Welcome to Girls on the Run!

At the heart of Girls on the Run® are amazing volunteers. Your dedication and desire to positively impact the lives of the girls you are coaching is so appreciated! We thank you for giving your time and energy to serve as a coach and to empower your team to recognize and celebrate the importance of leading a healthy and confident life.

The mission of Girls on the Run is to inspire girls to be joyful, healthy and confident using a fun, experience-based curriculum which creatively integrates running. Over the next few months, with you as a role model, your girls will learn what it means to be strong, confident and connected, and by the conclusion of the program, they will be physically and emotionally prepared to participate in a 5k run with their teammates.

At Girls on the Run, however, the finish line is just the beginning, as our ultimate goal is to provide the girls with tools and resources that develop their ability to think critically – a skill that will serve them well for a lifetime.

Thank you for your commitment to impacting the lives of the girls in your community. Get ready for your life to be changed as well!

Many thanks to all the councils who contributed to the development of this playbook.
About this Guide

The start of a Girls on the Run season always brings to our coaches a wide array of thoughts and emotions. Whether you are a new or returning coach, you are undoubtedly feeling excited to meet your team, proud to be making a difference in your community and a bit overwhelmed all at the same time.

Through your local council, you have attended coach training, completed all the necessary paperwork and gained a better understanding of the mission, learning goals and program structure of Girls on the Run. Your council has provided you with a copy of the curriculum, your program supplies and team roster. And yet, with all of this behind you, you may still be feeling a sense of the unknown or nervous anticipation about what you are about to experience.

This playbook provides suggestions and ideas shared by experienced Girls on the Run coaches to ensure that you and your team have a fun and enriching experience. Please note that each team of girls is unique and ideas that have worked well with some may be reworked for your team. You may have a talkative group, a group of leaders that have previously participated in the program or a group of first timers eager to learn, but unsure of what is going on. As you and your team get to know one another, this playbook is designed to guide you through the common questions and challenges that may arise throughout the season.

Please remember that if you ever need support from Girls on the Run, we are always available for you.

Have a great season!

“I am always inspired by the strength and courage of the girls on my team.”

“The girls just helped remind me that anything is possible. There were times when I felt as though I wasn’t doing enough or couldn’t finish and they inspired me. It helped me follow my own advice I was giving them.”

“This program not only helps the girls gain confidence in themselves, but it has made such a difference in my life. The determination that I see in the girls and the other coaches is an inspiration to me.”

“I was nervous to coach because I’m not a runner, but I quickly learned that I didn’t have to be. The girls loved when I cheered them on and when we were able to have one-on-one time together walking some laps.”

Girls on the Run wants to continue to support you in being the best coach you can be. Be sure to check out our online coach resources at http://www.girlsontherun.org/coach.
Inspiration

We hear all the time from our coaches that Girls on the Run has as great of an impact on their lives as it does on the girls’ lives. Your season is sure to be full of laughter, hugs, fun and maybe even a few tears. Embrace this wonderful experience and all that you gain from it.

We hope this playbook has provided you with a deeper understanding of Girls on the Run and our mission. We have one final coach tip that is the best advice that we can give to you - **be yourself!** You are confident, empowered, joyful, open-hearted and compassionate. Your team will love you just as you are. Be silly, dance, laugh and most importantly have fun!

“My entire outlook has changed (as a coach). I have matured as a teacher in ways that I did not think were possible. My time with the girls has improved my communication skills, my patience and also my management skills.”

“I actually ran! I have never been a runner, but the girls encouraged me to try just like they did!”

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Reaching the finish line: The majority of girls will see the finish line and find that final burst of energy to dash to it! Make sure they know not to stop suddenly or cut off other runners in the finish line chute and to quickly move through the finish line corral area so other runners can filter in behind them.

Expect to be moved by the experience: A Girls on the Run 5k is an unforgettable and life-affirming event for all involved. Don’t be surprised if you are overwhelmed with emotion upon seeing all of the girls’ cross the finish line. Acknowledge your feelings, embrace them and let them fuel your spirit until your next season as a Girls on the Run coach begins!
Pre-event festivities: Before the 5k begins is the time for signing shirts, getting hair “happied” (decorated with temporary colored hair spray) at the Happy Hair Station, warming up with teammates and, in general, enjoying that the big day has finally arrived! Please be sure to arrive early so your girls and you can enjoy the excitement together and don’t forget your camera! While Girls on the Run 5k events across the continent vary in size, they are all full of fun!

Go at your own pace: As part of the excitement, it’s very tempting for your girls to run faster than they can maintain to keep up with other runners. It’s okay to start with a burst, but remind them that their experience will be much more pleasant if they run their “happy pace”. You or their running buddy will need to encourage and remind the girls to run at their normal pace. Advise your girls to be aware of other runners and share with them that, just like driving, slower traffic stays to the right and you pass on the left.

Be aware of your surroundings: Advise the girls to pay attention to what is going on around them during the event. Just as in real life, expect the unexpected. Remind the girls not to stop suddenly on the course or at water stations. If they need to stop on the course, tell them to move to the side of the course to avoid being bumped by people behind them. At the water stations, grab water from the table or from the outstretched hand of a volunteer and keep moving. Make sure they know to move to the side of the course if they intend to stop to drink the water. Have the girls’ toss used cups to the side of the course route so runners behind them don’t have to run through an obstacle course of crushed cups.

Vision

We envision a world where every girl knows and activates her limitless potential and is free to boldly pursue her dreams.

Our Core Values

Girls on the Run honors its core values. We strive to:
• Recognize our power and responsibility to be intentional in our decision making
• Embrace our differences and find strength in our connectedness
• Express joy, optimism and gratitude through our words, thoughts and actions
• Nurture our physical, emotional and spiritual health
• Lead with an open heart and assume positive intent
• Stand up for ourselves and others
**Role of a Coach**

Being a Girls on the Run coach may be one of the most rewarding experiences you will ever have. It can also be challenging because it encompasses many diverse responsibilities.

A coach is not a teacher, although they teach. A coach is not a parent, although they treat the girls like their own. A coach is not a friend, although they befriend the girls. A coach is a combination of all of these roles. You are a role model, friend, confidante and authority figure wrapped into one. While coaching you need to be emotionally accessible, responsible, confident with yourself, and open to sharing your experiences, dreams, fears or insecurities in an age appropriate manner.

Girls on the Run is a safe place for your team of girls to come together and you will be the person that listens openly to every girl without judgment. You are the person who has been in their shoes and can help them make sense of their experiences and develop the skills to make wise decisions in the future. When you are a coach you aren’t a parent, teacher, professional or student - you are a role model, an empathetic confidante and, most importantly, a voice of love and reason.

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**5k Tips and Etiquette**

The Girls on the Run program culminates with all participants completing a celebratory 5k event together. Keep in mind that a Girls on the Run 5k is like no other! It is a joyful and festive occasion where the girls’ perseverance throughout the season is honored, families experience the impact of Girls on the Run first hand and the program is showcased to your community through a party atmosphere. A Girls on the Run 5k is a noncompetitive run where everyone is a winner. There is no brighter moment than when you see the girls’ eyes beaming with accomplishment as they cross the finish line!

- **Rest up:** It is important for all participants, running buddies and coaches to get plenty of rest before the event. Often it is difficult for the girls to sleep the evening before because of nervous excitement so try to get plenty of sleep the week leading up to the 5k as well.

- **Hydration:** Make sure your girls know the importance of drinking plenty of water before the 5k and to take advantage of the water stops while they are running.

- **What to wear:** The girls are encouraged to wear their Girls on the Run shirt the day of the 5k. Make sure that your girls pay close attention to weather conditions and advise them to wear layers of comfortable clothing, if necessary. Of course, make sure that they wear appropriate running shoes; ideally a pair that they have been wearing throughout the season to prevent blisters from forming!

Feel free to be creative with your team by decorating your program shirts or providing them unique hats, shoelaces, capes or socks. Encourage your team’s family members, friends and running buddies to share their creative spirit as well!
Practice 5K
The day of the practice 5k should be treated as a momentous occasion. Here are some tips to make it fun and memorable for the girls:

- Invite all parents, staff and teachers from your site to get involved
- Invite high school track teams to come out and cheer
- Recruit volunteers to pass out lap counters
- Make a poster for each girl to cross off her laps
- Create a water stop
- Combine with another Girls on the Run team in your area
- Invite your school mascot or a local community mascot
- Create goody bags for the girls
- Write girls’ names and encouraging messages on the track using sidewalk chalk
- Make a chart in chalk for girls to count their laps
- Make a CD of songs to play while the girls are running and then give it to them as an end of the season gift
- Have a sign party before the 5k where each girl can decorate a sign for herself
- Ask parents to stand in cheer zones and make encouraging signs for the girls
- Give parents who attend noise makers (cow bells, clappers, party horns) to cheer the girls on
- Create a finish line for girls to run through (crepe paper, banners with all the girls’ names on it, etc.). Ask volunteers to hold for each girl as they cross
- Ask principal to announce the practice 5k during daily announcements
- Assign a photographer to take pictures of each girl crossing the finish. Make copies and give to the girls at the end of the season with their energy awards
- Have girls wear their program shirts to school that day to build excitement

All Girls on the Run Coaches will:
- Serve as role models to the girls, both during and outside of sessions
- Arrive early, already dressed in work-out clothes (even if you are not running)
- Honor Girls on the Run core values
- Attentively focus on the girls ensuring no one feels left out
- Notify their council of any conflicts or challenges that arise during the season
- Keep their commitment to attend all sessions and the Girls on the Run 5k event
- Read information distributed by their council and attend required council meetings
- Prepare in advance for each lesson
- Start and end each GOTR session on-time
- Provide feedback, suggestions and tips to council
- Connect with your council’s social media page(s) and share your photos, videos and season updates
- Have fun!

Head Coaches – all of the above, plus the following:
- Engage assistant coaches
- Ensure all required paperwork is completed and returned to your council
- Return all curriculum materials at the end of the season
- Work to build a good relationship with site representatives (i.e. school principal, guidance counselor, facility director, etc.) on behalf of Girls on the Run
- Help to create site sustainability with coaches and location
Getting to Know Your Girls

Over the course of the season it is your responsibility to get to know your girls. What are their strengths? What is their family situation? What are their fears? Both personal and academic issues can impact a girl’s experience with Girls on the Run. At this age, many girls don’t know how to acknowledge or address life issues and instead may exhibit emotional responses such as withdrawing or acting out. If you aren’t aware of their personal circumstances, it will be challenging to support the girls. Most of the time a simple and straightforward conversation will start to build a relationship. Occasionally, you may have to dig a bit and contact the parents or reach out to teachers that know the girl.

Working with Children

What to expect with 3rd, 4th and 5th grade girls:

🌟 Energy – This age group is full of energy; you may feel overwhelmed at first. There may be days when you feel like you have barely gotten your point across. You will be pleasantly surprised when you realize that they generally do hear the lesson message, even through the ordered chaos.

🌟 Cliques – The girls are beginning to identify with their peers and are searching for groups that share their same values. Someone is ‘in’ the group and someone is ‘out’ and this is normal at this age. The key to managing cliques is to share the values of Girls on the Run so all the girls realize that they are part of the group. They each become a ‘Girl on the Run’ and a special bond will begin to develop within the entire team.

🌟 Limited attention span – This is very common with this age group. Don’t spend too much time with lengthy explanations or down time between activities. They are ready to go!

🌟 Collect hats, scarves, gloves, shoes for those in need

🌟 Have each girl donate a book, game, toy or stuffed animal to bring to a women’s/children’s shelter

🌟 Write a letter to elected officials advocating for an issue the group feels passionate about

🌟 Write letters and collect fun trinkets or candy to send to those serving in the military

🌟 Bake cookies for retirement homes or homeless shelters

🌟 Collect classroom papers to recycle

🌟 Help shelve books in the school library

If you are making a donation to another organization, have the girls write a letter explaining that they are part of Girls on the Run and articulating why they are donating the items.
Community Service Project Ideas

There is only one session devoted to performing the community service project, therefore, it needs to be relatively simple in order to execute. Ask the girls for ideas and help them determine a plan that is feasible to complete in the allotted time.

Here are some potential ideas to get the girls on the right path:

- Plant flowers on or around the school grounds
- Pick up trash on the school grounds or a nearby park (be sure that the girls wear plastic gloves!)
- Make cheerful cards for senior citizens
- Create some sort of thank you for a community leader --the girls could decorate cups or pots and plant a flower inside to show their appreciation to someone
- Collect personal care items to put in a kit the girls design to be delivered to a local service organization or homeless shelter
- Plan and practice random acts of kindness – leaving notes on cars, on desks of their classmates, in lockers, etc.
- Conduct a food drive
- Make fun games, arts and crafts kits or coloring books for children in the hospital

- **Openly express affection** – Don’t be surprised if the girls want to hold your hand or braid your hair. This age enjoys showing how much they care for you, though the older girls will be less likely to express physical affection.
- **Variation in reading levels** – Be sure to remind all girls that you are happy to assist with activities that require reading.
- **Gregarious** – This age group loves to giggle and talk about themselves. Have your team determine a simple hand signal that a coach can do to indicate that it is time to stop talking.
- **Constantly growing, learning and developing** – This age is interested in their ability to express their emotions. Provide every opportunity you can for the development of these skills in a healthy manner. If two girls are upset or angry with each other, be the mediator and allow them time to try out their assertive communication skills. Congratulate them in front of the entire group during wrap-up time for their willingness to express their discomfort and seek a win-win solution.
What to expect with 6th, 7th and 8th grade girls:

🌟 Variation in behavioral and thinking patterns – Some girls will demonstrate cognitive development more than others. Girls at this stage of development are beginning to form their own identities, learn about romantic intimacy, strive toward self-reliance and develop a value system. They vary greatly in their levels of maturity.

🌟 Variation in attention span – Watch for distracted minds when you are processing topics. Check in with them often. Wandering eyes or excessive talking are signals to move on.

🌟 Self-focused – Girls in early adolescence are very focused on themselves. It is very common for this age to feel that they are special or different and that no one understands how they feel. They are concerned about their physical appearance and often believe that everyone is watching them and passing judgment on their appearance and behavior. They are also watching everyone else.

🌟 Low self-esteem, body image and self-confidence – Girls in this stage of development are far more likely than boys to experience depression. This depression is often linked to negative feelings about their bodies and appearance. Teen girls are often more dependent on others for approval and support, more sensitive than younger girls to pressure to conform to stereotypical gender roles and more eager to accommodate what they perceive as appropriate feminine behavior.

🌟 Seek adult attention – In early adolescence, girls begin to seek the company of adults other than parents who can serve as role models and provide support and guidance. In your position as a coach, your messages of encouragement can greatly enhance self-confidence.

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Nuts and Trail Mix

Serve a small handful along with another snack, such as fruit.

Healthy Beverages

🌟 Water should be the main drink served to children at snack times. Water satisfies thirst without adding calories or sugars (and it is low-cost!)

🌟 Seltzer or Sparkling Water

🌟 Low-Fat and Fat-Free Milk – Milk is a terrific source of calcium and vitamin D, but it is also a main source of saturated fat in children’s diets. Choose fat-free (skim), low-fat (1%), soy or rice “milks” (fortified with calcium and vitamin D).

🌟 100% Fruit Juice – Limit juice to no more than 6 ounces and avoid those which have minimal nutritional value.
Healthy Snacks

Serving healthy snacks to the girls supports the development of lifelong healthy eating habits. We encourage our coaches to provide healthy snacks for the girls and have listed some healthy suggestions below.

Fruits and Vegetables

* Fresh fruits and vegetables (vegetables can be served with dips like hummus, bean dip, or salad dressing)
* Fruit cups or canned fruit (in juice or light syrup)
* Dried fruit and fruit leathers (without added sugars)
* Fruit juice popsicles

Healthy Grains (whole grains that are low in fats and sugars)
Check nutrition labels and choose options that are whole grain and low in sugar, saturated fat and trans fat.

* Granola or cereal bars
* English muffins, pita or tortillas
* Crackers
* Rice cakes
* Popcorn

Low-Fat Dairy Foods
Make sure all dairy foods are low-fat, such as yogurt and light/lower-fat cheeses. If providing cheese, consider serving it with other foods like fruit, vegetables or whole grain crackers.

Parent/Guardian Communication

Communication with caregivers is central to a successful experience. All head coaches must contact each girl’s parent or guardian upon receiving the team roster. Families appreciate hearing from coaches, therefore e-mailing or calling them prior to the start of the season is required. Make sure you provide the following important information:

* Welcome them to Girls on the Run and share how pleased and excited you are to have their daughter participating on your team.
* Introduce yourself as the head coach and briefly share relevant information about why you serve as a coach.
* Provide key program information
  * Program start and end dates
  * Session days and times
  * The date of the Girls on the Run 5K
  * Any other important dates for your team
* Tell them where you will meet the girls each day and when and where the girls must be picked up or dropped off (i.e. afterschool program). Remind them that being punctual is important and share council policies around tardiness, carpools and designated caregivers (i.e. - custody issues).
* Give them a list of what each girl needs to bring to practice
  * A water bottle
  * Running shoes
  * Clothing that is comfortable for running and weather appropriate
  * A healthy snack
Give each girl a construction paper ‘link’ after every lap to create a team chain – each girl makes a difference and plays a part.

Play a game while running where the girls cannot allow any coaches to pass them.

Have extra coaches to take turns running with girls and keep them pumped.

Use sidewalk chalk to keep track of laps – make a large graph.

Bring empty baby food jars for the girls to keep their earned beads every lesson – they watch how their jar grows to contain more and more beads.

Have girls tell coaches something they love about themselves each lap.

Write each girl’s name on an index card and attach it to yarn to make a necklace. The girls can wear their necklaces during the run and collect sticker lap counters on it to keep track of the total laps they complete.

Play music during the lesson – let the girls choose the music.

Chalk motivational messages on the track or parking lot where the girls run.

Have girls chalk one flattering adjective that describes them for each lap.

Ask them to help with creating a schedule for families to rotate and bring snacks to each session, if applicable.

Encourage all parents to read the Grown Up Guide and support their daughters by asking the questions that are within it.

Remind them of council deadline to receive health and history form and ask them about any particular health, food or allergy issues their daughter may have.

Share your council’s ongoing communication plan (i.e. – weekly e-mail from Council Director or Coach, seasonal reminders, etc.)

The more information you can provide to parents, the better their daughter’s experience at Girls on the Run will be.
Lap Counters

Developing methods to record the number of laps that the girls have completed is a powerful way to track progress during a session and throughout the season. The following is a list of tips to keep the girls inspired to run!

- Make a bulletin board photo display at the site to showcase the girls and acknowledge the number of laps run
- Have the girls keep track of how many laps they’ve run each session in their journals
- Use colored hair spray to give each girl a stripe each lap
- Record laps on a chart to show progress and display near your site location
- Use pipe cleaners to make bracelets/necklaces and give the girls a bead for each lap they complete
- When struggling to accomplish a goal, have the coaches run and donate a lap to a girl that is trying her hardest
- Have each coach assigned to specifically motivate certain girls and find out what works for THEM!
- Give different lap counters every lesson
- Paint a finger nail for every lap run
- Using a washable marker, write a letter on their arm to complete a sentence after 8 laps

Girls on the Run Curricula

Lesson Preparation

Before each session with your team, it is important that you read and understand the lesson, and prepare the materials needed for the lesson.

The primary obstacle that will affect the girls’ program experience is if you do not clearly understand the lesson that you are leading. Be sure to reach out to your council if you have questions regarding the lesson content.

All lessons are designed take 75-90 minutes to complete and have the following structure:
1. Getting on Board and Processing: 10 minutes
2. Stretching and Strengthening: 5 to 10 minutes
3. Warm-up and Processing: 20 minutes
4. Work-out and Processing: The amount of time for this portion builds throughout the season as the girls are enhancing their cardiovascular ability
5. Wrap-up: 10 minutes

Please note: The above time estimates are recommendations. Use your judgment when the team is engaged in an important conversation or experiencing a significant impact with a specific activity. The ultimate goal is a fun and transformative experience for the girls!
Leading Your Team

As you get ready for the season to start, the following tips will help you prepare for a wonderfully positive experience with your girls!

**Expectations:** Make your team expectations clear from the beginning. Your girls will strive to meet the expectations you set. Set them high, but within reach. The suggestions below are recommended when sharing basic rules and will help you establish solid ground from the beginning:

- **Getting your team’s attention:** At your first session, establish how you will get their attention and teach them how to respond.

Some easy ways to get their attention are:
- You say, “One, two three, eyes on me!” and they respond with, “One, two, eyes on you!”
- You say “Girls on the Run” they say “is so much fun!”
- “If you can hear the sound of my voice clap once, clap twice and three times…”

- **Missing practice:** At your first session, talk to the girls about how you expect them to notify you if they are going to miss a session. Make sure they understand that it is their responsibility to let you know when they will be absent. The same goes for you!

- **Encouraging each other:** A positive team attitude is expected at each session. Don’t assume your girls know how or when to encourage each other! Set an example by teaching them fun ways to cheer each other on. Eventually, they’ll catch on and support their teammates on their own.

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**Energy Award Examples**

- **“The Surfer”** – Mimick that you are standing on a surfboard, riding the waves while coolly stating “Hoo-raaaaaay”!

- **“Superstar”** – Jump with your right foot forward and your arms extended overhead and joyously yelling “Superstar”!

- **“The Firecracker”** – Clap your hands together and saying “MMMMMMM” as you raise them above your head before thunderously yelling “POP” with a sudden clap at the top of your head before bringing them down to your sides as if they were falling fireworks.

- **“WOW”** – This one is a silent award. You hold three fingers up on either side of your mouth to show a “W” and your mouth is open to show an “O” together it looks like W-O-W.

- **“Fan-tastic”** – Fan yourself and then point to the award winner. While you fan yourself you say “Fan” then point and say “tastic”. Together you say “fan-tastic”.

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**Closing Cheer:**

At the end of every Girls on the Run session, all the participants and coaches conclude the lesson by standing in a circle, putting one hand in the middle and exclaiming in unison “Girls on the Run is so much fun!”
Energy Awards

Energy awards are one of the girls’ favorite things about Girls on the Run! They are simple cheers that are used to acknowledge, reinforce and reward positive behavior. A coach will share sample energy awards at the initial sessions and the girls will then start creating their own as the season progresses.

Energy awards can be given for many reasons at the discretion of the coach including:
- Reinforcing a shy girl who had the courage to share her thoughts during processing
- Recognizing a girl who exemplified caring for another girl
- Encouraging a girl who was not in the mood to run but diligently completed the physical activity
- Honoring the entire group for achieving a lesson goal

Coaches need to be cognizant of who has received energy awards during the season to ensure that everyone is recognized for something during the season. Coaches should always initiate the energy awards, but it is appropriate to allow the girls to recognize each other as well. The coach must oversee this because all the girls will want to create a cheer and it is important to keep the focus relevant.

A few energy awards are listed here and a comprehensive list is located at girlsontherun.org/coach. Enjoy!

Contributing to discussions: Let the girls know your expectations from the very start and convey to them that while they may not always get to share, it is important that all team members have a chance to speak during each discussion. This will prevent hurt feelings when team members are not called on at a particular time.

Determine how the girls will share their thoughts. Some examples include raising one’s hand, inventing a creative hand signal, or holding an item (i.e. magic wand, talking stick, etc.)

Attitude: Greet the girls enthusiastically as they enter your gathering location, make eye contact with each one and smile! Maintain an open, accepting, non-judgmental attitude at all times as it is critically important that they feel safe while discussing the lessons. Most importantly, be yourself! If you are a 9 our of 10 on the energy spectrum, show it, but if you are a 2 out of 10, don’t feel a need to be gregarious or something you are not.

Group Structure: Sit in a circle on the floor/ground with all the girls and coaches. Always have coaches sit among the girls on opposing sides of the circle. Distribute any items the girls might need (i.e. health forms, Grown-Up Guide) at the end of the session.
**Motivation**

Each girl will have a day when she doesn’t feel like running. Please remember that every girl has the option of running, walking, skipping, jumping, cartwheeling or hopping. The Girls on the Run philosophy is that the girls need to continue moving forward at our sessions just as they do in life. Each girl is capable of completing a 5k in her own way - the only barrier is what she may believe she is capable of achieving. Girls on the Run will encourage and inspire them to believe they can and will give them the opportunity to accomplish something transformational. Don’t worry if you have girls who aren’t runners, because they do not need to be.

Here are some ways to motivate the girls to set and achieve goals throughout the season:

- Have each girl determine how many laps she is going to individually complete
- Have the team determine how many laps they are going to collectively complete together
- Have a traveling toy where the girls determine how many laps the toy is going to do and everyone is then responsible for helping the toy reach its goal.

**Past Participants**

Girls who have previously participated in the program may feel they already know the lessons and don’t need to put forth effort. Find a way to provide these girls with a new experience. Have them help you lead a lesson or activity, hand out materials or mentor other girls.

**Routine:** Keep your session routine predictable. Creating a routine will minimize disruptions, keep things moving smoothly and give you more time to focus on the lesson goals. Make sure your girls know the following:

- Where and when to change clothes and what type of clothing is appropriate to run in
- When you will break to eat snacks

Depending on your session time, snack time may be before or after practice. Do they need an after-school boost or would a “treat” at the end of practice work out better?

- What you expect from the girls at the end of practice such as picking up/putting away supplies
- How dismissal will occur at the end of the session. Do they need to walk to a pick-up area? Are they required to check in with you before they leave with the person picking them up?
- How restroom visits and water breaks will occur
  - Encourage them to use the restroom before the session begins
  - Non-verbal cues work well for restroom or water breaks during the session
  - Hold the girls accountable for these breaks and don’t allow them to overtake the lesson
Inclement Weather

Some days you may find yourself staring at a large dark rain cloud, battling a snow storm or facing excessive heat. Fortunately, you will still be able to have fun with the girls as all Girls on the Run sites must have access to indoor space to use in these situations. Whether it is a classroom, auditorium or gymnasium, be sure to let the girls know in the first session where you will meet if you are unable to go outside. If your indoor space prevents you from performing the lesson activities as planned, adapt the lesson in such a way to make it appropriate for your indoor space.

If it is impossible to run, the following activities have been found to be successful:

- Teaching and singing age appropriate songs
- Play “two truths and a lie”. Have the girls write down on paper two true statements about themselves and one false statement. Collect all the papers and read each one aloud. After you finish reading one, have the girls try to guess who wrote the three statements and which one is the lie
- Repeating previous Girls on the Run activities that the girls enjoyed
- Writing thank you notes to parents, coaches and/or Girls on the Run sponsors
- Creating an obstacle course and/or activity stations (jumping jacks, jump rope, hula hoop, run in place, etc.)
- Avoid risky activities such as red rover, human pyramids or dodge ball

Where to place backpacks/bags – be specific
Where to sit as a team

Pairing your girls: Coaches should always pair girls as allowing the girls to self-partner can lead to someone feeling left out or hurt. The curriculum has fun ideas on how to pair your girls or feel free to come up with new ways to pair them up. Get creative and share ways that have worked well with your council.
Group Management Best Practices

Techniques for Effective Group Management

🌟 Focusing – Get everyone’s attention before beginning the lesson so no one misses anything

🌟 Direct Instruction – Give the girls a preview of what to expect during the session. This will help them stay focused and make transitions easier. Feel free to let them know how long you will do each activity

🌟 Monitoring – Circulate while the girls complete tasks. Check their progress and engage yourself in what they are doing

🌟 Modeling – “Values are caught, not taught.” Role model the behaviors you wish to see in the girls. Everyone is accountable for their actions and “do as I say, not as I do” won’t work

🌟 Non-verbal cues – Utilize facial expressions, body posture and hand signals to support positive group dynamics and minimize disruptive behavior

Examples of Behavior Issues and Consequences:

🌟 Forgets water bottle ➞ Is thirsty

🌟 Talking while you talk ➞ Sits next to a coach and away from her friend

🌟 Hits another girl ➞ Coach removes girl from team to address immediately “No, that is not acceptable behavior”; talk with parent/guardian

Suggestions for Refocusing the Group:

🌟 Talking stick – only the person with the stick (or other unique item) can talk

🌟 Whispering – if you have a loud group, you can get their attention by whispering and leaning into the group. They must quiet down in order to hear you.

🌟 Sharing time – Run a lap with every girl and ask each to share a story with you

🌟 Encouraging shy girls – Let the team know that you are going to ask a specific question and allow the shy girls time to think, gain their composure and come up with answers that they are confident in.
Distractions
Here are a few ways to keep participants who may be disruptive engaged and contributing to a healthy team:

★ Talk to them! Find out what is going on in their lives that day. Check-in with each girl prior to the beginning of each lesson to let them know that you care and to open the lines of communication. If you sense that someone needs you, be there for them. This can be the most powerful lesson they will ever learn from you!

★ Give them a job or responsibility (time-keeper, game piece distributor or collector). This is a source of positive attention and a way for the girl(s) to feel needed. Often when participants are actively acting up, it is simply in an attempt to be noticed.

★ Ask them to help you lead an activity. Many repeat participants already know what to expect. Engage these girls as leaders for the day. Have them assist you with a visual aid or game introduction. This will keep them engaged and will also provide an opportunity to work on their leadership skills.

Consequences Need to Fit the Action
Throughout the season, girls will inevitably forget their water bottles, snack, shoes or running clothes. Ensure that the consequences fit the situation. For example, when a girl forgets her water bottle, she is thirsty; when she forgets her shoes, she has to sit out from running. If a girl consistently forgets, offer suggestions like packing her items in a bag the night before and putting it by the door. This is going to show that you care about her and want to do what it takes to get her re-engaged with the group. If it becomes chronic, have a conversation with her parent/guardian to determine solutions.

Time Management
★ Start and end on time

★ Sessions are designed to be 75-90 minutes in length. Anticipate the amount of time you will need to complete each activity

★ Have your materials organized and ready to go

A few ways to get back on track if you are running behind include:
- Reducing the number of processing questions
- Allowing fewer girls to answer each question. Do, however, make sure each girl still has an opportunity to speak at some point during the lesson.
- Keep things moving. It is okay to transition to a new activity even if the majority of girls are still enjoying it. You can always revisit it later in the season if you are experiencing inclement weather and are unable to run.
Praising Positive Behavior

If a participant is having a difficult day or has ongoing struggles, focus on what they are doing well. It doesn't mean that negative behaviors are ignored, but instead the emphasis is placed on publicly acknowledging the participant’s positive behaviors.

Behavior Explanation

Explain the consequences of negative behavior in a firm, non-confrontational way. Children act impulsively and often do not think about the consequences.

For example: Don’t say “stop playing rough”; do say “by picking each other up, someone could fall and get hurt.”

Two Choices

The “two choices” scenario provides a participant with two options. The first choice is “I know that sometimes you don’t feel like participating or just need a break and that is okay. If you decide to make that choice I need you to sit here (in a shady, safe location where you can see her) by yourself.” The second choice is “…or you can participate with us and today we are going to have a lot of fun. We are going to focus on (describe the topic) and (insert energetic descriptions of the day’s activities). We would love to have you join us.”

The key is to make the second choice much more attractive than the first while also reminding the girl that once she makes her choice, it is her responsibility to honor it.
Addressing Behavior Challenges

During the course of the season, you may experience times when a girl does not honor the guidelines that your team has established. The following suggestions and techniques are designed to help in these situations.

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Low-Profile Intervention
If you are having an issue with a participant, discuss the issue privately in a public location. Involve only the individuals affected in the issue. Private discussions will minimize the publicity of the issue and help the participant understand what the issue is in order to resolve it. Public acknowledgements of inappropriate behavior can embarrass a participant and result in further challenges.

I-Messages
Use assertive I statements such as “I need you to…” or “I expect you to…” This technique will refocus the participant’s attention while focusing not on the behavior issue but of the expectation. Express your feelings about what the child is doing that is an issue. Using our “Standing up for yourself” lesson as a guide, say “I feel…, when you…, because… and I would like for you to…” This technique works well to communicate effectively and convey the desired behavior.

Behavior Redirection
Redirection is effective when you have a participant who chooses not to participate in the lesson activities or chooses not to abide by the team guidelines. This method is called “redirection” because instead of discipline, it encourages the girls to make their own decisions and ultimately be responsible for their actions.

It is important not to demand or request a positive behavior but to encourage the positive behaviors when they arise. Often when a positive behavior is publicly demanded (“I need you to stop talking and listen to me”) it will result in fueling the negative behavior because the participant is frustrated and embarrassed.
Distractions
Here are a few ways to keep participants who may be disruptive engaged and contributing to a healthy team:

- Talk to them! Find out what is going on in their lives that day. Check-in with each girl prior to the beginning of each lesson to let them know that you care and to open the lines of communication. If you sense that someone needs you, be there for them. This can be the most powerful lesson they will ever learn from you!

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✔ Encouraging shy girls – Let the team know that you are going to ask a specific question and allow the shy girls time to think, gain their composure and come up with answers that they are confident in.
Inclement Weather

Some days you may find yourself staring at a large dark rain cloud, battling a snow storm or facing excessive heat. Fortunately, you will still be able to have fun with the girls as all Girls on the Run sites must have access to indoor space to use in these situations. Whether it is a classroom, auditorium or gymnasium, be sure to let the girls know in the first session where you will meet if you are unable to go outside. If your indoor space prevents you from performing the lesson activities as planned, adapt the lesson in such a way to make it appropriate for your indoor space.

If it is impossible to run, the following activities have been found to be successful:

- Teaching and singing age appropriate songs
- Play “two truths and a lie”. Have the girls write down on paper two true statements about themselves and one false statement. Collect all the papers and read each one aloud. After you finish reading one, have the girls try to guess who wrote the three statements and which one is the lie
- Repeating previous Girls on the Run activities that the girls enjoyed
- Writing thank you notes to parents, coaches and/or Girls on the Run sponsors
- Creating an obstacle course and/or activity stations (jumping jacks, jump rope, hula hoop, run in place, etc.)
- Avoid risky activities such as red rover, human pyramids or dodge ball

Where to place backpacks/bags – be specific
Where to sit as a team

Pairing your girls: Coaches should always pair girls as allowing the girls to self-partner can lead to someone feeling left out or hurt. The curriculum has fun ideas on how to pair your girls or feel free to come up with new ways to pair them up. Get creative and share ways that have worked well with your council.

Empowerment, Responsibility, Intentionality, Diversity, Connectedness, Joy, Optimism, Gratitude, Nurturing, Healthy, Open-hearted, Compassion
Motivation

Each girl will have a day when she doesn’t feel like running. Please remember that every girl has the option of running, walking, skipping, jumping, cartwheeling or hopping. The Girls on the Run philosophy is that the girls need to continue moving forward at our sessions just as they do in life. Each girl is capable of completing a 5k in her own way - the only barrier is what she may believe she is capable of achieving. Girls on the Run will encourage and inspire them to believe they can and will give them the opportunity to accomplish something transformational. Don’t worry if you have girls who aren’t runners, because they do not need to be.

Here are some ways to motivate the girls to set and achieve goals throughout the season:
• Have each girl determine how many laps she is going to individually complete
• Have the team determine how many laps they are going to collectively complete together
• Have a traveling toy where the girls determine how many laps the toy is going to do and everyone is then responsible for helping the toy reach its goal.

Past Participants
Girls who have previously participated in the program may feel they already know the lessons and don’t need to put forth effort. Find a way to provide these girls with a new experience. Have them help you lead a lesson or activity, hand out materials or mentor other girls.
Energy Awards

Energy awards are one of the girls’ favorite things about Girls on the Run! They are simple cheers that are used to acknowledge, reinforce and reward positive behavior. A coach will share sample energy awards at the initial sessions and the girls will then start creating their own as the season progresses.

Energy awards can be given for many reasons at the discretion of the coach including:
• Reinforcing a shy girl who had the courage to share her thoughts during processing
• Recognizing a girl who exemplified caring for another girl
• Encouraging a girl who was not in the mood to run but diligently completed the physical activity
• Honoring the entire group for achieving a lesson goal

Coaches need to be cognizant of who has received energy awards during the season to ensure that everyone is recognized for something during the season. Coaches should always initiate the energy awards, but it is appropriate to allow the girls to recognize each other as well. The coach must oversee this because all the girls will want to create a cheer and it is important to keep the focus relevant.

A few energy awards are listed here and a comprehensive list is located at girlsontherun.org/coach. Enjoy!

Contributing to discussions: Let the girls know your expectations from the very start and convey to them that while they may not always get to share, it is important that all team members have a chance to speak during each discussion. This will prevent hurt feelings when team members are not called on at a particular time.

Determine how the girls will share their thoughts. Some examples include raising one’s hand, inventing a creative hand signal, or holding an item (i.e. magic wand, talking stick, etc.)

Attitude: Greet the girls enthusiastically as they enter your gathering location, make eye contact with each one and smile! Maintain an open, accepting, non-judgmental attitude at all times as it is critically important that they feel safe while discussing the lessons. Most importantly, be yourself! If you are a 9 our of 10 on the energy spectrum, show it, but if you are a 2 out of 10, don’t feel a need to be gregarious or something you are not.

Group Structure: Sit in a circle on the floor/ground with all the girls and coaches. Always have coaches sit among the girls on opposing sides of the circle. Distribute any items the girls might need (i.e. health forms, Grown-Up Guide) at the end of the session.
Leading Your Team

As you get ready for the season to start, the following tips will help you prepare for a wonderfully positive experience with your girls!

**Expectations:** Make your team expectations clear from the beginning. Your girls will strive to meet the expectations you set. Set them high, but within reach. The suggestions below are recommended when sharing basic rules and will help you establish solid ground from the beginning:

🌟 Getting your team’s attention: At your first session, establish how you will get their attention and teach them how to respond.

Some easy ways to get their attention are:
- You say, “One, two three, eyes on me!” and they respond with, “One, two, eyes on you!”
- You say “Girls on the Run” they say “is so much fun!”
- “If you can hear the sound of my voice clap once, clap twice and three times…”

🌟 Missing practice: At your first session, talk to the girls about how you expect them to notify you if they are going to miss a session. Make sure they understand that it is their responsibility to let you know when they will be absent. The same goes for you!

🌟 Encouraging each other: A positive team attitude is expected at each session. Don’t assume your girls know how or when to encourage each other! Set an example by teaching them fun ways to cheer each other on. Eventually, they’ll catch on and support their teammates on their own.

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**Energy Award Examples**

“The Surfer” – Mimick that you are standing on a surfboard, riding the waves while coolly stating “Hoo-raaaaaay!”

“Superstar” – Jump with your right foot forward and your arms extended overhead and joyously yelling “Superstar”!

“The Firecracker” – Clap your hands together and saying “MMMMMMM” as you raise them above your head before thunderously yelling “POP” with a sudden clap at the top of your head before bringing them down to your sides as if they were falling fireworks.

“WOW” – This one is a silent award. You hold three fingers up on either side of your mouth to show a “W” and your mouth is open to show an “O” together it looks like W-O-W.

“Fan-tastic” – Fan yourself and then point to the award winner. While you fan yourself you say “Fan” then point and say “tastic”. Together you say “fan-tastic”.

**Closing Cheer:**

At the end of every Girls on the Run session, all the participants and coaches conclude the lesson by standing in a circle, putting one hand in the middle and exclaiming in unison “Girls on the Run is so much fun!”
Lap Counters

Developing methods to record the number of laps that the girls have completed is a powerful way to track progress during a session and throughout the season. The following is a list of tips to keep the girls inspired to run!

- Make a bulletin board photo display at the site to showcase the girls and acknowledge the number of laps run
- Have the girls keep track of how many laps they’ve run each session in their journals
- Use colored hair spray to give each girl a stripe each lap
- Record laps on a chart to show progress and display near your site location
- Use pipe cleaners to make bracelets/necklaces and give the girls a bead for each lap they complete
- When struggling to accomplish a goal, have the coaches run and donate a lap to a girl that is trying her hardest
- Have each coach assigned to specifically motivate certain girls and find out what works for THEM!
- Give different lap counters every lesson
- Paint a finger nail for every lap run
- Using a washable marker, write a letter on their arm to complete a sentence after 8 laps

Girls on the Run Curricula

Lesson Preparation

Before each session with your team, it is important that you read and understand the lesson, and prepare the materials needed for the lesson.

The primary obstacle that will affect the girls’ program experience is if you do not clearly understand the lesson that you are leading. Be sure to reach out to your council if you have questions regarding the lesson content.

All lessons are designed take 75-90 minutes to complete and have the following structure:
1. Getting on Board and Processing: 10 minutes
2. Stretching and Strengthening: 5 to 10 minutes
3. Warm-up and Processing: 20 minutes
4. Work-out and Processing: The amount of time for this portion builds throughout the season as the girls are enhancing their cardiovascular ability
5. Wrap-up: 10 minutes

Please note: The above time estimates are recommendations. Use your judgment when the team is engaged in an important conversation or experiencing a significant impact with a specific activity. The ultimate goal is a fun and transformative experience for the girls!
Ask them to help with creating a schedule for families to rotate and bring snacks to each session, if applicable.

Encourage all parents to read the Grown Up Guide and support their daughters by asking the questions that are within it.

Remind them of council deadline to receive health and history form and ask them about any particular health, food or allergy issues their daughter may have.

Share your council’s ongoing communication plan (i.e. – weekly e-mail from Council Director or Coach, seasonal reminders, etc.)

The more information you can provide to parents, the better their daughter’s experience at Girls on the Run will be.

Give each girl a construction paper ‘link’ after every lap to create a team chain – each girl makes a difference and plays a part.

Play a game while running where the girls cannot allow any coaches to pass them.

Have extra coaches to take turns running with girls and keep them pumped.

Use sidewalk chalk to keep track of laps – make a large graph.

Bring empty baby food jars for the girls to keep their earned beads every lesson – they watch how their jar grows to contain more and more beads.

Have girls tell coaches something they love about themselves each lap.

Write each girl’s name on an index card and attach it to yarn to make a necklace. The girls can wear their necklaces during the run and collect sticker lap counters on it to keep track of the total laps they complete.

Play music during the lesson – let the girls choose the music.

Chalk motivational messages on the track or parking lot where the girls run.

Have girls chalk one flattering adjective that describes them for each lap.

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Healthy Snacks

Serving healthy snacks to the girls supports the development of lifelong healthy eating habits. We encourage our coaches to provide healthy snacks for the girls and have listed some healthy suggestions below.

Fruits and Vegetables

🌟 Fresh fruits and vegetables (vegetables can be served with dips like hummus, bean dip, or salad dressing)
🌟 Fruit cups or canned fruit (in juice or light syrup)
🌟 Dried fruit and fruit leathers (without added sugars)
🌟 Fruit juice popsicles

Healthy Grains (whole grains that are low in fats and sugars)
Check nutrition labels and choose options that are whole grain and low in sugar, saturated fat and trans fat.

🌟 Granola or cereal bars
🌟 English muffins, pita or tortillas
🌟 Crackers
🌟 Rice cakes
🌟 Popcorn

Low-Fat Dairy Foods
Make sure all dairy foods are low-fat, such as yogurt and light/low-fat cheeses. If providing cheese, consider serving it with other foods like fruit, vegetables or whole grain crackers.

Parent/Guardian Communication

Communication with caregivers is central to a successful experience. All head coaches must contact each girl’s parent or guardian upon receiving the team roster. Families appreciate hearing from coaches, therefore e-mailing or calling them prior to the start of the season is required. Make sure you provide the following important information:

🌟 Welcome them to Girls on the Run and share how pleased and excited you are to have their daughter participating on your team.

🌟 Introduce yourself as the head coach and briefly share relevant information about why you serve as a coach.

🌟 Provide key program information
  - Program start and end dates
  - Session days and times
  - The date of the Girls on the Run 5K
  - Any other important dates for your team

🌟 Tell them where you will meet the girls each day and when and where the girls must be picked up or dropped off (i.e. afterschool program). Remind them that being punctual is important and share council policies around tardiness, carpools and designated caregivers (i.e. - custody issues).

🌟 Give them a list of what each girl needs to bring to practice
  - A water bottle
  - Running shoes
  - Clothing that is comfortable for running and weather appropriate
  - A healthy snack
What to expect with 6th, 7th and 8th grade girls:

- **Variation in behavioral and thinking patterns** – Some girls will demonstrate cognitive development more than others. Girls at this stage of development are beginning to form their own identities, learn about romantic intimacy, strive toward self-reliance and develop a value system. They vary greatly in their levels of maturity.
- **Variation in attention span** – Watch for distracted minds when you are processing topics. Check in with them often. Wandering eyes or excessive talking are signals to move on.
- **Self-focused** – Girls in early adolescence are very focused on themselves. It is very common for this age to feel that they are special or different and that no one understands how they feel. They are concerned about their physical appearance and often believe that everyone is watching them and passing judgment on their appearance and behavior. They are also watching everyone else.
- **Low self-esteem, body image and self-confidence** – Girls in this stage of development are far more likely than boys to experience depression. This depression is often linked to negative feelings about their bodies and appearance. Teen girls are often more dependent on others for approval and support, more sensitive than younger girls to pressure to conform to stereotypical gender roles and more eager to accommodate what they perceive as appropriate feminine behavior.
- **Seek adult attention** – In early adolescence, girls begin to seek the company of adults other than parents who can serve as role models and provide support and guidance. In your position as a coach, your messages of encouragement can greatly enhance self-confidence.

### Nuts and Trail Mix
Serve a small handful along with another snack, such as fruit.

### Healthy Beverages
- **Water** should be the main drink served to children at snack times. Water satisfies thirst without adding calories or sugars (and it is low-cost!)
- **Seltzer or Sparkling Water**
- **Low-Fat and Fat-Free Milk** – Milk is a terrific source of calcium and vitamin D, but it is also a main source of saturated fat in children’s diets. Choose fat-free (skim), low-fat (1%), soy or rice “milks” (fortified with calcium and vitamin D).
- **100% Fruit Juice** – Limit juice to no more than 6 ounces and avoid those which have minimal nutritional value.
Community Service Project Ideas

There is only one session devoted to performing the community service project, therefore, it needs to be relatively simple in order to execute. Ask the girls for ideas and help them determine a plan that is feasible to complete in the allotted time.

Here are some potential ideas to get the girls on the right path:

- Plant flowers on or around the school grounds
- Pick up trash on the school grounds or a nearby park (be sure that the girls wear plastic gloves!)
- Make cheerful cards for senior citizens
- Create some sort of thank you for a community leader -- the girls could decorate cups or pots and plant a flower inside to show their appreciation to someone
- Collect personal care items to put in a kit the girls design to be delivered to a local service organization or homeless shelter
- Plan and practice random acts of kindness – leaving notes on cars, on desks of their classmates, in lockers, etc.
- Conduct a food drive
- Make fun games, arts and crafts kits or coloring books for children in the hospital

- **Openly express affection** – Don’t be surprised if the girls want to hold your hand or braid your hair. This age enjoys showing how much they care for you, though the older girls will be less likely to express physical affection.
- **Variation in reading levels** – Be sure to remind all girls that you are happy to assist with activities that require reading.
- **Gregarious** – This age group loves to giggle and talk about themselves. Have your team determine a simple hand signal that a coach can do to indicate that it is time to stop talking.
- **Constantly growing, learning and developing** – This age is interested in their ability to express their emotions. Provide every opportunity you can for the development of these skills in a healthy manner. If two girls are upset or angry with each other, be the mediator and allow them time to try out their assertive communication skills. Congratulate them in front of the entire group during wrap-up time for their willingness to express their discomfort and seek a win-win solution.
Collect hats, scarves, gloves, shoes for those in need
Have each girl donate a book, game, toy or stuffed animal to bring to a women’s/children’s shelter
Write a letter to elected officials advocating for an issue the group feels passionate about
Write letters and collect fun trinkets or candy to send to those serving in the military
Bake cookies for retirement homes or homeless shelters
Collect classroom papers to recycle
Help shelve books in the school library

If you are making a donation to another organization, have the girls write a letter explaining that they are part of Girls on the Run and articulating why they are donating the items.

Getting to Know Your Girls

Over the course of the season it is your responsibility to get to know your girls. What are their strengths? What is their family situation? What are their fears? Both personal and academic issues can impact a girl’s experience with Girls on the Run. At this age, many girls don’t know how to acknowledge or address life issues and instead may exhibit emotional responses such as withdrawing or acting out. If you aren’t aware of their personal circumstances, it will be challenging to support the girls. Most of the time a simple and straightforward conversation will start to build a relationship. Occasionally, you may have to dig a bit and contact the parents or reach out to teachers that know the girl.

Working with Children

What to expect with 3rd, 4th and 5th grade girls:

★ Energy – This age group is full of energy; you may feel overwhelmed at first. There may be days when you feel like you have barely gotten your point across. You will be pleasantly surprised when you realize that they generally do hear the lesson message, even through the ordered chaos.

★ Cliques – The girls are beginning to identify with their peers and are searching for groups that share their same values. Someone is ‘in’ the group and someone is ‘out’ and this is normal at this age. The key to managing cliques is to share the values of Girls on the Run so all the girls realize that they are part of the group. They each become a ‘Girl on the Run’ and a special bond will begin to develop within the entire team.

★ Limited attention span – This is very common with this age group. Don’t spend too much time with lengthy explanations or down time between activities. They are ready to go!
Practice 5K
The day of the practice 5k should be treated as a momentous occasion. Here are some tips to make it fun and memorable for the girls:

- Invite all parents, staff and teachers from your site to get involved
- Invite high school track teams to come out and cheer
- Recruit volunteers to pass out lap counters
- Make a poster for each girl to cross off her laps
- Create a water stop
- Combine with another Girls on the Run team in your area
- Invite your school mascot or a local community mascot
- Create goody bags for the girls
- Write girls’ names and encouraging messages on the track using sidewalk chalk
- Make a chart in chalk for girls to count their laps
- Make a CD of songs to play while the girls are running and then give it to them as an end of the season gift
- Have a sign party before the 5k where each girl can decorate a sign for herself
- Ask parents to stand in cheer zones and make encouraging signs for the girls
- Give parents who attend noise makers (cow bells, clappers, party horns) to cheer the girls on
- Create a finish line for girls to run through (crepe paper, banners with all the girls’ names on it, etc.). Ask volunteers to hold for each girl as they cross
- Ask principal to announce the practice 5k during daily announcements
- Assign a photographer to take pictures of each girl crossing the finish. Make copies and give to the girls at the end of the season with their energy awards
- Have girls wear their program shirts to school that day to build excitement

All Girls on the Run Coaches will:
- Serve as role models to the girls, both during and outside of sessions
- Arrive early, already dressed in work-out clothes (even if you are not running)
- Honor Girls on the Run core values
- Attentively focus on the girls ensuring no one feels left out
- Notify their council of any conflicts or challenges that arise during the season
- Keep their commitment to attend all sessions and the Girls on the Run 5k event
- Read information distributed by their council and attend required council meetings
- Prepare in advance for each lesson
- Start and end each GOTR session on-time
- Provide feedback, suggestions and tips to council
- Connect with your council’s social media page(s) and share your photos, videos and season updates
- Have fun!

Head Coaches – all of the above, plus the following:
- Engage assistant coaches
- Ensure all required paperwork is completed and returned to your council
- Return all curriculum materials at the end of the season
- Work to build a good relationship with site representatives (i.e. school principal, guidance councilor, facility director, etc.) on behalf of Girls on the Run
- Help to create site sustainability with coaches and location
Role of a Coach

Being a Girls on the Run coach may be one of the most rewarding experiences you will ever have. It can also be challenging because it encompasses many diverse responsibilities.

A coach is not a teacher, although they teach. A coach is not a parent, although they treat the girls like their own. A coach is not a friend, although they befriend the girls. A coach is a combination of all of these roles. You are a role model, friend, confidante and authority figure wrapped into one. While coaching you need to be emotionally accessible, responsible, confident with yourself, and open to sharing your experiences, dreams, fears or insecurities in an age appropriate manner.

Girls on the Run is a safe place for your team of girls to come together and you will be the person that listens openly to every girl without judgment. You are the person who has been in their shoes and can help them make sense of their experiences and develop the skills to make wise decisions in the future. When you are a coach you aren’t a parent, teacher, professional or student - you are a role model, an empathetic confidante and, most importantly, a voice of love and reason.

5k Tips and Etiquette

The Girls on the Run program culminates with all participants completing a celebratory 5k event together. Keep in mind that a Girls on the Run 5k is like no other! It is a joyful and festive occasion where the girls’ perseverance throughout the season is honored, families experience the impact of Girls on the Run first hand and the program is showcased to your community through a party atmosphere. A Girls on the Run 5k is a noncompetitive run where everyone is a winner. There is no brighter moment than when you see the girls’ eyes beaming with accomplishment as they cross the finish line!

★ Rest up: It is important for all participants, running buddies and coaches to get plenty of rest before the event. Often it is difficult for the girls to sleep the evening before because of nervous excitement so try to get plenty of sleep the week leading up to the 5k as well.

★ Hydration: Make sure your girls’ know the importance of drinking plenty of water before the 5k and to take advantage of the water stops while they are running.

★ What to wear: The girls are encouraged to wear their Girls on the Run shirt the day of the 5k. Make sure that your girls’ pay close attention to weather conditions and advise them to wear layers of comfortable clothing, if necessary. Of course, make sure that they wear appropriate running shoes; ideally a pair that they have been wearing throughout the season to prevent blisters from forming!

Feel free to be creative with your team by decorating your program shirts or providing them unique hats, shoelaces, capes or socks. Encourage your team’s family members, friends and running buddies to share their creative spirit as well!
Pre-event festivities: Before the 5k begins is the time for signing shirts, getting hair “happied” (decorated with temporary colored hair spray) at the Happy Hair Station, warming up with teammates and, in general, enjoying that the big day has finally arrived! Please be sure to arrive early so your girls and you can enjoy the excitement together and don’t forget your camera! While Girls on the Run 5k events across the continent vary in size, they are all full of fun!

Go at your own pace: As part of the excitement, it’s very tempting for your girls to run faster than they can maintain to keep up with other runners. It’s okay to start with a burst, but remind them that their experience will be much more pleasant if they run their “happy pace”. You or their running buddy will need to encourage and remind the girls to run at their normal pace. Advise your girls to be aware of other runners and share with them that, just like driving, slower traffic stays to the right and you pass on the left.

Be aware of your surroundings: Advise the girls to pay attention to what is going on around them during the event. Just as in real life, expect the unexpected. Remind the girls not to stop suddenly on the course or at water stations. If they need to stop on the course, tell them to move to the side of the course to avoid being bumped by people behind them. At the water stations, grab water from the table or from the outstretched hand of a volunteer and keep moving. Make sure they know to move to the side of the course if they intend to stop to drink the water. Have the girls’ toss used cups to the side of the course route so runners behind them don’t have to run through an obstacle course of crushed cups.

Vision

We envision a world where every girl knows and activates her limitless potential and is free to boldly pursue her dreams.

Our Core Values

Girls on the Run honors its core values. We strive to:

• Recognize our power and responsibility to be intentional in our decision making
• Embrace our differences and find strength in our connectedness
• Express joy, optimism and gratitude through our words, thoughts and actions
• Nurture our physical, emotional and spiritual health
• Lead with an open heart and assume positive intent
• Stand up for ourselves and others
Mission

We inspire girls to be joyful, healthy and confident using a fun, experience-based curriculum which creatively integrates running.

-reaching the finish line: The majority of girls will see the finish line and find that final burst of energy to dash to it! Make sure they know not to stop suddenly or cut off other runners in the finish line chute and to quickly move through the finish line corral area so other runners can filter in behind them.

Expect to be moved by the experience: A Girls on the Run 5k is an unforgettable and life-affirming event for all involved. Don't be surprised if you are overwhelmed with emotion upon seeing all of the girls’ cross the finish line. Acknowledge your feelings, embrace them and let them fuel your spirit until your next season as a Girls on the Run coach begins!
Inspiration

We hear all the time from our coaches that Girls on the Run has as great of an impact on their lives as it does on the girls’ lives. Your season is sure to be full of laughter, hugs, fun and maybe even a few tears. Embrace this wonderful experience and all that you gain from it.

We hope this playbook has provided you with a deeper understanding of Girls on the Run and our mission. We have one final coach tip that is the best advice that we can give to you - be yourself! You are confident, empowered, joyful, open-hearted and compassionate. Your team will love you just as you are. Be silly, dance, laugh and most importantly have fun!

“My entire outlook has changed (as a coach). I have matured as a teacher in ways that I did not think were possible. My time with the girls has improved my communication skills, my patience and also my management skills.”

“I actually ran! I have never been a runner, but the girls encouraged me to try just like they did!”

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About this Guide

The start of a Girls on the Run season always brings to our coaches a wide array of thoughts and emotions. Whether you are a new or returning coach, you are undoubtedly feeling excited to meet your team, proud to be making a difference in your community and a bit overwhelmed all at the same time.

Through your local council, you have attended coach training, completed all the necessary paperwork and gained a better understanding of the mission, learning goals and program structure of Girls on the Run. Your council has provided you with a copy of the curriculum, your program supplies and team roster. And yet, with all of this behind you, you may still be feeling a sense of the unknown or nervous anticipation about what you are about to experience.

This playbook provides suggestions and ideas shared by experienced Girls on the Run coaches to ensure that you and your team have a fun and enriching experience. Please note that each team of girls is unique and ideas that have worked well with some may be reworked for your team. You may have a talkative group, a group of leaders that have previously participated in the program or a group of first timers eager to learn, but unsure of what is going on. As you and your team get to know one another, this playbook is designed to guide you through the common questions and challenges that may arise throughout the season.

Please remember that if you ever need support from Girls on the Run, we are always available for you.

Have a great season!

“I am always inspired by the strength and courage of the girls on my team.”

“The girls just helped remind me that anything is possible. There were times when I felt as though I wasn’t doing enough or couldn’t finish and they inspired me. It helped me follow my own advice I was giving them.”

“This program not only helps the girls gain confidence in themselves, but it has made such a difference in my life. The determination that I see in the girls and the other coaches is an inspiration to me.”

“I was nervous to coach because I’m not a runner, but I quickly learned that I didn’t have to be. The girls loved when I cheered them on and when we were able to have one-on-one time together walking some laps.”

Girls on the Run wants to continue to support you in being the best coach you can be. Be sure to check out our online coach resources at http://www.girlsontherun.org/coach.
Welcome to Girls on the Run!

At the heart of Girls on the Run® are amazing volunteers. Your dedication and desire to positively impact the lives of the girls you are coaching is so appreciated! We thank you for giving your time and energy to serve as a coach and to empower your team to recognize and celebrate the importance of leading a healthy and confident life.

The mission of Girls on the Run is to inspire girls to be joyful, healthy and confident using a fun, experience-based curriculum which creatively integrates running. Over the next few months, with you as a role model, your girls will learn what it means to be strong, confident and connected, and by the conclusion of the program, they will be physically and emotionally prepared to participate in a 5k run with their teammates.

At Girls on the Run, however, the finish line is just the beginning, as our ultimate goal is to provide the girls with tools and resources that develop their ability to think critically – a skill that will serve them well for a lifetime.

Thank you for your commitment to impacting the lives of the girls in your community. Get ready for your life to be changed as well!

Many thanks to all the councils who contributed to the development of this playbook.