

Encouraging Girls' Communities

Adults can encourage and support girls' communities in a number of ways.

Encouraging girls

- ◆ Affirm girls' right to speak up and speak out.
- ◆ Learn from girls about their issues and perspectives.
- ◆ Affirm girls' thoughts and feelings and encourage them to channel their enthusiasm, anger, joy, or frustration into positive action.
- ◆ Support girls as they form communities around shared passions.
- ◆ Provide comfortable and resourceful places for girls to get together.
- ◆ Work with girls to develop the specific principles and purposes of their communities.
- ◆ Help girls to envision the possibilities, then to work toward big goals — justice, equity, environmental preservation.
- ◆ Encourage respect. Help girls create diverse communities that recognize girls' similarities and celebrate their differences.
- ◆ Help girls establish symbols and even create rituals that affirm their togetherness.

Staying in the background

- ◆ Listen to girls! They have the answers or the seeds of solutions.
- ◆ Be an advisor and resource rather than a director; be proud as girls take charge.
- ◆ Ask questions that lead girls to express their ideas and identify potential allies.
- ◆ Encourage girls to tell one another their stories of success and struggle.

Fostering pride in girls, women, and their achievements

- ◆ Anchor girls' experiences in appreciation of "herstory" — the achievements of girls and women of many times and cultures.
- ◆ Develop resources about organizations and institutions composed of women and girls as well as those run by women and girls.
- ◆ Introduce girls to women who have made a difference. Women who hold public office, own businesses, and invest their time and treasure in social change go a long way toward showing girls what is possible.

Articulating gender challenges to girls' communities

- ◆ Help girls succeed in traditional, male-dominated areas by emphasizing their shared experience.
- ◆ Strategize with girls' communities about how to sustain their leadership and avoid deferring to boys in mixed-sex settings.
- ◆ Foster the notion of girls' sisterhood and help them avoid pressure to compete for boys' attention.

Connecting, supporting, and defending girls' communities

- ◆ Connect girls' communities with networks that have their interests and concerns in mind.
- ◆ Help girls' communities build and maintain resilience in the face of challenge and adversity.
- ◆ Help girls navigate others' criticism — it is okay for girls to be together in ways they choose.
- ◆ Encourage girls to protect and preserve the communities to which they belong. Demonstrate the value of being there for one another over the long haul.

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