

LEAN IN
GIRLS

FACILITATOR HANDBOOK

**WELCOME TO
LEAN IN GIRLS!**



WELCOME TO LEAN IN GIRLS

As a Lean In Girls facilitator, you can make a big difference in teens' lives by helping them recognize themselves as leaders today, and by broadening their sense of what's possible in the future.

You don't need any specific expertise in girls' leadership to run this program, just a willingness to learn and explore along with your group.

In this Facilitator Handbook, you'll find two sections with step-by-step instructions, helpful tips, and resources:

Quick Start Guide pages 3 to 8

- Provides a brief overview of Lean In Girls and our curriculum and supporting materials
- Walks you through what you need to know to facilitate your first session

Resource Guide pages 9 to 27

- Covers additional recommendations and resources for running your sessions
- Includes a series of reflection questions to help you gauge how your sessions are going and explore strategies for making them more welcoming, engaging, and inclusive

Please note: This Facilitator Handbook is intended to help you facilitate group sessions with girls and young teens who identify with the girlhood experience. It explores topics such as leadership, the importance of goal-setting and risk-taking, and how to identify and push back against stereotypes. Given that participants may have limited knowledge and maturity with regard to these topics, it's critical that facilitators strive to encourage positive discussions, behaviors, and interactions by and among participants.

By using this Facilitator Handbook and the accompanying curriculum, and any other materials that we may make available to you in connection with the Lean In Girls program, including all related intellectual property and other proprietary rights of any kind (the "Materials"), you confirm that you understand, acknowledge, and agree to the terms and conditions available at leanin.org/LIG_terms (the "Terms of Use"). Please carefully review these Terms of Use before using the Materials.



FACILITATOR HANDBOOK
QUICK START GUIDE

CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

Lean In Girls is a leadership program that helps girls see themselves as leaders in a world that often tells them they're not. We want to equip girls to be self-assured, resilient, and inclusive everyday leaders and inspire them to lead boldly. And we want the world to remove the obstacles in girls' way and encourage them to lead on their own terms.

The curriculum is developed for girls and young teens (ages 11 to 15) who identify with the girlhood experience. It includes eight one-hour sessions on topics critical to equipping girls to embrace their leadership superpowers and reject stereotypes about what girls can't do. Each lesson is rooted in research, developed in collaboration with experts and teens, and designed to be engaging, intersectional, and culturally responsive.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE CURRICULUM

The the curriculum is organized into two parts—and starts with a foundational session on leadership:

Kickoff Session: Redefine Leadership

Designed to introduce girls to a more expansive definition of leadership that celebrates the everyday ways they're already leading.

Part 1: Celebrating Girls' Leadership Superpowers

Designed to help girls see how their values and strengths contribute to their unique leadership style.

- Session 1: Put Your Values into Action
- Session 2: Lean into Your Strengths

Part 2: Challenging Stereotypes & Inspiring Girls to Go for It

Designed to build girls' awareness of the social forces that can discourage them from setting bold goals and taking risks. It also teaches girls to reframe failure as a chance for growth and learning.

- Session 1: Challenge Stereotypes
- Session 2: Reframe Failure
- Session 3: Embrace Risk-Taking
- Session 4: Set Bold and Healthy Goals
- Bonus Session: Celebrate!

 We suggest running the sessions in the recommended order. Earlier sessions emphasize relationship building and establishing group trust—which lay a strong foundation for what's next—and later sessions build on concepts introduced in the earlier sessions.

INSIDE EACH SESSION

Each session follows the same basic structure, which makes it easier for you to prepare and helps participants know what to expect.

1 Check In

Initial connection moment to reflect on the last session and share how they applied what they learned

2 Ignite

Short, energizing activity that sparks interest in the topic and makes it feel personally relevant

3 Learning activities

Key concepts are introduced and applied through a range of activities, including role-plays, scavenger hunts, group design projects, and low-stakes contests.

4 Closing and One Action

Group comes together to discuss what they've learned and commit to take action before their next session.

HOW SESSION GUIDES WORK

Each session comes with all the materials you need, including:

- A **Facilitator Session Guide**, which has two main parts:
 - Part 1: Session Overview, including:
 - The goals and intended takeaways of the session
 - Directions for preparing for the session, including the supplies you'll need
 - Part 2: Step-by-Step Instructions, including:
 - An overview of each activity and the estimated time it will take to complete
 - Sample scripts, including optional discussion prompts and opportunities for you to share with the group
 - Tips for customizing the activity and managing any complexities that come up
- **Activity Materials** for whole-group and small-group activities, such as card decks and game boards
- **Participant Packet** for individual participants

GETTING STARTED

SESSION BASICS

Facilitator: Any caring adult or small group of adults can run a session

Target ages: 11 to 15

Group size: 6 to 15 teens

Session length: One hour (or read our tips for [adapting sessions for length](#))

PREPARING FOR YOUR SESSION

Before each session, take time to:

- Read the session guide and make decisions about how to tailor sessions for your group.
 - This typically takes about 30 to 45 minutes, depending on your comfort level with the material. Remember, you don't need to become an expert in every aspect of the content.
- Print everything out (e.g., participant packet, group activity materials), gather the supplies you'll need, and set up your space.

JOIN OUR FREE FACILITATOR TRAINING

[SIGN UP](#) 

This one-hour Zoom training walks you through the program materials and strategies for creating a welcoming and engaging environment.

LAYING THE RIGHT FOUNDATION

We've designed each session to foster a warm and welcoming environment, but there are also strategies that you can use to elevate your sessions to their fullest potential.

Creating a safe, brave space where teens can explore and grow

Here's what the curriculum does:

- Invites teens to co-create group agreements in the first session about how they will engage and interact
- Uses early sessions to encourage relationship building and group trust
- Offers low-stakes opportunities for teens to step from their comfort zone into their growth zone
- Builds from easier to more challenging topics so teens can settle in before taking bigger risks

For additional help, read our tips for:

- [Effective approaches to working with teens](#)
- [Setting discussion boundaries](#)
- [Leading discussions on sensitive topics](#)
- [Counteracting biases and barriers in group settings](#)
- More resources for [creating a safe, brave space](#)

Facilitators have found these strategies helpful:

- Make sure you uphold group agreements.
- Model a willingness to be vulnerable.
- Encourage teens to stretch beyond their comfort zone, while also respecting their boundaries.
- Praise teens for taking positive risks and treating setbacks as opportunities to learn and grow.
- Redirect the group if a discussion is making someone feel uncomfortable or overwhelmed.
- Intervene if anyone is treated unfairly or unkindly.
- Avoid assumptions or uninvited questions about the identities teens hold—for self-protection, teens may hide certain aspects of their identity.

Engaging teens by helping them feel motivated, respected, and connected

Here's what the curriculum does:

- Emphasizes that everyone can grow their leadership skills with practice
- Actively teaches strategies that support growth, such as taking positive risks and reframing failure
- Offers opportunities to commit and take action before the next session

For additional help, read our tips for:

- [Supporting a growth mindset](#)
- [Using a strengths-based approach](#)
- [Gender inclusion](#)
- [Adapting sessions for teens with disabilities](#)
- [Encouraging teen leadership by avoiding adultism](#)

Facilitators have found these strategies helpful:

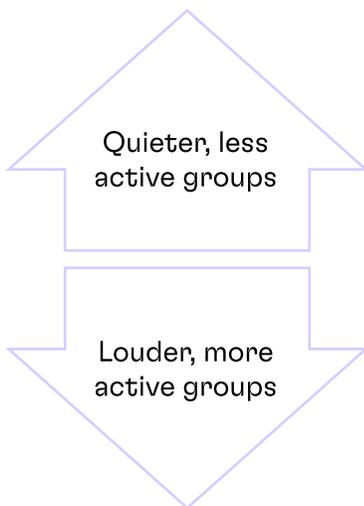
- Get to know the teens in your group as individuals.
- Express empathy for the challenges teens are facing.
- Take a strengths-based approach that focuses on teens identifying and building on their unique gifts.
- Create space for teens to share their perspectives—this shows that you value what they think.
- Make sure everyone is included group discussions (rather than allowing a few voices to dominate).
- Avoid favoritism of any kind.
- Offer teens a choice in what to do and how to do it (e.g., allow teens the option to work individually or in pairs).
- Encourage teens to actively include others.
- Use group activities to draw in teens who are on the margins of the group.
- Give constructive feedback privately and emphasize positive behaviors a teen can practice (instead of focusing on “problem” behaviors).
- Invite teen feedback and take it seriously.

Adapting sessions for your group's personality

Every Lean In Girls group will have a unique personality. Some will be loud and high-energy, with participants who love silly games. Others will be quieter and more reserved, with participants who reflect deeply before speaking.

We've designed group activities to flex for different group preferences and styles. In addition, you can adapt activities based on your group's personality and/or energy level on a particular day:

- If participants want more time to think, let them draw, journal, or share with a partner before a group activity.
- If your group is having a sleepy day, ramp up the pace of an activity or give the group more room to move.
- If participants are a bit too rowdy, scale back to slower, quieter options. Depending on the personality of your group, you can explore different ways of responding to questions:



- Raise their hands
- Hold up zero (“really disagree”) to five (“really agree”) fingers
- Hold up a piece of paper with their answer
- Call out their answer
- Stand up or stomp their feet when they agree or disagree
- Step in or out of a circle to signal their preference
- Arrange themselves in a line from strongly disagree to strongly agree
- Move to different corners of the room based on their answer

For additional help, read our tips for [optimizing sessions for your group](#).



FACILITATOR HANDBOOK RESOURCE GUIDE

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES YOU MAY FIND HELPFUL

We designed this Resource Guide as an ongoing reference. Use it in whatever way makes the most sense to you, from skimming a few topics to diving deep into the recommended resources. After each session, many facilitators also use the reflection questions to identify new ways to encourage and support their group.

Reflection questions	Resources and strategies
<p>Were teens engaged and having fun?</p>	<p>If not, you may want to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make sure you're leaving enough time for connection and sharing. ▪ Let more of your personality and humor shine through. ▪ Explore options for optimizing sessions for your group, such as amping up energy levels with more movement, and ask teens which options they would prefer.
<p>Were teens willing to take risks and be a bit vulnerable?</p>	<p>If not, you may want to explore tips for effective approaches to working with teens and creating a brave space.</p>
<p>Did teens leave feeling optimistic and empowered?</p>	<p>If not, consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Spending less time discussing difficult experiences and more time practicing leadership strategies ▪ Giving teens more positive feedback, validation, and encouragement ▪ Reviewing tips for supporting a growth mindset and using a strengths-based approach
<p>Was there space for each participant to show up as a leader within the group?</p>	<p>Consider making more space for teen voices and review tips for encouraging teen leadership by avoiding adultism.</p> <p>Consider trying to encourage broader participation by inviting teens who haven't shared yet to offer their perspective or by helping talkative teens practice making space for others.</p>

Reflection questions	Resources and strategies
<p>Did teens understand the take-home points?</p>	<p>If not, you may want to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Define words the group may not know. ▪ Ask extra questions to check the group’s understanding of concepts. ▪ Close discussions and activities by highlighting key points. ▪ Drop optional session elements to allow more time for the basics. ▪ Explore options for optimizing sessions for your group, such as customizing activities with scenarios that are relevant to your participants and at the right level of difficulty.
<p>Did participants seem to feel welcome, included, and valued?</p>	<p>If not, you may want to explore strategies for creating a brave space, adapting sessions for teens with disabilities, gender inclusion, and counteracting biases and barriers in group settings.</p> <p>If there are tricky group dynamics, you may want to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Revisit group agreements at the beginning of the next session. ▪ Privately encourage individual teens to demonstrate leadership by actively welcoming others. ▪ Explore tips for managing group dynamics.
<p>Did I feel in over my head with a difficult conversation?</p>	<p>If yes, you may want to explore tips for leading exploration of sensitive topics or setting discussion boundaries.</p>
<p>Did I have to put a lot of energy into managing off-task behavior?</p>	<p>If yes, you may want to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review tips for optimizing sessions for your group to make sessions more engaging. ▪ Revisit group agreements at the beginning of the next session. ▪ Explore effective approaches to working with teens or tips for using a strengths-based approach to address teen behavior.

All of our resources

Below is a comprehensive list of all the resources provided in the Facilitator Handbook. From identifying effective ways to work with teens to counteracting biases and barriers in group settings, this guide serves as your companion in cultivating a brave, inclusive, and growth-oriented space for your Lean In Girls sessions.

- 12 [Effective approaches to working with teens](#)
- 14 [Setting discussion boundaries](#)
- 15 [Creating a brave space](#)
- 16 [Leading discussions on sensitive topics](#)
- 18 [Supporting a growth mindset](#)
- 19 [Using a strengths-based approach](#)
- 20 [Optimizing sessions for your group](#)
- 22 [Encouraging teen leadership by avoiding adultism](#)
- 23 [Counteracting biases and barriers in group settings](#)
- 25 [Gender inclusion](#)
- 26 [Adapting sessions for teens with disabilities](#)

If facilitating sessions with an emphasis on social and emotional learning is new to you, you may want to complete an evidence-based [self-assessment](#)  from American Institutes for Research (AIR) to help you get prepared. It takes about 15 minutes and covers important topics, such as self-awareness and social awareness.

EFFECTIVE APPROACHES TO WORKING WITH TEENS

Teens have a reputation for being one of the most challenging age groups to engage. But the developmental factors that can make leading a group of teenagers difficult—their intense desire for autonomy, their willingness to challenge authority, and their tendency to feel things deeply—also make working with this age group tremendously rewarding.

Earning participants' trust and getting buy-in

Research shows that interventions with teens are more effective with facilitators who earn their trust and get their buy-in. You may consider doing that by:

- **Offering autonomy and choice where possible**
 - Give the group small choices where you can, like whether you should do an activity indoors or outside.
 - If the group suggests a fun twist on an activity, take them up on it if you can. If you can't, show you took the request seriously and look for opportunities to give them a choice in the near future.
- **Building individual relationships**
 - Learn each participant's name and pronounce it correctly. Names can be an important aspect of identity, and being referred to by their names can help teens feel seen and respected.
 - Pay attention to each participant's goals, interests, and life outside your group. Remembering to ask how a test or basketball game or recital went can help people feel seen and valued.
 - Strengthen your connection by offering specific, genuine praise regularly.
- **Taking a strengths-based approach to critical feedback.** Teens are in a uniquely self-conscious stage of life, which makes them easily embarrassed and quick to feel judged.
 - Give constructive feedback privately to avoid embarrassing anyone in front of the group.
 - Pair constructive feedback with acknowledgment of strengths, like ways they've shown leadership in the group.
 - Focus on specific, positive things teens can do differently, rather than on what they got wrong.
 - Be cautious not to misread some engagement styles as “bad” behavior. Some teens show engagement through deep listening, others through rowdy banter.

CONTINUE SECTION ON THE NEXT PAGE ►

- **Having clear and appropriate boundaries with participants.** Although the curriculum encourages you to share examples from your own life and make a genuine connection with participants, it is also important to maintain clear facilitator/participant boundaries.
 - Avoid sharing information that might be distressing to teens or talking about overly personal topics.
 - Be careful not to show favoritism or create special relationships with some participants.

Managing group dynamics

Social dynamics can have a real impact on whether participants gel as a group. A friend group might dominate discussions or create a subgroup by talking only among themselves. Teens who joined without a friend might be left on the margins. Older participants might exclude younger ones.

You can help the group come together by being intentional about where participants sit and how they partner up for group work. You might try:

- **Mixing up seating arrangements** to encourage new connections or split up subgroups
- **Being strategic about creating small groups.** Instead of having people turn to the people next to them, intentionally group people who haven't worked together yet. Or group participants randomly by having them count off.
- **Encouraging individuals to stretch their leadership skills by actively including people they don't yet know well.** This can be especially beneficial for participants with more social power (e.g., older students, those with many friends in the group).

To learn more about classroom management strategies that build connection and support participant autonomy, check out [these resources for building positive, compassionate classroom communities](#)  from Edutopia.

SETTING DISCUSSION BOUNDARIES

The Lean In Girls program encourages participants to talk about personal experiences. At the same time, it's important to set boundaries that keep group members from getting overwhelmed. The right boundaries will differ across groups, depending on the mix of participants, the norms of your setting, and your own comfort facilitating sensitive conversations.

There are several steps you can take to establish the right boundaries for your group:

- Before the first session, think about what boundaries you want to draw. Those may be different from the limits you set in other contexts. For example, facilitators may want to offer more leeway in this program than they would in a social studies class or more leeway with older participants.
- When in doubt about whether a discussion topic might make teens uncomfortable, err on the side of caution.

To redirect participants if a topic is not right for your group, you might:

- Remind participants of group agreements created in the first session.
- Consider letting teens know that a topic falls outside the scope of the group.
- Consider checking in with the teen who raised the topic at the end of the session.

Lean In Girls groups are not the right place to discuss concerns about safety or well-being. If an individual raises those topics, check in with them after the group. Review the guidance on [responding to safety concerns](#) in this Facilitator Handbook.

These resources may help you learn more about guiding groups through sensitive conversations and setting discussion boundaries:

- [“Let’s Talk! Facilitating Critical Conversations with Students”](#) from Learning for Justice
- [“Managing Difficult Classroom Discussions”](#) from the Indiana University Bloomington Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning

CREATING A BRAVE SPACE

You may already be familiar with the idea of a **safe space**—an environment in which people can feel confident they won't experience physical or emotional harm, discrimination, or harassment. Although all young people deserve to learn in a safe space, for some the term has come to suggest an intellectually limiting space in which exploration of ideas and respectful disagreement are not allowed.

Our hope is that your group will go beyond being a safe place to become a **brave space**—an inclusive, welcoming space in which people recognize that growth often involves some discomfort. The program encourages teens to explore new ideas, contend with injustice, and practice active allyship. All of those things require the courage to take emotional or relational risks.

As a facilitator, there are several ways you can support a brave space:

- Help participants develop a group identity by recognizing shared experiences, values, and perspectives; having a sense of connection and belonging will make it easier for group members to take risks.
- Model a willingness to be vulnerable and imperfect so participants are more comfortable talking about important topics and trying new things.
- Notice and praise teens when they take positive risks.

These resources may help you learn more about creating safe, brave spaces where people can take risks:

- [“Daring Classrooms”](#) from Brené Brown SXSW EDU
- [“The Future of Healing”](#) by Shawn Ginwright

LEADING DISCUSSIONS ON SENSITIVE TOPICS

During the program, participants explore biases and barriers that can make it difficult for young people to be recognized as leaders. The goal is to help participants recognize “it’s not me” when they are judged unfairly. Although the curriculum pairs exploration of biases and barriers with empowering strategies for navigating them, participants may still have moments of feeling sad, mad, worried, surprised, confused, guilty, or stuck.

Leading discussions of sensitive topics is likely to be your most challenging task as a facilitator, but it is also likely to be the most satisfying.

To help participants feel safe, brave, and valued in conversations about sensitive topics, you can:

- Remind participants of group agreements before diving into difficult topics and intervene when group agreements are not being upheld (especially if someone is not speaking respectfully to or about others).
- Acknowledge that a topic might feel difficult or awkward to discuss. Simply naming shared discomfort can help the group move past it.
- Encourage people in the group to assume other group members have good intentions.
 - Point out that we don’t always get it right when we’re learning new things. We might use the wrong term or ask an unintentionally hurtful question.
 - Encourage group members to consider the possibility that when someone gets it wrong, the mistake comes from ignorance rather than a desire to hurt.
 - At the same time, recognize that **good intentions can still lead to harmful impacts** . If one group member hurts another, help them apologize and learn what to do differently in the future.
- Actively manage the discussion.
 - Make sure everyone has opportunities to speak, rather than allowing a few voices to dominate the conversation.
 - Remind participants to listen respectfully without interrupting.
 - If a conversation brings up strong feelings, you can move on to a new topic or give the group a reflection break to journal about their perspective.
- Recognize that teens will vary in their comfort levels and the amount of reflection time they need.
 - During discussions, try to allow room for silence as teens collect their thoughts. For example, you could hold for a silent count of 10 before you dive in to fill a gap.

CONTINUE SECTION ON THE NEXT PAGE 

- Try to avoid pushing participants to share personal experiences. Let individuals choose how vulnerable and open they want to be.
- Model empathy and compassion for difficult experiences and validate people's feelings.
- Encourage open-mindedness.
 - Remind participants that other people's experiences might be quite different from theirs.
 - Help teens recognize that when they hear something surprising or unfamiliar, that is an opportunity to learn, not a moment to challenge the other person's experiences.

If teens ask a question you can't answer:

- You can draw on the collective wisdom of the group by asking teens to share what they know about the topic.
- You can model self-confidence and a growth mindset by letting people know that you don't know the answer yet, but will find out.

SUPPORTING A GROWTH MINDSET

Although teens often recognize that they can build concrete skills, like learning how to shoot free throws, they may not recognize they can also learn more abstract leadership skills. Instead, they (and the adults around them) may see leadership ability as fixed, a talent people either innately do or don't have.

But that's simply untrue! Lean In Girls aims to instill a **growth mindset** about leadership, the understanding that anyone can grow their leadership skills through focus, effort, and practice.

To support your group in developing a growth mindset, you can:

- Praise teens for carrying out One Action commitments between sessions, even when things didn't work out the way they hoped.
- Treat "failure" and setbacks as learning opportunities. When teens experience a setback, consider asking them what they've learned or what they might try next.
- Normalize moments of struggle by sharing times things didn't go as planned for you and explaining how you grew from the experience.
- Praise teens for effort and practice, not for their raw talent.
- When teens say they can't do something, add the word "yet" and help them identify the next step on their journey. For example, "You don't know how to prepare for auditions *yet*. What could you do to find out?"
- Encourage teens to act with courage. For example, consider:
 - Revealing times you felt nervous but stepped outside your comfort zone anyway
 - Praising them for taking positive risks between sessions or for trying something new within sessions, like volunteering for a role-play or speaking up when they usually hold back

These links may help you learn more about supporting a growth mindset:

- ["The Power of Believing That You Can Improve" ↗](#) a TED Talk by Dr. Carol Dweck, author of *Mindset*
- ["Carol Dweck Revisits the 'Growth Mindset' ↗](#) from Education Week
- [Growth Mindset Toolkit ↗](#) from Transforming Education

USING A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH

Strengths-based education is rooted in the idea that our greatest potential for growth comes from building on our natural strengths, rather than targeting our deficits. Instead of expecting each person to develop the exact same package of skills by following the exact same strategies, strengths-based approaches support people in becoming the best versions of themselves. Instead of focusing on things people can't do yet, strengths-based approaches emphasize ways people can apply their strengths to develop new skills.

Research shows that strengths-based approaches can boost motivation, encourage persistence, and build confidence. As a facilitator, consider taking a strengths-based approach by:

- **Recognizing individuals as unique, competent, and resourceful.** Your role is to guide teens on their unique path, not to determine their path. For example:
 - Support participants' personal goals. If someone wants to practice speaking up, invite them to speak during a discussion or ask them to read directions out loud for the group.
 - Create opportunities for participants to share their perspectives and demonstrate their abilities.
 - Support autonomy by letting participants make decisions (e.g., if the group would rather stand up than raise hands or if an individual would rather write than draw, give them that flexibility).
- **Making participants more aware of their strengths and ways they can use them.**
 - Sharing ways you've used your strengths to overcome challenges, which can help participants feel more comfortable claiming their own strengths.
 - Noticing what each individual does well and pointing it out when you see a strength in action. This can be especially helpful when it involves strengths people have not yet recognized in themselves.
 - Helping participants recognize moments when a challenge they're having is related to an external barrier, not an individual skill gap.
 - Having participants reflect on how they (or their role models) used their strengths to navigate a challenge.
- **Calling on strengths to overcome challenges within the group.**
 - Framing "problem" behaviors as opportunities for teens to practice alternate strengths. For example, if someone is dominating a group, rather than telling them to stop, encourage them to use their collaborative abilities to promote others to share their ideas.
 - Instead of focusing on things participants aren't doing well yet, highlighting ways they can use their strengths to build new skills. For example, instead of telling someone they aren't participating enough, help them recognize they could call on their courage to practice sharing their ideas.

To learn more about strengths-based approaches, check out "[Using a Strengths-Based Approach to Help Students Realize Their Potential](#)" from KQED.

OPTIMIZING SESSIONS FOR YOUR GROUP

Because every group is different, sessions are designed to be easy to adapt to meet the unique needs of your participants.

Adapting sessions for length

Sessions are designed to run for an hour, but you may have a different block of time to fill or have a group that tends to move through activities faster or slower than expected.

If you're pressed for time, sessions include tips for shortening activities, such as dropping the second round of a game or skipping less essential discussion questions. As you make decisions about where to cut, consider the impact of your decisions on:

- **Engagement:** Prioritizing experiential learning over direct teaching will make sessions more interesting and more memorable.
- **Empowerment:** Prioritizing activities that teach concrete leadership strategies, and encouraging teens to practice them, will help ensure that they leave each session feeling empowered. A good rule of thumb is to make sure that any explanation of bias or barriers is paired with an activity that builds capacity for navigating those challenges.

If an unexpected event means you need to significantly shorten a session on the fly, pick a small number of things to do well rather than trying to rush through every element of the session.

If you have extra time, consider expanding sessions by:

- Encouraging more people to share their experiences during the opening check-in
- Expanding discussions by adding optional questions or encouraging more people to participate
- Doing longer versions of activities that cover more scenarios or include more opportunities for practice
- Closing by having participants share what they chose for their One Action commitment

If your discussions are running long, consider shortening them by:

- Replacing a full group discussion with a turn-and-talk conversation with a partner
- Having participants share a word or sentence popcorn style instead of inviting lengthy responses
- Setting expectations up front about the time available for a discussion
- Indicating when there is only enough time remaining for one more comment
- Encouraging participants to practice stepping back to make space for others if they've already contributed and to practice stepping up if they've not yet shared ideas with the group

CONTINUE SECTION ON THE NEXT PAGE 

Keeping sessions relevant for your group

Lean In Girls serves teens with diverse identities across a wide range of settings, which means no one example or scenario will be equally relevant across groups. Groups will also differ in their foundational knowledge of the biases and barriers that can make it hard for people to be recognized as leaders. Some groups will start the program without knowing what a stereotype is, while others will arrive with a strong understanding of systemic bias.

The curriculum is easy to customize for your group by:

- Building in space for facilitators and participants to share examples from their own lives
- Offering optional discussion questions that encourage deeper, more nuanced conversations
- Offering a range of options for some activities, so facilitators can choose situations that are relevant to their group and at the right level of complexity

Additionally, sample scripts are not intended to be read word for word. Most facilitators switch back and forth between reading sample scripts and using their own words. Please feel free to adapt the scripts so they feel natural to you and relevant to your group! Whatever balance works for you is the right balance.

ENCOURAGING TEEN LEADERSHIP BY AVOIDING ADULTISM

A key goal of Lean In Girls is helping teens recognize they can lead *today*, not just in the future. A major barrier younger leaders face is adulthood—the belief that adult attitudes, ideas, and actions are more valuable than those of young people and that young people’s role is simply to learn and follow directions. We want this group to actively counteract those ideas.

To counter adulthood and open the door to teen leadership, consider:

- Reflecting on the wisdom you had as a teenager and reminding yourself of times you were unfairly judged or dismissed due to your age
- Remembering that your role is “facilitator” not “group leader” and making space for teens to take on leadership roles within the group
- Intentionally prioritizing teens’ voices during discussions, stepping back when you can to keep the focus on their perspectives
- Avoiding assumptions about participants’ skills and knowledge. There may well be topics they know more about than you do.
- Encouraging teens to speak up if they have suggestions or concerns about the group and demonstrating that you take their ideas seriously
- Reflecting on how your own beliefs and background might impact your facilitation, the way you relate to group members, and your approach to behavior management
 - It is especially important to consider the possibility that you are misinterpreting assertive behavior as aggressive or disrespectful. Research shows adults are especially likely to unfairly judge the assertive behavior of Black and Latina girls.
- These links may help you learn more about adulthood and strategies that support teen leadership:
 - [“Student Autonomy and Empowerment”](#) from the CDC
 - [“Building Effective Youth-Adult Partnerships”](#) from Advocates for Youth
 - [“Understanding Adulthood”](#) by John Bell, director of leadership development for YouthBuild USA

COUNTERACTING BIASES AND BARRIERS IN GROUP SETTINGS

Like most leadership programs, the Lean In Girls program supports participants in building new skills and developing their confidence as leaders. At the same time, the program also addresses the biases and barriers that girls often experience.

To create an inclusive environment that supports participants in recognizing and overcoming biases and barriers, you may:

- **Educate yourself** about ways people with traditionally marginalized identities are stereotyped and treated unfairly.
 - We are often unaware of biases we haven't experienced. The more aware we are of subtle ways people are treated unfairly, the less likely we are to accidentally harm others and the more likely we are to recognize opportunities to act as an ally.
- **Pay attention to ways your identity influences the comfort of your group members and the ways you relate to the group.**
 - Some aspects of our identity can give us more or less social power. For example, adults, wealthy people, able-bodied people, and fluent speakers of the local language generally have more power than teens, people living in poverty, people with disabilities, and non-native speakers.
 - If parts of your identity give you more social power than your participants have, you may need to work harder to build trust by demonstrating respect and striving to understand their experiences.
 - If parts of your identity give you less social power than your participants, noticing how that affects you can make you a more effective facilitator.
 - If you're interested in a structured approach to exploring your identity, feel free to review Learning for Justice's [Unpacking Identity](#) ✕ guided self-reflection exercise for educators.
- **Avoid making assumptions or asking uninvited questions about the identities participants hold.** Teens often protect themselves by hiding their gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, immigration history, ethnicity, or invisible disabilities.
- **Remember that individual experiences differ.** Every member of a group is unique. Even if you share an identity with participants in the room, the experiences they've had or the way they think about them may be different from your experiences and perspectives.
- **Pay extra attention to the experiences of "Onlys"**—participants who are one of the few people in the room with a historically marginalized identity, such as being a person of color or gay or disabled. Because they stand out, Onlys are more likely to be reduced to stereotypes. Take special care to ensure that Onlys are not singled out or asked to speak as representatives of their group.

CONTINUE SECTION ON THE NEXT PAGE ►

- **Pay attention to your physical environment.** Does the space you're in reflect a range of people and experiences? If the environment does not positively represent people of all identities, think about what you could add to signify that this is a welcoming and inclusive space. If you don't have the freedom to change the space, consider talking to your group about the hidden messages conveyed by images that don't represent everyone.

You can also help create an inclusive environment by recognizing common ways bias shows up in group settings. Facilitators can accidentally harm teens by:

- Expressing surprise at the quality of their contribution, which suggests not much was expected of someone with their identity
- Questioning the validity of their experiences (for example, implying that a young person who is upset is just being too sensitive)
- Treating one way of being as the norm, like assuming everyone is straight, lives with a mom and dad, or celebrates Christmas
- Asking individuals to “represent” the perspective of all people who share their identity, rather than treating them as individuals and recognizing that there will be diversity of opinions and experiences within any group
- Making assumptions based on limiting stereotypes, such as that people with their identity:
 - Come from a poor or uneducated family
 - Don't speak English fluently
 - Excel in stereotypical ways

These resources may help you learn more about the biases and barriers teens experience:

- [Learning for Justice resources](#)  for educators exploring biases related to race, ethnicity, religion, ability, class, immigration, gender, and sexual identity
- [Strategies for responding to biased behavior](#)  presented by the University of Washington Center for Teaching and Learning
- [“A Look at Implicit Bias and Microaggressions”](#)  from Edutopia, which includes suggestions for deeper learning

GENDER INCLUSION

Each participant will bring a unique experience with gender to Lean In Girls. Some teens in the program may identify strongly with being a girl, while others may be exploring their gender identity or may feel uncomfortable with the label “girl” for any of a number of other reasons. As a facilitator, you can help create a welcoming space for all participants by avoiding assumptions about teens’ gender identity and experiences, and by empowering them to take the lead in defining how they would like to be identified and addressed throughout the program.

Using gender-neutral language is one simple step facilitators can take to help all teens feel included. When you greet your group or refer to them as a whole, avoid calling them “girls” or “guys” (note that “guys” is not a gender-neutral term, even though people often use it as if it is). Instead, you might say:

- Y’all or you all
- Everyone
- Folks
- Leaders
- Team

Facilitators can also foster inclusion by:

- **Inviting participants to introduce themselves.** If the teens in your group don’t know each other well, consider providing name tags or name cards that teens can decorate and prop at their seats. Allowing participants to share the name they want to be called models that they are free to explore and construct their own identities.
- **Encouraging everyone to state their pronouns and respect each other’s pronouns.** While encouraging everyone to state their pronouns is valuable, making it mandatory can risk teens feeling unsafe. Making an effort to use the correct pronouns and apologizing for any mistakes made can help foster trust with your group.
- **Swapping in they/them pronouns in scenarios.** In the fictional scenarios presented in some of the sessions, feel free to swap in they/them pronouns (this approach can also be applied to changing names, hobbies, turns of phrase, etc. to make the scenarios more diverse or relevant to your group).

These resources may help you learn more about creating a safe, welcoming space for teens with a range of gender identities and relationships to gender:

- [“Let’s Talk: Discussing Gender in the Classroom”](#) from SPLC Learning for Justice (webinar)
- [“Gender Savvy: Creating an Inclusive School Climate”](#) from SPLC Learning for Justice (webinar)
- [“Next Steps in Inclusive Education”](#) from Stonewall
- [“Gender Triangle Education Guide”](#) and the [“Pronoun Guide”](#) from GLSEN, which include links to many other helpful resources for gender inclusivity

ADAPTING SESSIONS FOR TEENS WITH DISABILITIES

It's important to recognize that participants in your group may have disabilities, including invisible disabilities such as visual or auditory impairment, chronic pain, chronic health conditions, learning differences, ADHD, autism, or mental health disorders.

Lean In Girls is designed to promote inclusive environments that allow all participants to engage fully. To create this welcoming, inclusive space, you may need to adapt activities or materials to meet the needs of participants with disabilities. You may also consider using the following guides to learn more about potential accommodations to support teens with disabilities:

- [“How Does Unintended or Unconscious Bias Affect Students with Disabilities?”](#) from the University of Washington’s DO-IT Center
- [“Adapting for Students with Learning Differences, Attention Challenges, or Autism Spectrum Disorders”](#) from the Greater Good Science Center
- [“Tips for Modifying the Learning Environment for Children with Visual Impairments and Additional Disabilities”](#) from the Perkins School for the Blind
- [Resource locator for evidence-based education practices for students with disabilities](#), supported by the IRIS Center at Vanderbilt University
- [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\) links to state-specific special education resources](#)

If applicable, follow your institution’s or organization’s policies and procedures for providing those accommodations and be aware of any laws, rules, or regulations applicable to such disabilities.

RESPONDING TO SAFETY CONCERNS

At all times while you are using this Facilitator Handbook and our Lean In Girls curriculum, you are responsible for complying with applicable federal, state, and local laws, rules, and regulations in addition to the Terms of Use.

The following links to publicly available resources may be helpful if you identify a safety concern or teen in need of support:

- [The U.S. government's guidelines on preventing, discussing, and responding to bullying](#) 
- [The Trevor Project: 24/7 crisis support for LGBTQ+ youth](#) 
- [National Sexual Assault Hotline](#)  (1-800-656-4673)
- [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: the U.S. government's gateway to 24/7 support for individuals in crisis and people supporting them](#) 
- [State child welfare agency websites](#) 

If you are facilitating Lean In Girls programming as a staff member or volunteer of an organization, you are also responsible for familiarizing yourself with and following any applicable organizational policies or procedures, as well any professional responsibilities you may have.

Contacting the Lean In Girls Team

If you have questions about running the Lean In Girls program, we're here to support you. If you just have something you'd like to share, we'd love to hear how your group is going!

You can reach us at support@leaninggirls.org.