

# *Girlfriends!*

Camaraderie

Connections

Community

Confidence

**SAMPLE PAGES**

**CHRISTINE SHIEL  
PHILLIPPA ADGEMIS  
ROBYN FLOYD**



# Foreword

Welcome to *Girlfriends!*— a program that provides opportunities for girls to grow and connect.

Developed out of the needs and relationships of teenage girls, *Girlfriends!* came into being through the guidance of teacher educators Phillippa Adgemis, Robyn Floyd and Christine Shiel, along with support from a team of committed community members and professionals.

It is my great pleasure to introduce you to some of the benefits and outcomes offered through this program to our young women, many of who are so desperately in need of more extended resource bases to navigate our world effectively and successfully.

These outcomes are perhaps best reflected through the parable of the Award Winning Corn Farmer, a gentleman who consistently won first prize in his region for many decades. It came to the attention of a reporter that every year, even though it was always he who won, this farmer shared his best seed with each of his neighbours. ‘How can you continue to be successful, when each year they compete against you with your own prize-winning corn?’

‘I couldn’t win if I didn’t!’ was the farmer’s reply. ‘On each side of my farm, my neighbours are kind enough to grow prize winning corn. The wind carries the pollen to my corn from every direction, and I cannot help but win. If I am to grow good corn, I must help my neighbours grow good corn too.’

And this is what *Girlfriends!* is all about — helping each participant to be their best by sharing the best we have to offer. Just as the corn farmer cannot improve without supporting his neighbours to do the same, so it is in schools and community. It has been said that ‘the value of a life is measured by the lives it touches. The welfare of each is bound up with the welfare of all.’ This is certainly true of *Girlfriends!*

This program offers students the opportunity to ‘grow good corn’ — to learn for and about themselves, to broaden their social, emotional and spiritual resource base, to develop connectedness. This is facilitated through the material in this book in so many different ways, which include, but are certainly not limited to, the development of:

- individual and group goals and the planning and developing of common pathways
- the creation and supplementation of individual future stories for each girl
- girls’ ability to identify and articulate their needs and feelings
- healthy connections with self, peers, teachers, community members and professionals
- more solid resource bases for each individual
- more pathways to connect students with the school curriculum in supportive ways

- increased academic outcomes for participants
- rich, contextual learning for each student

As the girls engage in the program, they support others to develop the same outcomes, and everyone wins together: our students, our schools, our families and our communities. Just like the corn farmer, we are in continual ‘cross-pollination’ with each other.

I commend this program to you, then, as an opportunity to sow more seed, and grow more community. The content and framework that follow offer a sound structure and a great growing guide.

Happy planting!

*Nairn Walker*

SOCIAL SOLUTIONS ... EDUCATING FOR A POSITIVE NOW

# Contents

Foreword	3
Rationale	7
Aims	8
Research	9
Program guidelines	11
<i>The 5-step planning cycle</i>	11
<i>To-do list for facilitators</i>	11
<i>Program tips</i>	12
<i>Advice to students</i>	13
<i>Advice to presenters</i>	14
Pre-program focus group	15
Introductory session	18
<b>FORUM SUGGESTIONS</b>	
1. Healthy relationships	20
2. Friends (Boyfriends)	21
3. Leaders of our community	22
4. Changing thinking	23
5. Safe partying	24
6. Beauty therapy and haircare	25
7. Nutrition	26
8. Effective public speaking	27
9. Are you old enough?	28
10. But marijuana's OK, isn't it?	29
11. Community art	30
12. Environmental awareness	31
13. Feeling fit and healthy	32
14. Real role models	33
15. Be a financial wiz	34
16. Journalling	35
17. Personal values	36
18. Presentation skills	37
19. Leadership skills	39
20. Peer pressure	40
21. Body changes	41
22. Dancing queen	42
23. Cyber safety	43
24. Why volunteer?	44
25. Juggling	45
26. Scrapbook	46
27. Treasure map your future	47

28. A career in ...	48
29. Social style	49
30. Wonder box	50
31. Celebrate!	51

## **APPENDICES**

1. Sample parent letter	52
2. Sample presenter letter	53
3. Sample excursion permission note	54
4. Sample timetable	55
5. Relationship scale	56
6. The ideal friend /boyfriend	57
7. People hunt	58
8. What's happening here?	59
9. Age timeline cards	60
10. SMART goals	61
11. Alligator River	62
12. Are you an agoniser or a splurger?	63
13. Using your voice as text	64
14. Leadership Y chart	65
15. Leadership through my eyes	66
16. Peer pressure scenarios	67
17. Cyber safety	68
18. Teacher notes for the Mastery Club	69
19. Reflection ideas	70
20. Case study: <i>Girlfriends!</i> is great – but what about boys?	71
21. Multiple Intelligences and Bloom's taxonomy	72
References	74

# Rationale

The *Girlfriends!* program seeks to empower girls in their early adolescence and increase feelings of confidence and wellbeing. The aim is to enhance protective factors by building skills and resources. Evidence has shown that after the course, girls feel stronger, are more aware of the effects of peer pressure, and have clearer goals and greater understanding of how to achieve those goals.

The program also responds to the needs of girls at risk of not completing their schooling and addresses critical issues including school attendance, engagement, social skills and emotional and mental health. *Girlfriends!* has already successfully operated in a diverse range of communities throughout Australia.

The program design invites participation from local community leaders and builds links for girls within their community. This program is not prescriptive, but offers facilitators a structure that is simple to use. *Girlfriends!* is unique in that the participants play a major role in determining the direct content of the course and it exposes girls to ideas that enable them to make empowering choices.

Each teacher or facilitator sources community experts based on focus group responses. Each program developed will therefore be based on the unique needs of each group. The local community supports the program by providing speakers and leaders who can inspire, support and offer a connectedness within a community. They form an integral part of the forums.

The facilitator could be the coordinator of the year level, the school welfare coordinator or a teacher volunteer from another grade level. This can be very successful, offering the opportunity for girls to gain the support of a mentor/significant adult with a different perspective. Some of our most successful programs have been organised by teachers from other grade levels: for example, a year 1 and year 3 teacher joined forces to organise the year 5/6 program during lunchtimes as part of their contribution to developing a whole-school wellbeing approach. In another setting, a graduate teacher took on the challenge of guiding troubled year 9 and 10 girls and found the experience to be inspiring and fulfilling.

The program is highly flexible and allows the facilitator to be responsive by tailoring the sessions to each group's underlying needs. The program can be fitted into the school day in a number of ways. For example, previous programs have included a 10- to 15-week lunchtime program, a timetable that rotates across the school week to minimise disruption to regular classes and a regular two-hour timeslot for the whole term.

We hope you and your *Girlfriends!* enjoy and grow through this experience.

Christine, Phillipa & Robyn

# Aims



*Girlfriends!* is a adaptive intervention program that:

- develops social competencies, confidence, self-esteem and resilience
- creates friendship between girls who may not normally be in the same social group
- addresses the needs of individuals and cohorts within schools
- develops a sense of community pride and understanding of the local community

*Girlfriends!* facilitators work with community organisations, business leaders and welfare agencies to develop a series of forums. The choice of forums and the way the program is timetabled will reflect the interests and needs of each particular group.

The strength of this program is that it values the suggestions of the focus group and encourages community support. Each volunteer speaker is given guidelines, and communicates with the facilitator before conducting the forum.

Group composition may include girls who are disengaged learners or identified as at-risk, as well as girls who are simply interested in the content or would like to make new friends. It is important to have a balanced and diverse group.

This intervention program can be part of the fabric of the school day. *Girlfriends!* creates opportunities for girls to interact with each other as well as maintain links with community members and service providers beyond the program.

Reflections from the girls, presenters and the facilitator enable monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the *Girlfriends!* experience. As the program evolves, students may write newsletter reports, give presentations at parent information nights and assemblies to showcase their understandings.

*You know that ad on TV where the girl says 'Now let's talk about love and commitment'? Good, that got all the men to leave the room.' That's what Girlfriends! is like. When you get boys out of the way, you can really get down to talking about real life. I never knew I could get so much out of friendships with girls. It brings girls together and you get to have deep conversations.*

# Research

The *Girlfriends!* program improves social competencies by building connectedness to peers, school and community. The program provides opportunities for shared and negotiated learning and creates a diverse community of learners. The development of *Girlfriends!* draws on research that advocates building protective assets to protect girls who are dealing with risk factors in their lives.

There is broad consensus that building protective assets is an effective way of addressing risk factors in young people. School data was used to identify issues for girls aged 11 to 16. Some schools used focus groups. Schools that trialled *Girlfriends!* identified specific risk factors for girls that could challenge their future wellbeing and success. These risk factors included depressed mood and depressive disorders, violence, physical and psychological disabilities, sexuality identity, health and behaviour.

Resilience is often identified as the key to overcoming adversity. Fuller (2001, p. 3) describes resilience as ‘the happy knack of being able to bungy jump through the pitfalls of life ... Resilience and emotional intelligence depend largely on a sense of connectedness, belonging and empathy with others.’ The *Girlfriends!* experience directly contributes to a sense of belonging and evidence has shown that participation positively impacts on school attendance.

Fuller recommends that curriculum directions include information about physical growth and family functioning. Important social competencies include anger and aggression management skills, and setting goals for achievement. Some of these issues were elicited in the pre-program focus groups and others emerged in sessions such as Healthy Relationships and Women’s Health.

*Girlfriends!* incorporates Fuller’s advice that ‘schools need to find ways to weave these activities into their regular schedule so that the establishment of social competencies becomes integral to learning and is something that members of the school community role model to one another on an ongoing basis.’ (2001, p. 12) He also advises that young people learn through experiences, a process which is consolidated through reflection, and which is integral to *Girlfriends!*

*Girlfriends!* is underpinned by Dr Ruby Payne’s work in understanding generational poverty. She defined poverty as not necessarily being without financial resources. *Girlfriends!* session topics and processes implicitly link to the resources that Payne identified as being critical to the success of young people. These resources include emotional, mental, spiritual and physical support systems. The *Girlfriends!* experience is all about building resources for girls in our schools. Building links to the community empowers girls to enhance their potential by ‘facilitating awareness, insight, freedom, growth and choice.’ (Walker 2008)

A number of research studies have suggested that there are significant reasons for organising girls-only support groups. Fuller (2001) outlined studies which found that girls had lower self-esteem than boys in middle school. Furthermore, this disparity between boys and girls increased when girls moved from primary to secondary school.

The program focuses on enhancing protective factors such as coping capacity, resilience and connectedness of individuals and communities to improve emotional and social wellbeing. The adaptability of the *Girlfriends!* program is highlighted by its success with marginalised students. This emphasis has particular relevance for indigenous students who are over-represented by poor attendance, low engagement and school retention. *Girlfriends!* creates opportunities for skills development and connectedness to school and community, critical factors in encouraging leadership.

*I started to trust people I never thought I would even go near. It helped going every week. I really got to know different girls.*

*I socialised with people I wouldn't normally associate with and the guest speakers told me things that I realised I needed to know.*

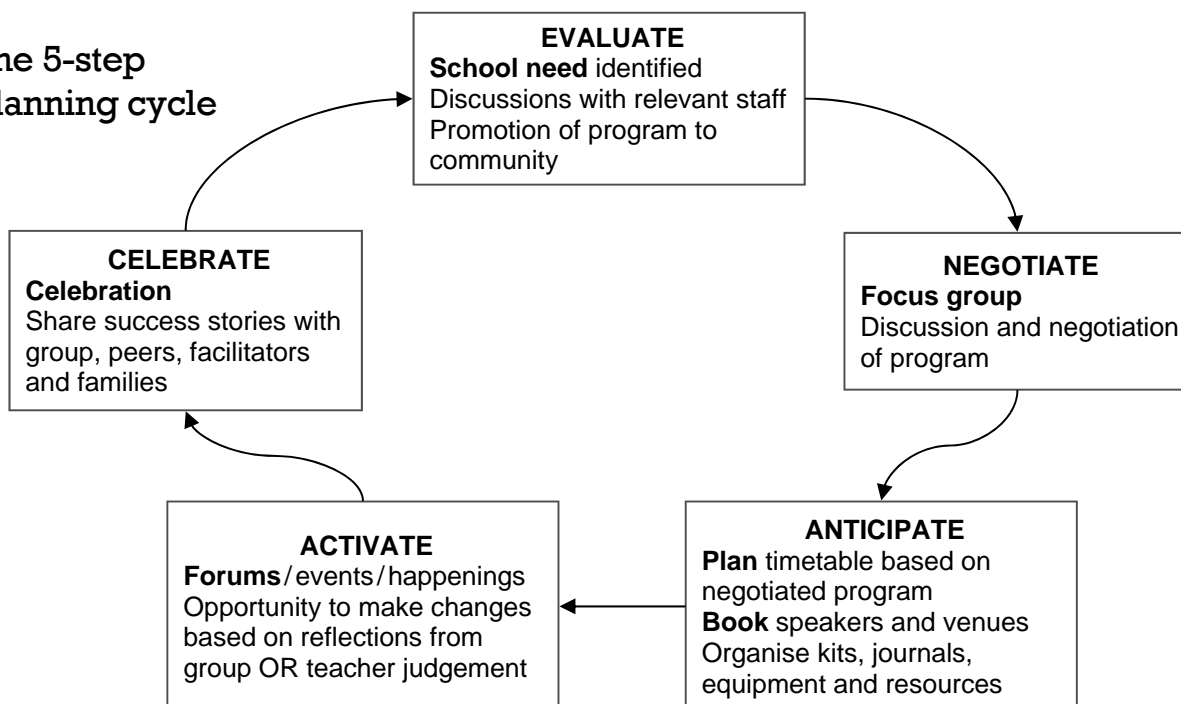
*This group wouldn't normally hang out together, but now we talk and count on each other.*

*Following suspension for fighting, two girls who had previously participated in the program accepted the option of mediation. I approached each of them separately to assess their receptiveness. Both expressed willingness to give mediation a go and shared a belief that they were equipped to negotiate a workable solution without the well-meaning interference of friends. That support was enough for the girls to reach a contract of disliking each other...with respect. Fighting ceased. Friends backed off and mediation was not required. 'I still hate her but I can live with that if she can.'*



# Program guidelines

## The 5-step planning cycle



## To-do list for facilitators

- Select *Girlfriends!* group members with advice from colleagues, welfare coordinator, and other relevant professionals.
- Promote the program to the community through newsletters, notice boards and meetings.
- Send introduction letter and permission form to families.
- Assemble *Girlfriends!* kits.
- On return of permission form, issue girls with their *Girlfriends!* kits. This ensures permission letters are returned.
- Run introductory focus session to establish forums and issues to be addressed in the program.
- Establish session protocols with the girls. Emphasise the need for confidentiality.
- Source presenters and send them a copy of the guidelines.
- Book rooms and organise catering.
- Be conscious of duty of care at each session.
- Check presenter's equipment requirements before each session.
- Restate the agreed protocols at the beginning of each session for the girls and the presenters.
- Keep school informed about the girls' progress and look for opportunities to raise their profiles and discuss their successes with teaching staff.
- Ensure one member of the group thanks the presenter.
- Insist on reflection time.
- Ask girls what they wish to cover in future sessions and inform the presenters.
- Alert the appropriate person should you consider a girl to be at risk.

*You have to just about book ahead to get an appointment with a counsellor. If I come to Girlfriends! I can talk about things that matter to me.*

## Program tips

- When creating a timetable, considerations such as girls not missing the same school sessions should be taken into account.
- Include a teambuilding activity at the beginning of each session to enable relationships to form.
- Allow an hour for each session.
- Icebreakers listed are not mandatory but encourage groups to connect more rapidly.
- Sometimes some girls may dominate discussions. Support your presenter by making sure every girl has an equal opportunity to participate.
- Group sizes vary, but for optimum relationship development keeping the groups under 10 to 12 is recommended.

The *Girlfriends!* sessions emphasise physical activities and can include yoga, belly dancing, hip-hop, cheerleading or rap. Positive body image is explored during these sessions.

*Four participants and two more friends approached me to request support in dealing with problems ranging from social disputes to trauma and abuse. Seeking help has resulted in continued contact and internal and external referrals including mandatory reporting. 'I trust you because I can tell you like me.'*

*The first Girlfriends! group was comprised of indigenous girls from year 7 to year 11. There was a need for the girls to be more at ease with themselves both as young women and within their cultural group. The next group, by popular demand, was selected by the year 8 coordinator and included five girls who had previously participated. This was unexpected, but their involvement propelled the program forward with renewed purpose and clearer structure. Their commitment to extending skills was evident in contributions to the focus group.*

## Advice to students

To be successful and get the most out of *Girlfriends!*

- Adhere to protocols
- Respect others and yourself
- Be kind and friendly
- No put-downs
- What is said in the group stays in the group
- Be honest and true to yourself
- You have the right to pass
- Take a risk and step out of your comfort zone
- Attend each session.

*I'd rather be here than in some classes. Girlfriends! is worth turning up to school for. (Yeah, but only on Fridays!) I feel safe enough to say anything.*

*The ritual of sharing food has been an integral part of the bonding process in Girlfriends! It is sometimes the first nutritious food of the day and represents nurturing, sharing and celebration. The choice of food is intentionally healthy, well presented and a mixture of familiar and novel. Students learn better when they have had food and interact more competently when they share experiences.*



Working together, girls complete a challenging task.

## Advice to presenters

---

---

### TIP

Phone to confirm you will be attending the session and to make sure of the venue and numbers.

---

---

- Find out the number of girls in the group.
- Consider providing handouts or samples.
- Before the session, ask the girls what they already know about the forum to gauge where you should pitch the level.
- Give the girls an overview of what you will cover in the session. You may wish to negotiate the content of the session based on their input.
- Include reflection time.
- Have a good time.
- Appreciate that you are a valuable community resource.

The facilitator may offer you a series of focus questions (found in the forum notes) and you might like to incorporate them in your presentation.

Girls often process their ideas by talking, so give them plenty of opportunity in your presentation to discuss and share.

*Our Girlfriends! program was about making connections with local service providers and businesses, predominantly in the physical and mental health domains. Each guest speaker contributed to the central messages about respect, resourcefulness and teamwork. Our first Girlfriends! program was during lunchtimes. Other schools have included it in an elective program.*



# Pre-program focus group

Inviting a cross-section of students to participate in a focus group allows the facilitator the opportunity to explore the interests and needs of girls in the middle years of schooling. This is important, as no two groups in any school will generate the same program.

This program is a student-negotiated program, although facilitators can guide if they believe there are issues that need addressing.

Setting up a focus group raises issues and explores interests in order to help facilitators plan the program.

## Sample focus questions

- What skills are important for your future life?
- What qualities do you need to be a friend?

## Focus questions for the facilitator

- What kind of workshops do you think could be useful for our new *Girlfriends!* program?
- What qualities do you need to be a friend?
- What skills are important to your future?
- What dreams do you have about your future?
- What have you always wanted to know about being an adult in the world outside school?

## Negotiating forum topics

### Alternative 1: 7/3 Voting

On a whiteboard or piece of paper, girls write down all the ideas or topics they think might be useful or interesting. Each person has 7 points to allocate to the topics that are most important to them. In three voting rounds they can spread their votes as they choose, for example:

- round one: 2 votes for family relationships
- round two: 4 votes to presentation skills
- round three: 1 vote for body image

At the end of each round, eliminate any topics not voted for or with the smallest number of votes. Leave a couple of surprise sessions that can be used to follow up issues (as identified by group or facilitator) or expand a session over two weeks.

## Alternative 2: Visualisation activity

The aim of the visualisation is to have the girls create a mental picture of what their ideal future might look like.

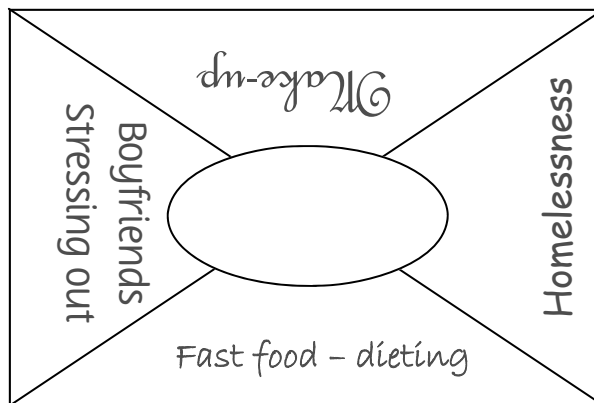
### Teacher script

*Girls please close your eyes. I want you to create a picture in your head about your ideal future. Will you have a job? What would you like it to be? Imagine what it would be like to be a successful member of the community. Who are the people around you? How do they contribute to your life being a success? What skills do you have? Open your eyes. What do you need to know about to become that successful adult?*

## Alternative 3: Placemat protocol

On a large sheet of paper, draw a circle and lines to make a space for each person to write. For two minutes each participant writes down their thoughts in their sector.

When time is up, participants take turns sharing their ideas without interruption. The group then negotiates consensus ideas recorded in the centre of the circle.



## Alternative 4: Bundling

Write responses on small pieces of paper (sticky notes) and bundle them into categories. Aim for consensus about the sessions that will form part of the program.



## Girlfriends! kit

The *Girlfriends!* kit is a symbol of collective understandings and is used to store reflections and materials collected during the program. It might include:

- storage container – pencil case, wallet ...
- pens
- notepad
- reflection sheet
- pencil
- nametags to assist local presenters with learning the girls' names
- stickers

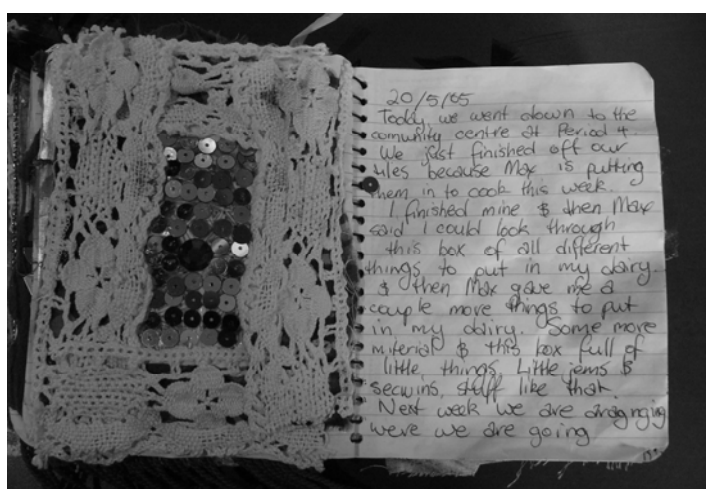
The kit is not compulsory, but if there is funding available, items can be cheaply sourced from discount shops. Speakers will also often provide something visual to add.

One kit consisted of a notebook, pens, stickers and colourful card and fabric to create a visual diary. Girls could write a reflection or create a visual representation of their feelings.



## Reflections

While reflections are valuable to store in journals or diaries, there is also value in sharing with the group.



*I put so much work into my diary at home using scraps of material and sequins from the Girlfriends! art box.*

# Introductory session

## Equipment

- sticky notes
- a Kinder® Surprise or broadsheet newspaper (if chocolate toy is not available)
- blindfolds
- masking tape
- ball of string

## Making agreements

Ask the girls to:

- write three words on sticky notes that describe the way they would like to be treated in this group
- express their ideas for the code of conduct in positive terms group ideas near other words that mean the same thing
- negotiate ideas to be included in the agreement code
- record the agreed code of conduct and have girls affirm their commitment to the agreements



These are the agreements made by the group. Respect their decisions. The teacher's role is to guide, not set the rules.

## Meeting others

Ask the girls to:

- Choose someone they don't know very well to be their partner. (One partner is blindfolded, the other has their dominant hand in a closed fist or behind their back.)  
Each pair is given a Kinder® Surprise (a chocolate egg with an unassembled toy inside).
- Together, unwrap the chocolate, break the egg into perfect halves and assemble the toy.

Use an alternative activity if chocolate toys are unavailable. For example, give each pair a broadsheet newspaper sheet and ask them to make a paper hat.

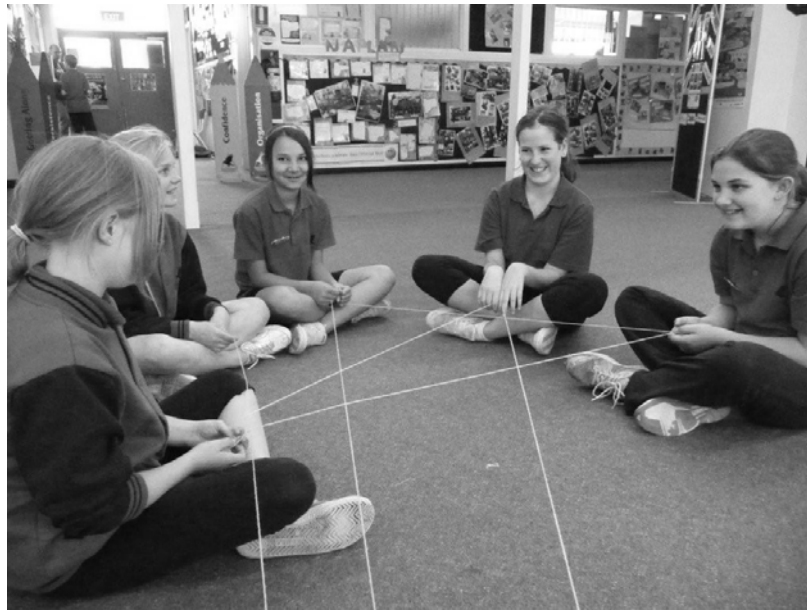
Discuss the skills and qualities needed to complete the challenge:

- communication skills
- persistence
- use of different strategies
- prior knowledge

## Beginning to connect

- Give one girl in the group a ball of string and ask her to roll the string to someone saying ‘What I like about you is ...’
- The recipient of the string holds it and the process is repeated until all girls have had a turn.
- It looks like a spider’s web! Have girls discuss their connections.

Depending on the length of the introductory session, these activities may need to be spread over more than one session. To build relationships you will need to include a teambuilding activity at the beginning of each session.



# FORUM: Healthy relationships

**FOCUS:**  
Belonging and camaraderie

## Possible speakers

- school welfare officer
- school guidance officer
- community health worker
- club organiser
- school principal or company leader

## Icebreaker

Use *Appendix 7: People hunt* to find the types of connections that are already between us. Connections may be through school, church, sport, cultural clubs, craft, music, theatre.

**Appendix 7: People hunt**

- The challenge is to find someone who matches the description in the appropriate square.
- You may use the person's name only once.
- You may use yourself only once.
- The first person finished calls BINGO.

Someone born in the same month as you	Someone who likes ice cream	Someone with the same number of brothers and sisters as you	Someone with the same favourite food as you	Someone about the same height as you
The person in here you least know the best	The person in here you like least	Someone who can sing their team song	Someone who has been to another country	Someone who has been to another state or territory
Someone who has a dog	Someone who likes the same favourite sport as you	Someone who had the same breakfast as you	Someone who gets to school the same way you do	Someone with the same hair length as you

## Activities

Have girls create a visual map of groups they belong to using brightly coloured pens and large sheets of paper. Place the important relationships at the centre of the map and include informal groups and occasional groups. Ask: 'What does being a member in each of these groups offer you?'

Brainstorm the quality of the relationships.

## Focus questions for speakers

- Why do people need to belong to groups?
- Can you define a healthy relationship?
- Can you list the qualities of a healthy relationship?

## Reflection starters

- Relationships in my life are important because ...
- I think relationships are ...



# FORUM: Friends (Boyfriends)

(The notes in this section can be focused on boyfriends.)

## FOCUS:

### Relationships

- Do I know what I want from a friendship/relationship?
- Do I know what I need?
- What do I give in relationships?

## Possible speakers

- district nurse
- school nurse
- youth services counsellor
- school welfare coordinator

## Icebreaker

In pairs, girls share one quality that is important in a friend (or boyfriend) and why.

## Activities

Watch and discuss a segment of a popular teenage drama that features boyfriend and girlfriend relationships. In one setting, the television series *Home and Away* was used extensively because relationships were a focus in every episode. Be aware that extensive use of the same segment will require permission. Movie segments can also be sourced from educational websites such as Clickview and Brainpop.

## Focus questions to promote discussion

Observe the body language of the characters.

- What do you notice?
- What is your expectation of the friend (boyfriend)?
- What indicates that this is or is not a good relationship?
- What is the ideal friend (boyfriend)?
- What do you want in a relationship?

## Handouts that could be used

- *Appendix 5: Relationships scale*
- *Appendix 6: The ideal friend/boyfriend*

Appendix 5: Relationship scale

How good are my relationships?  
Mark a cross where you feel your relationship sits.

Really bad	Sometimes great	OK	Fantastic
------------	-----------------	----	-----------

Parents \_\_\_\_\_  
Children \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix 6: The ideal friend/boyfriend

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Appearance: \_\_\_\_\_

Attitude: \_\_\_\_\_

His hobbies might be: \_\_\_\_\_

His personality can be described as: \_\_\_\_\_

His beliefs are: \_\_\_\_\_

His values: \_\_\_\_\_

Other qualities I would like: \_\_\_\_\_

Things I want him to respect about me: \_\_\_\_\_

*My mum said I have been less angry since I started Girlfriends! Now I can talk to her about what happens in my life, like kissing a boy.*