

## Ways for Adults To Help Girls Achieve Their Rights

Through *Taking the Lead: Girls' Rights in the 21st Century*, girls have told us that they recognize outmoded gender stereotypes that limit their rights and they are ready for change. They also told us that adults play pivotal roles in their lives. What can you do to help the girls in your lives resist the stereotypes? Here are a few suggestions.

### **Girls have the right to be themselves and to resist gender stereotypes.**

- Confront notions of female fragility. Challenge views in the media and elsewhere of assertive women as “unfeminine” or destructive.
- Celebrate the accomplishments of women who are competent in nontraditional areas. Through books, videos, the Internet and real life meetings introduce girls to a wide range of successful women.
- Ensure that child-rearing classes and materials promote an approach to raising children that is not limited by gender stereotypes.
- Ask a girl if she wants a truck or a doll, a jewelry box or a chemistry set, a flute or a bass drum, a new dress or some new software
- Don't assume you know.

### **Girls have the right to express themselves with originality and enthusiasm.**

- Teach girls skills that help them to think on their feet, make their points and defend their positions without apology.
- Share decision-making authority with girls at home, in school and in after-school activities. Show girls that their voices have a significant impact on their own lives and the lives of others.
- Ensure equal participation of girls in youth forums and public events involving youth.

### **Girls have the right to take risks, to strive freely, and to take pride in success.**

- Refuse to accept “I won't” or “I can't” in place of “I don't know how.” Then help girls to develop the skills and confidence to say, “I'll try.”
- Make sure girls get equal time. In coed situations develop rules that give each person a fair chance to speak without being interrupted.
- Avoid rescuing girls. Encourage girls to make an imperfect product, to get dirty, disheveled and sweaty in pursuit of a goal, to make big, interesting mistakes.

### **Girls have the right to accept and appreciate their bodies.**

- Help girls develop a healthy body image. Teach them that beauty comes in different sizes, shapes and colors and abilities. Encourage girls to focus on health, flexibility and strength.
- Enable every girl to become a media critic. Examine the portrayals of girls and women in television programs, popular songs, movies, books and magazines: Are the portrayals realistic? Are female characters judged more by their looks or actions?
- Praise girls for their skills, efforts and successes, not only their appearance. Applaud girls for scoring the winning basket, hitting the tying run.

### **Girls have the right to have confidence in themselves and to be safe in the world.**

- Help girls find healthy ways to manage stress. Many more adolescent girls than boys report feeling a lot of stress in their lives and more girls than boys report that a reason

they use drugs is to combat stress. Healthy ways to deal with feelings of stress include exercise, artistic endeavors, letting off steam by yelling in an out-of-the-way place or punching a pillow, quiet relaxation and visualizing a restful place.

- Offer girls training in self-defense and in sports that promote feelings of strength.
- Encourage girls to come together to improve schools, neighborhoods and other settings where they don't feel safe. Find out what you can do to help them accomplish this goal.

**Girls have the right to prepare for interesting work and economic independence.**

- Introduce girls to dynamic women who combine paid work, volunteer work and family life and personal life in innovative ways.
- Provide opportunities for girls to explore roles, experiences and activities that are generally reserved for boys. Girls may not ask for the opportunity to hold a snake, learn carpentry or construct an electrical circuit, but they participate eagerly when given the chance to do so.
- Debunk the myth of Prince Charming. Most women will work for pay for a large portion of their adult lives and need to be responsible money managers.
- Openly discuss family finances. Show girls that financial planning is part of everyday life. Talk about your income, expenses and family budget. Try balancing the checkbook together.