



Girls Incorporated of Meriden

Parent Handbook

Inspiring all girls to be Strong, Smart, and Bold.

130 Lincoln Street
Meriden, CT 06451

Phone: 203-235-7146
Fax: 203-238-4466

Organizational Mission

To inspire all girls to be Strong, Smart, and Bold.

Vision

Empower girls in an equitable society

Girls Bill Of Rights

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

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

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

Girls have the right to accept and appreciate their bodies.

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

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

The essential elements of the Girls Inc. Experience are:



1. A pro-girl and girls-only environment that is physically, socially and emotionally safe and confirms that girls can succeed and deserve to be taken seriously for the persons they are now and the women they will become;
2. Trusting, mentoring relationships with adult staff and volunteers trained in an approach that is grounded in a belief in girls' rights and abilities;
3. Holistic, compensatory, and intentional programming focused on girls' needs and that provides exposure to a wide variety of experiences and options that girls might not have experienced otherwise;
4. Relevant, field-tested, and research-based curricula that confront the serious needs of girls while building the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to enable girls to be competent, confident individuals and adult women;
5. Girl-centered, motivating, deliberate, and interactive activities that develop and promote girls' strengths.
6. Sustained exposure to programming and connection with a girl over time to increase positive outcomes and reduce the potential for negative outcomes.

The essential elements have since been collapsed into three critical areas that define the Girls Inc. Experience: **people, environment, and programming**. **Signs and Steps** is a resource that presents a variety of observations affiliates can make to help verify how they are addressing each element and offers suggestions for improvement.

Our **Theory of Change** is that the Girls Inc. Experience leads to these long term outcomes:

1. **Strong/Healthy:**
 - Makes healthy choices
 - Manages reproductive health
2. **Smart/Educated:**

- Motivated to achieve
- Graduates from high school and has post-secondary education
- Sets & achieves personal, educational and career goals

3. Bold/Independent:

- Has healthy relationships
- Has sound body image (which is related to self-confidence)
- Uses own voice & advocates for others
- Is resilient

The essential elements and the foundational Girls Inc. Experience have been developed over decades of Girls Inc. affiliate experience, guided by our Research and Program & Training Services Departments, and documented in the Girls Inc.

Registration/Form Requirements

Registration can be done in person at 130 Lincoln Street or off-site online through our website www.girlsincmeriden.org. When registering a legal guardian must be present to register their child. We will collect information about the child, require contact information for legal guardian(s), information on an emergency contact, learning/medical needs, authorization for medical release, liability release, activity release and photo release. Please be sure to come with current information and always contact the office if anything changes so we have the latest and greatest contact information.

When providing an emergency contact person please be sure to list someone that is reliable and knows about the medical needs of the child in your life. This person is considered back up if we are not able to get in touch with the legal guardian(s).

Membership Information

All participants are required to be members of Girls Incorporated. The fee is \$30.00 and is non-refundable. Membership year begins June – May. A new membership will be required during this cycle regardless of when previous membership was purchased.

Hours of Operation

Girls Incorporated of Meriden is open Monday – Saturday. The building shuts down each evening when the last class is completed. General times of operation are as follows and may change due to class enrollment:

During the School Year:

Monday 9:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Tuesday 9:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Wednesday 9:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Thursday 9:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Friday 9:00 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Saturday 9:00 a.m. – 2:30 p.m..

Summer Hours

Monday – Friday 7:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m. (10 weeks)

The organization follows the Meriden Public School Systems calendar and is closed when school is not in session during the school year. No programs occur on days the school system is closed including vacations. The administrative office is open during April vacation to answer any questions you may have. The office will post in advance any other times the office is shut down.

If the Meriden Public Schools are closed due to snow Girls Incorporated of Meriden is closed and there will be no classes that day and evening. If there is a morning delay all a.m. classes are canceled and evening classes will run. If there is early dismissal all evening classes are canceled. The organization reserves the right to cancel evening classes due to weather at its own risk and will notify families individually if necessary. We will post to facebook, local tv channels, and on our phone systems closures due to weather.

Girls Inc. also reserves the right to cancel class if an instructor is out sick. All efforts will be made to bring in a substitute.

If a class is canceled due to a holiday, weather, or sick instructor classes will not be made up and class fees will not be prorated. Any makeup of classes is at the discretion of the Executive Director.

Programs

All programs advertised will run if there are enough participants enrolled. It is at the discretion of the Program Director and Executive Director to determine class size minimums and maximums. Basic class size minimum is 3 and maximum depends on the class. If a class is canceled due to enrollment Girls Inc. will make every effort to get you into a comparable class, if class fee is greater than the original class the difference will be waived for that session only as a courtesy. If we are unable to accommodate you with a class a credit for the class fee will be placed on your child's account to be used for future sessions. Refunds typically are not given; it is at the discretion of the Executive Director to approve any refunds. Please note Memberships are non-refundable as explained above.

Fall Session – Typically runs for eleven weeks

Winter Session – Typically runs for eleven weeks

Spring Session – Typically runs for ten weeks

Summer Camp – Typically runs for ten weeks

If any special items are needed for class that is not included with class fee you will be notified at time of registration.

Characteristics of the Girls Incorporated Environment¹

Nonsexist

The setting conveys the message that girls can do anything. Adult female and male leaders are caring and egalitarian in their beliefs and behavior. Many opportunities exist to explore nontraditional roles and activities. Posters and other artwork depict girls, boys, women and men in ways not limited to gender stereotyping.

Positive

There are many examples in evidence of success, of problems confronted and overcome and of new beginnings. Such phrases as "I can't," "I won't," and other excuses for not giving one's best effort are discouraged.

Supportive

The environment lets every girl know that she is important, interesting and likeable just as she is. Staff greet each member warmly; pictures of the girls and samples of their work are displayed on the walls; all girls are listened to attentively; the teaching of sign language, Spanish and other courses helps make everyone feel accepted.

Accessible

The center and outreach sites are within walking distance of members, or otherwise easy to get to safely; the environment is open and welcoming to the newcomer, familiar and comfortable to the long-term member and suited to the needs of girls with a wide range of disabilities.

Inviting

The setting is clean, bright and equipped for active, energetic girls; there are many reminders that “people like me” come here often and enjoy themselves.

Resourceful

It is a place of books, ideas, tools, up-to-date equipment and other resources for having fun, solving problems, improving one’s academic performance and planning for a career.

Challenging

Staff encourage girls to set and meet high standards of achievement and all accomplishments- large or small- are celebrated, in the belief that success is habit-forming.

Realistic

The setting invites girls not to escape from an imperfect world, but to gain confidence and skill in meeting the world on its own terms.

Inclusive

The environment affirms all girls, celebrating their commonalities and differences. Girls and adults actively reach out to people of all backgrounds and abilities, especially those who may be new to the community.

Equitable

It is an environment where all girls experience equality and fairness. The “isms” that divide girls in the rest of their lives are addressed and overcome.

Democratic

It is a place full of examples of how to be effective as a leader or participant; how to make and abide by rules; how to respect differing points of view; and how to take on the responsibilities of membership and citizenship, including the responsibility of participating in social change.

Age-Appropriate

The environment takes account of the fact that girls' interests, needs and abilities change with age and experience; space is set aside so that they can be apart from younger girls, and appropriate challenges and support for girls at each age and talent level enable them to stretch and grow at their own pace.

Safe

The setting meets rigorous standards for the health and safety of girls and staff; the age level of participants and the nature of the activity being conducted determine the adult-to-child ratio.

Girl-Centered

The environment places priority on serving girls; even in coeducational settings, some programs are for girls only and some space is set aside for girls' use only.

Other Helpful Resources/Guidelines

Youth Development Framework

In an effort to provide programming that inspires girls to be strong, smart and bold, we work to implement program and organizational practices which utilize a youth development approach. This approach provides opportunities and supports to help participants gain the competencies and knowledge they need to meet the increasing challenges they will face as they mature. It strives to build youth capacities, in contrast to deficit-based program models, which focus primarily on fixing youth problems. Programs employing a youth development perspective work to build the positive social, cognitive, physical, emotional and moral capacities of participants with the goal of helping youth become competent, engaged, and responsible adults.

Girls Inc. has adopted and operates under the Youth Development Framework developed by the Community Action for Youth Project (CAYP) and the Community Network for Youth Development (CNYD). The Youth Development Framework works to improve the quality of relationships and experiences, also known as supports and opportunities, for youth participants in order to increase their chances for successful transition into adulthood.

The Youth Development Framework Supports and Opportunities are:

1. **Safety**, so young people feel:
 - Physically and emotionally secure.

2. **Relationship Building**, so young people can experience:

- Guidance, emotional and practical support,
- Adults and peers as knowing who they are and what's important to them.

3. **Youth Participation**, so that young people can:

- Be involved in meaningful roles with responsibility,
- Have input into decision-making,
- Have opportunities for leadership, and
- Feel a sense of belonging.

4. **Skill Building**, so that young people can have:

- Challenging and interesting learning experiences which help them build a wide array of skills, and
- Experience a sense of growth and progress.

5. **Community Involvement**, so that young people gain:

- An understanding of the greater community, and
- A sense of being able to make an impact in their community.

These five supports and opportunities- Safety, Relationship Building, Youth Participation, Skill Building, and Community Involvement set the criteria for evaluating youth development program practices within the organization. Check with your Program Manager to discuss the implementation and evaluation of the Youth Development Framework.

Technology Policy

Technology used for the purpose of Girls Incorporated of Meriden's programs must all be used solely for the wellbeing of the organization and girls with inspiring all Girls to be Strong, Smart, and Bold. Any and all materials produced that are being distributed must be approved by either the Program Director or Executive Director prior to release to ensure the integrity of the organization is secure.

The use of the internet is allowed for certain programs. All work must relate specifically to projects and/or information needed to complete a task and must relate in a positive manner to the organization's mission.

Inappropriate use of technology i.e. internet, flyers, photos, etc. will result in disciplinary action deemed necessary at the discretion of the Executive Director and/or Program Director.

We do not allow the use of personal cell phones by the girls when in programs or activities. They must be put away out of sight of staff, if a member is unable to follow the rule staff may hold onto their technology until the end of the program day in a safe location.

Payment/Financial Assistance

At time of registration it is expected that payment will be received to reserve a spot for your loved one. Partial payment not approved by the Executive Director will not hold the spot for the child in your life. Girls Inc. is dedicated to ensuring that no girl is turned away due to financial constraints. Financial Assistance is available to families meeting general income guideline requirements. A meeting must be set up with the Executive Director and at that time proof of income must be disclosed with current year taxes and four current pay stubs or benefits letter.

We have the ability to set up recurring payments to accommodate payment plans to help families on a budget. Inquire with the office to see what options are available.

Drop-off and Pick-up

It is expected that all children be escorted to and from the building by an adult. Members and guests may enter through the front and back doors of the organization and escort their child into the living room to make sure they get to their intended class and do the same at pick-up. No child should leave this building without an adult it is not ok for them to meet you at the car. This rule is for the safety of our members and is strictly enforced.

Behavior Policy

Members – Girls Incorporated is dedicated to ensuring a safe and nurturing environment. Staff works closely with our members to ensure their safety. Basic organization rules are followed by all programs with activity specific rules also added on for members to follow. It is at the discretion of the Executive Director and Program Director to determine overall safety of members and any action will be discussed with parents/guardians on a case by case basis.

Parents/Guardians/Guests – Girls Incorporated expects all adults in the building waiting for their loved ones or visiting for a defined purpose will conduct themselves in a

manner that too is respectful and responsible. The Executive Director and Program Director reserve the right to ask anyone on the property to vacate if their behavior or actions put our members and or staff at risk. Non-compliance of any request will result in the contact of local authorities.

Administration of Medication –

Just like schools we are required to have on file current Authorization of Medication forms, medication in its regular prescribed container with matching pharmacy label, non-expired medication, a plan of action from the physician for items like epi pens and inhalers. When it is determined at time of registration if medication is needed to be onsite we will go over the organization policy on Medical Administration in depth.

Incident Reports – In the event an injury has occurred on the premises the member is assessed and/or treated for their injury as allowed by the State and general Red Cross First Aid guidelines. Parents will be verbally contacted depending on the situation for you to determine if you would like to pick up your loved one early. Injuries that present to be minimal i.e. cut, scrape, etc., will be treated and encourage the child to return to scheduled activities. An Incident Report will be filled out by the proper staff person for all injuries. Once signed by all parties a copy will go to the family and one on file at Girls Inc.

Safety is our number one priority, in the event of a severe injury occurs Girls Inc. reserves the right to contact emergency services for hospital transport at your expense. Please refer to registration form regarding this statement. At time of registration you will be asked to grant permission for this action.

Transportation

It is the responsibility of members to get to and from Girls Inc. on their own. Staff members are not allowed to transport children in their own personal vehicles at anytime. Daily transportation is provided only to participants registered in Girls Inc. on the Move where girls are picked up daily from School. In this case proper forms, releases etc. must be current for participation to begin.

In the case of special programs that are being offered off-site where Girls Inc. will be providing transportation either through our van or contracted by a local bus company a special Field-Trip form will be required to be signed by a legal parent or guardian in order for your loved one to be transported.

Emergency Procedures

In Case of Evacuation – depending on the situation all staff with their girls are to report to the outside pavilion. Once headcount has been conducted proper protocol will be conducted. 1. Contact of families for immediate pick-up or 2. Re-entry to building upon clearance from professional services, i.e. Firemen, Police, Utilities workers etc.

In Case of Off-Site Evacuation- staff and girls will meet at the bottom of the driveway and proceed to Women & Families Center located at 169 Colony Street. Once in a safe location contact will be made for families to pick-up. Relocation will occur if there is immediate danger to anyone without the possibility of keeping everyone safe.

Personal Items

It is recommended that no personal items be brought to programs. They can cause unnecessary distractions. All contact information is in the office so use of cell phones is not needed. Cell Phones, iPods, computers, nice jewelry, etc. should remain at home. Girls Incorporated is not responsible for any lost or stolen items. Please encourage your loved one to adhere to this recommendation it is to protect their valuables.

Closing Remarks

Girls Incorporated of Meriden has an open door policy and encourages families to communicate with the office if you have any questions or concerns. We want to make sure your experience with the organization is enjoyable and that the loved one in your life is inspired to be Strong, Smart, and Bold.