



Elementary School Girls Run for Fitness and Fun (San Francisco Bay Area)

Girls on the Run[®] is one of the many sports programs sponsored by Team-Up for Youth in the San Francisco Bay Area. The after-school running program trains girls in third through eighth grades for a one-mile or 5K race, and mixes in life lessons intended to build self-esteem along with the exercise.

One day, the lesson focused on the importance of keeping promises, or "being girls of our word." Coach Kirstin talked about respect and promises, and then each of the girls ran to her and made a promise.

Next, the coaches teamed each girl with a partner, encouraging them to help each other keep running. Some girls ran in sneakers. One girl wore boots, and another sandals and a dress.

"Come on, you can do it. It's only a little bit more," said third-grader Brianna to encourage her partner, Lorena, to run. Each time Brianna and Lorena, and the other partners, crossed the finish line, they received a cloth bracelet as a prize. Soon, the cloth bracelets went up to their elbows.

After the girls finished their laps, they rested on the blacktop. Coach Leah asked the girls what they had learned about promises and partnerships.

"Be respectful to each other, even the people we're going against," said Janice, a fifth-grader.

"To cooperate with each other and help each other do it," said Brianna. "If somebody falls, we're going to promise to pick them up."

Then Coach Kirsten asked whether the girls liked the running. "Yes," they shouted.

"Running feels good," said Janice. "My teacher said it will help me out when I get bigger if I want to play a sport." Forming a circle again, the girls ended the session with a cheer: "Girls on the Run is so much fun."

Girls on the Run is held twice a week, in two 10-week sessions per year. At the end of the program, the girls participate in the Lollipop Run, a one-mile race that ends with a party.