

“ We go over lessons that inform us about things such as abuse, drugs, bullying, and female empowerment. These are some of my favorite topics because I feel they really relate to us as teenagers and the things that we go through.

-Chloe ”

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 resist the use of legal and illicit substances.

Why is a substance use prevention program for girls important?

Girls deserve healthy environments in which to flourish, but too often face 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, or escape overwhelming problems. Because many of these pressures are more prevalent for girls than boys, standard prevention programs may not be effective for girls.

Girls use substances differently and for different reasons than boys. Girls are more likely than boys to be introduced to substance use by a person they want to please or who wants them to engage in sexual behavior when under the influence of a substance. The desire to be accepted by peers can further encourage girls to use substances. Moreover, girls are more likely than boys to perceive themselves as being overweight and also have greater social pressures than boys do to be thin. Thus, girls are more likely to take diet pills, powder, or liquids.

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 choices. Additionally, participants learn about various legal and illicit substances and understand 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-Me's), thereby reinforcing their own commitment to avoiding substance use. Friendly PEERsuasion is available in Spanish (*Persuasión Positiva*).

Ancillary Components:

- **Connecting HIV and Substance Abuse** is a series of activities that help girls learn about the connection between substance use and other risky behaviors that lead to HIV/ STIs. The activities can be used to supplement both Girls Inc. Healthy Sexuality and Girls Inc. Friendly PEERsuasion. The activities can be adapted to be developmentally appropriate for the girls expected to participate in the workshop.
- **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/STIs.

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

-Wanda, age 11

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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.

