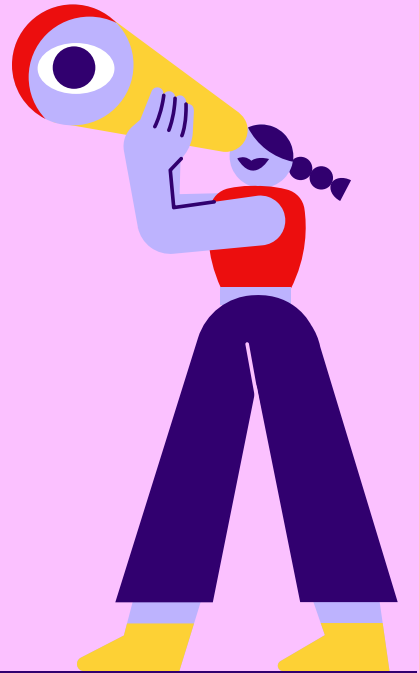




# Welcome To The “Challenge Stereotypes” Session



Girls grow up surrounded by all kinds of stereotypes — overly simplified beliefs about an entire group — that send the message that *all* girls should look or act a certain way. For example, people often focus on girls’ appearances, such as how they style their hair or what they choose to wear. We also tend to assume that boys are better natural leaders than girls. Girls take in these and other harmful messages from a young age, and they influence how they see themselves. By middle school, girls have already internalized many of these unfair messages, such as how they look is more important than what they’re capable of and that traits like assertiveness are better received if you’re a boy.

The good news is that parents and caregivers like you have the power to shift the narrative and empower girls to be all that they can be. To help you start to raise girls’ awareness of stereotypes in their day-to-day lives and shift their thinking about gender roles, we’re sharing this interactive session you can do with girls.

In about an hour, you can take a small group of girls through a series of activities and discussions that go deeper on how to recognize, reframe, and push back against stereotypes about what girls can and can’t do.

If you get stuck along the way, please reach out to our team at [support@leaninggirls.org](mailto:support@leaninggirls.org).



# CHALLENGE STEREOTYPES

## Session Guide

## SESSION GOALS

Teens can recognize limiting stereotypes about girls and challenge stereotypes by countering them with accurate self-descriptions.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Stereotypes are biased assumptions about what girls are like (or should be like).
- Girls can experience different stereotypes depending on their unique mix of identities.
- We can't make stereotypes go away — but we can reduce their power by countering them with accurate information.

## SESSION AT A GLANCE

**Ignite (“Stereotype Stomp”):** The facilitator reads a list of traits, and teens stomp when they hear a trait that supposedly describes girls.

15 min

**Unpacking Stereotypes:** The facilitator leads a discussion on key concepts related to stereotypes.

20 min

**Stereotype Circle:** Teens practice pushing back against both negative and “positive” stereotypes.

15 min

**Closing and One Action**

5 min

## SESSION OVERVIEW

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### Gather materials:

- Participant handout: Print out a handout for each member in your group
  - Pens or pencils (one for each teen)
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### Room setup:

- Ensure teens have space to complete an individual writing activity.
  - Ensure teens have space to stand in a circle for the Stereotype Circle activity.
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### Get ready to facilitate:

- Familiarize yourself with the session materials and instructions.
  - Write in your responses to the "facilitator example" prompts in the session instructions so you're prepared to share examples with the group as needed.
  - Write in your planned start and end times for each part of the session.
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## IGNITE: STEREOTYPE STOMP

Estimated time: 15 minutes / Start time: \_\_\_\_\_ End time: \_\_\_\_\_

**Goals:** Teens practice recognizing stereotypes and begin to understand that stereotypes are limiting assumptions.

**At a glance:** The facilitator reads a list of phrases. For Round One, teens stomp when they hear a phrase that sounds like a stereotype (an overly simplified belief about a group or category). For Round Two, teens stomp when they hear a stereotype about girls.

1. Introduce the definition of stereotypes and give the group directions for the Stereotype Stomp.

**SAMPLE SCRIPT**

*Today we're going to explore stereotypes about girls. We'll start by getting the hang of what is and isn't a stereotype. Stereotypes are overly simplified beliefs about an entire group — for example, what they're good or bad at, or what they are or aren't interested in. Stereotypes suggest that everyone in a group is alike, when really every individual has unique interests and talents. When you hear a word or phrase that sounds like an overly simplified belief about an entire group, I want you to stomp.*

2. For Round One, read the general stereotypes below. Move through the list quickly, without discussing items. Teens should stomp when they believe a statement is a stereotype. If you're short on time, you can omit some of the prompts.

### Prompts: general stereotypes

- All boys like blue.
- Big cities are dangerous.
- All Americans like hot dogs and french fries.
- My friend Taylor likes hot dogs and french fries.
- Boomers are bad at technology.
- My uncle Darrel is bad at technology.
- Teenagers are irresponsible.
- All dogs are friendly.
- My neighbor's dog is friendly.
- School principals are mean.
- People in California surf all day.

CONTINUE ACTIVITY ON THE NEXT PAGE ►

### 3. Give directions for identifying stereotypes about girls.

#### SAMPLE SCRIPT

*Now we're going to play again to practice recognizing stereotypes about girls. This isn't about what you think is true about girls or about what **you** are like as an individual. It's about recognizing common assumptions that people make or ideas about girls you see in TV shows or on social media.*

*For example, if I said, "Girls like playing with dolls," you would stomp, because a lot of people assume all girls like playing with dolls (although plenty of girls don't).*

*I also want to point out that if some of these stereotypes do fit you, that is totally fine! It's great to play with dolls or trucks or both. It's just not great when people expect you to fit into their stereotypes about you.*

### 4. For Round Two, read the stereotypes about girls below, moving through the list quickly. If you're short on time, you can omit some of the prompts.



There are no right or wrong answers in this activity! Girls experience different stereotypes depending on their mix of identities. Be sure to validate their experiences, even if some of their responses surprise you.

#### Prompts: stereotypes about girls

- All girls like the color pink.
- My sister likes the color pink.
- All girls are gossipy.
- My aunt is gossipy.
- Girls should be helpful.
- Girls should be sweet.
- Girls aren't good at sports.
- Girls are good at babysitting.
- Girls are too emotional.
- My mom loves shopping.
- Girls are bad at math.
- Girls like to wear dresses.
- Girls should be pretty.

CONTINUE ACTIVITY ON THE NEXT PAGE ►

## 5. Ask the group to share additional examples of stereotypes.



If you're short on time, skip the optional question.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

- *Does anyone want to share another example of a stereotype about girls?*

### OPTIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTION

(For advanced groups)

- *Do you think these stereotypes about girls benefit anyone?*

Draw out ideas like:

- When people assume girls aren't as capable as boys, boys benefit.
- When people expect girls to be helpful and generous, other people benefit.
- When people assume girls should look a certain way, fashion and beauty companies benefit.

## UNPACKING STEREOTYPES

Estimated time: 20 minutes / Start time: \_\_\_\_\_ End time: \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal:** Teens understand that stereotypes are harmful, even when they sound positive on the surface, and can affect how girls are seen as leaders.

**At a glance:** The facilitator explains key concepts related to stereotypes, inviting teens to reflect and add their perspective through discussion questions.

1. Share that stereotypes can vary across communities and can change over time.

**SAMPLE SCRIPT**

*Some stereotypes are assumptions about pretty much all girls. Others depend more on your community, culture, or identity. It's possible that some of the stereotypes about girls we talk about in this session won't match your experience. That's normal! But one way or another, stereotypes affect us all.*

*It's also important to know that stereotypes change over time. For example, in the past, many women wore heavy white makeup to achieve the look of fashionably pale skin. Nowadays, pale skin is out of fashion, and many women get fake tans and wear heavy bronzer to achieve the look of darker skin. In both cases, the stereotype was that women should be "pretty," but the standard for "pretty" changed dramatically.*

2. Share that stereotypes are harmful even when they sound positive on the surface.

**SAMPLE SCRIPT**

*Some stereotypes are obviously negative, like when people assume girls are bad at math. But other stereotypes sound like compliments — for example, when people assume girls are helpful and generous. To be clear, those are good things to be! But there's a harmful message in those stereotypes, which is that all girls should always be helpful and generous. That can mean girls get called "selfish" or "stubborn" when they say no or look out for themselves.*

CONTINUE ACTIVITY ON THE NEXT PAGE ►



3. Read from a list of “positive” stereotypes and invite teens to raise their hands if they’ve ever been told they should fit that stereotype.



Feel free to select the “positive” stereotypes from the list below that will resonate most with your group or add your own examples.

**SAMPLE SCRIPT**

*Raise your hand if you’ve ever been told that you should be:*

- *Helpful*
- *Sweet*
- *Responsible*
- *Respectful*
- *Quiet*
- *Strong*
- *Good at babysitting*
- *Good at helping your classmates*
- *Good at cooking and cleaning*
- *Interested in math and science*


4. Draw out the stereotypes that generated the biggest reactions from your group and invite one or two teens to share how they’re limiting.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION**


- *What’s the harmful message in that stereotype? How does it limit what girls are “supposed” to do or be like?*

CONTINUE ACTIVITY ON THE NEXT PAGE 

5. Share that expectations of girls can shift and conflict depending on the situation and ask teens to identify conflicting expectations they have experienced.

 If time is tight, you can skip this topic and move to number six.

**SAMPLE SCRIPT** *To make this even more confusing, people can face different expectations about who they ought to be depending on where they are or who they're with. For example, maybe you have family members who believe women are happiest as homemakers, but teachers who encourage you to have a career.*

 Feel free to select the “positive” stereotypes from the list below that will resonate most with your group or add your own examples.

*Raise your hand if people expect you to be:*

- *Obedient and respectful at home, but adventurous and outspoken with peers*
- *Quiet and cooperative in the classroom, but aggressive in sports*
- *Sensitive to other people's emotions, but emotionally controlled when you're sad or mad*
- *Willing to put other people's needs first, without asking others to take your needs into consideration*
- *Soft-spoken and submissive when around boys, but outspoken and assertive when around girls*
- *Serious and studious at school, but playful and carefree outside of class*
- *Modestly dressed and conservative to meet family expectations, but fashionable to meet teens' expectations*
- *Good at cooking and cleaning at home, but focused on having a career outside of the home*

**DISCUSSION QUESTION**

- *How do these conflicting expectations affect you?*

CONTINUE ACTIVITY ON THE NEXT PAGE 

## 6. Share how stereotypes affect the way girls are seen as leaders.

**SAMPLE SCRIPT**

*A big part of the reason we're talking about stereotypes today is because stereotypes often make it harder for people to see girls as leaders.*

*When girls lead by taking charge, that contradicts the stereotype that most girls are supposed to be quiet and obedient — so they get bad reactions, like people calling them “mean” or “bossy.” On the other hand, when girls lead by being kind and cooperative, that’s not seen as “real” leadership, because leaders are stereotyped as being forceful and in charge.*

*Obviously, none of these stereotypes are true, so in a few minutes we’re going to practice pushing back against them.*

## 7. Close by emphasizing that stereotypes hurt everyone — not just girls.

**SAMPLE SCRIPT**

*Before we move on, I want to point out that stereotypes don’t only hurt girls. For example, boys are stereotyped as being brave and tough, which means they’re more likely to be teased for getting scared or needing help. Stereotypes also hurt nonbinary people, people of different races and ethnicities, and lots of other groups.*

## STEREOTYPE CIRCLE

Estimated time: 15 minutes / Start time: \_\_\_\_\_ End time: \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal:** Teens practice pushing back against stereotypes about girls.

**At a glance:** Teens stand in a circle as the facilitator reads examples of stereotypes, step in to indicate stereotypes they have experienced, and call out ways that stereotype is not true for them.

1. Have teens stand in a circle. Introduce the activity and give directions.

**SAMPLE SCRIPT**

*Unfortunately, stereotypes are pretty hard to change. But we can push back against them, and that makes a big difference. Especially if we all work together and support each other, we have even more power to make sure stereotypes don't get in our way when we set out to lead. So we're going to practice that in our next activity.*


*Here's how this will work: I'll call out a stereotype, like "I've been treated like an airhead." If that's true for you, and you feel comfortable sharing, you'll step into the circle.*

*Then I'll ask, "Are you an airhead?" Obviously, the answer is no — so we'll go around to the people who stepped into the circle and have volunteers share why it's not true. For example, you could say something like, "No, I care about important things" or "No, I have a lot of good ideas."*



*After each person shares, we'll give them a quick round of applause for pushing back against the stereotype.*

CONTINUE ACTIVITY ON THE NEXT PAGE ►

2. Read aloud the stereotype prompts below, one at a time. After each prompt, have teens step into the circle if the prompt applies to them, and ask for volunteers to share how they would challenge the stereotype.

 You don't need to use this exact list. Feel free to omit prompts if you're short on time, or add examples of stereotypes that you know will resonate with your group.

***I've been treated like I'm:***

- *Dramatic or overly emotional*
- *Too loud or too opinionated*
- *Weak*
- *Not leadership material*
- *Immature*
- *Too bossy or demanding*
- *Illogical or unintelligent*
- *Irresponsible*
- *Helpless or incapable of doing something*
-  Add your own: \_\_\_\_\_
-  Add your own: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Wrap up the activity by reflecting on how teens pushed back against limiting stereotypes.

**SAMPLE SCRIPT**

*I love seeing the ways you're pushing back on the stereotypes that get in girls' way when they set out to lead.*

## CLOSING AND ONE ACTION

Estimated time: 5 minutes / Start time: \_\_\_\_\_ End time: \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal:** Teens think of a way to apply the session content to their day-to-day lives.


**At a glance:** Teens choose a way to practice pushing back against stereotypes.

1. Direct teens to the One Action handout, and ask them to write down one way they can practice pushing back against stereotypes. Offer a personal example to help spark ideas.

**SAMPLE SCRIPT** *Before we wrap up for today, I want everyone to write down one thing on their One Action handout that they can do to keep pushing back against stereotypes. That could mean sharing what you learned today with a friend or family member, doing something that people assume girls don't like or aren't good at, or just noticing stereotypes you see on social media or in movies and TV shows. For example, I'm planning to ...*


**FACILITATOR EXAMPLE** *One way you're planning to push back against stereotypes:*

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 If you have extra time at the end of the session, ask a few teens to share their One Action with the group, or have them discuss their One Actions in pairs.

2. Close by collecting participant handouts and thanking the group for a great session!

 It's a good idea to collect participant handouts at the end of the session to keep teens' private work from being shared.

 After the session, take a few minutes to look over the One Action each teen picked. This will give you insight into their individual goals and help reveal any misunderstandings of today's topics.



# CHALLENGE STEREOTYPES

## Participant Handout

Print one copy for each participant

💡 It's a good idea to collect these handouts at the end of the session to keep teens' private work from being shared.

## ONE ACTION: PUSHING BACK AGAINST STEREOTYPES

**Stereotypes are overly simplified beliefs about a group of people. We can't make these beliefs go away entirely — but by pushing back against them, we can reduce the power they have.**

Pick one thing you can do to push back against stereotypes. For example, you could...

- Share what you know about stereotypes with a friend or family member.
- Do something you supposedly wouldn't like or be good at according to stereotypes.
- Notice stereotypes you see on social media or in movies or TV shows.



**Pick something you can do this week  
and write it here!**