



Our Approach

Girls on the Run® councils across the United States and Canada serve girls in their local communities under the umbrella of our parent organization, Girls on the Run International. Our 24-lesson curriculum is designed for 3rd – 8th grade girls and combines training for a 5k run with lessons that inspire them to recognize and honor their individual strengths and talents and to celebrate their inner selves. The culminating event of the 12-week season is the opportunity for the girls to participate in a non-competitive 5K running event. For most of the girls, this is the first time that they have ever attempted a physical goal of this magnitude and completion of the 5k provides an incredible feeling of strength and a real sense of accomplishment.

The curriculum is designed to aid and support girls in their emotional, physical, social and intellectual development.

Expectations

The girls complete the 12-week program with a stronger sense of identity, greater self-confidence, a healthier body image and a better knowledge of what it means to be a member of a team and a community.

Curriculum Structure

Each of the twenty four Girls on the Run sessions adheres to a formal structure that combines physical activities with experiential learning activities.

Every session begins with a getting-on-board and warm-up activity that brings the girls' focus to the lesson topic. The warm-up is followed by a stretching routine that allows for question and answer time and deeper discussions around the topic. A work-out game follows, where the girls participate in a variety of running activities that incorporate individual or team goals. This is followed by a wrap-up that includes cool-down stretching and final discussion. Each session closes with positive words from the team coach regarding individual and group behaviors.

Academic Evaluation

Girls on the Run International has evaluated program efficacy since 2001. Girls on the Run is currently the only positive youth development program for girls with evidence-based results. Rita Debate, Ph.D., MPH, CHES, developed a formal evaluation tool entitled "Girls on the Run: An Assessment of Self-Esteem, Body Image and Eating Attitudes." Our evaluation is based on established and well-known measurement tools including the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Child/Adolescent Silhouette Rating Scale, and the Children's Eating Attitude Test.

Prior to our program evaluation, the academic research in the area of girls and sports reflected two contradictory results. Girls involved in athletics have higher self-esteem and engage in fewer risky behaviors than girls who are not. Conversely, girls who become highly competitive in some sports (such as running, figure skating, gymnastics and other sports in which slim body images are admired) have a higher incidence of eating disorders than girls who are not involved in such sports. This poses a dilemma that the Girls on the Run curricula address.

Unlike traditional athletic programs, the Girls on the Run curricula couple physical activity with a whole-person philosophy to provide the positive benefits of physical activity without increasing the risk of unhealthy attitudes about body image and eating. Evaluation results show that participation in Girls on the Run improves girls' self-esteem, body size satisfaction, and physical activity behaviors to a statistically significant extent. Also noted are positive changes regarding attitudes towards physical activity, health behaviors, and empowerment.