Girls Support Group

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Author Note

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Abstract

The purpose of this capstone project was to shine light onto the current crises girls in East Salinas are facing. The project addressed the hardships girls are facing by not having someone they feel comfortable talking to. The project highlighted and promoted coping skills for the hardships they go through everyday such as growing up in low-income families, high violence rates and the lack of resources available to them. There are many consequences that affect the girl’s mentality. Some of these consequences include isolation, behavioral issues and lack of empowerment. The capstone project provided a Girls Support Group at Taylor Farms: Center for Learning. This group discussed important concepts that are relevant to the girls such as bullying, healthy relationships, self-love and many more. The expected outcomes were to create a safe and comfortable environment for the girls to share their stories. Overall, 100% of the girls felt safe in group. The findings and recommendations were Girls Group can be effective if given more resources to provide more hands-on activities for the girls.

*Keywords: Girls group, education, counseling*
Agency & Communities Served

The Future Citizens Foundation is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) agency. The agency is located in East Salinas, California where they serve ages seven to twenty-two. The Future Citizens Foundation mission “is to offer young people of Monterey County opportunities for a better future” (Future Citizens Foundation, 2018). The Future Citizen Foundation offers three programs, which are The Center for Learning, The First Tee and Pay It Forward. Each program offers a variety of services. To receive these services parents or guardians can walk into the agency and sign up their child. “The Center for Learning is outfitted with the latest technology that is designed for stimulated learning” (Future Citizens Foundation, 2018). The Center for Learning focuses on three pillars; these pillars are Academia, Science Technology Engineering Arts Mathematics, and Life Exploration and Preparation. “The focus of The First Tee is to give young people of all backgrounds an opportunity to develop, through golf and character education, life-enhancing values, and sportsmanship” (Future Citizens Foundation, 2018). A few of the life-enhancing values that The First Tee focuses on are honesty, integrity and respect. Pay It Forward is a scholarship and mentoring program provided to first generation students who will be attending California State University, Monterey Bay for four years. The girls support group will be located primarily at The Center for Learning for grades fourth and higher.

The community that is served is East Salinas, California, which is the home of the Alisal School District. The Alisal School District is where many farm working families are located, and many do not have high education making it hard to help their children with homework or even understand the concepts that they learn at school. According to the United States Census (2018), 59.9% of 25 years old and up have a high school diploma and 12.9% 25 years old and up have a
bachelor’s degree or higher. The Alisal School District is in a direct partnership with the Center for Learning. This partnership allows the staff at the Center for Learning to make sure that the students are well on track by having access to their grades and homework assignments. The population served is predominantly Hispanic or Latino. According to the U.S Census Quick Facts (2018), 77.2% identify as Hispanic and 56.2% identify as White only. The Center for Learning focuses on grades second to fifth grade. As they do accept middle school, they are lacking with middle school participation. “In 2017, the total number of students served was 541” (Future Citizens Foundation, 2018). The agency strives to continue the learning of the students through activities.

**Problem Description**

Youth girls are going through hardships that are often overlooked. The youth girls at the Center for Learning are dealing with issues at home and at school. These issues include friendship troubles, self-esteem and bullying. Many do not have someone they feel comfortable enough with to share their stories. They hold in their emotions hoping to just forget them. “Fourteen percent of local elementary school kids reported being victims of bullying, compared with twelve percent for the state” (Monterey County Weekly, 2015). Being a victim of bullying can affect someone especially young girls because they are at a vulnerable state and just want to fit in.

**Contributing Factors**

A contributing factor to young girls feeling that their hardships are being overlooked is low-income families. This meaning that there are other issues that arise in the family, which makes other issues seem not as big. For example, if a family is struggling with how they are
going to pay rent for the month they are not going to see their daughter being upset about school issues as important. According to the United States Census (2018), there are 17.2% of people living in poverty in Salinas compared to 13.3% in California. Salinas has a high poverty rate and it affects the wellbeing of the student’s especially young girls. “Stress from housing conditions, poor nutrition, and other factors can affect a child’s physical and cognitive development” (Operation Warm, 2019). Stress can lead to depression and many other mental health concerns. The parents of these young girls are also under stress, which can add on to the girls not having anyone to talk to. According to California Dashboard (2018), in the Alisal School District there are 88.6% socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

Another contributing factor is the high violence rate in Salinas. According to VICE News (2016), Salinas encountered its highest number of gun violence in history with 103 shooting victims, 31 of them were killed and almost half of them were 24 years old or younger. A high violence rate creates trauma and that can take a toll on the youth by making them feel scared or helpless. “It can create and build upon norms of violence as an acceptable form of behavior and place youth at a greater risk for perpetrating or being victimized by further violence” (Cultivating Peace in Salinas, 2001). For example, a girl may become accustomed to gun shoots and no longer fear them.

Lastly, another contributing factor is the lack of resources in Salinas. Most of the resources are aimed for high school girls such as Girls Inc. Many of the resources are recreational services and do not focus on the mental and emotional states of younger girls such as the YMCA and The Boys and Girls club. The lack of resources does not give these young girls opportunities to meet new people or meet someone they can confide in. Not having enough
resources makes these girls face their problems by themselves and leads them having to teach themselves about life. Lack of resources also has to do with culture. Growing up Hispanic there are many subjects that are just not talked about. These girls are curious to find out about these subjects but do not feel comfortable discussing it with their parents. Having parents who work long hours and then come home tired is also tough on these girls because they are not able to talk to their parents about their day and if they had any problems.

**Consequences**

A consequence that occurs is isolation. Since these girls do not have anyone to support them, they distance themselves trying to deal with their issues their own way. Isolation can lead to many other problems such as anxiety. According to Centers for Disease (2019), “7.1% of children aged 3-17 years have been diagnosed with anxiety”. This leads to isolation because the girls get overwhelmed when they are in a crowd and do not know how to act with others. In an interview with one of the young girls at the Center for Learning, she mentioned that she isolates herself so that she does not have to explain to others what she is going through. “3.2% of children aged 3-17 years have diagnosed depression” (Data and Statistics on Children's Mental Health | CDC, 2019). These girls find it easier to ignore the problem. There is only so much that a person can hold in, sooner or later these girls are going to need to talk to someone.

Another consequence is behavioral issues. Due to these girls not having a place where they feel safe, they may begin to have behavioral issues. This can mean acting out for attention. According to California Dashboard (2018), in the Alisal School District 1.5% of Hispanic and socioeconomically disadvantaged students were suspended. Although the number may seem low there is still a reason to why these students are being suspended. “7.4% of children aged 3-17
years have a diagnosed behavior problem” (Data and Statistics on Children's Mental Health | CDC, 2019). Due to Salinas being a disadvantaged city many students may have undiagnosed behavior problems. Acting out causes these girls to be in the spotlight and feel wanted. It is a cry for help, and they are just waiting for someone to notice. The behavioral issues can start with talking back and being disrespectful, but it can lead too much more.

Lastly, another consequence is lack of empowerment. This means that these girls are struggling with figuring out their role. These girls do not have a strong sense of self-esteem and positive self-image due to not having a strong role model in their life. Lack of empowerment leads to these girls feeling they are not good enough and that can lead to mental health problems. Making sure that these girls know that they are important will help them to continue to strive even if they feel the odds are against them. According to Girls’ Health in Girls: Hands: A Girls’ Health Action Research Project in Monterey County (2009), 35% girls in the Monterey county appeared to be unable to find support or services in body image.

**Capstone Project**

The capstone project provided a Girls Support Group. Girls Support Group addressed the problem because it created a space for the girls to feel comfortable and confident talking about themselves and the issues they encountered growing up. It allowed them to have a space devoted to their needs and have someone they trust and will listen to them. The group also helped them learn about positive self-respect for themselves. The support group was measured by participation survey and questionnaires at the end of each session.

**Problem Model**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contributing Factors</th>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low-income families</td>
<td>Youth girls are going through hardships that often are overlooked.</td>
<td>Isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td></td>
<td>Behavioral issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack or resources</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of empowerment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Project Purpose**

The Girls Support Group addressed the consequences of behavioral issues that the girls are having at school and at home. The girls support group addressed these issues because it allowed the girls to express themselves and have someone to listen to them tell their story. This decreased their behavioral issues because they felt they had someone they can trust and is genuinely interested in their ongoing issues. They will not act out as a cry for attention because they received attention in the girls support group by the other girls and the lead intern. The girls needed to have a place where they feel safe and comfortable sharing.

**Project Justification**

The Girls Support Group encouraged grades fourth and higher to feel more empowered about themselves through the activities. Girls Inc. focuses on activities to stimulate healthy living, academic enrichment, and life skills instruction. Girls Inc. has helped over thousands of girls nationwide figure out their true potential while reminding them they matter. Girls Inc. is an example of how young girls need mentors and encouragement to put their best foot forward even though the circumstances are difficult. Girl Scouts has a similar approach. Girl Scouts core values are to help young girls develop a strong sense of self, form and maintain healthy relationships and learn from setbacks. These two organizations are evidence based that young
girls can have a positive change with the right support and resources that the Girls Support Group provided.

Project Implementation

The agency noticed a negative atmosphere within a few of the fourth and higher grade girls due to issues at home and school. The agency had been wanting to implement a Girls Support Group but did not have someone who was willing to take on the responsibility. It was important to make sure that there are fourth and higher grade girls who were interested in participating in the group and were willing to be open to benefit from the group. To do this, a survey was distributed to hear the girl’s opinions and what outcomes they expected from the group. The group met every Thursday. The program discussed meaningful topics such as peer pressure, self-esteem, coping mechanisms and many other relatable topics that these girls felt they had no one to talk about these issues with. To implement this program, lesson plans were developed to have topics prepared for each session. Resources that were needed to implement the program were materials for each activity. A discussion with the mentor overseeing the program had to take place to discuss finances and resources to receive materials. A variety of steps such as lesson plans, recording of materials needed, and surveys had to take place in order to have a reasonable timeframe for implementation. A detailed implementation plan and timeline can be seen in the Scope of Work in Appendix A.

Assessment Plan

To measure effectiveness, there were biweekly check in with the girls to see how they felt the group was working. To determine the benefits of the program, the girls were asked to bring behavioral reports from school in the beginning and the end of the project to see the changes, if
any. The girls were also given a five-question survey at the end of each session to measure if the group was working in the areas of feeling comfortable and safe in group.

**Expected Outcomes**

The Girls Support Group will allow grades fourth and higher to feel more comfortable sharing their stories. The group will encourage young girls to immerse and feel confident in talking for themselves and learn about important concepts. The project will create a safe space for the young girls to be themselves and create a bond with each other. This will allow them to rely on one another to trust and build friendships with girls who face the same issues they do so they do not feel alone.

**Project Outcomes**

The activities that were conducted for Girls Support Group were a total of ten themes related to the girls. These themes consisted of self-esteem, inner peace, gossip, self-love, peer pressure, sending kindness, back to school success, career exploration, bullying and healthy relationships. The overall implementation process was to first build a trusting relationship with the participants. Once they were able to build the relationship, the agency began to mention to the girls how they felt about a girls group. Many of the girls showed interest and thus began the group. The girls group started with a focus group to let the girls get a feel for how the group would work. For the group to get started, curriculum had to be created that would be relevant to the girls participating. The expected project outcomes were for the girls to learn about important life concepts as well as feel confident with each other and feel safe in group to share their stories.

In order to measure if Girls Group was effective, the girls were given a five-question survey after each session. The questions consisted of: If they were happy in girls group, did they
feel safe in group, did they feel comfortable sharing in group, Do they trust the other girls in group, and If they are learning in group. The questions were set up with the choices strongly disagree, disagree, agree and strongly agree.

**Project Results**

After the first session, the survey was handed to the girls anonymously. As seen in figure 1, 100% of the girls strongly agree that they felt happy after the session was concluded. 100% of the girls also strongly agreed that they felt safe in group meaning it was a space for them to be themselves. On the other hand, 71% strongly agreed that they felt comfortable sharing in group while 29% agreed that they felt comfortable. In the beginning the girls did not quite know each other so they did not trust each other right away. 57% of the girls strongly agreed that they trusted each other while 29% agreed. 14% disagreed that the trust was not there. 71% of the girls strongly agreed that they are learning in group. 14% agreed and 14% disagreed about learning in group. There was an even split between the girls about whether they are learning in group.

In session 2, the survey was also anonymous so there would be no bias in the answers. As seen in figure 2, the girl’s still 100% strongly agreed that they felt happy in group. There was a slight change in the category of feeling safe compared to figure 1. In figure 2, 90% of the girls strongly agreed to feeling safe in group while
10% agreed that they felt safe in group. Since girls group was based on voluntary attendance there were sessions were there were a couple of new girls. This took some time for the girls to get use to because the girls who attended regularly began to develop a bond. 70% of the girls strongly agreed that they felt comfortable sharing in group and 20% agreed. 10% of the girls disagreed that they did not feel comfortable sharing. 70% of the girls strongly agreed that they trusted the girl’s in group and 30% agreed. In this session the girls felt that they learned more. 90% strongly agreed and 10% agreed in learning. As mentioned above, the categories of trust and feeling comfortable slightly changed due to new girls joining the group. In order to make sure that the girls felt safe and comfortable in group, each session was started with icebreakers and check-ins. The girls were asked how their day/week had been as well as how they are feeling. This allowed the girls to open up about their feelings and thus began to trust each other due to hearing each other’s stories.

In session 3, the data shifted in a positive manner. The girls continued to 100% strongly agree that they felt happy after girls group as well as 100% strongly agreed that they felt safe in group. 86% of the girls strongly agreed that they felt comfortable sharing and 14% strongly disagreed. The girls continued to build their trust with each other. 86% strongly agreed that they trusted each other and 14% agreed. Overall, the girls 100% strongly agreed that they learned in girls group.
Overall, the girls group did achieve minor expected outcomes. Compared to the first set of data to the last set the girls did learn about important concepts that related to their experiences in life. The girls also felt safe in group meaning that girls group did create a safe atmosphere for the girls to share their stories and experiences with one another.

**Conclusion & Recommendations**

Based on the results, Girls Group was effective. Compared from the first session data to the last session data, the girls strongly agreed and agreed to most of the questions on the five-question survey. At the end of the sessions 100% of the girls learned and felt safe in group. The girls that attended regularly really enjoyed the atmosphere and the curriculum. The researched showed that Girls Group can in fact continue effectively. The girls that attended regularly enjoyed having a space devoted to them to freely discuss their days and hardships. To improve Girls Group, a few recommendations that should be considered is having an employee support the coach/intern in charge of girls group to discuss themes and activities prior to facilitating. Also having more availability to materials for each session would have benefited the sessions to make them more hands on and engaging for the girls. Another recommendation to consider is ensuring girls who do not attend regularly feel comfortable and feel they are part of Girls Group. Offering Girls Group twice a week may be beneficial for the girls so that they could learn more concepts as well as get to know each other on a more sensitive basis.
References:

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k-for-violence-prevention

## Scope of Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Deliverables</th>
<th>Timeline/Deadlines</th>
<th>Supporting Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Build relationships with the participants</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>September 2018</td>
<td>Gabriela Lopez Chavez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>Survey to assess needs</td>
<td>Last week of January</td>
<td>Gabriela Lopez Chavez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop Curriculum</td>
<td>Hard copy of curriculum</td>
<td>On going</td>
<td>Gabriela Lopez Chavez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage participants to sign up</td>
<td>List of girls for group</td>
<td>First week of February</td>
<td>Gabriela Lopez Chavez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gather supplies/ Materials</td>
<td>Materials ready for each meeting</td>
<td>Tuesdays each week</td>
<td>Gabriela Lopez Chavez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research themes for group</td>
<td>List of themes for each session</td>
<td>On going</td>
<td>Gabriela Lopez Chavez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Surveys at the end of each session</td>
<td>Gather data before and after to see the effectiveness of the sessions</td>
<td>On going</td>
<td>Gabriela Lopez Chavez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permission slips</td>
<td>Permission slips on file for participants</td>
<td>February</td>
<td>Gabriela Lopez Chavez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum: Self-esteem</td>
<td>Self esteem mad lib/made journals</td>
<td>March 7</td>
<td>Gabriela Lopez Chavez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum: Inner Peace</td>
<td>Made peace rocks</td>
<td>March 14</td>
<td>Gabriela Lopez Chavez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum: Gossip</td>
<td>Did the human pretzel ice breaker and played telephone to address how gossip spreads</td>
<td>April 4</td>
<td>Gabriela Lopez Chavez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum: Self-love</td>
<td>Filled out worksheets of why they love themselves then did the name game with positive affirmations and took their picture next to their name with a polaroid</td>
<td>April 11</td>
<td>Gabriela Lopez Chavez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum: Peer Pressure</td>
<td>Peer pressure scenarios on construction paper</td>
<td>April 25</td>
<td>Gabriela Lopez Chavez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum: Sending Kindness</td>
<td>Making bracelets for one another and one for themselves</td>
<td>May 2</td>
<td>Gabriela Lopez Chavez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum: Back to school</td>
<td>Free calendars and supplies for academic success</td>
<td>August 29</td>
<td>Gabriela Lopez Chavez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum: Career Exploration</td>
<td>Vision boards for the future</td>
<td>September 12</td>
<td>Gabriela Lopez Chavez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum: Bullying</td>
<td>Activities about anti-bullying</td>
<td>September 19</td>
<td>Gabriela Lopez Chavez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum: Healthy relationships</td>
<td>Activities about understanding healthy relationships</td>
<td>September 26</td>
<td>Gabriela Lopez Chavez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survival Kit for next cohort</td>
<td>Book of tips from the girls to other girls who will be in 4th and 5th grade</td>
<td>October 3 and October 10</td>
<td>Gabriela Lopez Chavez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Girls Group Curriculum</td>
<td>Digital/hard copy of curriculum</td>
<td>Late November</td>
<td>Gabriela Lopez Chavez</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Alexa Alvarez and I am an intern at the Center for Learning. On Thursdays, I lead an activity called Girls Group and we talk about many different themes. For example we talked about sending kindness to ourselves and each other, how to face bullying and planning for the future. If you wish to not have your daughter participate, please mark the box and sign. Thank you.

- I wish to not have _______________ participate
  (parent name)

X_____________________________
  (parent/guardian signature)

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Estimado Padre o Guardián,

Mi nombre es Alexa Alvarez y soy una interna en el Center for Learning. Los jueves yo enseño una actividad que se llama Girls Group y hablamos de diferentes temas por ejemplo: amabilidad, como enfrentar el bullying y planeación para el futuro. Si no desea que su hija participe por favor marque la caja y firme. Muchas Gracias.

- No deseo que mi hija _______________ participe
  (nombre de hija)

X_____________________________
  (firma de padre o guardián)

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Today in girls group I feel:

😊 😐 😞

I feel safe in girls group

1 Not safe 2 3 4 5 Very safe

I feel comfortable sharing in girls group

1 Not comfortable 2 3 4 5 Very comfortable

I trust the girls in girls group

1 Not trust 2 3 4 5 Trust

I am learning in girls group

1 Not learning 2 3 4 5 Learning
# Session 1: Promoting Self Esteem

**Goals:** Get to know each other
- Get to know each other
- Establish group rules and purpose
- Understanding Confidentiality
- Group rules

**Materials Needed:**
- Paper to make journals
- Hole puncher
- Ribbon
- Copies of confidentiality agreement
- Whiteboard markers for writing group rules/agreements
- Copies of self esteem MadLib
- Pencils

**Activity & Discussion:**
Define self-esteem
- Sources of self-esteem
- Self-esteem MadLib

**Closing:**
Reflect on what self-esteem means to each participant

[Future Citizens Foundation](https://drive.google.com/drive/a/1/s/08318a45480f0d7b3w2e24edc122f74)

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# Session 2: Inner Peace

**Goals:** Find inner peace in situations
- Review confidentiality
- Review last session
- Reminder about confidentiality
- Review group rules/agreements

**Materials Needed:**
- Set up space for the participants to sit together
- Books to decorate
- Tokens
- Hand out with three questions about peace

**Activity:**
Talk about what brings you peace

**Activity & Discussion:**
Participants are given three rocks to follow with peace by placing them in a vase and thinking about a time when they felt peace. Participants will then decorate their rocks and a way that will bring them peace. Participants are encouraged to carry their rocks with them and read them when they begin to feel uneasy.

**Questions:**
1. When do you ask for help?
2. When are you at peace?
3. When do you feel confident?
4. When do you feel happy?

**Closing:**
Reflect on ways to feel peaceful and remind participants they matter

[Peace Rocks worksheet](https://www.educator.com/res/worksheets/17688/peace_rocks.pdf)

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# Session 3: Gossip

**Goals:** Ways to avoid and handle gossip
- Review confidentiality
- Review last session
- Reminder about confidentiality
- Review group rules/agreements

**Materials Needed:**
- Pencils
- Chalk or circle

**Activity & Discussion:**
- Telephone game: each participant will have an opportunity to begin the game and see how twisted words can get after 10 passes through many people.

**Closing:**
Reflect on how gossip spreads and ways to not participate in gossip

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# Session 4: Self-Love

**Goals:** Each participant to find ways to love themselves
- Review confidentiality
- Review last session
- Reminder about confidentiality
- Review group rules/agreements

**Materials Needed:**
- Pencils
- Self-love worksheet
- Polaroid camera
- Whiteboard markers

**Activity & Discussion:**
- Fill in self-love tree
- Participants will read them out loud
- One participant will write her name vertically on the whiteboard (participants will take turns)
- Each participant will help the participant at the whiteboard come up with positive affirmations with each letter of her name
- Take photos with polaroid

**Closing:**
Reflect on self-love and the importance to love yourself
Session 9: Bullying

**Goals:** Discuss the effects of bullying

**Objectives:**
- Review Confidentiality
- Review last session
- Reflect on what was learned
- Discuss group rules/agreements

**Materials Needed:**
- pencils
- transparencies
- toothbrush
- coloring/paints
- large poster for anti-bullying pledge

**Activity:**
Ask your week to go:

- Discuss what bullying is
- How can we stop bullying
- What to do if you’re bullied
- Discuss how to stand up for others

**Activity & Discussion:**
- Discuss how the toothbrush represents the pain bullying has caused and how we can’t put it back into the tube. We can’t remove the pain caused by words or doing hurtful things to others.
- Remind the girls to BE KIND and STAND UP FOR OTHERS

**Closing:**
- Have the girls throw their hand in paint and sign an anti-bullying pledge (if and only if they agree to it)
- "I will not use my hands for bullying or my words for hurting others. I will use them only for helping.

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Survival tips for next cohort

**Goals:** Reflect on what the girls have learned

**Objectives:**
- Discuss Confidentiality
- Discuss group rules/agreements
- Discuss what girls group will be about

**Materials Needed:**
- pencils/pens
- markers
- scrapbook materials (cut/trim letters, stick on flowers)
- notepads/journals

**Activity & Discussion:**
- List the 10 themes from girls group on whiteboard
- Have the girls pick themes and explain in their own words what they mean to them
- In the journals have the girls write tips/advice about the themes for future girls

**Closing:**
- Have the girls share and explain their journals and thank the girls for participating in girls group.