

Equipping Young Women to Communicate and Advocate Against Gendered Career Pressures

Best Practices for Educators
and Youth Workers



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Why helping Young Women Advocate for STEM or Business Ambitions Matters?

Many young women interested in STEM or business face pressure from family or society, common expectations that they choose “safe” or traditionally feminine careers. These pressures can reduce their confidence, even if they are very capable.

Research shows a vast number of factors that complicate the path of young women toward careers in STEM or business:

- When traditional gender roles are strongly endorsed girls often report lower self-confidence (self-efficacy) in STEM than boys (Social-Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)).
- Stereotypes about who “belongs” in STEM or business (e.g., the idea that engineers are exclusively male) can hurt girls’ beliefs in their own future in these fields.

Positive mentoring and supportive relationships make a measurable difference. As a youth worker, you can play a key role in helping young women articulate their ambitions and push back against these limiting messages. Your role can be especially critical is strong family pressures against non-traditionally feminine career ambitions are present.



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Communication and Self Efficacy

As a youth worker, you can help young women stand firm in their STEM or business ambitions by equipping them with practical skills to understand themselves, communicate clearly, and advocate for their goals.

To make this actionable, focus on three key areas:

1. **Self-awareness** - Encourage them to reflect on what they care about, their values, strengths, and dreams.

Use simple tools: ask them to write or draw a “future self” — where they see themselves in 5–10 years, what kind of work they’re doing (research shows imagining future selves can help build motivation and identity).



Help them identify what pressures they feel: from family, culture, peers. Naming these makes the challenge clearer.

2. **Communication Skills** - Teach assertive communication: how to speak in “I” statements (e.g., “I feel ...”, “I want ...”), without being aggressive.

Use role-play: simulate conversations they might have with parents, relatives, or friends who question their ambition. Practice how to explain why STEM or business matters to them.

Foster negotiation and conflict resolution skills: help them learn how to ask for what they need (time for clubs, projects, study) in a calm, confident way. Teach basic mediation techniques - listen, reflect, share, ask questions, so that conversations stay respectful and constructive.

3. Building Agency & Confidence - to help young women take charge of their STEM or business ambitions.

Encourage leadership: let them run a small project (e.g., a STEM workshop, implement a business idea, or social enterprise) to gain real experience.

Prepare them for public speaking: support them to talk about their goals publicly, within youth-group assemblies, community events, or a “career night” with family.

Foster peer support: set up peer circles where they can talk about challenges, practice their “career pitch,” and encourage each other.



Best Practices and Practical activities to use

1. Vision-Board Workshop

Have participants create vision boards (digital or on paper) for their future selves: career, life goals, and values.

Ask them to pick 2–3 goals and identify possible obstacles (family expectations, money, stereotypes) and write how they might talk about those with family.

2. Role-Play Conversations

In small groups, have youth role-play tough conversations: e.g., a parent saying “STEM is not for you, you should be a lawyer or a doctor,” or a sibling saying “why would you want to be an entrepreneur?”

After role-play, debrief: What worked? What felt awkward? How can they rephrase to be more persuasive but respectful?

3. Confidence Building

In small groups, each girl shares a future goal. The group names the strengths they see in her that can support that goal, and she ends by choosing one strength she recognizes in herself and saying it aloud.

Use this approach in women or mixed teams to strengthen girls confidence. Peer validation strengthens identity and resilience, especially for girls.

4. Art of Argumentation

Reframe negotiation in the context of different visions for professional careers between young women and their loved ones, as a problem-solving task.

Help design win-win scenarios. Organise brainstorming about the issues and solutions, teaching how to effectively match and apply them, e.g.:

- My family worries about job safety in STEM → I can show them female role models in the field and how successful they became.
- If they worry about financial safety, I can present job prospects, scholarships and earning potential.

Alternatively or as a complement, ask students to create a simple map that includes:

- What I want (STEM/business goal),
- What my family wants,
- Where our goals overlap (e.g., stability, success, helping others)
- Define what are the potential bridges - e.g. "Engineering offers good job security," "Business skills offer job security by being applicable in multiple careers and across sectors".

Ask students to share their maps with peer circles and invite others to contribute other bridges they recognise.



5. Negotiation Practice

Help students identify what they need to reach their objective (time for clubs, study sessions, projects, permission for applying for summer school or engaging with a mentor).

Use role-play conversations to practice asking for it respectfully, applying proper argumentation and suggesting compromises when needed.

Introduce reflection worksheets to guide help girls identify what should be improved or think through alternative scenarios or arguments.

6. Mentorship connections

Pair young women with mentors (women in STEM/business) to share advice and model strategies for handling pressure.

7. Family career nights

Host informal events where students present their STEM/business goals to family members, with youth workers facilitating to ensure respectful dialogue.



How those practices will help?

- Boosting confidence: Self-awareness and role-playing increase self-efficacy, which research shows is key for girls persisting in STEM/business.
- Challenging stereotypes: Learning to articulate ambitions counters the impact of societal or family bias.
- Relevance of mentoring and peer support: Seeing women succeed and practicing communication in supportive groups builds resilience and belonging.
- Hands-on practice: Real exercises (role-play, vision boards, presentations) make skills stick and prepare students for real-life conversations.