

# Behavior Issues

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Dealing with a disruptive girl can be challenging. How you deal with these participants is of utmost importance and is an invaluable lesson for all the girls in your program.

***Establish behavior expectations*** the very first day after introductions. This sets the tone and establishes you as the authority leading the group.

***Put-downs will not be permitted.*** Share that criticism of others is not a Girls on the Run value and always acknowledge when a girl says something in an unhealthy or negative manner regarding another person. As they girls get used to this, they will start to self-monitor themselves for put-downs.

***Set limits and remain consistent with the rules.*** The girls will have a better time because the program will run smoothly. Lesson 2 is entitled “*How to Be a Girls on the Run Promise Keeper*” and provides the opportunity for the group to set its own rules and consequences. You can then remind a disruptive girl of the Promises and Expectations established and agreed on in week 2 by everyone in the group.

***Attention seekers just want attention – even if it is negative.*** Keep your responses positive. The girls will respect you when your reaction is fair, calm, and positive.

***A girl’s desire to be part of the group is usually stronger than her desire not to be.*** Share that “sitting out” is a potential consequence of disruptive behavior and that one can re-join the group at anytime upon apologizing to everyone for the behavior. Occasionally a girl will choose not to participate. She may physically remove herself from the group by “pouting” in a spot separate from the others. Girls often learn that their desire to be a part of the group is stronger than their desire to not be. Express positively at the beginning of each lesson that the group is going to have a lot of fun and that you expect everyone’s positive energy.

***Give a disruptive girl an important role to uphold within the group.*** Giving an attention-seeker a job (handing out treats, taking attendance, leading stretches) can provide her with the attention she needs. She will learn that positive attention and leadership make Girls on the Run a better experience.

***Dealing with conflict will allow you to model the appropriate way to address it.***  
How you deal with challenges and conflict should show the girls the healthiest way to address conflict.

***Publicly praise and privately reprimand.***

***Mean what you say, so be careful of what you say!***

If unruly behavior continues and is disrupting the group's ability to form a team, outside intervention may be needed. Talk to the child's teachers and, guardians/caretakers to learn if there may be a behavior modification system they use that you could reinforce.

***Praising Positive Behavior:***

If you have a participant who is having a difficult day or week, focus on what they are doing right. It doesn't mean that you will ignore the negative behaviors, but acknowledge the participant's positive behaviors.

***Behavior Explanation:***

Try explaining the consequences of the negative behavior in a firm yet non-confrontational way. For example: Instead of saying "stop playing rough"; say "Playing like that could lead to someone falling and getting hurt.."

***Two Choices:***

Give a challenging participant two choices to consider. 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 and hangout." The second choice is the same as above but includes "...or you can participate with us because what we are going to do today is 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 to this is to convey the fun in the second choice. Stress the importance of sticking to whatever choice they make. Ultimately it is their choice and thus their responsibility.

## *Distractions*

Here are a few ways to keep participants engaged.

- **Talk to them!** Find out what is going on that day. It could be their birthday or they could be experiencing something sad in their family. The participants bring their outside lives to Girls on the Run so it is imperative that we are aware of their needs. 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 someone needs extra support, give it to 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)
- Give them positive attention. Many participants that are acting out are simply seeking to be noticed.
- Ask for their help. This can include you asking them to get something for you, lead the group somewhere or even help a teammate when you are “busy” doing something else.
- Allow them to help you lead an activity. Have them help you with a game introduction. This allows them the opportunity to work on their leadership skills while remaining engaged.