



The Girls Circle model, a structured support group for girls from 9-18 years, integrates relational theory, resiliency practices, and skills training in a specific format designed to increase positive connection, personal and collective strengths, and competence in girls. It aims to counteract social and interpersonal forces that impede girls' growth and development by promoting an emotionally safe setting and structure within which girls can develop caring relationships and use authentic voices.

Circle Guidelines

The Girls Circle does not aim to provide advice, but encourages girls to share experiences that are helpful to one another. To participate, girls need only have the desire, make a commitment to attend the meetings, and agree to follow the circle guidelines, i.e. respect, no put-downs or interruptions, offer experiences - not advice, keep the focus on oneself, and keep what's said in the group private. Girls are free to share at their own pace.

Girls Circle Format

The [Girls Circle Activity Guides](#) are designed to help a facilitator, set a safe, creative environment and provide weeks of age-appropriate themes and activities.

Girls Circles are most often held weekly for 1 1/2 to two hours. Each week the facilitator leads a group of girls through a format that includes each girl taking turns talking and listening to one another respectfully about their concerns and interests. The girls express themselves further through creative or focused activities such as role playing, drama, journaling, poetry, dance, drawing, collage, clay, and so on. Gender specific themes and topics are introduced which relate to the girls' lives, such as being a girl, trusting ourselves, friendships, body image, goals, sexuality, drugs, alcohol, tobacco, competition, and decision-making.

Giving Voice to Feelings

When girls voice their ideas and opinions in a safe environment, it strengthens their confidence and self-esteem and encourages them to express themselves more fully and critically think through their behavior and choices. By examining cultural expectations in a safe and supportive setting, girls gain greater awareness of their options and strengthen their ability to make choices that are consistent with their values, interests, and talents.

Enhances Current Programs

The Girls Circle format is applied to programs in areas such as schools, peer leadership, health education, juvenile justice, economic literacy, outdoor adventure, athletics, school advisory groups, pregnancy prevention, boys and girls clubs, scouting groups, gang-prevention, and substance abuse prevention in such settings as schools, agencies, group homes, parish halls, clinics, and homes. In this way, the Girls Circle provides the opportunity for authentic relationships within a context of a girl's own setting and community.

The model responds to recommendations from national organizations, including the National Council on Research for Women, the Girl Scout Research Institute Report, United Way of the Bay Area, and the OJJDP that have pointed to the need for gender-relevant girls' programs that allow girls to voice their experiences, develop positive connections, and gain skills to pursue meaningful goals in education, careers, and relationships.

Research-Based, Highly Valued Program

Girls Circle is recognized as a “promising approach” in the Model Programs Guide of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Outcomes showed significant increases in self-efficacy, body image, and social connection. (Promising programs display a strong theoretical base and have been demonstrated to prevent delinquency, and /or reduce/enhance risk/protective factors for delinquency using limited research and requires further experimental study.)

In school year 2006-2007, fifteen collaborating organizations partnered with Ceres Policy Research to study the short and long term outcomes for girls in Girls Circle groups (Irvine, Roa, Cervantez, 2007).

278 girls of diverse ethnicities in nineteen cities across the United States completed pre and post surveys, utilizing the Girls Circle Survey. Settings included schools, community sites, juvenile justice and residential settings, and served girls ages 10 – 18 years of age.

Girls Circle participant’s surveys revealed *statistically significant improvement* for girls in four long-term outcomes:

- A decrease in self-harming behavior.
- A decrease in rates of alcohol use¹.
- An increase in attachment to school.
- An increase in self-efficacy.

Additionally, girls’ surveys revealed *significant increases in six skills* developed over the short-term:

- Finding things they have in common with a new person.
- Trying to see beyond girls' reputations.
- Telling adults what they need.
- Feeling good about their body.
- Picking friends that treat them the way they want to be treated.
- Telling people how much they mean to them.