

“ In the program, there were sessions on self-esteem and body image. It was here that I learned not only how to overcome my low self-esteem but how I could take charge of my body by maintaining healthy eating habits. I came to believe I had the right to accept and appreciate my body.

- Evon, age 17 ”

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 - that girls lead healthy lives, succeed academically, and have life skills needed that prepare them for adulthood. To meet our goal of girls leading healthy lives, we work to ensure that girls have the skills, knowledge, and support to take charge of their health and increase healthy behaviors throughout their lives.

Why is a healthy living program for girls important?

Girls today face a broad range of challenges to their physical, mental, social, and emotional health: a culture of high-fat and high sugar foods; too little physical activity; media and cultural messages overemphasizing the importance of physical appearance; and unrealistic expectations and pressures from a variety of sources (including family, teachers, and peers). These challenges and the unhealthy strategies that girls too often adopt to address or cope with them can prevent girls from reaching their full potential.

Girls deserve a supportive environment for developing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, and they deserve to be involved in decisions about their health. A positive youth development approach can be key to equipping girls with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and support for maintaining a positive

sense of self and for being healthy today and throughout their lives.

About the Girls Inc. Mind + Body Initiative

Girls Inc. Mind+Body supports and promotes the whole health of girls ages 6 to 18, using a philosophy which recognizes that many factors, including physical and mental wellness, contribute to girls' health. Consequently, the Initiative focuses on four critical content areas:

- **Physical Activity:** Every girl can find a type of physical activity that she not only enjoys, but that also accommodates her lifestyle, culture, and schedule.
- **Body Image:** Girls of all shapes, sizes, weights, and capabilities have the right to feel good about their bodies and appreciate the bodies of others.
- **Nutrition:** It is possible for girls to identify a strategy for healthy eating that works for her body, circumstance, budget, home life, culture, and activity level.
- **Stress Management:** It is important for girls to understand that stress is a normal and acceptable part of life, and that handling stress in a healthy way is a key factor in having a strong and healthy body and mind.



Mind+Body gives all Girls Inc. organizations a consistent set of messages and outcomes for addressing major health issues confronting girls. The Initiative also provides Girls Inc. organizations with a variety of tools and resources to guide each organization in creating a programming environment that addresses the health-related needs of girls:

- **Mind + Body Toolkit** In recognition of the wealth of health-related programs that are already being delivered by our affiliates, the Toolkit provides a flexible process and format for strengthening each organization's programming to better meet the particular needs of the girls being served.
- **Mind + Body Family Activity Packs** Recognizing that parents and caregivers play an essential role when it comes to supporting girls in making healthy decisions, activity packs provide family activities that build the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for creating home environments consistent with Mind+Body messages. The two Activity Packs focus on nutrition and physical activity.
- **Health Bridge** This guide details a process of building a bridge between girls and health care providers in their community, creating an environment that is supportive of girls' health, and encouraging girls to be advocates for their own well-being.



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.

