

What Can I Do?

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What Young Women Leaders Can Do to Strengthen the Impact of Utah Girls and Teens

UTAH WOMEN & LEADERSHIP Project

Utah is full of engaged, passionate individuals who frequently ask the question, “What can I personally and/or professionally do to strengthen the impact of Utah girls and women?” To provide specific answers to that question, the **Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP)** hosted a series of “think tank” gatherings to collect best practices for various stakeholders interested in supporting and empowering Utah girls and women.

This idea sheet is based on a 2019 gathering of 30 Young Women leaders from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter, “the Church”) in Utah. Since around 60% of Utahns identify as members of the Church, these leaders have the potential to influence a large segment of Utah teens. This discussion focused on how leaders could help young women find purpose and perspective, develop new knowledge and skills, form healthy relationships, and grow as leaders. Attendees also discussed how they could advocate for young women with other stakeholders.

PURPOSE & PERSPECTIVE

Young Women leaders focus primarily on helping girls develop their spirituality, gain a larger sense of personal purpose, and embrace a long-term perspective. Leaders can help young women feel grounded in these areas as they do the following:

- Teach girls explicitly that their worth is inherent, limitless, and unchanging. This will help counteract external messages that they are “not enough.”
- Encourage growth through personal devotion (e.g., prayer, reading sacred books, attending services, pondering, and discussing matters of faith).
- Discuss the value that comes from practicing faith both upward (toward deity) and outward (connecting with other people).

- Teach girls to seek after truth, meaning, and purpose in many different areas of their lives; focus on helping them learn to love themselves.
- Model the fact that greater happiness and peace is a natural byproduct of reducing distractions (e.g., technology, negative messages, and social pressures).
- Enable young women to cope with the many challenges of life as they learn to connect with something larger than themselves and come to recognize the world is broader than it seems.

KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS

Leaders have many opportunities to equip young women with a wide variety of new information and widely applicable skills. They can help teen girls prepare for the future in the following ways:

- Use classroom instruction, workshops, and activities to teach and practice communication and social skills, including public speaking, listening and validating others’ ideas, formulating thoughtful questions, finding connections and common ground, and problem solving.
- Provide training for a variety of practical life skills, including those that are often taught to young men (e.g., bike and car repair, household maintenance, personal finance).
- Stress the value of higher education and lifelong learning; teach

young women that education will serve them and their families in all areas of their lives.

- Teach employment fundamentals, including interest assessments, career exploration, resume writing, interviewing skills, and negotiation. Ensure girls understand that professional preparation and motherhood are not mutually exclusive.
- Help young women identify their strengths and grow in confidence; this will happen naturally as they take on and achieve challenging tasks.

RELATIONSHIPS

The teenage years are critical for learning how to develop healthy relationships. Successful leaders will form strong connections with the young women in their congregations and guide their efforts to build relationships with others:

- Work side by side with young women, listen with intent, and ask for direct feedback on how to best lead and serve them.
- Become familiar with the ways teens communicate and interact (i.e., technologies), then invite them to stretch beyond those and practice one-on-one and face-to-face communication as well.
- Get to know girls outside the church setting; attend their sporting events, recitals, or other activities; and ensure they feel known and loved as individuals.
- Give compliments that are not appearance-based; remind girls that their worth does not come from their looks.
- Be ready to support young women with their own difficult realities, challenges, and failures; remind them perfection is impossible, and that it is okay not to have all the answers.
- Facilitate the creation of relationships that come as young women provide meaningful service; deep bonds will form as they identify real needs and discover how to address them.
- Help young women build close relationships with each other; teach them to refrain from comparing and judging, and to look for the good in everyone.
- Teach healthy and appropriate relationship and dating principles to both young women and young men.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The Young Women organization is specifically designed to prepare teens to lead (both within the Church and in other areas). Leaders can support this process among young women as they do the following:

- Teach girls to form their own leadership identity; educate them about what leadership is, why it is so important for them to lead, and help them to see themselves as leaders.
- Adopt a step-by-step leadership training model, recognizing that development will take time; ensure that all adult leaders

are committed to the process of allowing girls to truly assume responsibility, autonomy, and ownership.

- Identify numerous areas where young women can take on leadership roles (e.g., planning activities and events, running meetings, participating in classroom instruction, reaching out to class members, leading in their homes).
- Facilitate mentoring relationships (formal or informal) where adult leaders partner with teens to both teach and model leadership skills.
- Hold formal leadership trainings for young women, and involve them in both planning and executing these events.
- Create opportunities for girls to lead outside their own classes, both in the larger congregation and within the community.
- Resist the temptation to override decisions made by young women or to “bail them out” when things go wrong; failure can be a powerful teacher.

BROADER INFLUENCE

Finally, in addition to working with girls directly, these leaders are also well positioned to influence attitudes and perspectives on behalf of the young women they serve. Leaders can positively impact their congregations as they do the following:

- Raise awareness of the ways that young women in Utah are diverse. As leaders seek out and listen to teens from varied racial/ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic situations, and other life circumstances, they will be able to enhance understanding and unity within their congregations.
- Ensure all stakeholders are aware of the many church resources available to serve the youth.
- Encourage male leaders to increase their involvement with Young Women classes and activities so they can be stronger advocates.
- Find ways to expose teens to more female role models and leaders within the Church.
- Engage Young Men leaders, congregational leaders, and parents in conversations about young women’s real lives; push beyond traditional expectations and boundaries to explore how to support them in both their challenges and opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Because of the large population of Latter-day Saints in Utah, Young Women leaders from the Church have an influence on a significant portion of girls and young women in the state. While focusing primarily on spiritual matters, they can also be a positive force on many other areas of a girl’s life. As these leaders gain a greater understanding of how they can successfully encourage and support young women in meaningful ways, they will help train and mentor a new generation of strong women leaders in Utah.

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