



Ten Tips on Getting Girls Interested in Computers

1. **Start a Computer Club designed to appeal to girls.** Girls like to join clubs and take classes with their friends. A lone girl, who likes computers, is unlikely to join a computer club by herself. Make sure girls take the highest level of computing offered.
2. **Give girls good role models.** They need to see women using computers competently and confidently. Check out computing magazines—most photographs show men. In high school campuses, being a computer geek raises a male student's coolness factor; it doesn't have the same effect for girls. To offset this, when you invite speakers to classes or clubs, make sure you include women.
3. **Encourage girls to use the computer more often.** Make them lab assistants. In class, call on girls more often, even if they don't volunteer. Ask them difficult questions that require a higher level of thinking. Try to find time for girls to be on machines when the boys are not around. They will be less tempted to ask the "gurus" for help. Choose a girl to help set up new hardware or software. Personally invite them to go to a computing contest. Don't let anyone deter them.
4. **Help them to envision computer science as a career.** Girls may perceive it as a job spent all day in a cubicle with nothing but a machine.
5. **Don't spoon feed solutions.** Girls tend to ask for assistance when something doesn't work. Boys tend to try to figure it out. Encourage them to be daring with the machine. It's a real confidence booster when they succeed. Only step in if you really need to and then try just a hint, or help them read the manual.
6. **Purchase games that appeal to them.** Ask what kind of computer games they enjoy. The more time a young child can spend on a computer, the more confident she will become with the machine.
7. **In class, collaborate more, compete less.** In general, girls respond better to collaborative projects rather than competitive ones. Encourage collaborations, but be alert to boys dominating the group.
8. **Explain the value of using computer in practical situations.** Girls like to see what computers can do for them. They see computers more as a tool and less as a toy. Let them type their papers on the computers, show them how to construct web pages or teach them to make a graph using a spreadsheet.
9. **Put the home computer in a centralised location; give girls equal access with their brothers and other family members.** Is it any wonder that girls aren't using the computer at home if it's in the boy's room?
10. **Establish what percentage of students in the highest level of computer science taught at your school is composed of girls.** If it's not at least 50 percent, make the school become aware of the problem. Talk to counselors, parents, and other teachers to enlist their help in encouraging the girls in your school to get into the highest levels of computer science.

The online world can either be a hostile or safe space for girls and young women. The responsibility rests on concerned individuals, parents, and educators, who will define how empowering or disempowering the Internet and other ICTs can become for girls and young women. After all, the computer is still a machine that can only be as useful as people want it to be.

Source: Girl Tech by Cynthia Lanus