

About G.I.R.L.S.

In our fast-paced society, girls are often forced to grow up too quickly. As they navigate their turbulent adolescent years, girls frequently feel alone in their struggles. Girls in Real-Life Situations (G.I.R.L.S) is a group counseling curriculum designed to give girls an opportunity to feel empowered, gain self-awareness, develop positive coping mechanisms, improve daily problem-solving skills, feel connected with other girls, and make healthy decisions as they grow through turbulent times. This book includes activities appropriate for girls of middle and high school age.

In G.I.R.L.S., group members share feelings, struggles, and similarities and serve as a sounding board for one another while discussing and participating in a variety of activities dealing with issues common to all young women. The lesson plans and activities in this book are especially valuable to girls in the following circumstances:

- ❁ Special populations of girls who are struggling through their adolescent and teen years
- ❁ Girls in need of self-confidence
- ❁ Groups of friends who have trouble communicating with one another
- ❁ An entire community of girls who are interested in bonding on more than a superficial level

G.I.R.L.S. is intended primarily for use by school counselors, psychologists, social workers, and teachers but is also valuable to youth group leaders, Girl Scout leaders, health and fitness club coordinators, camp counselors, and anyone else interested in enhancing the social and emotional development of girls.

GROUP THEMES

The G.I.R.L.S. facilitator may choose from 12 themes important to their particular population. These themes include topics important to all adolescent girls. The content of each is carefully designed to provoke thought and insight and promote a feeling of camaraderie while sharing personal experiences. Most important, the girls will have FUN!

1. Who Am I?
2. Body Image
3. Choices
4. Communication
5. Emotions
6. Friendships
7. Relationships
8. Self-Esteem
9. Stress
10. Reaching Out
11. Tough Times
12. Who I Am!

Each theme includes the following components.

Connect!

A 5- to 10-minute icebreaker activity is designed to introduce the topic about to be discussed in a fun, relaxed forum.

Lesson Plans

Each theme includes four different lesson plans from which to choose. Facilitators should consider the needs and interests of participants and the complexity of the issue when choosing the lesson or lessons.

Each lesson includes a rationale that explains the significance of the topic as well as step-by-step instructions for conducting the group. G.I.R.L.S. facilitators should review the rationales before each group session and summarize and personalize them as a way of introducing the girls to each topic. Each lesson should take approximately 45 minutes to complete—many involve supplemental hand-outs.

Talk about It

A “Talk about It” page presents a number of discussion questions. These discussion questions are designed to provoke thought and self-exploration about each theme. The discussion questions present a great forum for a high school group session, or they can be used at any time during a lesson plan as a supplement. The G.I.R.L.S. facilitator can read these questions aloud, or photocopy and cut apart the questions for girls to draw from a hat or bowl, and then discuss.

If the discussion questions alone are used for a group session, the facilitator can provide the “Think about It” and “Check It Out” pages, next described, at the end of the discussion for further self-exploration.

Think about It

A reproducible handout titled “Think about It,” intended to encourage further soul searching about each theme, is also included. At the end of each handout are optional journaling questions. (Having the girls keep a journal is not necessary, but it does give them a healthy outlet to explore normative and self-beliefs.)

Check It Out

A “Check It Out” page lists books that supplement the session theme, for facilitators’ or students’ further exploration.

TEACHING OPTIONS

The G.I.R.L.S. curriculum can be used with small groups or, if desired, larger groups. In educational settings, the G.I.R.L.S. meetings can be held during lunch, before school, during a TA/activity period, or as an alternative to study hall. Prior to joining the G.I.R.L.S. group, each participant should receive a G.I.R.L.S. parent consent form (Appendix A) and confidentiality pledge (Appendix B), to be returned to the facilitator at a convenient time.

Small-Group Format

A small-group presentation of the G.I.R.L.S. curriculum provides girls with a safe place to share and work through issues. In the small-group setting (4 to 12 participants—preferably an even number of girls), meetings approximately 45 minutes long should be conducted once a week over an 8- to 10-week period.

Each series of G.I.R.L.S. meetings should begin with the “Connect!” activity and an introduction to the chosen topic. The facilitator should then choose and conduct one or more lessons from the theme and end each theme with the “Talk about It,” “Think about It,” and “Check It Out” handouts. If facilitators plan to conduct multiple themes, it is suggested that the series begin with the theme “Who Am I?” and conclude with “Who I Am!”

Larger Groups

The G.I.R.L.S. materials can be adapted for use with larger groups at the facilitator’s discretion. Such groups may include school clubs, Girl Scout troops, and girls attending a summer camp, among others. The discussion questions are a great way to share issues openly in a nonthreatening large-group format.

OTHER MATERIALS IN THIS BOOK

In addition to a parent consent form and confidentiality pledge, this book includes other helpful materials: a pretest/posttest (Appendix C),

a certificate of achievement (Appendix D), and a group evaluation (Appendix E).

Pretest/Posttest

A brief pretest/posttest is included to help facilitators to determine the progress girls make from participating in G.I.R.L.S. Before conducting the first lesson, facilitators should administer the measure as a pretest, stressing the importance of honesty in the girls' responses. The measure can be administered again as a posttest during the final lesson. In addition to determining progress, comparisons between the pretest and posttest can help establish accountability.

Certificate of Achievement

The certificate of achievement gives group members an enthusiastic congratulation for their efforts and a reminder of their participation that they will be proud take home.

Group Evaluation

The group evaluation is intended to help the facilitator determine how the group went and to provide insight for any changes that might need to be made before selecting a new group of students. Girls may complete this evaluation at the same time they take the posttest or shortly thereafter.

Ten Tips for G.I.R.L.S. Facilitators

1. Begin each group by having everyone state the confidentiality pledge. Make sure the girls understand that what they share in the group will remain in the group unless you feel they are a danger to themselves or someone else and must refer them to a professional for help.
2. Always validate the girls' feelings. Validating their feelings will comfort them and encourage them to continue to participate in the group. You can validate their feelings both verbally and nonverbally.
3. During discussions, allow the girls to talk freely. Be sure to ask directive questions if there is a lull in the conversation. Do not attempt to challenge "wrong" answers; oftentimes the girls will do this on their own. If you need to intervene, try to ask probing questions that will motivate the girls to explore different sides of a topic. In addition, always give the girls the right to "pass" if they are not comfortable sharing at any particular point. It's important to keep in mind that group cohesion takes time to build.
4. Encourage discussion by asking open-ended questions or having one of the G.I.R.L.S. group members share an experience that is on topic or similar to the experience you're discussing.
5. Remain conscientious about not sharing personal information or lecturing the girls. Oftentimes, justification and validation of their concerns is all that they are seeking.
6. If a G.I.R.L.S. member is silent for weeks at a time, or emotionally shuts down, it is best to approach her privately. You may want to say, "I have noticed that you have not said much the past few weeks. Is there something going on?" or "Today I noticed that you shut down and refused to talk. Would you like to talk now about what the group was discussing or about what may be bothering you?"
7. Let the girls know that you are available to talk before or after the group session—or some other time, depending on your schedule—about issues brought up in the group.
8. Begin and end each session on time. Allow enough time at the end of the session for the girls to process and internalize what they have discussed.

Ten Tips for G.I.R.L.S. Facilitators (continued)

9. Allow everyone the opportunity to share and be watchful of group dominators. If the behavior of a few girls becomes a problem for the group as a whole, speak to them individually or consider using a tool (such as a speaking stick, wand, etc.) so everyone has a chance to speak.
10. Have fun! Remember your days in middle school and high school and enjoy the opportunity you have to help girls bond together, use their voices, feel heard, and learn to trust one another.

G.I.R.L.S. Screening Interview

The following is a suggested screening procedure for G.I.R.L.S. facilitators to use when meeting with a potential G.I.R.L.S. member:

1. Introduce yourself.
2. Describe the rationale for and purpose of G.I.R.L.S.
3. Describe why the candidate was chosen for possible participation in G.I.R.L.S.
4. Discuss the frequency and duration of the G.I.R.L.S. meetings.
5. Discuss the goals of G.I.R.L.S.
6. Discuss the time commitment required for G.I.R.L.S.
7. Discuss group guidelines (timeliness, respect, honesty, empathy, and openness).
8. Discuss confidentiality and the consequences if confidentiality is broken.
9. Assure the candidates that you will keep their participation confidential but that, for the safety and welfare of everyone in the group, there are limits to what you can keep private. (You must tell if someone in the group says or does something that indicates she is at risk of harming others or herself.)
10. Ask the candidate the following questions:
 - ✿ Do you think you are interested in G.I.R.L.S.?
 - ✿ How do you feel G.I.R.L.S. will benefit you?
 - ✿ What do you think you can offer other participants?
 - ✿ Do you think you can follow the required guidelines?
 - ✿ Are you willing to make up any assignments, tests, or quizzes if you have to miss them because of personal circumstances?
 - ✿ Do you have any questions?

If the potential member shows an interest in participating in G.I.R.L.S. and agrees to adhere to the guidelines and confidentiality requirements, give her a consent form so she can have a parent or guardian review, sign, and return it to you before the group sessions get under way.