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Young Women Leaders Program Mission

The mission of YWLP is to help adolescent girls create “a belief in self far greater than anyone’s disbelief” (August Wilson as quoted by Robinson, 1996). We do this by promoting the girls’ competence, connection to important others, and autonomy. While this is an overarching focus for the program, we also include specific activities and opportunities within the group mentoring to promote these goals. Here are some examples:

1. Competence: We get things done!

- Setting Academic Goals
- Promoting Sparks (Topic schedule, outside time)
- Doing Service Projects (Food Drive, January Project, Global Connections projects)

2. Connection: We care about each other!

- Developing Mindfulness (Stress reduction, Breathing)
- Practicing Appreciation (Certificate of Appreciation, Appreciation Dinner, Practicing Kindness)
- Exploring Alternative Stories (Hot Topics, problem solving)

3. Autonomy: We think for ourselves!

- Developing Problem-Solving Skills (ABCs, Magic Three, Gossip Guard, GASP)
- Negotiating Hot Topics (Bullying, inequality, drama with friends and family, dating, body image)
- Practicing Leadership (Group leadership roles, group and one-on-one interactions)



YWLP Leadership Secrets

One of the goals of YWLP is to support the leadership development of both mentees and mentors. To help the Big and Little Sisters hold on to the leadership skills and strategies incorporated in the YWLP curriculum, we have identified nine “leadership secrets” we think are foundational to good leadership. We have organized each week’s curriculum around one of these secrets. Groups are encouraged to create a Leadership Ladder at the beginning of the year with a secret on each rung and display it each week during group time to help everyone remember what the Leadership Secrets are!

1. Leaders Set Goals!

“A goal without a plan is a wish.”

In YWLP, we learn to set goals in an organized and intentional way. The YWLP goal-setting process involves frequent check-ins during which we can assess our current progress and reevaluate our goal as needed. Big and Little Sisters encourage each other to set goals in different areas of their life (i.e., school, home, sports) to help them achieve the future that they would like for themselves.

2. Leaders Appreciate Others!

*“Appreciation is a wonderful thing. It makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well.”—
Voltaire*

An important part of YWLP is learning to show others how much they mean to us. We do this in a variety of ways, including thank you notes and spoken words of appreciation. This is because leadership is strengthened when we appreciate the resources of others.

3. Leaders Are Mindful!

“If you want to conquer the anxiety of life, live in the moment, live in the breath.”— Amit Ray

Being mindful is an important part of successful problem solving and a necessary skill for effective leadership. In YWLP, we practice slowing down and using our breathing as a way to take a timeout when we feel stressed or overwhelmed.

4. Leaders Help Others!

“One woman can make a difference but together we can rock the world.” — Anonymous

Recognizing we are part of a larger community helps us act on our empathy for others. In YWLP, the Fall Food Drive and mentoring group leadership projects are a way for Big and Little

Sisters to work together to help others in the broader Charlottesville community as well as across the globe.

5. Leaders Respect Differences!

"A great relationship is about two things. First appreciating the similarities and second, respecting the differences." — Anonymous

YWLP brings together middle school girls and college women from a variety of backgrounds. We also learn about the lives of young women leaders at our sister sites around the world. As we spend more time together, we learn that appreciating differences enriches our connection with others and understanding of ourselves.

6. Leaders Create Support Teams!

"Behind every successful woman is a tribe of other successful women who have her back." — Anonymous

YWLP mentoring groups are meant to be a supportive place for all group members. This is because recognizing and appreciating our support systems helps us grow as leaders. In YWLP, Big and Little Sisters can help each other identify and appreciate the support others give them. Success often requires leaning into and collaborating with our support network.

7. Leaders Keep Their Cool!

"Keep cool; Anger is not an argument."—Daniel Webster

Middle school can be a very frustrating and confusing time. Sometimes our tempers get the best of us and we end up saying things we don't really mean or doing things that are not the best thing for us. In YWLP, we learn different strategies to help us keep our cool during these challenging moments. Being able to "keep our cool" helps us think more clearly and better recognize all of our options.

8. Leaders Respect Themselves!

"When you say yes to others, make sure you are not saying no to yourself." — Anonymous

An important part of being a leader is treating ourselves with respect and love. In YWLP, we practice loving ourselves and our bodies, both of which are foundational to respecting ourselves.

9. Leaders Celebrate Success!

"To be successful, the first thing to do is fall in love with your work." — Anonymous

In YWLP, we take time each week to recognize the hard work and success of each group member. We learn that it feels good to celebrate the successes of others, as well as our own successes. It is important to acknowledge these moments because celebrating effort fosters growth.



YWLP MENTORING COMPETENCIES

Mentoring youth can be an amazingly rewarding experience but rarely will it be without challenges. Mentoring challenges can include relational schisms, misunderstandings, unmet expectations, and/or difficulty keeping commitments, among other things. However, we believe these challenges are also an opportunity to work through issues in a way that can strengthen the mentoring relationship.

In YWLP we have identified five mentoring competencies we think contribute to mentors being able to successfully respond to challenges within the mentoring relationship in a way that promotes a stronger relationship with and positive outcomes for the youth they are mentoring. These competencies provide a map for reflecting on what might already be an area of strength for you as a mentor and what might be an area for growth.

The Five Mentoring Competencies Are:

1. Positive Attitude (Zest)

- Growth mindset
- Enthusiasm

2. Collaboration (Teamwork)

- Positive communication
- Mutuality

3. Empathy and Attunement (Heart)

- Appreciation of differences
- Mentee-centered interactions

4. Initiative and Perseverance (Grit)

- Analysis and problem solving
- Creativity and adaptability

5. Mentoring Knowledge (Brains)

- Program curriculum and expectations
- Adolescent development and best practices

Applying the YWLP Mentoring Competencies in the Mentoring Relationship:

1. Positive Attitude (*Zest*):

A Big Sister with this competency believes in the potential of all kids and plasticity of their development. She engages her mentee enthusiastically through a variety of methods, including maintaining positive affect (positive sentiment override), seeking physical proximity, engaging in conversation, and sharing in her mentee's interests and activities. She is able to redirect negative interactions positively and not take them personally.

2. Collaboration (*Teamwork*):

A Big Sister with this competency communicates warmly and regularly with her mentee using different strategies as needed (e.g., calls, emails, visits mentee's world, connects via school contact, parent, or friend). She is an active listener, seeking to understand rather than hoping to give advice. She creates safety in the relationship by being reflective and non-judgmental. She values commonalities in the relationship and looks for opportunities to strengthen her mentee's independent thinking while also conveying that she is on her mentee's team.

3. Empathy and Attunement (*Heart*):

A Big Sister with this competency seeks to understand and appreciate her mentee and her world and is respectful of differences (e.g., developmental, cultural, racial, social, religious). She is empathic to and patient with her mentee's concerns and challenges.

4. Initiative and Perseverance (*Grit*):

A Big Sister with this competency uses strong critical thinking and problem solving skills to adapt to her mentee's changing needs. She has a bias toward action and experimentation and perseveres in overcoming relationship obstacles and disruptions.

5. Mentoring Knowledge (*Brains*):

A Big Sister with this competency appreciates the nuances of adolescent development (e.g., physical, cognitive, emotional changes) and uses best mentoring practices to develop the mentoring relationship. She understands and follows program rules and expectations and seeks support when needed.