

All About the Branch – Sparks

Welcome Spark Guiders!

Sparks is the youngest branch of Canadian Guiding. In Sparks, girls have fun trying a bit of everything and begin discovering their individual skills, talents and interests. Girls will make lots of new friends, start earning badges and get to know what Guiding is all about.

Sparks operates on a two-year cycle and units usually meet once per week for about an hour. Spark activities might include:

- Discovering the community through outings to places such as a fire station, a farmer's market or a neighbourhood landmark
- Exploring the arts by making collages or creating a dance
- Having fun preparing simple snacks
- Discovering the outdoors on a nature scavenger hunt
- Having sleepovers or going to a weekend camp

Spark-aged girls (age 5-6)

Sensory and motor development:

- Somersault and possibly skip
- Swing and climb, hop on one foot
- Use the toilet by themselves - they may still wet the bed, though
- Copy triangles and other geometric shapes
- Draw a person with a head, a body, arms, and legs
- Dress and undress on their own, although they may still need help tying shoelaces
- Write some small and capital letters from the alphabet
- Eat with a fork, spoon, and possibly a flatware knife

Cognitive development (thinking and reasoning):

- Know their address and phone number
- Recognize most letters of the alphabet
- Can count 10 or more objects
- Know the names of at least 4 colours
- Understand the basic concept of time

Emotional and social development:

- Want to please and be liked by their friends, though they may sometimes be mean to others
- Agree to rules most of the time
- Show independence
- Are more able to distinguish fantasy from reality but enjoy playing make-believe and dress-up
- Have distinct ways of playing according to gender - girls of this age are more likely to engage in social play



Spark Traditions

The Spark Promise:

“I promise to share and be a friend.”

The Spark Sign:

When girls say their Spark Promise, they make the Spark Sign with their right hand. Young Sparks might find this a challenge. Suggest to them that they use their other hand to help fold their fingers over. One finger of the Spark Sign stands for the promise to share and the other for the promise to be a friend.



Spark story:

Crystal's New Friend is a short story that introduces girls to Sparks. The Spark story can be found on the platform under *All About Guiding*.

Enrolment ceremony:

Enrolment ceremonies are one way to celebrate the start of a new Guiding journey. It's a chance for girls to make their promise and celebrate the sisterhood of Guiding. A sample ceremony and script can be found on the platform under the *Our Story Theme of Guide Together*.

Advancement ceremony:

A way for girls to celebrate their time in Sparks and prepare to go on to Embers. Sample advancement ceremonies can be found on the platform under the *Our Story Theme of Guide Together*.

Openings and closings:

Use simple ceremonies to start and end your meetings to help establish a routine. The traditional songs for opening and closing Spark meetings are listed at the beginning of this section. Your opening might also begin with a greeting the girls respond to as a group – encourage the girls to create their own opening and closing ceremonies! Sample Spark Openings and Closings can be found on the platform under the *Our Story Theme of Guide Together*.

Friendship circles:

Friendship circles help girls get to know one another. Call the girls into the Circle at different times during your meeting, especially for opening and closing the meeting, and for Sharing Time.

Spark Insignia:

Apart from program badges, rewards in recognition of achievements or service are important milestones. Here is a list of the badges and insignia for Sparks:

- Enrolment Pin – indicates a girl has made her Spark Promise and is now a member of Sparks.
- Unit Title Tape – shows the name of the Spark unit.
- Membership Pins – Membership Pins: the girls receive membership pins that indicate the number of years they have been in Sparks. Membership pins are typically presented at the beginning of the Guiding year.
- Fun and Friendship Pin – is given to girls at the end of Sparks, when they move on to Embers.

Spark songs:

Sparks have a traditional opening song: The Sparks are here, and traditional closing songs: Buddy and Pals, Friendship Song, and Make New Friends. More songs are available on the program platform under *All About Guiding*.



The Spark meeting

Typical Spark meetings are one hour. They consist of an opening, a friendship circle, program activities and a closing. Spark-aged girls appreciate consistency, so it's helpful to open and close your meetings the same way.

Sample weekly meeting		
Opening	5 minutes	Welcome, recite Spark Promise or participate in your unit's unique opening ceremony
Friendship circle	10 minutes	Sharing time for experiences or feelings
Program activities	40 minutes	Dive into the Spark program - include active and quiet activities – follow the girls' lead
Closing	2-3 minutes	Reminders, closing song

Girl-driven strategies for Sparks

Safe Space:

- Create unit rules or norms and enforce them consistently and kindly
- Listen to girls, pay attention to their body language and ask for input in ways they are comfortable sharing it
- Do empathy-building activities as a unit

Growth Mindset:

- Understand her developmental stage and meet her where she's at (e.g. concrete thinking, imaginative play, short attention span)
- Offer a variety of fun and novel experiences based on girls' interests
- Focus on the process of learning and fun rather than goals or rewards

Positive Identity:

- Introduce girls to inspiring women
- Reiterate often that girls can do anything they want to do
- Support girls in overcoming societal barriers

Shared Leadership:

- Involve girls in planning and decision-making in age-appropriate ways
- Encourage girls to work as a team and share responsibilities
- Focus on building relationships between girls and Guiders – ensure every girl has at least one Guider she feels comfortable talking to



Engage Community:

- Foster girls' awareness of their community and their ability to contribute
- Learn about the community from the girls' perspective using community mapping
- Identify situations where you can help as a unit
- Participate in community events and service projects that align with girls' interests

Engaging Sparks

Promote participation: Watch for girls who hold back from games and activities. Help them feel comfortable. Consider pairing girls into “special buddies” so that no one feels alone.

Be encouraging: Never push a girl to participate. Encourage her gently and entice her with something she especially enjoys, such as painting a picture or playing a game. Be aware of physical conditions. For example, if a girl isn't feeling well, encourage her to take some quiet time and let her know what she'll gain. Choose or adapt activities so that all girls can participate.

Use Spark helpers: Sparks love to help. Being a special helper means a lot to the girls and enables them to develop a sense of responsibility. It also gives them a sense of belonging and ownership in unit activities. Designate a different girl each week to be your helper and give her a special name, such as “Sparkle”. Put all the girls' names into a basket and draw one name each week until everyone has a turn.

Provide extra challenges for older girls: Girls mature a great deal between the ages of five and seven. There might be times when it makes sense to divide girls according to age group to enable older girls to take on more challenging activities. Also, some girls might want to do more than others – add something extra to keep these girls interested and engaged.

Plan programs that use lots of energy: Spark-age girls are bursting with energy. Organized physical activity channels this energy in positive ways. Play active games for approximately 20 minutes at each meeting. Try a variety of activities and mix up quiet time with active time – be prepared to keep them busy!

Give directions one step at a time: Use different ways of explaining directions: through role-play, lecture and demonstration. Use short sentences and give directions one step at a time.

Be sensitive to conflicts: Girls at this age tend to be self-absorbed and need adult guidance. Remind them of the results of their actions and provide frequent reassurance and praise.

Be a caring role model: The girls will mirror your mood and tone. Be positive, happy and enthusiastic.

Demonstrate activities and join in! Be a role model for the behaviour you would like to see reflected in your girls.

Encourage the girls to help each other: Your Spark Ounit is a great place for girls to develop sensitivity towards others. Look for ways each girl can help someone else.



Behaviour Challenges

1. Sparks aren't paying attention
2. Sparks are energetic and can't sit still
3. Sparks are competitive and/or cry when they don't win or get their way
4. Sparks sometimes have a hard time making decisions/choices
5. Sparks may be shy or be reluctant to try new things

Tried and true strategies

- Have different options for girls who don't want to participate in a certain activity – consider setting up a quiet spot for Sparks to regain their balance
- Make clear rules and stick to them, such as how long Sparks have to play a game. Be clear about what behavior is okay and what is not okay.
- Follow up any discussion about what not to do with a discussion of what to do instead.
- Praise Sparks for good behavior. It's best to focus praise more on what girls do ("you worked hard to figure this out") than on traits they can't change ("you are smart").
- Try short activities and incorporate movement whenever possible.
- Find productive and creative ways that allow Sparks to use their loud voices in contrast to their quiet ones.
- For activities that require focused time or discussion, try to break up into smaller groups.
- Start with something familiar or link new activities to something that Sparks may have done before. For instance, you could say "this game is like _____".
- Come up with a few different signals to get Sparks' attention. Make sure they understand what they mean and what's expected of them. They can be verbal or non-verbal.

