

“If you’re the leader, you can’t just sit back and hope others will do it...you’ve got to do it first.”

— Wanda, age 11

Why This Program?

Girls deserve healthful environments, but they face many pressures that thwart their ability to make smart choices concerning the use of legal and illicit substances. Girls often are induced to use alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs to become or stay slim, manage stress, appear mature, be popular with peers of both sexes, or escape overwhelming problems. Because many of these pressures are more prevalent for girls than boys, standard prevention programs may not be effective with girls.

Girls use substances differently and for different reasons than boys. Girls are more likely to accept a substance from someone else and to engage in sexual behavior under the influence of a substance than boys are. The desire to be accepted by peers can further impact girls’ use of substances. Moreover, girls are more likely than boys to perceive themselves as being obese as well as have greater social pressures than boys to be thin. Thus, girls may use diet pills and cigarettes for weight control, self-esteem, and popularity.

About the Program: Girls Inc. Friendly PEERsuasion®

Girls Inc. Friendly PEERsuasion develops the skills of girls ages 11 to 14 to resist pressure to use harmful substances, such as drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and household chemicals. Friendly PEERsuasion targets the years during which girls begin to more fully experience and respond to influence and pressure from their peers to participate in risky behaviors. During the program, girls build their knowledge and skills for resisting negative peer pressure and unhealthy ways to respond to stress. Girls learn to identify healthy alternatives to risky behavior and invite peers to join them in acting on their smarter choice. Additionally, participants learn about various legal and illicit substances, responsible use of readily available prescription and over-the-counter medications and supplements, and analyze media messages that glamorize substance use.

Participants also build leadership skills that help them plan and implement substance use prevention activities with groups of younger children ages 6 to 10 (referred to as PEERsuade-Mes), thereby reinforcing their own commitment to avoiding substance use. Friendly PEERsuasion is available in Spanish (*Persuasión positiva*).

Friendly PEERsuasion has received awards and has been recognized as an effective, evidence-based program by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (U.S. Department of Justice). For more information on the program’s awards and recognition, contact Girls Inc.

Ancillary Components:

- **Connecting HIV and Substance Abuse** is a series of activities help girls learn about the connection between substance use and other risky behaviors that lead to HIV/STDs. The activities can be used to supplement both Girls Inc. Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy and Girls Inc. Friendly PEERsuasion. The activities can be adapted depending on what age group you are working with to ensure that they are developmentally appropriate.
- **Talking About Tough Stuff Workshop** is an eight-hour workshop that can be delivered in one day or over two half days. It is designed for girls and their caregivers to learn about the connection between substance use and other risky behaviors for HIV/STDs.



About Girls Inc.

Girls Inc. delivers life-changing programs that inspire girls to be strong, smart, and bold. Research-based curricula, delivered by trained professionals, equip girls to achieve academically; lead healthy and physically active lives; manage money; navigate media messages; and discover an interest in science, technology, engineering, and math. The network of local Girls Inc. nonprofit organizations serves 136,000 girls annually at over 1,250 sites in 325 cities across the United States and Canada. Learn more about our programs and advocacy at www.girlsinc.org.