



Girl Scouts of Kentuckiana  
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## FLAG CEREMONIES IN THE OUTDOORS

A flag ceremony is an important part of Girl Scout program. Girls should be familiar with the proper way to conduct a flag ceremony both indoors and out. Additional information about flag ceremonies and a description of an indoor ceremony appear in the Council's Resource Sheet #32, Indoor Flag Ceremony.

### Proper Handling of the Flag

These guidelines for handling and displaying the flag were revised by Public Law 94-344, passed by the 94th Congress on July 7, 1976, and this law is known as the Federal Flag Code. The one purpose of the Flag Code is to assure RESPECT. The flag is always honored as the paramount official symbol of American liberties, loyalty, dignity and power.

- The American flag (not the color guard or the audience) always has the place of honor: to the right of other flags, in front of other flags, or higher than other flags.
- Right means "the flag's own right." Imagine that you are holding the flag in front of you and stand so you are facing the people who will see it. With the flag in that position, your right is "the flag's own right."
- The American flag should never be allowed to touch the floor, ground, **or** anything beneath it, nor to brush against objects.
- The flag should never be carried horizontally or flat, but always aloft and free.
- A salute to the American flag is given when the flag is being raised or lowered, when it passes by, and when the Pledge of Allegiance is recited. Each Girl Scout, whether in uniform or not, salutes the flag by placing her right hand over her heart.
- The flag should be raised briskly and lowered ceremoniously. Do not raise the flag while it is furled (rolled up or folded).
- When the national anthem is played or sung and the flag is presented, everyone should stand and face the flag and salute. If the flag is not present, everyone should stand at attention and salute while the anthem is played.
- The flag should be raised after sunrise and lowered before sunset unless there is a spotlight on the flag.
- In bad weather, the flag should not be displayed outdoors unless it is an all-weather flag.
- The flag should never be used as a cover (except to cover a casket) or draped over anything.
- When carried in a procession with another flag or flags, the American flag should be either on the marching right of the line of flags **or** in front and in the center of the line of flags.
- When flags of two or more nations are displayed together, they must be flown from separate poles of the same height and the flags should be approximately equal in size. International usage forbids the flag of one nation to fly above another in peacetime.
- When state, local or organizational flags are flown from the same pole, the U.S. flag should always be at the peak. When flown from separate poles, the U.S. flag should always be hoisted first and lowered last. The U.S. flag should always be higher than the adjacent flags.
- The flag should be washed or dry-cleaned if it becomes soiled.

- When the flag becomes old and worn it should be destroyed, preferably by burning. For the proper procedure for burning the flag, check with the American Legion or the Veterans of Foreign Wars or refer to the GSUSA publication, *Ceremonies in Girl Scouting*, 1990.

## CONDUCTING FLAG CEREMONIES IN THE OUT-OF-DOORS

A flag ceremony in the out-of-doors can add meaning and beauty to any outdoor ceremony. The key to a successful flag ceremony is practice. As long as the girls are familiar with proper handling of the flag and have had adequate time to become comfortable with the raising and lowering of the flag on a large flagpole, they are sure to execute a perfect flag ceremony.

As with all activities in Girl Scouting a good girl/adult partnership will help the girls plan a ceremony appropriate for the occasion. A short, simple rehearsal with emphasis on speaking clearly, slowly, and loudly will make all the difference in the girls' confidence and consequently in the ceremony.

### **Formation**

Observers should gather around the flagpole in a horseshoe or hollow square formation and stand silently at attention as the color guard advances. The caller, who verbally commands the color guard, should stand at one end of this formation.

### **The Color Guard**

The color guard consists of the color bearer, who holds the flag, and two, four, or more guards, depending on the size of the flag and the number of people needed to handle and fold it. After everyone has assembled, the caller says: "Color guard, advance." The color guard advances until it stands at the foot of the flagpole. The color bearer leads with the triangularly folded flag on her hands and forearms. (The long side of the triangle is toward her body and the broadest point of the triangle leads.) The guards follow in pairs behind her.

### **The Ceremony**

The most important part of the ceremony is the raising and lowering of the flag. Other features of the ceremony such as songs, the Pledge of Allegiance, or poems are recited or sung after the flag has been raised or before it is lowered. The color guard stands at attention during the ceremony. The color guard does not participate in the singing, speaking, or saluting since its part in the ceremony is handling and guarding of the flag. While the flag is being raised and lowered, all present salute and stand quietly at attention throughout the ceremony. Silence is observed from the time the color guard begins its advance until the color guard returns to its starting point after the ceremony.

### **Raising the Flag**

When the flag is to be raised, the caller says: "Color guard advance. Post the colors." When the color guard reaches the flagpole, the color bearer passes the flag to the first two color guards to hold while she takes the ropes of the flagpole and fastens the clips to the grommets of the flag. The color bearer should make sure the distance between the clips is the same as between the grommets on the flag. After both grommets have been fastened securely, the bearer quickly hoists the flag up to the top of the flagpole. If the flag does not unfurl by itself, the two front color guards may help unfold it. Then the ropes are secured to the flagpole.

### **Lowering the Flag**

When the flag is to be lowered, the color guard advances as before and stands at attention at the base of the flagpole. The color guard remains at attention until the ceremony is over. The caller announces: "Color guard, retire the colors." The bearer lowers the flag slowly, without stopping, until she can hold the bottom corner of the flag. The color guards step forward to catch the rest of the flag and to prevent it from touching the ground.

The color guards hold the flag while the bearer unhooks the clips. The guards then take the flag from the bearer and fold it into its original triangular shape. The bearer fastens the rope to the flagpole as the guards fold the flag.

### **Folding the Flag**

Open fully, the flag is held by the color guards, with the blue field nearest the flagpole. The flag is folded in half lengthwise (twice, if necessary). The blue field should be on the outside of the fold. The two color guards farthest from the flagpole begin folding the flag into a triangle until the flag is completely folded. The first two color guards then present the folded flag to the bearer.

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### **Dismissing the Color Guard**

After the girls have lowered and folded the flag, the caller says: "Color guard, dismissed." There is no set way to dismiss the color guard; however, the following are suggestions.

1. The color bearer holds the triangularly folded flag (point forward) and turns right, walking back in the direction the guard advanced. The color guards, in pairs, follow closely behind the color bearer.
2. The color guards, in pairs, line up shoulder to shoulder behind the color bearer. Each guard then turns to face her partner and takes a big step backwards creating an aisle for the color bearer to walk through. The bearer turns aboutface, the flag placed correctly in her hands, and walks down the aisle. The color guards fall in behind her in pairs. The caller should say: "Girls, dismissed."

