

## Top tips: Growing hope for girls in a COVID-19 world

These are challenging times for churches, and children's and youth work is no exception. Girls' Brigade (GB) has created a top tips resource to help leaders build connections and continue to help nurture children's and young people's faith during this season.

Many of the ideas and advice below is from GBEW leaders who are currently engaging with GB members on Zoom or face-to-face (when restrictions allow).

### Top tips on how to facilitate an effective and fun GB online session well

- Choose the best software
  - There are a few types of software available. Choose the software which is best for you. Read more about the options at <https://swgfl.org.uk/resources/safe-remote-learning/video-conferencing-for-kids-safeguarding-and-privacy-overview/>.
- Equip leaders
  - Not all leaders will be confident on using online software like Zoom. GB has produced this short film about how to use Zoom effectively – watch at <https://youtu.be/zUoMypbs2-A>. Have a trial session with the leadership team before your first session with the girls.
- Be authentic, not perfect
  - Please don't feel pressure to do everything perfectly. The children and young people will be excited to connect with you – even if the technology doesn't go smoothly. Be authentic, not perfect.
- Be vibrant & engaging
  - Imagine you're there in the room with your GB group. Be lively as you speak.
- Create ground rules
  - If you're using software like Zoom, it's important to create some boundaries i.e. no swearing, don't take photos, no misuse of chat function, and explain how you will use the mute button.
- Make it interactive
  - Listening passively is not a great way to learn. Invite children to shout out responses when key words are said in a story or to take part in acting out the Bible story.
  - Zoom has a host of features which enable lots of interactivity. For example, the whiteboard facility can be used to play games like hangman and draw emotions.
  - Use slides, pictures, videos, PowerPoint and YouTube. Add sound clips, pictures, multimedia. Just remember to click the share computer sound button when you're sharing your screen.
- Include all members of the leadership team in delivery
  - 4<sup>th</sup> Lincoln found it worked well to have each member of the leadership lead a different part of the programme. This helped the members to become familiar with the structure and format as well as maintain relationships with the leaders.
- Be quiet
  - Including some times of quiet space is very effective in helping children reflect, ponder, and connect with God in their own way. Use background music, an object or image as a focus.

- Have a chat
  - Use Zoom calls before, during or after your session is broadcast so children can discuss content together.
- Build community
  - Incorporate videos or pictures of GB members doing song actions, weekly challenges, memory verse recaps, Bible readings or prayers. This can convey a strong sense of community and belonging.
- Create programme packs for children
  - 4<sup>th</sup> Lincoln made packs which consisted of pre-prepared craft kits and the GB@Home badgework, an item of 'tuck', glue stick, colouring picture, a letter to keep in touch with those who couldn't Zoom and whatever else was needed. These were hand delivered by the leaders to the children, and the team included some children who'd shown some interest before lockdown (but hadn't yet joined) into the mail drop.
- Cultivate space for children to express emotions
  - As we know, this is a challenging time for everyone. It's really important to help children and young people express their emotions. Create time for the group to share a good thing about their week and then a challenge that they encountered.
- Engage with the whole family
  - Some GB groups have made relationships with parents stronger by encouraging whole families to take part in the online programme. This has given families a better understanding of the value of GB and how their children are cared for.
- Empower members
  - 4<sup>th</sup> Nottingham found it useful to ask the girls for ideas for informal nights and then use their ideas or better still you could get them to prepare activities such as the games and quizzes.

### Programme ideas for engaging children and young people online

- **GB@Home programme:** Over the past few months, GB has produced a number of excellent resources for groups to use online, face-to-face or to send to girls to complete individually.
  - Christmas Countdown is a look at the themes of advent – a journey together towards Christmas, considering God coming close to us and linked to the fact we might not have been physically close to those we love this year but we can be close to them in other ways. It's supported by 10 YouTube videos, which share Bible stories, prayers, and demonstrations of how to do craft activities.
  - The material is suitable for delivery face-to-face in a group, online, or could be sent to parents/carers for them to do with their children at home. Although we think programme content is important, connection with children, young people and their families is even more so.
  - Download the Christmas Countdown resource as well as the other GB@Home programmes at <http://leaders.gbew-members.org.uk/activities/resource/christmas-countdown>.
- **In addition, there are also lots of additional online activities and challenges to do**
  - For example scavenger hunts, pictionary, talent shows, bingo, 'Would I Lie to You', quizzes – picture and questions, scattergories, countdown and many more!



- **Host a virtual challenge**
  - 4th Nottingham hosted a sunflower growing competition, a cake decorating competition and even a 'Hope' picture competition where the entries were sent to a local care home.
- **Reimagining annual events**
  - **Camps and residentials**
    - 16th Liverpool leaders sent out a camp booklet and some sweets to each young person before the camp, then three videos per day over five days for the young people to watch and engage in. The videos included photo challenges, water challenges, TikTok challenges and recipes and demonstrations of the food they would have eaten at camp. Participants took photos of their attempt at the challenges and sent them in each morning via the WhatsApp group. Team Leader Linda says 'The 7pm video was our camp devotion time, we took the theme of using four Disney princesses and looked at how they interacted with the Bible verses and everyday life. We thank God that the camp was a success and girls and leaders alike were blessed.'
    - Last July, 4<sup>th</sup> Nottingham GB should have been going on a trip to Skegness, so seized the opportunity to go on the trip virtually! Everyone dressed ready for the seaside and had buckets and spades, surfboards, sun hats, ice lollies etc. 'On the way' the group sang songs and played Simon says!
  - **Online award evenings**
    - 1st Hawkwell held an award's evening where parents and girls were invited online to see photos and videos accompanying a retelling of the activities and fun that the girls had over the past year. When the time came for the special awards, girls who'd been chosen were asked to go to their doors where GB leaders had placed a trophy and prize!
    - At 1st Uxbridge, to celebrate the end of the school year, they held a 'Big Virtual Get Together' with their local Boys' Brigade group. Team Leader Stephanie says '20 families – including one family who joined from Bulgaria where they were visiting relatives – met online for an incredible evening. The young people sent in videos of themselves showcasing their talents – football, playing the piano, recorder, drums and violin, computer animation, dancing, gymnastics, trampolining, canoeing and paddleboarding, singing and a variety of different crafts. There was a look back at previous displays and events in "A Blast from the Past", and the **n:vestigate** girls and Anchor boys treated the group to a very special rendition of "Our God is a Great Big God". The resounding message at the end of the event was to remind everyone that they're STILL 1st Uxbridge and WILL be back! It was a very special occasion for everyone who took part and watched.'

### **Other ideas for maintaining contact with children and young people during lockdown**

Some children and young people will prefer not to engage online for a variety of reasons or may not have access to technology or quiet space. But there are other ways that we can maintain contact with our GB members.

- **Deliver gifts and goody bags**
  - In the first lockdown lots of GB volunteers worked hard to deliver gifts to their young people. 1st Clacton-on-Sea members received Easter cards, chocolates and activity packs from the leaders. The young people at 21st Castleford were treated to goody bags every month.
- **Film a staying in touch film**
  - 4th Sheffield recorded a short film to help stay in touch with their GB members. Watch this at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZS7t4lbPtc&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZS7t4lbPtc&feature=youtu.be).
- **Record a Bible bedtime story**
  - Pre-record a weekly bedtime story and send to parents or host a live weekly bedtime story. This could be very effective in engaging with **n:vestigate** groups for a short time online.
- **Hosting a weekly/monthly GB challenge**
  - Groups don't need to meet online to host a challenge. Ask girls to write a poem about GB or to create the GB crest out of different materials or even incorporate GB into baking cakes. Get their parents to send you the photos and you could even choose a weekly winner.
- **Church buddy scheme**
  - 1st Gawsorth started a buddy scheme with GB members paired up with a member from the church community. During lockdown, the buddies wrote to each other. This was a great way to provide support to children as well as the older members of the church community.
- **Keep in touch with parents via WhatsApp**
  - 5th Northampton group leaders decided it was also important to stay connected with parents and carers and set up a WhatsApp group. This proved to be a very constructive decision and created the opportunity to share positive messages to boost morale as well as sharing COVID-19 related guidance and general communications and photos of the activities.

## Top tips for resuming face to face GB meetings

Please check the current GBM guidance about resuming face-to-face activities and ensure that the group submits all paperwork to the GB Support Centre in order for approval to be granted. Please note that during a national lockdown, GB groups should not be meeting face-to-face. Read more information at <https://www.girlsbrigademministries.org.uk/resource/covid-19-resuming-gb-community-group-activities-guidance/>.

- **Personal invitations**
  - 2nd Arnold's leaders were pleased when their girls joined them online after creating invitation leaflets and hand-delivering them to their members.
- **Engage with local media**
  - Trinity GB group submitted a press release about their local GB group starting again and it was included in their local newspaper. With most things in the local community closed, the newspaper was thrilled to have some good news.
- **Preparing members**
  - There's no doubt that GB will 'look' a little different for the foreseeable future with having to wear face masks and social distancing. Make sure the girls and parents are aware of how you're going to keep everyone safe – as well as a letter from GB you could make a video so everyone knows what to expect before they arrive. Have clear signs so that both girls and parents know what's expected when they arrive.



- **Make being socially distanced a fun thing not a scary thing**
  - Use carpet square samples or hoops to show where children can sit. They're also great for using as markers for many games. Can you play the 'bean' game and not fall off your carpet square? Make sure the leader has their own square too!
- **Create individual resource packs**
  - Give each child their own stationery (felt-tips, scissors, pencil, glue stick etc.) and craft supplies for that evening. This could be a colourful cloth bag or a box that the girls can decorate and easily identify each week. This will be loved from the youngest to the oldest girl and is a great starter activity!
  - You can also put things in the packs like plain paper for drawing, colouring, wordsearches and other puzzles that can be done by the girls during the evening particularly at the beginning and end of a session. Those are the most challenging times, the girls need to be engaged from the very beginning of the evening as we can't have our usual routines.
- **Set up the room to be inclusive**
  - Putting tables into a large circle round the room with girls facing inwards so the girls can all still see each other and there is still space for activities in the centre. They've all had enough sitting in rows at school!
- **Ask the girls**
  - It's going to feel strange and different to both girls and leaders to how GB was 'before'. So ask the girls the games that they'd like to play or the activities that they'd like to do. How can you adapt them to make them socially distant? We can try to make things as normal as possible but we don't know, until we ask, the things that the girls have really missed doing at GB.

## **Ideas for how to build relationships with the wider church and community**

- **Community trails**
  - Trinity GB decided to create a special fairy trail in the community to engage other families and spread some happiness. Leader Kerin shared 'The first week, the children all decorated fairy doors or made them from scratch, whilst their second sessions were spent out hiding – or finding – the doors along the Radstock end of the local Greenway. Many of the children have taken their families on the same walk to search for their particular fairy door.' The group is currently planning a Christmas trail for more safe-but-fun outdoor antics for the whole community.
- **Food parcels and outreach**
  - More than 40 food parcels were delivered in less than two weeks to people stuck at home during the COVID-19 pandemic first lockdown, thanks to members of 1st Haydock GB group. A group leader's daughter said she wanted to help people and the leaders came up with the idea of a weekly food parcel service, delivered to people who are referred from the community. Team Leader Becky Taylor says 'We've asked for donations from the families that come to GB and the leaders have donated too, but it has expanded to the public also donating, with the leaders using their homes as drop-off points, and the local Home Bargains shop staff are also collecting weekly for us.'
  - 1st Guildford GB leaders actively led a community response to COVID-19 in the first lockdown, having set up an association to provide free cooked meals to vulnerable families, now working across Guildford and surrounding villages. The

response is called Stoke Community Support (SCS) and is supported by members of Girls' and Boys' Brigades, St John's and St Peter's churches in Guildford alongside several local schools.

- **Messy Church**

- 1st Hinckley GB and BB joined with their Messy Church team to produce their first Messy Parade service featuring songs, a virtual drama, a cake, photos and videos of prayers and readings from the members.

### **More resources to help you:**

- GBM film on how to use Zoom – [youtu.be/zUoMvpbs2-A](https://youtu.be/zUoMvpbs2-A)
- List of game ideas – <http://leaders.gbew-members.org.uk/perch/resources/games.pdf>
- @home sheets- <https://www.girlsbrigadeministries.org.uk/post/gbhome-launches/>
- koko – <https://www.girlsbrigadeministries.org.uk/koko-blog/>
- GB International has launched two Connected resources designed to help parents and leaders across the world support children and young people during this difficult time. You can download both free: <https://gbworldwide.org/gb-connected-resource-part-2-launched/>
- The Kitchen Table Project has produced a brief resource about how to make online children's work effective. It is based on ideas from Sarah Holmes, an expert in children's faith formation, who researched the online provision from 100 churches to identify the most important factors. Read more at <https://kitchentable.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/CFF-KTP-Online-Childrens-Work-Research-FINAL.pdf>.