

Heartland Girls Ranch Parent Handbook

This handbook is useful for: parents, foster parents, or concerned adults in the life of a HGR resident, current or past. We wanted to put this together for you to explain what we do at HGR because we want you to feel like you are a part of this process in your daughter's life. This handbook describes a little bit about our program and how we work with the girls. It will hopefully give you an idea of what their experience is like here.

Your daughter now knows:

Even if she doesn't graduate the program, your daughter will learn...

- How to clean the kitchen, bathroom, living room, & bedroom
- How to wash her own clothes
- How to take care of animals
- How to cook- she even has recipes
- How to say please and thank you
- How to live off a small allowance
- How to use appropriate table manners, including how to say grace

Of course she will deny the ability to do any of these things!

Heartland Girls Ranch Mission Statement: “Healing youth, building lives through success”

...Okay so what does that mean?

Healing youth: it means that the Heartland Girls Ranch works with teenage girls who may have had experiences that were unhealthy, unsafe or harmful. Sometimes these unhealthy experiences can get so big that they become unmanageable and girls end up hurting themselves, their family or others. The hurt can be done physically, emotionally, sexually, spiritually, financially, or a combination of them all. After these harmful experiences, girls work on healing themselves while they are here.

Building lives through success: We find that girls have a hard time growing if they feel like everything they do is wrong. While girls are here, we want them to experience success in a lot of different things like riding horse, keeping their room tidy, learning to crochet, talking to others, writing their poetry and lots of other things. When girls feel like there are a lot of things that they do well, the things that they need to improve on doesn't seem to be so impossible to do.

Program Philosophy:

Heartland Girls Ranch (HGR) was founded in June 1992 to provide a service to at-risk female juveniles. It was developed with the commitment to provide an effective and unique approach to working with these girls. HGR is a working ranch that uses horses as tools to bring positive change. We believe that individuals are responsible for their own choices, consequences and ultimately their own well-being. Heartland's goal is to provide a supportive, structured environment where girls learn to make responsible choices and become mature young women.

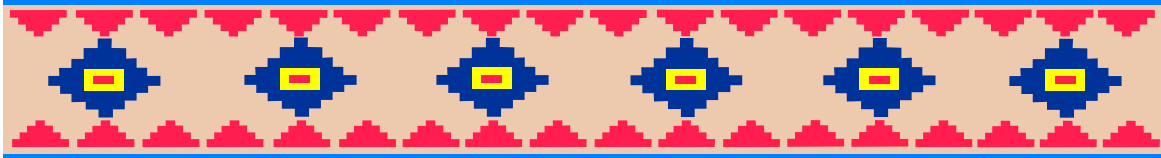
Heartland Girls Ranch is a place where girls can experience success and where that success can lead to self worth. Opportunities for positive experiences are given to the girls through challenges, relationship development and encouragement. Girls are not punished for poor choices, but rather they are given the opportunity to be responsible for the choices they make. They receive natural consequences and instructions for learning to make better choices. While a girl is at HGR, staff will provide the security and support needed for the years ahead. Our program strives to meet the needs of a whole person; this includes physical, emotional, spiritual, social and educational health.



“You can’t make me change!”

Does that sound familiar? Well, even if it’s said in defiance, it’s true.

Change is hard & can take a long time. Unfortunately, there isn’t any chart we’ve found that says how long it will take to change based on age, issue or height. We can’t predict how long the change process will take.



Program description:

The Heartland Ranch program provides a supportive, structured environment in which girls' ages 12 to 21 learn to make responsible choices and become mature young women.

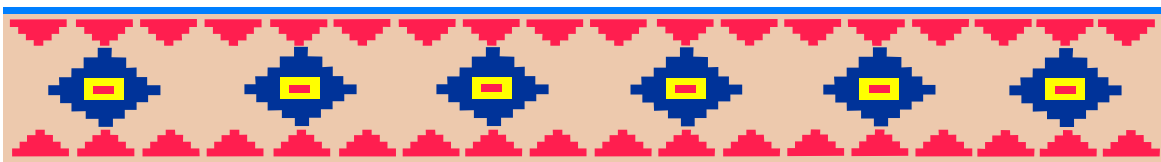
The main program operates on a five-level system. There are specific assignments and privileges to match levels. To be on a higher level implies that a resident has been working on her issues and has displayed appropriate behavior for an ample amount of time.

A high standard of behavior is expected at all times. Residents are graded in several areas, especially with regard to respect of others. Among other things, this grading decides whether the resident has passed or failed their day. Passed and failed days are recorded on a resident's grade sheet. Residents must complete specific program work in a given number of days to advance to a higher level. Graduation is earned when the girl passes the five levels and has completed required level work.

A specialized *treatment plan* is created specifically plan for each resident. Each plan covers topics like: education, behavior, attitudes, family and personal issues, health, recreation, social skills, future plans and employment. Staff take these topics and create an outline of program goals.

I'm Not Like These Other Girl's Here!"

No girl at the Ranch is the same as another. Each girl at HGR has her own unique strengths, abilities and experiences. Although some girls may share common experiences, we know there are also many differences. That is why each girl has an individual treatment plan that addresses her own unique needs. Some of the things they do at the Ranch will be the same as other girls and other things will be very different.





Horses

Winston Churchill said “There is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a man.” Heartland Girls Ranch is home to 25 horses. The horse program at the Heartland Girls’ Ranch focuses not just on learning about horses, but also on what horses can teach us about ourselves. The girls’ learning and experience comes in many different ways.

Heartland Ranch is a working ranch that uses horses as a catalyst to bring about positive change. The horses are used daily to address problem areas, attitudes and behaviors from a perspective that is new to our clients, that of the authority figure. Our clients are put in a role of on-going responsibility as "parent" and caregiver to the horse, the "child". This role reversal offers our clients remarkable insight into problem areas and ultimately invites and encourages girls to make dramatic changes in their approach to life. The girls grow in their self-esteem as they gain skills and experience success with horse programming.

Residents have several opportunities a year to show their riding skills. Having family attend horse shows at HGR or in the community is really exciting for girls and a great way to connect with one another.



More Stuff about HGR

Location: Heartland Girls Ranch is located in Benson, MN; about two and a half hours west of the twin cities. The Ranch is located on 160 acres one half mile north of Benson on Highway 9. Also located on site is a Ranch community center which houses administrative offices, case manager offices, group meeting areas and recreational opportunities.

How does this work?

Usually, girls are sent to the Heartland Girls Ranch by their county. Typically, the plan is to “complete the program”. That means that girls are expected to graduate the program which can take anywhere from 4 1/2 months and beyond. The average length of stay is usually 11 months.

HGR monitors behavior and determines what is a “passing day” via grade sheets. Grade sheets are used to offer residents feedback for positive and negative behavior choices. This is our main way of giving consequences and rewards. Girls have a chance to earn points throughout the day based on their level of respect (respect towards authority, peers, themselves and rules). They are also expected to do a few different things everyday that we think are really important like: chores, exercise and goal work.

“GROUP HOME” LIFE:

HGR can have up to 24 residents at a time. There are 12 bedrooms so usually girls have a roommate. There are staff at the house 24 hours a day, but no staff “lives” at the house. About 30 staff work here, all in different ways. Sometimes it’s hard with so many staff and residents, but we try to keep the house feeling as much like a home as possible.

You Want Me to Be Perfect!

No one is perfect. Every human being has areas in their life that could be improved on. At HGR we believe that everyone is a “work in progress”. For that reason we don’t expect perfection.

The daily schedule and house rules regulate the day to day living routine. It probably seems like there are lots of rules (because there are). These rules are designed to provide consistent structure and safety and to teach individual and group responsibility.

We believe that rules and daily routines provide the structure and consistency that we all need in order to develop healthy daily living routines, acceptance of limits, and a self-initiated level of responsibility. Our goal is to ultimately teach residents that not only should you do something because it’s a rule and you might get in trouble, but because it’s the right thing to do.



Restraints:

The idea of someone putting their hands on your daughter is likely to feel unsettling. Please keep in mind, escorts and restraints are done as a last resort after all other efforts to de-escalate the situation has failed. Also, the need for escort or restraint is rare, it doesn't happen very often. The Heartland Girls Ranch is licensed under the Minnesota Department of Corrections to use physical holding

Most of our residents are never involved in a restraint. Occasionally, a resident may become unsafe to themselves or others and require more than just a verbal de-escalation from staff. When this situation does arise, staff may need to use a physical maneuver called a restraint. Basically it is a way that staff hold a resident on the ground to prevent an unsafe situation.

Staff are trained in defensive maneuvers and are required yearly to take a restraint class and a verbal de-escalation class. *Why?* Because we want our staff to know exactly what they are doing to minimize risk of injury and the necessity of using restraints at all. When a restraint occurs, custodial guardians and county workers will be notified.

They Aren't Helping Me Here!

Our goal is to assist girls in helping themselves. As much as we might want to, the staff can't do it for them. We are here to assist the girls in finding the tools they can use that will help them to be successful.

Therapy: Each resident sees a therapist on a weekly basis. Most of the counseling is done on-site. This is especially beneficial because the therapists understand the ranch program and can work in tandem with treatment goals. Therapy is an expected part of every resident's program.



School: HGR has its own school for residents. There are 2 full-time special education teachers and 2 regular education teachers as well as a school social worker and administrative manager. Class sizes are small, a benefit to meet the need of each individual student. Our school strives to create a place where students, who may have been previously overlooked or have large gaps on their transcripts, can

begin to get back on track. Having our own school allows for increased support of each individual's therapeutic goals. The school is located one mile away from the HGR house in the city of Benson.

Staffings:

We have staffings to evaluate the progress of the resident, present concerns and brainstorm solutions with the treatment team. Who is this treatment team? The county workers, the school, the therapist, the HGR staff, the resident and YOU. We value what you have to say and want you to be involved if at all possible. The first staffing is around the 30th day of being at HGR and every two months there-after.

Visit Information

At HGR, visits help residents keep connected to their family, community and culture. Visits also prepare residents for the challenges they will face when they ultimately leave HGR. We encourage families to have visits with their child while she is at HGR. Please review the following information regarding onsite visits below and home visits on the following page.

On-site Visits:

Before the visit:

- All visits (home and two hour) need to be set up with office staff (at 320.843.4815) by Thursdays at 3 p.m. Please provide us with the time you are planning to come. Our general visiting day is Sunday between 12 p.m. and 5 p.m. If there are family conflicts with the day and time, we will be flexible, but advance notice is needed.
- When setting up your visit, please provide a list of those who will be attending. Only people who have been approved by the county worker will be allowed to visit. Due to limited space, we ask that on-site visitors are kept to a minimum and consist of immediate family only.

During the visit:

- **You will not be allowed to visit if it was not set up in advance with a case manager.**
- Visitors need to show identification when coming to the Ranch and need to sign in on the Visitors Sign in sheet.
- (Immediate family consists of Mom, Dad and siblings). If prior arrangements are made it is possible for extended family members (grandparents) to be included in the visit.
- The first visit will take place on-site and be for 2 hours. Residents must be on Level 2 or higher and have had appropriate behaviors during the week to have an off site visit.
- Our facility and grounds are a smoke free zone. Please respect this and not smoke anywhere on the property. We also ask that you respect the legal age of tobacco use and not allow our residents to smoke during off site visits.
- Visitors that are suspected to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol will be denied a visit and asked to leave the premises.
- Visiting time is for you and your child. We discourage other resident's involvement during your visit.
- Visitors are not allowed in the resident's bedroom without staff supervision and approval from the resident's roommate.
- As a reminder when visiting with your child (either on site or off site) that they are not to have access to cell phones, telephones or contraband items.
- Food items should be limited to things that can be consumed during your visit. Residents will not be able to keep extras. The only food items that can be shared with the house have to be store bought and in their original packaging.
- Please do not bring your pets to the Ranch for visiting. They are not allowed in the house or on the grounds of HGR.

Also:

- Please be respectful of time limits on visits. If you are going to be late, please call the Ranch house at 320.842.4472 to let staff know.

Visit Information, continued

- Please be respectful and appropriate during your visits. Remember the Ranch is “home” to the girls staying with us. Ranch staff may cut a visit short due to inappropriate behavior or failure to follow visiting rules.

Home Visits

In order to be eligible for a home visit, a resident must:

- Have been at the Ranch for at least 30 days.
- Have a place to stay that has been approved by treatment team (county workers, Heartland staff, family, etc.) & will be able to provide 24 hour adult supervision.
- No safety concerns (No risk of running, or harming self or others, etc.)
- Arrangements for the visit must be set up with the office staff (at 320.843.4815) by Thursdays at 3 p.m.

Home Visit Rules:

Residents are responsible to follow Heartland Ranch rules and expectations while on home visits. This includes the following:

- 24 hour direct adult supervision. Direct supervision means that the resident is within audio or visual range of the supervising adult at all times. (Residents on Level 5 may have a 2 hour visit if it has been pre-approved by guardian and Heartland Ranch).
- No smoking, drinking, or drug use.
- Appropriate, respectful interaction with the supervising adult(s).
- Girls need to follow their regular routine. *For example:* staying up all night is not appropriate.
- No sexual contact.
- Take medications as prescribed.
- *Home visit contract:* Each resident will be sent home with a Home Visit Contract that must be filled out and returned with the resident after the visit. It is a good idea to look this contract over right away, as there may be special instructions or goal work she should be working on. Failure to return the Home Visit Contract may result in loss of future visits.
- If delayed for any reason in returning from the visit, contact should be made to the Ranch at (320) 842-4472. Unexcused lateness on returning from a visit may result in less time on the next visit.

2 Types of Visits:

- *Planned Visits:* Everyone is eligible for a planned visit, if they meet the general rules (above). They are scheduled once a month.
- *Level-up Visits:* Residents who have moved up to the next program level in the last month is eligible for a level up visit. Only one level up visit per level.

Generally, residents can receive up to two home visits a month. They are generally planned for the 2nd and 4th weekends of each month.

Visit Information, continued

Transportation: Will be provided by HGR on specific weekends. HGR will drop off and pick up residents from a general location in the Twin Cities. HGR may be able to accommodate drop-offs outside the Twin Cities (discuss with case managers). The time schedule and meeting location will always be the same. Transportation for visits scheduled on other weekends will be the responsibility of the resident's family/county.

Twin Cities Meeting Location: Hwy 694 and Central Avenue (Hwy 65) in the Petco Parking Lot (Next to Target). Petco street address: 753 53rd Ave NE, Fridley, MN 55421. Bus Route: 10, Closest Bus Stop: 53 and Target.

Transportation Schedule:

Friday - 3:30pm Leave Ranch, 6:30pm Arrive at meeting location
Sunday - 3:30pm Leave meeting location, 6:30pm Arrive at Ranch

A short list of the things your daughter is expected to do everyday:

- Be respectful to yourself, others, property and rules
- Go to school
- Clean room and two other chores
- Eat 3 healthy meals
- Very minimal phone, TV and computer access
- May purchase 1 pop per day with allowance and minimal sweets
- Shower and journal daily
- 1 goal and physical fitness activity daily

Phone Calls

- Phone call times: M-F 3:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m., Sat 12 p.m. – 8 p.m., Sun 9 a.m. – 8 p.m.
- Each wing gets two weekdays (East Wing – Tuesday & Thursday & West Wing – Monday & Wednesday) that they are allowed to use the phone; anyone is allowed to make calls on the weekends.
- You can have up to two calls a day (incoming and outgoing)
- Calls are limited to 10 minutes
- Approved Contacts: Residents are allowed to have family members on their phone list who have been approved as appropriate and supportive by their guardians, county workers and HGR staff.
- All calls must be supervised by staff, and be with the intended caller
- Staff Monitored calls: Staff will get on the phone line if a resident has abused phone rules in the past, or if there seems to be suspicious or inappropriate conversation. Staff may pick up the phone at any time if there is a safety concern.
- *Staff will end a call if:*
 - a. The conversation escalates in an abusive or inappropriate way and redirection does not work
 - b. The time limit has been reached
 - c. There is an Emergency and staff need an open phone line.
- NO: Three way calls or collect calls



Letters

- Outgoing-
 - All resident outgoing mail must be scanned by a staff.
 - Not allowed: Swearing, threatening, discussion about sex, gangs, drugs and alcohol, running away, abusive behaviors, etc.
 - When a letter is appropriate, staff will seal the letter in front of the resident and sign their initials across the envelope's seal.
 - All letters will be mailed through the HGR office.
 - Residents are not allowed to mail letters elsewhere.
 - Residents may buy stamps with their allowance.
- Incoming-
 - Incoming mail is picked up by office staff. Staff document all incoming items.
 - The resident will open the letter in the presence of staff and allow them to scan the letter.
- Care Packages –
 - Care packages may be sent, but should not include any food, glass items or CD's.
 - Appropriate things to send would be stationary and envelopes, crafts and needed clothing.



Glossary of Terms:

Your daughter might reference some of these things. Here's a glossary so you know the lingo!

- A. Mandatory Goal - an assignment that has been given as consequence to an inappropriate behavior.
- B. Limitation - you are not allowed to do something because of your behavior. Example: stealing food from the kitchen may result in you not being allowed in the kitchen. You will also be given assignments to complete.
- C. Restriction Level (RL) - RL means that you have to sit at the table, without privileges, unable to do group activities, and are unable to interact with your peers. You will be given assignments to complete. After your assignments are complete, you can work on program work, read, write or draw.
- D. Level Drop - If a resident's inappropriate behavior is very serious, she may lose days or an entire level she passed. You also lose privileges associated with that level. Examples of such inappropriate behavior: using drugs, running away.
- E. Placement Paper - The placement paper is a tool to have girls discuss, take responsibility for or confront the issues that contributed to their placement. Residents are expected to explain what they did, how it affected them, how it affected their family and their community, and what they've learned about themselves. Examples of placement paper issues are: Authority, Truancy, Grief and Loss, Anger, Drug Use, Gangs, etc. Writing the placement paper takes a long time, especially if residents aren't ready to address some of their issues. Eventually the paper is completed and the resident reads it a group of staff and peers. Residents generally dread the placement paper reading, but later are glad they did it.
- F. Allowance, work projects and fines - Girls earn allowance for each day they pass. They can also do work projects to earn extra money. If a resident has restitution to pay, a portion of this money will go to pay it.
- G. Plan of Action (POA) - a behavior plan designed to increase specific appropriate behaviors and decrease inappropriate behaviors for a resident. POA's are tailored to a resident's needs.
- H. Goals - Residents are given daily assignments that are meant to help her explore her issues. Goals can be to write a paper, talk to a staff, read a chapter in a book, talk to her peers, etc. Staff try to use a method that works best for the resident.
- I. Physicals - It's important for all of us to get exercise each day. We find that when girls participate in physical activity they tend to have better moods and health. Residents are therefore required to exercise for at least 30 min. a day. Activities include: riding horse, playing basketball or volleyball, going on a walk, using workout equipment in the fitness room (treadmill, stationary bicycle, etc) participating in a game like tag, etc. Each semester, residents receive physical education credit on their high school transcript for doing physicals.

HOUSE SCHEDULE

Weekdays

AM: Residents are woken up around 6:30 a.m. Before they leave for school, each girl is expected to eat breakfast, get dressed for school, complete their hygiene routine, complete their AM chore, and have a clean room.

School: School is from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Residents have one hour for lunch. They are bussed back to HGR where lunch is prepared.

Afternoon: Residents have a short period of “in-rooms” to recharge from the day. Most girls use the time to relax or nap. After that, there is an afternoon check-in, where staff go over the plan for the day, and have a chance to hear any news from staff. Then girls are served an afternoon snack and are given a variety of options for recreation/leisure activities. Residents can usually ride horse up to two afternoons on weekdays. Phone calls can be made or received after check-in.

Evening: After supper, all residents complete a chore either in the house or the barn. Once chores are completed, girls are usually expected to complete their goal work or attend their weekly group meeting. Groups usually last until about 8:15 p.m., after which evening snack and medications are distributed. Prior to bedtime, each wing of residents get together to review their day, seek support and provide feedback for one another; this is called Positive Peer Culture (PPC). Phone calls are not made during dinner or while a resident is completing her chores. If the girl is not in a group, she may receive calls after chores until about 8:15 p.m.

Bedtime: Bedtime or “lights out” is usually at 9:30 p.m. on weekdays. Residents are expected to be settling down and in their rooms (called “in rooms”) about 15 minutes before that. Each room has a night light that stays for an hour or so after lights out.

Overnight: Girls are expected to stay in their beds and only leave their rooms to go to the bathroom, unless there is an emergency. There are less staff at the house while the girls are sleeping; these overnight staff stay up through the night and make frequent room checks to ensure safety.

Weekends

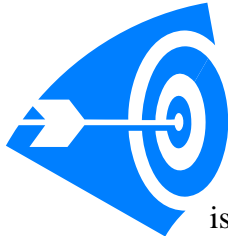
AM: On the weekends, residents generally sleep in until 8:30 a.m.; they have an hour to eat breakfast, etc, before the day’s activities begin. On

Saturdays, residents do “super-cleans” in the house and the barn. Unlike weekday chores, Saturday super-cleans are a thorough cleaning routine. Each girl is responsible for one area. Depending on the job, super-cleans take between one and two hours. On Sunday mornings, residents often have the choice of attending a church service or relaxing at the house.

Afternoon: After lunch is served, residents may have the opportunity to participate in leisure activities, group horse therapy, or work on program work. Sunday afternoons are set aside for visits from families.

Evening: For girls who passed their week, they are taken on a community outing (usually the movie theatre) and can go out to eat if they have money. On Sunday evenings, there is an on-site bible study group that girls may attend.





4 Respects

These are the core behavior expectations, what we spend most of our time and energy on. We feel that these four areas of behavior are not only important for being successful at HGR or fundamental to living a healthy, prosperous life in society. We encourage you to work with residents on these issues as well.

Respect for Authority

Authority is: All HGR staff, bus drivers, teachers, police officers, parents, HGR volunteers, community members, employers, etc

What it looks like:

Asking for help politely, using manners, saying “please” and “thank you”, using a calm tone when talking
Accepting and following direction without talking back
Willing to make adjustments when asked
Respecting personal space

What it doesn’t look like:

Ignoring, complaining or refusing to follow directions
Making demands of authority, talking back
Yelling, cursing, bashing authority, threatening, aggressive posture
Continuing behavior after you have been directed to stop
“Other staff let me do it”, manipulating staff
Asking another staff after one has told you “no”
“Fishing” for information or a yes
Entering personal space without permission

Respect for Peers and Appropriate Peer Interactions

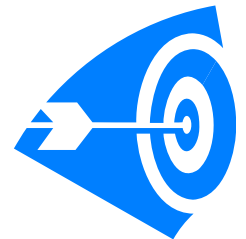
Peers are: other residents of HGR, other kids from the community

What it looks like:

Talking politely, using manners, saying “please” and “thank you”, using a calm tone when talking
Encouraging others to make good choices
Allowing other’s personal information to stay personal
Working conflicts out peacefully, using a problem solve when needed
Living together peacefully (this does not mean that you have to like them!)
Assuming the best of others, and working together
Respecting personal space
Healthy, platonic relationships
Alerting staff if a peer is being unsafe (planning to run, has a weapon or drugs, etc)

What it doesn’t look like:

Gossiping, bickering, arguing, name calling, saying “shut up”, insulting someone and then saying “just kidding”
Bullying or intimidating to get your way
Saying or doing things on purpose to get the other person mad or in trouble
Play-fighting, aggressive posture, invading personal space
Romantic Relationships, flirting, snuggling, sexual contact
Refusing to work with one another
Encouraging others to make unhealthy choices, “partners in crime”
Stealing or misusing peer’s property
Not telling staff if a peer is being unsafe (planning to run, has a weapon or drugs, etc)



Respect for Yourself and Your Property

What it looks like:

Good Hygiene: showering daily, brushing teeth, face washed, clean smelling, hair clean and neatly groomed
In appropriate clothing for the situation (sleeping, barn chores, school, etc)
Eating appropriate sized portions at meals and snacks, eating a well-balanced diet,
Taking medications as directed, attending doctor's visits, not using drugs, alcohol or cigarettes, not misusing any substance
Staying safe: alerting staff if you feel like hurting yourself, returning sharp objects (ex. Scissors) to staff after use, making sure staff know where you are at all times
Clean room, keeping property in good shape, keeping your property to yourself

What it doesn't look like:

Poor Hygiene: skipping showers, dirty teeth, smelling of body odor, messy or dirty hair.
Wearing the wrong type of clothes for the situation (ex. Pajamas to the barn or to school)
Boobs, Butts, Bellies or Backsides showing
Bringing barn shoes in the house
Overeating, unbalanced diet, refusing meals
Refusing or misusing medications, refusing to attend or cooperate at doctor's visits, using drugs, alcohol or cigarettes, misusing any substance
Being unsafe: hiding sharps or not turning them in, hiding weapons, planning on running away or harming self, going outside without permission
Messy room, leaving property out in common areas, allowing others to borrow clothing, misusing or destroying your property

Respect for Program and Rules

Following program rules, rules of probation, laws, etc.

What it looks like:

Follow rules as outlined in the Resident handbook
Following laws and having pro-social behavior
Participating in groups and check-ins, waiting your turn to talk, raising your hand
Completing journal entry
Being on time for things
Following rules for phone calls, writing letters, visits, etc
Being in the appropriate places with permission
Only using what you are allowed to use and being in the allowed areas, asking staff to go into areas that require permission first (kitchen, front office, phone room, outside, etc)

What it doesn't look like:

Breaking program rules, laws or being socially inappropriate
Disrupting check-ins
Not doing evening journal entry
Being late for things, making the group wait for you
Misusing privileges like phone calls, writing letters, visits
Stealing or hoarding food, office supplies or hygiene products
Entering areas that are restricted or not getting permission to enter (kitchen, front office, phone room, outside, etc)



Internet Information for Parents

Today's children rely heavily on technology to learn, play and community with their friends. Most children have access to the Internet. And while the Internet presents a vast opportunity for education and entertainment, it also presents dangers: Some chat rooms and social settings on the web may influence children in an unhealthy direction and predators can lurk in anonymity.

Internet Safety:



What Parents Can Do –

- Talk with your child(ren) about the benefits and risks of the Internet. Ask them what they do online, what websites they visit, who they chat with and what games they play.
- When possible, go online with your children. Have them show you their favorite websites, online games and chat rooms.
- Go online and look at websites, chat rooms, and blogs that your child(ren) might visit. This will help you identify what you think is important to discuss with them. Make a list of any websites you find that you think your children will enjoy and share it with them.
- Keep the computer in a busy area of the house.
- With your child(ren), agree on rules of what they can and cannot do online, when they can go on the Internet and how long they can stay.
- Have your child(ren) sign an Internet pledge and post it by the computer so they remember how to stay safe online.
- If your child(ren) tell you that they saw something inappropriate online, don't blame or punish them. Remember that how you react will affect what your child(ren) share with you in the future.
- Ask who your child(ren) talk to online and how they communicate (i.e. email, instant messenger, chat rooms, blogs, etc.). Tell them that you expect them to be as nice online as they are offline. Make sure they know the dangers of meeting new friends online.
- Decide if you want to allow your child(ren) to purchase items or sign up for online services (e.g. membership to a gaming website) on their own or if they should ask your permission first.
- Teach children about plagiarism. Explain that if they conduct online research they must give attribution to the author, organization, or website that created the content.
- Talk with your child(ren) about downloading music and movies online. If you decide to let your child(ren) download files onto your computer, show them legal ways to do so, such as using pay per download or pay per month services like iTunes and Napster.
- Consider using a filter, blocking, or ratings system for your computer.

For more information on Internet Safety, visit www.iKeepSafe.org.

Sample Internet Rules

- Ask permission to be on the Internet
- No Internet after 9 p.m.
- Do not allow child private access to Internet – no Internet in bedrooms, have computer in central local of house
- No chat rooms or chatting while playing online games
- Know your child's username and passwords for email and social websites (face book, my space, etc.)
- Work with your child to set privacy settings on social websites
- Ask permission to give out personal information or make purchases
- Do not sign up or register on any sites without permission
- Tell an adult if anything makes you feel scared, uncomfortable or confused
- If an inappropriate web site pops up or you accidentally come upon one, tell an adult immediately
- Do not search inappropriate or sexual words
- Insist that your child must know about a person in the flesh before they can be added as a friend on social sites

More Information:

For more information on Internet Safety Tips, etc. please visit the following sites:

FBI Publications – A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety –
www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguide.htm

Safety Tips – www.netSMART.org

SafeKids.com – www.safekids.com

Internet Safety: Information for Parents – www.wiredsafety.org/parent.html

Internet Safety Education – www.iSAFE.org

How to Contact Your Local Social Service Agency:

Not sure where to go to contact your local social service agency or who to talk to? Visit the following web site and look up the contact information for your county –
<http://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Legacy/DM-0005-ENG>.

Goals for Home Visits:

When your child comes home for a visit, you might notice some of the following on their Home Visit Contract.

Three types for Home Visit Goals:

1. Bonding
2. Creating Understanding
3. Rules and Limits

Bonding:

- *Make Dinner:* Make a healthy meal for the family
- *Play Games:* Enjoy time together. Play a board game, video game or card game together.
- *Siblings:* Spend time with your siblings (without, bickering, bossing, or mean mugging and you both need to be awake!)
- *Help Out:* Do something helpful for someone in the family without being asked to. Write down what you did on the Home Visit contract.

Creating Understanding:

- *Family discussion:* Everyone says something based on the following questions:
 - o One thing that was *good* and one thing that was *bad* today.
 - o One thing that you were *looking forward* to and one thing that you were *worried about* today.
 - o One thing that *went well* and one thing that *can be improved* while you were on Home Visit.
 - o One thing you are *proud of yourself* for and one thing you *wish you would have done differently*.
- *Placement Paper:* Bring home a section of your placement paper and read to your parents.
- *Baby Talk:* Ask your parents what you were like as a baby. Were you sick? Did you cry a lot? What did you like to do? Who did you like to be around? Look at old pictures or your baby book together.
- *Missing each other:* Have a conversation with your parent: share three things that you miss about one another.
- *Friends:* Have a conversation with your parent about your friends. Who do you both agree are positive friends? Who do you both agree are negative friends? Which friends do you disagree about?
- *Horse Riding:* Tell your family about the horse you ride. What do you like about that horse and how are you similar?
- *Change:* Tell your parents three ways that you want to change before you come home. Have your parents say three ways that they want you to change too.
- *Career Goals:* What do you want to do when you grow up? What things do you have to do to obtain those goals? Discuss with your family.
- *Similarities:* How do you remind your parent of themselves?

- *Disappointments:* Share three times that your parents disappointed you. Listen while they share three times they were disappointed in you. Do not make justifications or try to explain your behaviors – just listen.
- *Family History:* Have your parents tell you stories about your family (grandparents, great-grandparents, etc.) that you don't know already.
- *New Foster Family:* Creating understanding
 - o Why did they decide to become foster parents? Why do they like having foster kids?
 - o What is their family or origin history? Describe where you come from too.
 - o What were they like growing up? Share funny/happy stories from your childhood.
 - o Share a time when you were scared.
 - o Talk to the other foster kids – where are they from? What do they like to do?

Rules and Limits:

- *Phone:* Discuss rules about using the phone while on home visit. How long can you be on the phone? Is there phone call curfew? Who are you allowed to talk to? Is this the same as it would be if you were living there permanently? What changes would be made?
- *Chores:* Will you be expected to do chores when you come home for good? What things will you be expected to do?
- *Dating:* Discuss rules about dating. What are their expectations for you? Write them down on your Home Visit contract.
- *Allowance:* Will you get a weekly allowance? Are there things that you have to do to get it, like chores or good grades? If you won't get an allowance, how will you get spending money? Write what you decide on your Home Visit contract.
- *Safety Plan for Discharge:* Share your discharge safety plan with your parents – ask for suggestions or improvements.
- *Curfew:* What rules will there be about curfew when you come home? What will be the consequences for breaking these rules? Discuss with your parent. What rules will there be when you are out with friends or cousins?
- *Running away:* Safety Plan for running away. Discuss and agree on a plan if there is an argument – how will you stay safe? What words will you use if you need a time out? Where will you go? How will things get resolved?
- *Fire safety:* Discuss escape routes and meeting plans in case there is a fire in the home.
- *Clothes:* Go through your clothes at home. Anything that you don't want – throw away, give to a sibling or donate to a charitable organization. (Don't bring it back to HGR!)

HEARTLAND



GIRLS' RANCH

How to Contact Heartland Girls Ranch

Mail: 189 Highway 9 NE, Benson, MN 56215

Office & Case Manager - 320.843.4815

Office Fax - 320.843.5105

Resident House - 320.842.4472

Web - www.heartlandgirlsranh.org