

Creating a positive group environment

Young people do some of their very best learning within small groups. When girls are able to come together to discuss friendship values, increase awareness of girl bullying behaviors, and learn skills for standing up to bullying, they benefit from knowing that they are not alone. Group participants feel supported by peers who are ‘all-in-the-same-boat’ (Shulman 2008) and profit from practicing new skills on real-world peers.

The facilitator can foster trust and help create a positive group environment by:

- role modeling assertive behaviors in all interactions with group members
- demonstrating unconditional positive regard for each participant
- conveying a belief in the abilities and skills of individual members and the group as a whole
- customizing the curriculum to the needs of the group
- encouraging active participation
- providing regular feedback to individual members
- safeguarding participants from hurtful interactions
- asking group members for their opinions and feedback
- celebrating group learning and successes.

Using the curriculum

Friendship and Other Weapons is a complete, ready-to-use curriculum. Each session begins by outlining specific learning objectives for participants and provides a list of necessary materials and *Before beginning* preparations.

Detailed, step-by-step instructions are provided to the facilitator for each session, along with italicized suggestions for general wording and important messages to convey to participants. Following the instructions for each session, facilitators will find handouts, activities, and *Friendship Journal* pages that can be photocopied and distributed to group participants.

Several of the sessions utilize role plays, scenarios, and/or questions pre-printed on index cards, for distribution to participants. It may be helpful for the facilitator to prepare extra cards in order to customize the activities with relevant real-world examples and provide a variety of options that encourage maximum participation from group members.

Supplementary activities

Following the regular 12-session curriculum, there is a Supplementary Activities section that features optional activities and discussions for helping young girls survive and thrive in a social media world. Three distinct topic areas focus on song lyrics and music video content, entertainment and advertising imagery, and guidelines for texting and social media use. The activities in this section may be incorporated into the regular 12-session curriculum or used separately, on an as-needed basis.

While not all of the girls for whom the *Friendship and Other Weapons* curriculum is designed are old enough to have cell phones or use social media, it is a near-certainty that all girls will be exposed to this world at an early age. The discussions and activities in this supplementary section provide an open forum for girls to talk about media use and to think critically about media messages.

Time requirements

Each session in the *Friendship and Other Weapons* curriculum is designed to be completed in about 45 minutes, though this time frame is offered only as a guideline. Depending on the program schedule, the day, the group, and the mood (among other variables), some discussions will need more or less time. Sessions can be divided and continued at later points, especially for younger participants who need additional time to learn and process new information. Skills that require extra practice (e.g. *STANDING up to Bullying*) may also necessitate additional time. The facilitator should use discretion in guiding the girls through each lesson, taking care to make the atmosphere interesting and fun and, most importantly, allowing each child to feel heard and understood.

Scheduling

Whenever possible, schedule the group sessions at regular intervals. Kids benefit from the predictability of knowing when sessions will take place and come to look forward to the regular interactions. Also, avoid holding the *Real Friendship* sessions during times of day when participants will be likely to have to come and go or miss frequent sessions. It is frustrating for young people to begin addressing a topic but not have the opportunity to finish it. Likewise, it is disruptive to the group process for the membership to be inconsistent. When adults prioritize group time, they signal to participants that the curriculum is important and convey their commitment to participants' learning.

The group room

Along with dedicating regular time to the group, it is helpful to select a physical space that accommodates group members comfortably and allows enough space for movement around the room during group activities. Additionally, it is important to use a room that is free of noisy distractions and provides enough privacy for participants to feel safe engaging in honest self-reflection and discussion.

Group size

Because each session is built largely around group activities and discussions, the ideal group size is 6–10 girls per adult facilitator. Whenever possible, enough adults should be present to allow each of the girls the chance to feel heard and understood and to be sure that all concerns, questions, and issues receive due attention.

Age of group members

The discussions and activities of the *Real Friendship* group are designed to be used with girls ages 5–11. There will likely be instances in which some girls are able to move quickly through concepts while others may need more focus and explanation. Each session has a special *Customizing the curriculum* section that provides notes on adapting the lessons for varied ages, ability levels, and real-world experiences. Since this is designed as a group experience, the facilitator will be called upon to use his or her skill to make the material meaningful for all.

Arranging girls into pairs and small groups for group activities and discussions

Because developing supportive friendships is a primary goal of this group, it is critical that the facilitator sets the tone for open and inclusive relationships. Whenever partners or small groups are needed, the facilitator should play a role in group formation and take care to protect girls from experiences of exclusion.

An easy and conflict-free way of doing this is to use the *Craft Stick Method*. Simply write the name of each participant on a popsicle (ice lolly) stick prior to the first group session. Anytime pairs or small groups need to be formed, the facilitator can draw from the pre-printed sticks and establish groups randomly. Index cards that kids decorate and personalize also work well for this group formation method.

Group materials

Many of the *Real Friendship* sessions involve handouts that are completed during the group and can serve as helpful “take home” reminders of specific skills. Every group session suggests a *Friendship Journal* topic for participants to continue their reflection outside of group. It is helpful to provide participants with a folder in which they can keep all of their *Real Friendship* papers.

Session 3

Silent Whispers

Two Rules for Stopping Gossip

Session objectives

- To understand the process of rumor-spreading and gossip.
- To identify these behaviors as hurtful to *Real Friendship*.
- To learn and practice two strategies for stopping rumors and gossip.

Materials needed

- wooden craft sticks for selecting small groups
- flipchart paper and markers.

Before beginning

- Prepare the *Stopping Rumors and Gossip* flipchart paper with the following two rules pre-printed:
 - i. “*Refuse to whisper down the alley.*”
 - ii. “*Tell the person to stop spreading rumors and gossip.*”
- Prepare copies of the *Friendship Journal* (page 51) for each participant.
- Prepare copies of the *Letter to Parents* handout (page 52) for each participant to take home.

Welcome back

1. Welcome participants back for their third session of the *Real Friendship* group.
2. Review the previous session:
 - *Last week, you each cast your votes for the Friendship Values that are most important to you. As a group, we determined that values such as (list three top values from the tally sheet) are important to any Real Friendship.*
 - *Since we last met, have you had any chances to see Real Friendship Values in action? Please share.*
3. Preview this week's agenda:
 - *This week, we are going learn about a behavior that goes against the values of Real Friendship.*
 - *We will also learn specific strategies for how to stop this behavior and stand up for Real Friendship Values.*

Opening activity: Whisper Down the Alley

1. Tell the girls that the group is going to play a round of the game *Whisper Down the Alley*. The same children's game may be better known to some as *Telephone* or *Operator*. While many girls may be familiar with this popular group game, a quick rules review will be helpful:
 - *I will whisper a sentence into the ear of the girl next to me. She will whisper the words she hears into the ear of the next girl in the circle, and so on, until the message is passed to all of the girls.*
 - *The only rules are that you cannot ask the person to repeat what they whisper to you and you must repeat back exactly what you hear—or think you hear—to the next person.*
 - *The final girl in the circle should announce the phrase aloud to the group. The facilitator who started the original sentence will verify if the message was transmitted correctly or incorrectly.*
2. The facilitator should initiate the first round of play, using the following sentence:
 - *I heard that Jenny likes Rachel but Rachel is best friends with Cassie and Cassie doesn't like Jenny (because Jenny likes Beth who is in a big fight with Cassie).*

- The bracketed part of the sentence may be added/eliminated, depending on the age level of the participants. While the sentence is intended to have a lot of detail, the first half may be sufficient for younger groups.
3. Per the rules, resist any requests for repeating the sentence, but rather let it travel around the circle completely. Chances are excellent that some of the details will become distorted along the way. At the end of the game play, ask the girls to reflect on the distortions:
 - *Did [name of final girl in the circle] say the same message that I started?*
 - *How were the messages different?*
 - *Why did the message change as it was passed among the group members?*
 - *Does anyone know another word for a message that spreads between kids, but is usually whispered, written about, or “spoken behind people’s backs?” This kind of message often starts with words like, “I heard...” or “Did you hear...”*
 4. Encourage girls to identify the words “rumor” and/or “gossip.”
 - *How is the game Whisper Down the Alley like real life gossip and rumor-spreading?*
 - *Notice how the names and details changed when the sentence was being passed around. In real-life gossip, can kids hurt one another by spreading incorrect messages and unkind information? How can you help stop this from happening?*
 - *Why is it important to express your thoughts and feelings out loud and directly to a person, rather than whispering about them to someone else?*
 - *What can you do when someone you know is spreading a rumor?*
 5. Summarize the discussion with a statement about how rumors and gossip are a bad idea when it comes to building healthy friendships.

Stopping Rumors and Gossip

1. Encourage participants to be the kind of girl who stops rumors, rather than spreading them:
 - *When you stop rumors, you show that you are the kind of girl who lives by Real Friendship Values. Stopping rumors is a powerful friendship move and can be done in two simple steps.*