls are really not into all that, follow their lead and maybe encourage just one symbolic element.
- **Include a physical bridge.** There are a lot of ways to represent a bridge: an actual bridge in a park, a homemade bridge in a back yard, stepping stones, an archway, or you can simply walk from one end of the room to another!
- **Purchase Bridging Kits.** The Girl Scout Stores often sell "bridging kits" that include all the essential pieces you need... certificates, pins, badges, etc.
- **Don't go too crazy!** Encourage the girls to keep it simple and meaningful rather than overdone and stressful.

- **Only go to Pinterest as a last resort.** Pinterest has a *lot* of great ideas but can also be overwhelming. You can definitely get sucked in and spend hours gathering ideas to propose to your girls only to find out that they are happy with just a short little ceremony and some ice cream!
- **Above all, be thankful.** The ceremony should include a few minutes where girls and leaders give thanks to their parents and family members who have helped them through the years. Do you have a special caregiver in the troop who is always there to help when you need it? As the troop leader, you can take a moment to give them a special Girl Scout pin or certificate.

BONUS: Earn the Bridging Award in Three Easy Steps

Many Girl Scouts take their bridging to the next level (literally) by earning the bridging awards. The bridging awards makes the transition easier by enabling girls to share what they've learned with younger girls (Pass it On) and gives them the chance to learn from older girls about what great things will be happening in their next years of Girl Scouting (Look Ahead).

Bridging Awards



Step One: Pass it On

Share your talents and skills by teaching younger Girl Scouts something you learned to do at your current level. This could be as simple as meeting with a younger troop and showing them how to knit or sharing camp songs with them. Or the girls could choose something more elaborate like hosting a younger troop sleepover.

Step Two: Look Ahead

Find out what Girl Scouts at the next level do. This is the reverse of step one – team up with an older troop who may be bridging and needs to “Pass it On.” This makes it a win, win for all involved.

Step Three: Celebrate!

Plan a ceremony! Again, this is the girls’ job, but you help facilitate. There are so many great ideas online that you can propose to the girls if they are struggling to decide and, of course, they should try to include some sort of bridge if you can.