

About G.I.R.L.S.

In today's society, girls are often forced to grow up too quickly. Unfortunately, girls often begin struggling with issues relating to self-esteem, friendship, decision making, and isolation beginning in elementary school. Girls in Real-Life Situations (G.I.R.L.S.) is a proactive 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. This book includes activities appropriate for girls in the elementary school grades.

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 experiences dealing with issues common to all girls. The lesson plans and activities in this book are preventive and proactive. They are designed to help promote self-esteem, friendship skills, social skills, and problem-solving skills.

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

G.I.R.L.S. facilitators may pick and choose from 10 themes. These themes include topics important to all girls of elementary school age. The content of each is carefully designed to provoke thought and insight and to promote a feeling of camaraderie while girls share personal experiences. Most important, the girls will have fun!

1. Who Am I? Self-Discovery
2. My Sassy Self: Positive Body Image
3. This or That? Making Choices
4. Talk It Out: Communication
5. Feeling Feelings: Understanding Emotions
6. Gal Pals: Healthy Friendships
7. Happy to Be Me: Self-Esteem

8. Hard Times: Dealing with Difficult Issues
9. It's OK to Need Help: Reaching Out
10. Who I Am! Self-Identity

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 handouts.

Many lessons also provide grades 3–5 alternatives—specific suggestions for adapting lesson procedures to make the activities more interesting for girls in the upper elementary grades.

Girl Talk

A “Girl Talk” page presents a number of discussion questions. These discussion questions are designed to provoke thought and self-exploration about each theme. The discussion questions can be used at any time during a lesson or at the end of the lesson. 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.

Today in G.I.R.L.S.

A parent or guardian letter titled “Today in G.I.R.L.S.” is included for each theme. These letters include information and fun activities for families to use at home in order to help prevent problems and encourage girls’ social and emotional growth. This letter also lists books that supplement and reinforce the session theme. (Facilitators as well as parents will find these resources helpful.)

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, or during an activity period. 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 topic. The facilitator should then choose and conduct one or more lessons from the theme and end each theme with the “Girl Talk” handout and discussion. Following the group meeting, members can take home the “Today in G.I.R.L.S.” letter. In addition, supplemental activities, such as crossword and seek-and-find puzzles, are included. If facilitators plan to conduct multiple themes, it is suggested that the series begin with the theme “Who Am I? Self-Discovery” and conclude with “Who I Am! Self-Identity.”

Larger Groups

The G.I.R.L.S. materials may 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 (Appendixes A and B), this book includes the following helpful materials: a certificate of achievement (Appendix C), a pretest/posttest (Appendix D), and a group evaluation (Appendix E). Appendix F provides answers and solutions for the “Just for Fun” supplementary activities.

Certificate of Achievement

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

Pretest/Posttest

A brief pretest/posttest is included to help facilitators determine the progress participants make 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 after the final lesson. Depending on group members' reading levels, the questions may need to be read aloud in both cases. In addition to determining progress, comparisons between the pretest and posttest can help establish accountability.

Group Evaluation

The group evaluation is intended to help the facilitator determine how the group went and to provide insight into 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. Frequently, justification and validation of their concerns are 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 at 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 for participants who may try to dominate the group. 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 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 candidate that you will keep her participation confidential but that, for the safety and welfare of everyone in the group, there are limits as 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 herself or others.)
10. Ask the candidate the following questions:
 - * Do you think you are interested in G.I.R.L.S.? Explain why or why not.
 - * What is something you would like to learn about in the G.I.R.L.S. group?

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 gets under way.