

GROUP LEADER GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

informal tips from voices of experience

The first thing that should be stressed is that you should not see this document as a 'how to' guide to 'do' the role of Group Leader. It should be seen as offering advice and tips from people who have done something similar before. But only take the advice if you want to; this booklet should in no way prevent you from bringing your own creativity to the role, doing things differently and doing things better. It's a cliché, but there really is no "right" way.

Pre-Holiday Tips

- **Familiarise yourselves with the timetable** for the week. If you know, then your helpers will be better informed, and so will the kids. This keeps everyone happy and increases the chances of everyone being in the right place at the right time (fingers crossed!).
- Put some time aside to **read the All About Me sheets**. Having a good understanding of the holiday-makers and their needs will mean that you are able to answer helpers' questions. If you are unfamiliar with particular diagnoses then ask the team, but don't worry too much about that - the most important thing to understand is the holiday makers' likes and dislikes, routines and needs, everything that will help us make the holiday the best it can be for each individual holiday maker!
- **Understand the SuperTroop senior team**, the different roles within the team, who does what and who to ask for different kinds of help.
- **Rest** if you can – catch up on sleep and eat well in the days beforehand. Think about **what you need** to survive and thrive during the week e.g. look at the kit list, snacks for your room, bring a notebook
- It can be really helpful for you to **review helper training and induction materials** to remind yourself what they have been told. Your job is to know this stuff well, **repeat** a lot of it, like the one-to-one rule, and **build on it** gradually over the week.

[New Volunteer Welcome Pack](#) – this is the same for all new SuperTroop volunteers

[Helper Flipbook](#) – this is the best practice guide for helpers, summarizing the key things they need to know in one place

[Volunteer Handbook](#) – this is a narrative introduction to SuperTroop, flagging important details from our policies

New helper quizzes on [Bedtime](#), [Communication](#), [Signing](#) and general [Best Practice](#)

What to bring

- ❖ **A rucksack** – Not as obvious as you might think – many people are prone to forgetting! This is what you will keep all your IMPORTANT GL stuff in, like medication, a spray bottle of water, spare rubber gloves, and your group's booklet for recording observations that day. Also to be found in a GL rucksack: snacks and spare toys etc., anything you want really.

The holiday team will provide wipes, suncream, gloves and so on. You don't need to bring these, but you do need somewhere to keep them when you're out and about!

- ❖ **Ideas** - It's nice to have an arsenal of ideas to fall back on in situations where there might not be a specific activity planned. Think of things to entertain the group on long bus journeys or when you're hanging out outside. A game of Duck Duck Goose or an impromptu theatrical production usually goes down a treat, but you might have other plans to help your helpers / kids bond... This is by no means a necessity, but it's worth having a little think about...
- ❖ **Props** – Similar to "ideas", it's always nice to be able to delve into your rucksack and pull out something that's going to entertain someone on a long bus journey. If you buy anything remember to keep the receipt and [claim back the cost](#). Only get stuff which is safe – assume it might be chewed, licked, thrown or sat on.

Look in HQ on the first day of the holiday for stuff like headphone splitters (so two people can listen to music on the same phone), Top Trumps cards, sensory and fidget toys.

- ❖ **Snacks** - Please bring crisps / chocolate / fizzy pop for sharing with your group on their duty night. This means you don't have to disappear into town just before your duty starts, and your group won't decimate the whole-holiday supplies in one night. Remember also that we do not expect you to fund any of the week out of your own pocket – you should ask your group for contributions or for refreshments etc. while we're on a trip, you should keep the receipt and ask to be reimbursed.

Meeting your group of helpers for the first time!

You might meet them for the first time at the holiday or you might have the chance to connect beforehand on WhatsApp.

Plan how you are going to cultivate a team, the key messages you want them to take on board, and the things they need to know about you.

- They need to be able to relate to you, so **introduce yourself**, give some background on your life and experiences and why you volunteer with SuperTroop.
- **Get to know your group** – what are their motivations for volunteering? What do they want to get out of it? Knowing this info will help you think about using their skills throughout the week.
- Explain what **your role as a group leader** involves: a group leader is a go-to person; they are responsible for each holiday maker-helper pairing in their group
- Set up a **WhatsApp group** so you can chat throughout the day/evenings! Very helpful for sharing of information regarding meeting points, changes in schedule etc
- For many helpers this will be the first time they have worked with or spent time with young people with disabilities. Have a quick chat about **respectful language** and the importance of ensuring the holiday makers' dignity at all times.
- **Go over the basics**, ensure they know the model e.g. they each have a bedtime kid and this stays the same throughout the holiday, but they will be partnered with a different holidaymaker each day.
- You will need to strike a balance between being **approachable** and **setting boundaries**, so it is worth discussing your expectations and setting group rules with them – best to start off slightly stricter and you can always ease off once you have a better sense of their styles.

Suggested Ground Rules

1. 1:1 AT ALL TIMES

- This does not just mean being near your kid and “keeping an eye”, it means active engagement and spending quality time together.

2. Communication between helper and GL is key.

- You need to know who they're with, where they are, and if they're OK.
- Asking helpers to share their phone location with you can be a great way to know where they are at all times, especially if they don't have time to message on the WhatsApp group.

3. Phones should be used for communication via the WhatsApp group, listening to music together, photos and should not take any attention away from spending quality time with the holiday maker

4. Breaks are essential

- Emphasise that constant engagement is tiring so they will be given breaks, and they can ask for them too.
- Taking a break BEFORE running out of energy is key to maintaining their role all week

5. Swapping & breaks go through YOU

- If a senior helper has offered to spend time with their holiday-maker while they run to the bathroom, they need to ask the senior helper to radio you so that you are aware of this change.
- Likewise, no swapping pairings without your approval, even if they have told a Senior Helper.

6. Asking for help and admitting mistakes is essential – keeping a secret is a lot worse than making a mistake.

The role of a Group Leader is really divided into two parts: **Practical** and **Pastoral**. The Practical elements will help you to be where you need to be and with all the things you need. The Pastoral encompasses the support you provide to your helpers, and each other.

Practical

Mornings: Now you don't have a kid to wash / dress of a morning, you have extra time in bed! However, it's also a good idea to make sure that all of your group are progressing with their morning routine and helping them where needed. It's also a great time to have another look over the About Me pages for your group that day. Make sure you pick up a radio for the day.

Swapping: Your helpers should get their bedtime kids to the dining hall, and during breakfast they should swap to their kid for that day. Try to get the swaps done as soon as bedtime kids are in their seats, so that your helpers don't end up leaving the dining hall with their bedtime kid, without having swapped. Try and share on the GL WhatsApp group chat which helper will be with each holiday maker to help organise swaps at breakfast.

Breakfast (/all meals): The most important thing is that the kids get the right food, so check their dietary requirements. The next most important thing is that they get the right amount of food (not too much or too little), so keep an eye on quantities and inform the SH team if you have concerns. Also ensure that your helpers are well fed - it's your job to ply them with food. Try and encourage your helpers / kids to stay at the table to minimise chaos, whilst you perform the role of waiter / waitress (reinforce the fact that no helper ever leaves his / her child alone at the table, even if

there's lots of other helpers around). You should also remember that it is the responsibility of you and your group to clear the table at the end of the meal.

Medication: If any of the kids in your group have medication that needs to stay with them (check All About Me), it remains in the medical room for as long as we are at the house. If we are going on a trip, discuss with the medical team who is going to carry that medication and how to stay in touch. You might need a radio for the helper with that kid, for example.

Trips: Usually require a spare set of clothes for all kids if water-based, and any kids who might have an accident should take spare clothes everywhere. You'll need spare socks if there's a ball pool, and if there's anything like sailing or canoeing, check any rules about footwear. Take plenty of pads for any kids who use them, along with gloves, aprons, wipes and bags. You might want special snacks and spare drinks for some kids in your group. There's plenty to remember... why not use this handy mnemonic:

What Might Come In Handy?

W – Wheelchairs

M – Medication

C – Clothing

I – Intimate care

H – HELPERS.

Make sure your group get breaks, snacks and drinks on a trip - you should keep the receipt and ask to be reimbursed or get a card-holder to buy for you.

Lunch: Might be packed, in which case make sure the right dietary requirement stuff gets to the right kid. Those children who have special diets will have an individually labeled pack lunch. Make sure everyone washes his or her hands and gets properly clean after eating too! This is a good chance to check in and see if anyone needs sunscreen, and to ask about bowel movements (discreetly!).

Swimming: This normally happens after lunch, so it can be a good idea to swap helpers during lunch so everyone is with someone of the same gender, ready for the changing rooms. There will be plenty of SHs on hand in the changing rooms if any of your helpers need assistance.

Diaries: On the SuperTroop week, your group of kids and their helpers will be managed by one of the senior team, while you have your daily GL meeting. Make sure you handover to them and let them know where your kids are and which helpers they are with.

Group Leader meetings: This is the time you get to talk about your groups, your helpers, the kids, and anything else that you think might be helpful to share. Information sharing between the GLs is key to the holiday so make good use of this time. Make sure the observations you've made that day are written down in your group's booklet.

Dinner: (See Breakfast). Make sure everyone washes his or her hands again and ask your helpers (discreetly!) about any bowel movements that day.

Sing Song: Just keep counting to check you have everyone. And sing loudly.

Bedtime: Some of your helpers may have challenging bedtime kids and senior team should be around to support them. Your role is to check that your group are all OK and ensure that no-one goes anywhere until the duty group is in place. If you are the duty group, position your helpers around the house as soon as possible and ply them with snacks.

Off-duty evening: Self-explanatory. Normally nice to socialize a bit with your group, but you don't have to/they may not want you to. Make sure no-one's getting pissed and make sure everyone heads back to the house in a timely manner.

Evening meetings: Here's when you go through the next day's group with your helpers. It's a good idea for everyone to read all of the kids' About Me pages and it's also a good idea to work out who will go with whom for the first part of the next day so they know who to find at Breakfast. Make sure you give everyone some praise and any feedback is constructive – how to do better, not what went wrong.

Bed: By "bed", we mean "send your group to bed" so the duty group can clock-off for the night. You might want to take some time to debrief the day with other GLs and senior team, but don't get to bed too late.

Bus or Waiting Games

I spy: One person picks an object they can see either in the bus or along the road. You usually play by giving a clue of the first letter of the word, or the colour, e.g. "I spy with my little eye... something blue." The other person keeps guessing til they get it right – add more clues if needed!

I hear with my little ear: This game has the same process as above, but the person thinks of a sound they can hear, and gives clues like, loud, quiet, far away, close, buzzy.

I'm going on a picnic: The first player says, "I'm going on a picnic and bringing..." and then names an item you can bring on a picnic. The next player names what the first person brought and names a second item, the third person needs to remember what the first two brought and add a third item and the game continues until it becomes too tricky to remember.

Treasure hunt: In Treasure Hunt, players must decide on what they will look for while on the road. For example, a yellow car, a man driving in a hat, a woman driving in a blue top, cows by the side of the road, horses in a field they call out what they see on the way and shout bingo when they have seen 3 items decided on the list.

Round and round the garden: run your finger in circles on the child's palm while saying the rhyme "round and round the garden..." other sensory / tickle games like this can be lots of fun for kids who aren't big on talking.

Rhythm hand claps: One person sets a rhythm clapping their hands together or on their legs and arms (please be sensitive to any motor difficulties your partner may have) and the other person has to join in the rhythm and follow as it gets faster, slower, or changes.

Mirror game: turn to face your partner and choose who is the leader and who is the mirror. The leader makes slow actions, dance moves and facial expressions and the other person tries to copy until one person shouts change and you switch who is the leader and who is the mirror.

Name that tune: this might be more suitable for the older kids and is a good opportunity to ask them about the kind of music they like (if they listen to music). Using your phone, play a well-known song (check the lyrics are not too outrageous) and help them guess what the name of the song is.

Pastoral

Day 1

If this is your first year as a Group Leader, you will probably spend the whole first day feeling very strange. This is normal. The most important thing to do on the first day is to make sure your helpers have the opportunity to bond with their bedtime kid. It is up to you entirely, but it is probably a good idea to keep each helper with their bedtime kid for the whole day. Be mindful that many of your helpers may be two-to-one with their bedtime kid – work with other groups leaders to give them each some one-on-one time to get them used to that feeling.

Experienced Helpers

There will be some experienced helpers at SuperTroop, who will want to be relied upon, so don't feel bad about heaping responsibility onto them. Encourage them to go above and beyond, especially if they're working with one of the so-called "easier" holiday makers. You can ask them if they have any advice to share with the group.

New Helpers

On the other hand, most of your helpers will be new and some may be struggling... There are a few things you can do to help them get into the swing of things. One of the best is the Senior Helper model. By placing a struggling helper with your group's SH for the day, they can watch how the senior helper interacts with the kids and hopefully pick up some ideas. Experienced helpers can also be paired with new helpers while their confidence is still growing. It's best not to tell the helper this is what you're doing though...

All Helpers

Encouragement is one of the most important things you can provide as a GL. Praise and reassurance through the day and at evening meetings goes a long way. Silly awards each evening can make helpers feel that their hard work is being noticed and appreciated.

Respect

Although it's vital to bond with your group, don't forget to stamp your authority. This will stop your helpers doing things like swapping kids without checking with you or undermining your instructions. This doesn't happen very often anyway, but by ruling your group with a firm iron fist, you can ensure it doesn't happen at all.

Support network

Whilst the SHs are obviously there to support you at all times, your most important support network is each other. SHs are always there for you and will do their best, but sometimes the SHs are too old to remember the day-to-day of being a group leader. But you're all doing it together and will probably have just the right piece of advice... so make the most of it. You should have no trouble in picking the right person to chat to if you've got something on your mind.

Breaks

Establish the length of breaks people prefer. Don't be afraid to use SHs and don't worry about not giving enough - GLs always feel this way, but you shouldn't feel pressured into giving unnecessary breaks. Different people prefer breaks at different times (coach trip versus middle of an outing), so be cognisant of that. Find a formula that suits you - there is no single rigid system for this. Also, beware not to take "more" breaks than your helpers and always ensure that your group is sorted (e.g. on arriving back at the houses) before going for a break yourself.

Day off

Hooray! It's your long-awaited and well-earned day off! If this is at the beginning of the week, it's a great opportunity to get to know your helpers, and for them to get to know each other. If your day off falls later on in the week it'll be these things too, but also a much-needed rest.

There will be some duties to do in the morning, which will be listed in HQ. After your group has had breakfast, arrange a time to meet there. It's really important to the running of the week that all tasks are performed fully and correctly. Be efficient, work hard and get them done so you can start your day off.

The world's your oyster – you will receive some spending money so go out and explore the beautiful city of Edinburgh. As long as you're back in time for sing song, you can do what you like. There's a growing tradition that groups prepare a song for sing song too! The most important thing is to make sure that no-one gets into a position where there is any doubt about their ability to look after a child. Be sure to remind your helpers that they will still need to put their kid to bed in the evening, but ultimately it is your responsibility to make sure everyone else is responsible.

Make the Most of the Senior Team

The SHs are there to help you, so use them!

- If you have more male / female helpers in your group, it's worth drafting in an SH of the less-represented sex to help you during swimming
- On trips away from the house book a senior helper the day before, to support your group.
- In house feel free to demand senior helper support at crunch times, like for personal care or during transitions between locations

Don't be afraid to ask any SH whether they would like to be with your group the following day. Don't assume that, for example, the medical team can't be with you. Try to get organised as early as possible when booking someone. Don't feel you need to pick someone who is used to working with a specific holiday-maker either, senior helpers like a bit of variety too!

Use your SH for whatever purpose you need them, whether that be allowing others to have breaks, being a 'model' helper to inspire your group, supervising a break-away holiday-maker who wants to do their own thing, or shadowing one of your helpers who is struggling.

Using the Radio

Hold down the button and wait a second before speaking, to make sure the channel is open.

Give clear information and context. Instead of "has anyone seen Sam?" try "Sam and Mo just left for the pool, can anyone confirm if they have arrived?" or "Are Lia and Brooke back from Costa yet?"

If your call is urgent start the message clearly "Urgent call: senior team needed at the dining hall". If it isn't urgent, say so "I need a first aider not urgently"

Make sure you ask for exactly what you want "male helper needed for personal care support" or "first aider needed at Dalmeny front door"

If a child is missing and not with a helper use the fake-helper code name to alert the team.

Managing Stressful Situations

The vast majority of experiences with holiday-makers during this week will be happy and positive. However sometimes crisis points do arise. These can happen because holiday-makers find it difficult to express their needs, or may find specific experiences – such as crowded noisy environments – extremely hard to handle. Other sources of stress include anxiety about transitions (e.g. moving from one place to the next), confusion about what is happening next, or how long something happening now (e.g. a bus journey) will last. **Keeping communication lines open is the single best tool for preventing a crisis.** This means listening and watching, as well as speaking.

Prevention

- Use **timetables**, or clear simple language, to help them understand what's happening next. Remember some people may only want to know about the next step, not a whole day's worth of activities
- Keep holiday-makers **entertained during waiting times**, or recognise and praise them for waiting nicely – *"good waiting", "lovely sitting", "thanks for waiting so nicely"*
- Make sure the individual has **plenty of time to process** what you are saying – use communication aids if needed / appropriate
- Try to find out about the **usual bedtime routine** of your helpers' bedtime kids, and follow that. Routines like this can be reassuring and helpful so that the individual knows that bedtime is approaching and settles to sleep

Choices and Changes

A common situation is that a holiday-maker may be reluctant to try something new, or start a less interesting activity (e.g. go to lunch instead of playing). In addition to the above you can:

- **Offer choices** and options so the young person feels they have control
- **Lead by example:** do it yourself, have fun, and show them what they are missing
- **Let other people start first** and watch them – you can talk about what you can see other people doing, and then suggest joining in with the group / a favourite person
- **Offer to help** with whatever the individual is finding tricky / wants to finish
- Give holiday-makers **warning** when an activity is coming to an end, try to allow time to finish what they are doing.
- Explain what the next activity is going to be like, and check they have understood
- Give reasonable **explanations** about why the next activity is a good idea – e.g. eating meals is important so you have energy to play
- Sometimes it is possible to offer a chance to **return to an activity later**, or on another day – but don't promise if you can't be sure
- Use **gentle encouragement** – don't push the issue and reassure them if they are anxious
- Don't be reluctant to **ask for help** from group leaders or senior helpers

De-Escalation

If you are with a holiday-maker who is becoming upset or showing signs of impending crisis, it is best to try and use a **low-arousal** or **low-demand environment**.

- Remember the **All About Me** sheet. Think about what strategies other people have used successfully, and what are common triggers which upset that person
- Use a **gentle voice**, **reduce eye contact**, **relax your body** and **create space**
- Try **not** to **over-crowd** them. Step back, keep a low calm voice, give time and space. **Reduce demands** - think "do I need to say this?"
- If the holiday-maker becomes rude or aggressive, don't respond, and **try not to take it personally**. Try to detect if there is a reasonable message in there.
- If something specific is causing the **distress**, see if you can **remove** that thing, or move them away from it (e.g. a noisy toy)
- **Don't make threats**, or offer rewards which cannot be met. However, it is OK to point out reasonable consequences: *"if you don't get ready now, we won't have time to go swimming"*

Your Priorities

1. One to one

At any one time you should know which holiday-maker is with which helper and roughly where they are. Even if you can't see them you should know, for example, "they set off for the playground ten minutes ago"

2. Supervision

If you can't keep your group together (e.g. you are swimming with most of the group, but one of them is going to a café instead) you should be assigning a senior helper to keep an eye on the part of the group that you're not with

3. Diets

Make sure all your kids get the right food, taking into account allergies and diets (e.g. halal), and keeping track of whether they are eating well or not

4. Hydration

Your kids should be getting plenty of water or juice, especially on hot days

5. Clean

Your kids should be clean, with washed hands before meals and wiped faces after food.

6. Suncream

Your kids should be getting suncream applied regularly as needed

7. Helper wellbeing

Your helpers should be getting breaks and support, drafting in senior team to do this as needed, as well as a chance to be challenged. Don't assume a new helper can't "manage" a tricky kid.

8. Day off jobs

Take the time to get these jobs done well, so everyone can benefit, and make sure you clearly communicate the results (e.g. where have you put any new shopping?)

Above and Beyond

Try as we might, there are some things that are always really hard to keep on top of during a SuperTroop holiday. If you have a calmer day, see what you can do to go above and beyond...

- Lost property – help your helpers with laundry and keeping bedrooms tidy. Do an audit at bedtime to make sure clothes haven't been lost and are in the right place.
- Bowel movements – keep track of any kids who are prone to constipation and keep the medical team proactively informed. Give kids uninterrupted time to sit on the loo without being distracted (can YOU poo with an audience?)
- Crushes – avoid crushes and gossip becoming entrenched. Don't indulge them, acknowledge feelings but divert kids to other topics and activities.
- Screens – many kids love a YouTube video but don't be afraid to get out a sticker book, story, jigsaw or blocks and put those devices to one side for a moment
- Writing things down – take a moment to record the observations you've made, in the group booklet for that day, or in an email to the senior team (e.g. families@supertroop.org) Jot down ideas for next year on the poster in HQ
- Tidy-up – mess can be unsafe: leftover drinks can be spilled on the floor, discarded glue sticks can be eaten, dressing up clothes can be tripped over. If you have a spare five minutes while your group are engaged, take a second to tidy one thing away.
- Helpers – take a moment to consider their strengths and weaknesses. What can you do to optimise pairings, match energy levels, support someone who is having a tough time, or stretch a strong helper?

Snippets of Advice

- ✓ **Be helpful to each other** – share good practice, things you are learning about the kids, have your helpers pack a bag for the next day to make all of your lives easier etc.
- ✓ **Be Creative** – Use your imagination. If you want to do something just do it... make a costume, put on a play, organise a game, don't just wait for organised activities and don't just sing.
- ✓ **Imagine** – this is your first time doing a role like this and how scary that would be – try to talk to your helpers in this context.
- ✓ **Big Picture** - Don't be afraid to tell people that you are unsure where a child & helper are – but think about whether the public can hear you!
- ✓ **Be A Group** – As much as is practical, try and keep your group together. It's easier for you as a GL, it's more relaxed for your helpers and it gives the kids more chance to interact.

Most of all, enjoy it! If you're happy and exude confidence and fun, then your helpers will be happy, and your kids will be happy.