



# TIP SHEET.

## Engaging with Girls

### WHAT IS A GENDER-SENSITIVE CLASSROOM OR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT?

This is a learning space in which both genders equally participate and benefit from the transfer of knowledge and in which gender-based barriers to learning are addressed through inclusive student/participant engagement and content. Such a space is vital to ensuring that everyone achieves their maximum learning potentials.<sup>1</sup>

### CLASSROOM/GROUP MANAGEMENT IS KEY

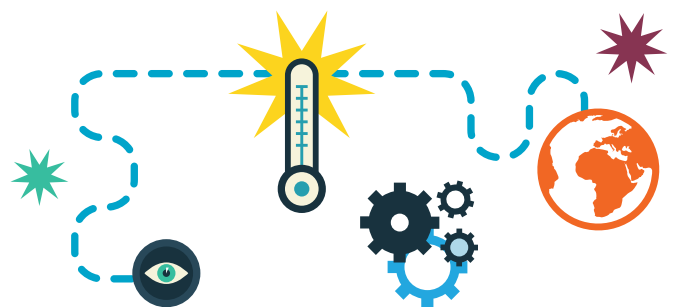
When you are in charge of a group, be it in the classroom, an after-school program, or a community event, you are effectively a temporary teacher. As such, you need to keep in mind certain points when engaging with youth participants—especially with mixed-gender groups but also groups of all girls:

- A key driver of girls' participation in a classroom/group is their feeling of being supported.<sup>2</sup> If they are teased or criticized by other students (especially boys) when asking or answering questions, they can be discouraged from engaging and pursuing their STEM<sup>2</sup>D (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math, Manufacturing, & Design) and other interests. Ensure that any teasing is stopped abruptly, and the recipient of the teasing is supported to share her view and be respected by the group. Other girls will see how this is handled, and their desire to participate may also be affected.
- Make sure students do not interrupt one another or prevent someone from speaking. In many Global South/developing countries, this may be a particular challenge; boys and young men may often speak over (and speak **for**) girls and young women; be conscious of this, and ensure that girls are given equal opportunities to speak.

#### STRATEGIES:

1. Calmly and respectfully address the participant who is teasing and explain that everyone has something important to share and that the group can learn from different perspectives.
2. Later in the class, if possible, refer back to the contribution made by the student/participant who was teased, reinforcing the value of her contribution to the discussion.
3. Have students/participants work in pairs or small groups, where they may feel more comfortable sharing their views and can focus more on the task or topic at hand.<sup>3</sup>

**STRATEGY:** Strictly enforce the practice of only allowing students to speak who have raised their hands and are called on by the teacher or otherwise invited to speak. If a student begins to interrupt another student, politely but firmly explain that everyone's voice is important, and each person should respect others' right to speak, just as they would wish their own voice to be heard. It is important to stay calm and respectful with the students, to model the behavior you are seeking from them.



## UNCONSCIOUS BIAS— UNINTENDED IMPACT

Unconscious bias is very common and can have unintended consequences. Unconscious bias is based on “...social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness... [it] is far more prevalent than conscious prejudice and [is] often incompatible with one’s conscious values.”<sup>4</sup> Unconscious bias can affect how a teacher interacts with students/participants, as well as the content provided.

- On average, teachers engage with girls less than boys, although this varies by grade.<sup>5</sup>
- Teachers often express unconscious gender bias when giving praise and criticism. Girls are disproportionately praised for good behavior rather than having the right answer, and they tend to be disproportionately criticized for having the wrong answer. Conversely, boys are disproportionately praised for providing a correct response and disproportionately criticized for negative behavior.<sup>6</sup>
- Most people unintentionally default to masculine nouns and pronouns when communicating (both verbally and in writing) and often reference males before females (e.g., boys and girls, men and women). Try to mix and balance these references.<sup>7</sup>
- Body language can also be influential. Avoid unintentional non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions or hand gestures that may be interpreted as dismissive or condescending. When used towards a girl, such gestures can be interpreted as judgements regarding gender and a girl’s general capability.<sup>8</sup>
- Presentation materials often inadvertently portray females and males in unequal ways. Aim for:
  1. Equal frequency of gender representation,
  2. Gender-equitable and inclusive illustrations/photos (avoid stereotypes and portray genders as equals),
  3. Gender-equitable and inclusive language (discussed above), and
  4. Gender-equitable and transformational roles (ensure that both genders are seen as capable in both traditional and non-traditional roles).<sup>9</sup>

## IMPORTANCE OF FEMALE ROLE MODELS TO BOTH GIRLS AND BOYS

The value of holding up examples of women succeeding in STEM fields cannot be understated. This is especially important when male volunteers speak with groups. The volunteers should of course share their own stories, but these should be supplemented with examples of female role models—whether of famous women (current and/or historical) or simply women known personally to the volunteers.

### OBSERVE THE CLASS OR GROUP AND ASK YOURSELF:

Are girls and boys participating equally?

Are any students being teased when they ask or answer questions?

Are male students allowing female students to speak without interruption?

### AND

Am I calling on both girls and boys with equal frequency?

Are my presentation materials gender sensitive?

Am I referring to both girls and boys equally in my verbal language and avoiding unintentionally negative body language?

## VISIT WWW.STEM2D.ORG

**Engaging with Girls** was developed by FHI 360 for Johnson & Johnson’s WiSTEM<sup>2</sup>D initiative (**W**omen in **S**cience, **T**echnology, **E**ngineering, **M**athematics, **M**anufacturing, and **D**esign).

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6. Ibid.
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8. Ibid.
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