

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Overview.....	4
The Need	5
How <i>Girls Unlimited</i> is Unique	6
The <i>Girls Unlimited</i> Research Summary	7
<i>Girls Unlimited</i> on the Web	8
Tips for Using the <i>Girls Unlimited</i> Curriculum	8
The Difference Between Teaching and Facilitating	9
Lesson One: Power Play	10
Lesson Two: Say What?.....	19
Lesson Three: Who Am I Anyway?	26
Lesson Four: What's Your Story?	32
Lesson Five: Sisterhood. We are Family.	38
Lesson Six: Invisible Connections	47
<i>Girls Unlimited</i> Facilitator Training	56
About the GU Creator and Research Team	57
The <i>Girls Unlimited</i> Research.....	58
The <i>Girls Unlimited</i> Questionnaire	59
References	62

INTRODUCTION

Girls Unlimited is a program created for the Peace Center, in Langhorne, PA. It is the mission of ThePeace Center to educate, empower and support individuals and organizations in efforts to prevent violence, promote peaceful resolution of conflict and foster inclusive, equitable and safe communities locally, nationally and globally.

School safety is a primary focus of The Peace Center. We believe in creating safety in our schools: physically, emotionally, socially, and morally so that students will excel academically. This six-lesson curriculum promotes an environment of trust, cooperation and respect between and among middle school girls. Toward this end, we foster emotional and social intelligence. The natural outcome of this increases school attachment and academic performance.

We hope you will find the activities and discussion topics valuable as you help middle school girls overcome relational aggression on their way to becoming their authentic selves.

Girls Unlimited is an evidence-based program developed and fine-tuned according to research conducted on more than 3000 middle school girls. At the conclusion of your *Girls Unlimited* program you will be invited to have your students fill out a questionnaire regarding their feelings about their experience in GU. By doing this, *Girls Unlimited* will be able to send you specific research results for your school! And your help will enable us to continue to make our program even more effective.

OVERVIEW

The *Girls Unlimited* curriculum can be used in many ways. Ideally, an entire grade (6th, 7th, or 8th) of girls, divided into small groups will participate on the same days. If this is not possible, one class of girls can be involved in the program at a time. Or, counselors and/or social workers can choose to limit participation to only a select few girls. If this is the case, please ensure that your group is composed of girls from different social strata in the school: the leaders, the aggressors, the bullied and the girls who travel completely "under the radar."

Ordinarily, *Girls Unlimited* takes place during PE or Health class, but it can also be delivered as an after- school program.

An all-day *Girls Unlimited* retreat is an excellent way to deliver the curriculum. All six lessons can be delivered in a single day, away from the school campus. Other games and team-building activities can also be incorporated. The intense nature of a full day retreat makes the program a truly memorable and life-altering experience. Please try to keep the ratio of leaders to students at no more than 1 leader per every 6-10 girls.

There are several activities in each 45-minute session. If you find yourself running out of time, the activities can be divided into more sessions.

As an adjunct to the curriculum, girls are encouraged to read, ***It's Not Drama, It's My Life: A Middle School Survival Story, Mine and Yours!*** by Karin Kasdin. This book is a personal account of Kasdin's horrendous middle school experience, as well as a survival guide for girls in 6th-8th grade. It is an excellent accompaniment to the program and can be purchased at www.youthlight.com.

THE NEED

Society teaches girls at a young age to avoid conflict. Rather than confronting problems, girls tend to channel their hurt and anger, and often resort to relational aggression. Recent studies have found that relational aggression among girls begins as early as preschool. (Morine, Crothers, Schreiber, et. al, July 2011) By middle school it is rampant!

Relational aggression harms others by damaging, manipulating, or injuring an individual's relationships with her peers. It includes such hurtful behaviors as gossiping, spreading rumors, exclusion, and power struggles. Most relational aggression takes place within intimate social circles. Girls often use friendships as a weapon to threaten or damage another person's feelings of social acceptance. The lasting effect of relational aggression includes anxiety, loneliness, depression and low self-esteem, which can lead to suicide ideation, isolation, cutting and other forms of self-harm.

Here is an alarming statistic: 1 in 5 teenage girls engages in some form of self-harm such as eating disorders, cutting themselves or burning themselves. (Sax, 2010)

The *Girls Unlimited* program addresses issues of bullying, power struggles, body image, respect, friendship, social media and gossip. Each lesson takes approximately 45 minutes.

Through shared stories, fun activities, discussions, and role-plays, girls will learn the following:

- **Practical ways to manage anger or upset**
- **How to intervene when witnessing relational aggression**
- **The meaning of self-respect and self-care**
- **The value of trust**
- **Acceptance and appreciation of our bodies**
- **The power of words**
- **How to effectively deal with power struggles**
- **The importance of women bonding together**
- **How to stay safe online**

The messages bombarding girls today are rarely positive ones. The pressure to be thin, sexy, and yes, sometimes mean, is in our magazines, on television and on the Internet. It is our hope that *Girls Unlimited* can combat some of those messages by empowering young women to be their best, most peaceful selves.

HOW GIRLS UNLIMITED IS UNIQUE

While many schools throughout the nation continue to meet their "anti-bullying" requirements by bringing in speakers to give presentations at school-wide assemblies, many times programs of this nature consistently fail to improve school climate. Students cannot relate personally to a speaker standing behind a podium. They spend the assembly time texting, chatting with a friend, or snoozing, and fail to absorb or implement the suggestions presented by the speaker.

Girls Unlimited is unique in that it is interactive. No one talks "at" the girls. Rather, girls are invited to talk "with" each other.

Extra-curricular girls' "clubs" abound. We applaud those trying to make a difference by inviting girls to join a club where women's issues are discussed and dissected. The problem with this approach is that girls volunteer to join these clubs, making them fairly homogenous. Most likely, membership is composed of girls who are *already interested* in delving into all matters girl-related. They are those who already understand the value of supporting each other. They are not the girls in most need of a program like *Girls Unlimited*.

Girls Unlimited is unique in that it reaches girls of every stripe, those who are comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings and those who are not, those who are socially adroit and those who lack social skills, those who see the benefit of building a compassionate and safe school environment and those who couldn't care less. Through *Girls Unlimited*, middle school girls are required to be physically present. It has been our experience that after one or two sessions, *all the girls* are present emotionally as well.



THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TEACHING AND FACILITATING

We work in classrooms, but we don't teach.

We work with small groups of girls on a particular subject, but we don't teach.

We equip girls with tools and skills that will last them a lifetime, and still, we don't teach.

Teaching is often about telling. It is about passing along information. We don't do that. We help girls discover things for themselves. We bring out their intuition and focus the wisdom that already resides in the group as we create something new and solve problems. **This is facilitation.**

Teachers present information and provide the right answers, but we facilitators guide the learning process and ask the right questions...questions that will help the girls reflect.

When you stand before a class, ask yourself, "Am I telling them something, or am I asking a question?" If you find yourself lecturing, quickly find a way to reframe your statements into questions that can be dissected and explored together.

When students think of us as mentors rather than experts, the process of discovery becomes an enjoyable experience rather than a mundane chore. We may have to listen more acutely given our subject matter, but that is what we like most about our work.

Facilitators empower the group to learn from their own experiences. This is the kind of learning that sticks. And best of all, facilitators also learn during this process. Through our work in the *Girls Unlimited* program each of us has learned as much from our students as they have learned from us and from each other. We leave each school with a heightened respect for middle school girls and a deeper understanding of the issues that confront them in these turbulent times.

Outcomes may vary when groups are facilitated instead of taught. Each group will appear with its own unique dynamics and will arrive at unique conclusions. We don't fear varied outcomes. We welcome them. And we welcome you!



LESSON ONE:

Power Play

OVERVIEW:

There are four activities in this 45-minute lesson. Together these activities should:

- Enable girls to see that understanding our own emotions is the key to understanding how others feel. This understanding is crucial for self-care.
- Allow girls to discover that they have the ability to trust their own instincts and not hand over their power to others, particularly when others demand they do something they know is morally wrong.
- Demonstrate the value of a social contract. Girls should live by the physical contract they create with others in the classroom and the unspoken one they share with everyone they encounter in their daily lives.

MATERIALS:

- Feelings and Emotions Handout
- Power Statements Handout
- Power Roles Chart Handout
- Flipchart
- Markers

ACTIVITY 1.1: EMOTIONAL CHECK-IN

Objective:

Girls should begin to understand that when we begin each day by acknowledging how we feel, we acquire a better understanding of the myriad of emotions that affect us in our daily lives. When we can understand our own emotions and how they differ from our physical feelings, we are better able to develop coping skills and engage in self-care. Until we understand how our own emotions impact us, we are helpless to empathize with the emotions of others.

Background:

Understanding and feeling comfortable when experiencing the broad range of human emotions is an ongoing process for everyone. But there is no better way to learn empathy than through the experience of raw emotion. For that reason, the emotional check-in should be done at the beginning of each one of the six lessons in this curriculum.

ACTIVITY 1.2: THE POWER STATEMENTS

Objective:

This activity should begin to make girls question their assumptions about power. They should discuss how people in power should treat those with less power. They should also begin to see that power is fluid and can shift in different situations. The same person can feel powerful in one situation and not in another. They should develop an understanding about the responsibilities of those in power toward the less powerful and the importance of empowering those who feel powerless. To have the girls understand that there is power and safety in numbers.

Procedure:

1. Read the Power Statements aloud and ask the girls to stand whenever one of the statements they hear has been directed at them. The statements do not necessarily have to come from parents. They could have heard them from anyone. They must sit between statements.

THE POWER STATEMENTS

Not now. I don't have time.

Get out of here!

You're too young to understand.

Now you're going to get what's coming to you!

We'll talk about it later.

I brought you into this world; I can take you out.

Go to your room.

Not until you finish your homework.

Turn off the TV. Now!

I work like a dog for you.

Wait till your father gets home.

When I was your age things were much harder.

Do what I say.

Mind your manners.

Watch your mouth.

Not in my house, you don't.

Because I said so.

Is that the best you can do?

Don't talk back to me.

You're just a kid.

You're stupid.

Shut up.

You show me some respect.

This hurts me more than it hurts you.

Don't tell your father about this.

You get right upstairs and change into something decent.

ACTIVITY 1.2: THE POWER STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

Discussion Questions:

- How did it feel to hear those things?
- Did you feel like you had power or did you feel powerless?
- How does it feel to be powerless?
- What are some emotions that come to mind when you feel powerless?
- What would happen if everyone had equal power?
- When do you feel like you have power?
- What do you need in order to feel powerful?
- What makes you feel powerful?
- How do we give our power away?
- What happens when the people who have power don't treat the people without it respectfully?

Follow-up:

Ask the girls who they think has the most power in their school. How many girls in the class try to grab power over everyone else? How many of those girls try to have power over others by being mean or engaging in negative behavior? Most likely, the number is very low. Then ask, "Why should so few girls have power over so many?" Don't you think there is more power in the majority of you who are nice and respectful than there is in the small minority who aren't those things? How can you support each other to not let those few girls have power over you? What can you do to stand together? That is what this class is about.