

“ Girls Inc. has helped me learn to respect myself. I’m so glad I have Girls Inc. on my side!

- Kimora, age 12 ”

Introduction

Girls Inc. empowers girls to succeed by providing trained staff who offer girls lasting mentoring relationships, a girls-only environment, and research-based, hands-on programming. Three critical goals drive our programming: help girls achieve healthy lives, succeed academically, and acquire the life skills needed to prepare them for adulthood. Within this framework, we believe it is imperative that we work with girls to ensure that they have the skills, knowledge, and support to take charge of their sexual health and avoid risky sexual behavior.



Why is a healthy sexuality program for girls important?

While community leaders and policymakers debate different strategies to address adolescent sexuality issues, most youth and parents say that girls need more comprehensive information relevant to their lives. Not only do girls need this information sooner rather than later—they need appropriate information throughout their development. Additionally, programs and efforts that deliver such information must include a focus on gender-specific issues because young women have particular needs in managing sexual relationships and they deal most directly with the impact of teen pregnancy.

Girls deserve education that empowers them to be healthy and reach toward future goals including completion of their education— and encourages thoughtful consideration about the impact of pregnancy on their future aspirations. The U.S. continues to have one of the highest teen pregnancy rates among industrialized countries. While Canada’s rate is less than half that of the U.S., it’s still higher than

many industrialized countries. Further, the rate of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among young women, especially young women of color, warrants additional concern.

About the Program: Girls Inc. Healthy Sexuality

Girls Inc. Healthy Sexuality will assist girls in understanding and embracing sexuality with a positive, empowered approach that is built on a foundation of accurate information, cultural sensitivity, and values of inclusiveness and respect. Girls will acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to take charge of and to make informed, thoughtful decisions about their sexual health. Girls Inc. Healthy Sexuality helps girls build skills to engage in healthy relationships, be inclusive and supportive of sexual diversity and rights, and explore values, build skills for handling various situations, and think about their futures and the world around them.

Primary Program Components

The program’s three primary components target different age groups and provide Girls Inc. affiliates with the flexibility to craft a program series to meet local needs and priorities, while upholding the unifying principles of Girls Inc. Healthy Sexuality.

Each component begins with a Parent Orientation and builds girls’ developmentally-appropriate knowledge and skills in four content areas:

Healthy Relationships to assist girls in identifying, establishing, and cultivating skills to support healthy romantic and non-romantic relationships (family, peers, others)

Sexuality Thumbprint to build girls’ understanding of themselves as sexual beings and of the diversity of human sexuality, including how to offer respect, equity, and positive support

Sexual Health and Reproduction to provide girls with critical information and opportunities to understand and communicate about their bodies, their values, and potential consequences related to sexual decision-making

Sex, Media, and Technology to assist girls in understanding the role that media and technology play in their self-perceptions and healthy development and practicing responsible use of technology in making decisions affecting their sexual health

• **Informed Together:** This toolkit, for girls ages 9-11 and parents/caregivers, consists of 23 sessions and is designed to be flexible in jump-starting and deepening essential conversations about sexuality between girls and their parents/caregivers. Four modules address development of girls' knowledge, skills, and attitudes as well as development of parent-child communication. In the Healthy Relationships module, participants explore kindness, understanding, empathy, love, and communication in all aspects of life, including friends, family, crushes, and future dating relationships. The Sexuality Thumbprint module focuses on sexuality as a broad concept and also as a specific part of a person, including discussing sexual and gender identity at the individual and global levels. The module on Sexual Health and Reproduction gives participants a safe space for learning and voicing concerns about the biology of the body, including anatomy, puberty, menstruation, reproduction, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Finally, the Relationships, Media, and Technology module focuses on navigating online spaces and the impact on issues like body image, dating, and sexual identity.

• **Informed and In Charge:** This toolkit, for girls ages 12-14, contains four distinct modules, each addressing a theme related to healthy sexuality. Each module contains multiple session plans to address the variance in young people's experiences. In the Healthy Relationships module, girls learn to identify, establish and cultivate healthy relationships through assertiveness and negotiation skills. In the Sexuality Thumbprint module, they have several opportunities to increase their understanding of sexuality, including ways to demonstrate respect, equity, and fairness. The module on Sexual Health and Reproduction offers guidance on expressing sexuality in ways that align with their personal values, and provides opportunities for girls to develop critical thinking skills and practice effective decision making. In this module girls receive information they need and are given opportunities to communicate about their bodies and their values around sex and decision making in order to be sexually healthy. Lastly, in the emerging reality of social media, the Sex, Media and Technology module provides support for exploring the role media and technology plays in girls' sexual development. Through critical analysis, discussion, and role play, girls identify and address their feelings, values, and safety concerns as they relate to media and technology.

• **Taking Charge:** This component, for girls ages 15-18, includes a toolkit of four modules, each of which concentrates on a distinct aspect of sexuality and/or sexual health. Healthy Relationships focuses on personal awareness of identity, boundary setting, communication, exercising personal rights, and

navigating interpersonal relationships with a special emphasis on healthy and safe relationship characteristics. Sexuality Thumbprint focuses on aspects of human sexuality with content aimed at raising awareness of the impact stigma, discrimination, prejudice, harassment, and allyship, all contributing to being able to fully and safely exercise human rights, access community resources, or express identities. Sexual Health & Reproduction features content around sexual anatomy and sexual response, expanding understanding of ways people may be sexually active, information about factors that contribute to risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancy, and making informed decisions to reduce their risk.

Sex, Media, and Technology focuses on analyzing media messages, critical thinking and social media, communicating online, sexually explicit imagery, and safety concerns related to meeting people online and in real life. Central to this toolkit is the concept of social justice. Session plans are intended to create space for group members to: raise their awareness of sources that can contribute to inequitable access to rights, resources, and authentic identity expression; build empathy for people who are particularly vulnerable or impacted by systems of oppression; and conceptualize actions to advance social justice.

About Girls Inc.

Girls Inc. inspires all girls to be strong, smart, and bold. Our comprehensive approach to whole girl development equips girls to navigate gender, economic, and social barriers and grow up healthy, educated, and independent. These positive outcomes are achieved through three core elements: people - trained staff and volunteers who build lasting, mentoring relationships; environment - girls-only, physically and emotionally safe, where there is a sisterhood of support, high expectations, and mutual respect; and programming - research-based, hands-on and minds-on, age-appropriate, meeting the needs of today's girls. Informed by girls and their families, we also advocate for legislation and policies to increase opportunities for all girls. Join us at girlsinc.org.

