



**youth
empowerment
group**

Gives tween and teen girls life skills for success in stressful times as fun, active experiences!

***PowerUp Girls for Life* Mental and Social Health Life Skill Community Program Overview, 2024**

Girls today are dealing with unprecedented stress and research shows that life skill training can empower them to achieve success and well-being. This document summarizes the content of the evidence-based *PowerUp Girls for Life* program for 4th- through 12th-grade girls that provides information and practical tools for life skills that support mental and behavioral health, safety, equality, healthy relationships, and academic and life success. Building empathy and positive, supportive cultures among girls as well as between students and adult leaders is emphasized throughout this program’s fun, active learning experiences.

Created by the all-volunteer nonprofit [Youth Empowerment Group \(YEG\)](https://www.youthempowermentgroup.org) of psychologists, counselors, educators, and an obstetrician/gynecologist, this video-based online program is designed to be flexible with minimal preparation, supplies, and training required. This allows women’s organizations, female mentors and leaders of youth organizations, female sports leagues, and parent groups to use the program in addition to counselors and teachers to support the girls they care for while making it easier to do so. Videos, instructor guides, student materials, and printable activity and game supplies are on the same webpage for each session. Other needed supplies are easily obtainable.

Structure of each 35-minute (on average) video-based session:

- 10- to 15-minute engaging topical teaching presentation followed by a brief review
- 5-minute “talk time” introduced by a rap song reminding students that discussing material and communicating respectfully are important, during which students write and then share thoughts and favorite things learned or heard, and ask questions (we

provide discussion prompts for instructors)

- Top takeaway messages
- 10 to 15 minutes of fun or interesting learning activities or games that have animated instructions and optional video timers

This premier, innovative, comprehensive girls' empowerment program was recently reproduced for enhanced ease of use and flexibility. Clips of girls speaking about mental health and life from our national film project highlighted in [Time Magazine](#) are being incorporated to add the power of peer-to-peer validation and support. This program and YEG's new parallel *PowerUp Co-Ed* life skill program are now available for licensed national and international use at programs.youthempowermentgroup.org.

POWERUP GIRLS FOR LIFE CURRICULUM SECTIONS

This mental and social health life skill program is divided into 6 sections according to the content area of knowledge and skill training provided to girls:

1. Self-esteem and positive body image building
2. Coping with emotions and stress, problem solving, and decision making
3. Healthy relationships, conflict solving, and social media management
4. Bullying prevention and defense, and personal safety
5. Mindsets, learning, and habits for academic and life success
6. *PowerUp* gender and diversity equality

Sessions that are best used with 6th-graders and older are numbers 16 (dating), 24 (female sexualization), and 25 (sexism and sexual harassment). But these and session 20 on safe touch may be used with 5th-graders as deemed appropriate. Before using this curriculum with 4th-graders, we recommend that all sessions be previewed by instructors for appropriateness according to their students' developmental and experiential levels.

SECTION 1

Self-Esteem and Positive Body Image Building

Welcome Session

Outlines session flow and life skill benefits of feeling prepared, optimistic, worthy, empowered to be equal, and resilient under pressures girls face growing up today (the *PowerUp* acronym). Builds positive culture, confidence, respectful communication, and

teamwork, and explains mental health and life skills and how they can make the difference between difficult and empowered lives. Brief anonymous student surveys asking how they rate their knowledge, confidence, and attitudes about topics taught in the program are taken, and this survey is repeated at the end of the program. The fun game gives students practice at following directions and having positive, affirming interactions with other girls they may not know or with small group leaders.

Activity: Either the Inside-Out Circle Game for 10 or more players including instructors or the Pass the Question Game for fewer than 10

Goal: build participant engagement, comfort, pleasant interaction, and a respectful, supportive, inclusive culture

Session 1: Self-Esteem and How to Build It

Explores what good, healthy self-esteem looks and feels like, where it comes from, how it is very different from harmful entitlement, and how girls can start or continue building it. Explains how things such as empathy for others, self-compassion, recognizing strengths, valuing diversity, social engagement, optimism, and standing up for oneself and others feed self-esteem. Girls do a self-esteem pledge to themselves and each other during the lesson.

Activity A: Start your positive affirmations and share one (students will finish sheets at home)

Goal: enable self-esteem building by teaching how to create positive self-affirmations (formulate positive aspects of themselves)

Activity B: You are amazing! game

Goal: provide fun interaction while students vocalize positive personal qualities to and about each other and start to build a supportive group culture

Session 2: Things that Can Break Down Self-Esteem if We Let Them

Reveals common stressful exposures that can reduce self-esteem, which are termed self-esteem breakers. Reframes things that may seem to support positive self-views but are unlikely sources of lasting self-esteem (e.g., body image, appearance, popularity), and things that may make us feel good temporarily but then lead to harm. Encourages ways to feel more in control, be optimistic and resilient, seek help, and not allow people or events to degrade self-worth. Ends with a brief review of self-esteem builders and sources of strength from session 1.

Activity: Self-esteem builders and breakers relay race

Goal: help girls remember things that build lasting self-esteem and recognize and seek

support for things that can reduce it

Session 3: How to Form Healthy Positive Body Images

Lists body changes that must happen in puberty for female body functions. Discusses that puberty often leads girls to compare their bodies to other girls' and to images of women in media, which leads to feeling bad about normal bodies and sometimes illness. Defines body image and describes what having a positive body image looks and feels like, its positive effects, and ways to build it while rejecting ideal body images.

Activity: Help! Give your leader advice to improve her unhealthy body image story

Goal: help girls critically evaluate unhealthy body thoughts and behaviors and internalize healthy ones to use instead for lasting positive impact

SECTION 2

Coping with Emotions and Stress, Problem Solving, and Decision Making

Session 4: Brain Development Basics

Investigates how and why brains remodel at their ages, what brains do in general, and the functions of parts that change. Introduces use it or lose it brain connection types and good connections to set goals for making while young. Portrays the sensitivity of the brain to permanent changes during remodeling, and how to protect their developing brains by limiting harmful exposures such as substances and maximizing good exposures such as positive social interactions.

Activity: Brain fact telephone game

Goal: reinforce knowledge of brain development and play a fun game

Session 5: Feelings, Actions, and Thoughts: Check Your Thoughts!

Clarifies why all emotions are normal and OK but need to be managed to work for us. How to measure, recognize, and manage intense emotions and the triggers that lead to them. Reveals the connection sequence between events, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors: thoughts determine feelings and reactions to an event, but thoughts can be inaccurate and unhelpful. Covers types of thinking errors that cause stress, over- or underreaction or unhelpful reactions, and how to check and change unrealistic or inaccurate thoughts for best results.

Activity A: Emotion charades

Goal: provide an opportunity to practice expressing and recognizing emotions, fun interaction

Activity B: Guess what she's thinking game

Goal: help students recognize the connection between emotions and thoughts and how changing thoughts can change our emotions and reactions for the better

Session 6: Depression, Anxiety, and Why Self-Harm Happens

Explains sadness versus depression, feeling anxious versus having anxiety that interferes with life, the common nature of these problems, and why self-harm including dying by suicide happens sometimes. Encourages use of trusted adults and resources (given to students and parents). Gives warning signs of needing help and reinforces that asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness. Teaches multiple ways to manage anxiety. Reassures there are always better solutions for distress than self-harm, and that help is available.

Activity A: When you're worried and you know it exercise

Goal: introduce using best, worst, and probable outcome analysis, and cognitive reframing of anxiety-producing situations

Activity B: Floor deep breathing and visualization technique training

Goal: briefly introduce and provide a practice session of relaxation techniques for anxious situations

Session 7: PowerUp Your Coping Skills for Stress

Validates that feeling stressed is normal and common. Defines coping as a learned skill and explains how it feeds resilience, optimism, happiness, and success. Provides ways to manage stress such as using support people, emotional control, self-care, healthy media, planning, and choices as well as avoiding things that harm coping. Reminds youth to check their thoughts when stressed because they may be thinking things that aren't accurate, causing unnecessary stress.

Activity: The let it go to cope game

Goal: help girls remember ways to cope with stress by acting them out, and provide creative, fun physical activity

Session 8: How Media and Substances Affect Coping and Decision-Making

Defines media and explains how media including social media can help or harm feelings, behaviors, and coping with stress. Examines how the substances alcohol, marijuana, narcotics,

and vaping can harm coping, motivation, learning, decision making, and mental and physical health and explains addiction.

Activity: Tag the media or substance race

Goal: physical fun while reinforcing knowledge of the risks of media and substances as well as positive benefits of some media

Session 9: When and How to Get Help for Yourself or Others

Specifies how students can recognize when they or other people are not coping well enough and need help, and how to get help. Reveals how to recognize warning signs that someone is dangerous to self or others and what to do about it including suicide and school violence prevention measures. Provides resources and hopeful, empowering messages.

Activity: Describe a trusted adult puzzle race

Goal: help girls be able to identify the qualities of trusted adults

Session 10: PowerUp Decision Making and Problem Solving

Explores factors that make it easier or harder to handle common problems and difficult situations such as being pressured by peers, concerned about a family member, worried about school, or lonely. Describes decision making and problem solving as two crucial life skills that feed happiness, confidence, and success while reducing stress. Explains how to make decisions and determine what to do about problems by using YEG's 5-Step Decision Problem Tool which includes weighing pros and cons, considering consequences for self and others, and evaluating and learning from results.

Activity: Practice using the 5-step tool to make decisions and solve problems

Goal: provide experience working to solve problems and make decisions using a 5-step method

SECTION 3

Healthy Relationships, Conflict Solving, and Social Media Management

Session 11: Signs of Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships

Overviews the many types of relationships people have and their importance. Explains how to recognize healthy and supportive relationships (communication, balanced social engagement, perspective-taking, empathy, trust, and respect), as well as unhealthy ones (pressure to do

what someone thinks is wrong or to exclude others including diverse people, manipulation, drama, violence, and threats) that don't help but can harm us. Includes specific elements of healthy versus unhealthy friendships.

Activity: Train wreck mixer game

Goal: positive culture and relationship building, provide fun physical activity and practice talking with others to get to know them

Session 12: Basics of Being a Good Friend

Clarifies the qualities of people who are good friends to have and how to be a good friend such as empathy, good listening, and respecting opinions as well as personal space. Reviews healthy expectations for friendships before adulthood. Unravels unhealthy aspects of friendships such as drama, pressure, put-downs, manipulation, danger, and one-sidedness. Covers practical aspects of healthy friendships including the details of good listening as well as things to avoid that can make it harder to form or maintain friendships.

Activity: Good and bad listening game

Goal: have fun acting out and identifying good and bad listening behaviors while practicing good listening skills

Session 13: PowerUp Your Friendship Making Skills

Presents friendship-making as a learned life skill that includes finding people who are good friends to have in good places and at good times. Explains the Importance of participating in group activities and being open to different people who aren't into popularity or drama, and how to approach kids for initial brief positive interactions, have full conversations, do things that indicate being a good friend to have, and connect while avoiding clinginess and unrealistic expectations. Offers healthy perspectives about rejection along with reassurance that making and keeping friends gets easier with age and experience.

Activity: Chitchat? Did that!

Goal: promote confidence using social communication needed to make new friends and maintain relationships

Session 14: How to Manage Social Media and Drama So They Don't Manage You

Explores the common nature of social media use today, how it is a choice with good and harmful consequences, what those consequences can be including for games, and how youth can choose to limit uses to beneficial and responsible ones and control their amount of use and with whom for best results. Explains how to recognize when messages are cyberbullying

or creating drama and gives healthy ways to react including using empathy and kindness. Promotes social media safety and protective adult input.

Activity: Explore and solve social media and drama situations

Goal: instill healthy approaches to handling common social media difficulties and friendship drama while showing empathy

Session 15: PowerUp Your Conflict Solving Skills

Defines conflict between people and explains conflict-solving skills, the many benefits they provide, and how to use them. Spells out why violence never resolves conflict, fear, anger, or disappointment. Teaches how to prepare for conflict-solving discussions by setting goals and regulating emotions, and then effectively communicating with I-statements, perspective taking, empathy, a chocolate-cookie method, and assertiveness as well as how to find compromises. Compares assertiveness to aggressiveness.

Activity: Solve THIS exercise

Goal: provide an opportunity to practice resolving or making sample conflicts better

Session 16: Dating Myths and Reasons to Delay

Explains the difference between friendship and dating relationships, myths that teens often believe about dating, and common peer and media pressure to date and engage in sexual behavior early. Presents a simple definition of sexual activity (two people touching each other's private areas with permission) and some general risks. Good reasons to delay dating and sexual activity are given.

Activity: Reasons to delay dating and sexual activity relay race

Goal: help participants remember good reasons to delay dating and sexual activity, destigmatize subject matter to make communication more likely between students and guardians

SECTION 4

Bullying Prevention and Defense, and Personal Safety

Session 17: The Who, What, Where, When, How, and Whys of Bullying

Clarifies how to recognize bullying versus teasing, types of harm caused, and methods used. Introduces the roles people play in events and investigates who tends to get bullied, who

tends to engage in bullying and why, and what can happen to them when they get or don't get help.

Activity: Is this bullying or not? game

Goal: help students recognize bullying situations versus what may be uncomfortable but not bullying as a foundation for knowing when to take action

Session 18: Stopping Bullies When They Mess with You

Explains that bullying is unfortunately common but is never okay or a victim's fault and why it's good for youth to get support and advice for handling it from trusted adults. Gives youth methods to try when encountering bullying face-to-face or online as well as things to avoid because they can make things worse. Specifies personal protective actions against cyberbullying.

Activity: PowerUp your bully deflector actions

Goal: provide an opportunity to learn and practice effective actions when facing a bully personally including after being cyberbullied

Session 19: PowerUp Your Bullying Bystander Actions

Delves into being a bystander of bullying, the different effects it can have depending on actions taken, and how witnesses can greatly help youth who are bullied. Empowers effective bystander action by providing options to fit students' comfort level and how well they know a child engaging in bullying. Provides the opportunity for students to discuss and devise a plan for handling bullying or preventing its harm as a group.

Activity: Bystander team decision and action practice (only leaders role-play being bullying victims)

Goal: give students practical bystander action training

Session 20: Boundaries of Safe Touch

Empowers girls to believe they deserve to have control over their bodies. Defines safe and unsafe touch in very basic terms, as well as sexual activity (two people touching private areas with permission), what consent is, and when consent is not possible. Gives a basic definition of sexual assault (touching private areas without permission or when consent isn't possible), explains it's never a victim's fault, and gives ways to prevent it by avoiding higher-risk situations along with fundamental defensive measures.

Activity: Safe touch relay race (e.g., touching a shoe, touching thumbs, high-five)

Goal: fun, safe physical interaction to support positive culture and comfort with the topic

SECTION 5

Mindsets, Learning, and Habits for Academic and Life Success

Session 21: Mindsets for Good Lives and Learning

Investigates ways of thinking that make people happy and successful. Explores the differences between growth and fixed mindsets, and why growth mindset thinking works much better for learning and getting good grades. Examines other mindsets—persistence, curiosity, optimism (and its difference from pessimism) and healthy expectations for academic and other success—and how they support good lives and good learning. Introduces goal setting and provides ways to deal with grade pressure.

Activity: What Can I Say Instead? exercise

Goal: help students recognize growth and fixed mindset thoughts and provide the opportunity to work as a team to change fixed statements to growth ones

Session 22: PowerUp Your Brain for Learning and Academic Success

Unveils common learning myths in a short class game followed by exploring how brains learn as well as common learning detours to avoid. Provides top tips for learning, memory, studying, test preparation, and achieving good grades based on the science of learning.

Activity: Learning tool game

Goal: promote understanding and retention of keys to academic success using a fun, active game

Session 23: PowerUp Your Brain with Healthy Food and Habits

Shows how brains and bodies function best with enough sleep, good nutrition, hydration, exercise, and limits on entertainment media. Spells out healthy versus unhealthy dietary fats, healthy complex carbohydrates versus simple carbs, the value of protein, and how to combine good carbohydrates with proteins for brain-healthy snacks.

Activity: Healthy snack bingo

Goal: aid recognition of food choices that provide good enough nutrition on the go

SECTION 6

PowerUp Gender and Diversity Equality**Session 24: Have Healthy Views of Being Female and Reject Being Sexualized (Valued Based on Looks and Sexiness)**

Gives reasons it's great to be a girl but explains that many girls grow up believing their value isn't based on important, interesting qualities but on unrealistic, attractive looks or sexiness (having romantic appeal or appearing interested in sexual activity), and that when this happens it is called being sexualized. Uncovers how these beliefs hurt people including when others value females this way, what causes these beliefs, and how to defeat them to build self-esteem, protect oneself from being sexualized, and promote societal valuation of females as human beings instead of objects.

Activity: Reject sexualized images: sorting exercise and brainstorm

Goal: help girls distinguish sexualized images of women from healthy representations of women as whole people and encourage not paying attention to sexualized images of people

Session 25: Understanding Sexism and Sexual Harassment, Their Harms, and Ways to Defeat Them

Explains how the word sex can be used to mean gender. Teaches simplified definitions of sexism and sexual harassment and explores their harms from a female perspective while promoting the value of all people. Provides girls with the opportunity to practice protective, assertive responses to both problems in a short intra-lesson activity, when they share ideas and practice saying things to stand up for themselves. Supports the ability to recognize the presence of one of these issues (or the absence of both) in the fun game's scenarios. Delivers practical tools to resist or help put an end to both these scourges and empower self-esteem, confidence, safety, and equality in females.

Activity: Pin the Post on the Target Game

Goals: support the ability to recognize sexism and sexual harassment and their absence and provide fun social interaction

Session 26: Understanding and Celebrating Diversity

Explores the differences between people in positive ways and the value of this diversity. Defines race as a social rather than biological characteristic on a developmentally appropriate level and defines ethnicity and culture as other descriptors of differences. Reveals why we are equally valuable and encourages celebrating differences amidst abundant human similarities.

Activity: Diversity Bingo

Goal: positive social interactions, help students become comfortable talking to each other and get to know each other and how they are different and similar other than race and ethnicity

Program Graduation Celebration

After the last session, parents, guardians, and other relatives are invited to a short ceremony during which girls receive a graduation award for their learning accomplishments. Students are given the option (and gently encouraged) to give “shout-out” recognitions of program leaders.

General curriculum notation

Simple, limited descriptions of sexual topics are used in this curriculum. Delaying both dating and sexual activity is encouraged, and ways to avoid and resist risky situations are covered but specific types of sexual activity, how pregnancy occurs, and birth control are not covered. Helpful information on some common female adolescent health issues is provided on handouts.