

## Girl's Circle

*A powerful method for helping girls grow and support one another.*

**Objective:** To create a place where girls can support one another and strengthen their voice.

**Format:** Group discussion. A topic is chosen by either a facilitator or the girls themselves, and certain "group agreements" get established (see below). A time limit is set (30-50 minutes), the agreements are reviewed and the discussion begins. Girls have a great tradition of talking and sharing verbally, but are not always encouraged to develop their own opinions, or "voice."

**Popular Topics:** •Loyalty •Friendship •Self-esteem •Parents •Boys •Admired female role models. Girls often struggle with issues of loyalty and betrayal, friendship and self-esteem.

**Procedure:** The tips below *are essential* success. Remember that as important as *what* the girls say is the *process*—how the girls respect, encourage and support one another as they develop and strengthen their individual voices. Keeping the group agreements is crucial to the process!

### **Specific Steps:**

1.) Whenever you meet with girls, whether they are four or fourteen, *have them sit in a circle*. By sitting this way, every girl sees every other girl in the group. Each girl should have her own space in the circle and not be sitting on top of or hanging all over another girl. The idea is for each child to participate fully, without distractions. Girls may choose to sit in chairs or on the floor, but each girls should have a place in the circle.

2.) *Adult facilitators should sit across from one another, not side by side*. Not only does this give the adults greater exposure to the girls by spreading out, it allows facilitators to see one another during the meeting and signal each other in response to any change in the course of the meeting or any "infraction" of the meeting "rules."

3.) Every meeting should begin with a review of the agreements the girls make for how the meeting is to be conducted. These rules should be written on a piece of poster board or paper and held up at each gathering of the group. The agreements might sound like the following:

- a.) **One girl speaks at a time.** For younger or more impulsive girls, use a pine cone, sea shell or similar object (*not a stick or a stone*) to hold while talking. The person with the object speaks. The *adult facilitator always controls the object*, giving it out and then getting it back after each girl speaks.
- b.) **Each girl speaks for herself.** Girls have a habit of speaking for one another or deferring to the thoughts or statements of others. As we have seen, girls often give up their own "voice" in the process. This is an important agreement that will need to be gently enforced.
- c.) **Respect what each person says.** This is another way of saying, "No put downs." It is important to create and maintain an environment where girls can feel heard and not judged.
- d.) **What gets said here, stays here.** This agreement helps promote safety in the group by keeping what gets shared from being turned into "gossip." Facilitators may want to amend this agreement by stating that, as caring adults, they, too, will respect the girls' privacy; but will, of course, do whatever needs to be done to keep the girls safe. If a girl shares anything that has to do with hurting herself or another, this cannot be kept a "secret" by an adult leader.

**Other Tips:** •When you first meet, have the girls generate their own meeting "agreements."

•Have the girls generate, then agree on their own topic for discussion. Stick to one topic per meeting. •Hand out two or three pebbles or beads (beads are a great choice for girls!), which each girl puts into the center of the group as she takes her "turn." This helps to keep one or two more vocal girls from dominating discussion. Once each girls has used her "turns," she must wait until everyone has had at least one turn before she gets another bead.

**The Job of the Facilitator:** 1) To encourage participation by listening and remaining non-judgmental. 2) To validate what a girl may think or feel. 3) To actively keep the meeting agreements.

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