

“**What you learn is: Don’t do anything you’re not ready for or you can’t handle. A lot of people I know just do it until they run into trouble.**

- Khana, age 15

”

Introduction

Girls Inc. empowers girls to succeed by providing trusting mentoring relationships, a girls-only environment, and research-based, hands-on programming. Three critical goals drive our programming: to help girls achieve healthy lives, succeed academically, and acquire the life skills needed to prepare them for adulthood. We work to ensure that girls 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 about 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 need to pay particular attention to gender-specific issues because young women have

particular needs in managing sexual relationships and they deal most directly with the consequences of teen pregnancy.

Adolescent pregnancy and parenthood present formidable challenges for teens’ development into productive and fulfilled adults. In addition to the physical implications of adolescent pregnancy, the reality is that most teen mothers raise their children as single parents, which may lead to girls not completing high school and thereby being employed in low wage jobs. Although the recent decrease in teen pregnancy rates is promising, the U.S. continues to have the highest teen pregnancy rate among industrialized countries. While Canada’s rate is less than half of 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, are still of great concern.

About the Program: Girls Inc. Healthy Sexuality

Through Girls Inc. Healthy Sexuality, girls acquire the knowledge and skills for taking charge of and making informed decisions about their sexual health. Exploring values, practicing responses in different situations, and thinking about their futures helps girls identify ways and reasons to avoid early pregnancy and prevent sexually transmitted infections including HIV.



- **Growing Together** (for girls ages 9 to 11 and a parent/adult; available in Spanish as *Crecer Juntas*): Interactive sessions jump-start crucial two-way conversations between girls and trusted adults about sexuality issues, opening doors to future communication. Key topics include the role of parents as primary sexuality educators; changes during puberty; anatomy, physiology, and hygiene; adolescent sexual development and feelings; and values and those related to sexual behavior.
- **Informed and In Charge** (for girls ages 12 to 14): This new flexible toolkit contains four modules. In the Healthy Relationships module, girls learn to identify, establish, and cultivate healthy relationships through assertiveness and negotiation skills. The next module, Sexuality Thumbprint, helps girls increase their understanding of sexuality, including ways to demonstrate respect, equity, and fairness. The third module, Sexual Health and Reproduction, provides girls with critical information and opportunities to communicate about their bodies and their values around sexual decision-making. Lastly, given the evolving use of social media, the fourth module entitled Sex, Media, and Technology, provides girls support for exploring the role that media and technology plays in girls' sexual development. Throughout the program, girls experience the power of a positive sister support system and build critical thinking skills for being sexually healthy.
- **Taking Care of Business** (for girls ages 15 to 18): Interactive sessions focus on recognizing and moving beyond limiting sex-role stereotypes for women; using values as a basis for positive decision-making; building assertiveness, refusal, and relationship skills; avoiding risky behavior, pregnancy, STIs, and HIV through abstinence and other smart choices; learning the facts about contraception and protection; strengthening communication skills; and thinking about life goals.



Ancillary Component:

Growing Up! Body Basics is a 3-hour workshop for girls ages 7 to 8, some of whom may already be experiencing signs of puberty. In this workshop, girls usually thought of as too young for these topics receive accurate, age-appropriate information on why and how their bodies are changing—with an emphasis on the fact that the changes are normal and okay, even if earlier than such changes among their peers.

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.

