



Strengthening Connection Skills through Girl-Centered Courses

Think with Heart’s mission is **to prepare and inspire high school girls to think and act with compassion in all aspects of their lives.** At Think with Heart, we believe compassion is a supreme virtue of the heart. Our world needs more acts of compassion – compassion is transformative, unifying, and profoundly rewarding. When we feel connected in meaningful ways, we discover and live out the most authentic version of ourselves. Since connection is a powerful foundation for cultivating compassion, Think with Heart’s learning experiences are designed to enrich our connections with ourselves and others. When we strengthen connections, we awaken the caring instinct we already have within us.

In partnership with schools and other organizations, Think with Heart designs and facilitates online courses and experiential programs that are created specifically for girls. The learning environment is positive, supportive, respectful and appreciative of each girl’s uniqueness. Our online community is safe, inclusive and nurturing. Every girl is supported as both a curious learner and a respected teacher.

Think with Heart’s introductory online curriculum, CORE, is a multidisciplinary course intended to complement academic and character-building programs. CORE’s emphasis is fostering what we’re calling Connection Skills—skills and competencies that build and deepen our human connections. These skills and competencies include monitoring cognitive biases as well as strengthening self-awareness, emotional intelligence and resilience. While not required as a prerequisite, CORE can serve as a foundational course for Think with Heart’s experiential program: *The Listening Project*.

“The desire to be listened to, to be cared for, burns inside the hearts of each and every person, and that is something that I have slowly began to realize.”

~ Think with Heart Student



The Listening Project: Learning the Power of Presence



The Listening Project

The Listening Project equips girls with active listening skills and relevant competencies while invigorating the key heart virtues of kindness, empathy, presence and compassion. Learning Coaches support girls as they expand their knowledge of compassion beyond conceptual awareness and into the realm of concrete application. At Think with Heart, we believe that any response rooted in kindness, generosity and acceptance can translate to compassion. We also know that empathic listening with our full presence is one of the most caring acts we can offer to others.

“Before this course, I didn’t recognize how rare it is for people to actually listen fully and in a way that is selfless, with the only goal being to understand... The skill of active listening is becoming less known, and I think undervalued...”

Our Learning Coaches are sometimes asked if compassion can be learned, and our strong belief is yes! Increasingly more research supports that our brains are more malleable than once thought. Because of brain plasticity, we can reform our brains with new knowledge, experiences and skills practice. According to several studies, social and emotional skill-building creates new pathways in our brains, thus remodeling our habits and behavior. So, Connection Skills such as active listening *can* be developed and nurtured while expanding the heart virtues we are wired to have.

Why Compassion? Put simply, we believe compassion is essential for human flourishing. There is a growing body of research supporting the theory that compassion is a “natural and automatic response that has ensured our survival” (Seppala, E., 2013, *Compassionate Mind, Healthy Body, Mind & Body*). We have a “compassion instinct,” and when we empower that instinct, we enrich not only our own lives but the lives of those around us. Acts of compassion invite us to experience the enormous benefits of living an interconnected life in community with others.

About the Course: *The Listening Project* is a learning experience involving both online coursework and an experiential program during which girls apply their social and emotional skills to real life situations. The aim of *The Listening Project* is to strengthen Connection Skills (for example, listening actively, communicating with empathy and kindness, and being present without judgment or bias) and to give girls the opportunity to practice these skills in real time. After a 8-week online course (or CORE can serve as a prerequisite), girls are paired up for a series of “connection conversations.” Throughout their connection conversations, girls practice empathic communication and share reflections in the online discussion classroom.

Through a discussion-based format, girls learn from a variety of social science experts, and even more importantly, gain valuable perspective from their peers. Student learning and growth are facilitated through the introduction of key concepts, prompted reflection, peer-to-peer discussion, learning exercises and role play.

Learning Coach: Alumna of an all-girls K-12 school, Mary Ellis (MA in Liberal Studies, B.S. in Psychology and Special Education) is the Learning Coach or course facilitator. Ms. Ellis encourages a student-centered environment and nurtures a respectful, supportive and collaborative learning community.