

“ Before Girls Inc. introduced me to sports, I never thought of myself as an athlete, let alone a leader. Playing volleyball made me proud and confident.

- Sydney, age 13

”

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 increase their physical activity and fitness through sports and adventure.



Why is a program to get girls active in sports important?

Girls Inc. aims to make sports an integral part of girls' lives and recognizes that girls have much to gain by early and sustained participation in sports. Though the number of girls participating in sports has steadily increased since the passage of Title IX in 1972, too many girls still encounter roadblocks that leave them sitting on the sidelines instead of sprinting toward the finish line. When their access to sports participation is limited, girls miss the chance to develop skills that will help them succeed and habits that can keep them healthy throughout their lives.

Sports participation helps lower the risk of obesity and of associated diseases, decreases feelings of anxiety and depression, and may help students focus in the classroom, increasing time spent on tasks and grades. In addition, girls' participation in sports has been shown to decrease risky behaviors, including delaying the initiation and frequency of sexual intercourse and reducing the likelihood of a female adolescent getting pregnant

Research shows that physical activity declines among young people as they move from childhood through the teen years, with girls falling further behind boys in every age group. In fact, in a 2015 national survey, only about 17% of high school girls indicated they exercised for the recommended amount of time each day in the week before the survey. Other research shows low-income youth may have fewer opportunities than their higher income peers to be physically active, with income-based disparities in physical activity widening over the past decade. Having access to sports and physical activity both at and outside of school, and in an environment that provides positive support and minimizes a “win at all costs” perspective while emphasizing healthy competition, can be key to helping girls embrace sports as an integral part of their lives.

About the Program: Girls Inc. Sporting Chance

Through Girls Inc. Sporting Chance, girls build a foundation for enjoying sports, adventure and physical activity throughout their lives. Girls develop movement and athletic skills, cooperative and competitive spirit, and healthy habits. They experience the benefits and excitement of taking positive risks that bolster their self-confidence and personal growth.



- **Steppingstones** (for girls ages 6 to 8) develops motor skills that get girls running, jumping, leaping, twisting, bending, and balancing as they utilize a variety of sports and movement-related equipment, including jump ropes, balls, scooters, bats, bowling pins, nets, hoops, and scoops. Girls begin to move more confidently and skillfully, get used to structured physical activity, learn about the positive connection between physical activity and health-related fitness, and accept sport as a legitimate activity for girls and women. The movement skills that girls develop in Steppingstones may later apply to the formal movement in a variety of games, sports, dance, and fitness activities.
- **Bridges** (for girls ages 9 to 11) picks up where Steppingstones leaves off, enhancing girls' motor skills while introducing girls to the world of organized sports. Participants focus on the skills and strategies of four sports: softball (throwing, catching, and batting); soccer (kicking and agility); basketball (shooting and teamwork); and tennis (striking and individual competence). Girls learn the concepts of offense, defense, and teamwork, and develop sport-specific skills in a progression that leads to game readiness and provides a foundation for lifelong participation in sports.
- **Girls enCourage** (for girls ages 12 to 14) is designed to sustain girls' interest in sports through adolescence by introducing them to nontraditional activities and adventures that go beyond stereotypes and challenge them to set their own personal goals and create their own definitions of success. Participation in program activities promotes movement skills, team cohesion, and health awareness to develop girls' sense of personal power and worth. As they master new physical techniques and learn to take calculated risks, girls build not only physical strength, but also courage, confidence, self-reliance, and other critical life skills.



Ancillary Component:

BoneZone (for girls ages 9 to 12) was developed as part of a national Bone Health Campaign. The component uses engaging physical activity, nutritional information, and advocacy by girls to promote bone health and reduce girls' risk of developing osteoporosis later in life.

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.