



Girl Connection

FOR THOSE WHO SERVE ADOLESCENT FEMALES
IOWA GENDER-SPECIFIC SERVICES TASK FORCE
DECEMBER 2004

ad·vo·ca·cy (əd·və-k-s) Noun

The act of arguing in favor of something;
active support.

The focus of work with young women is frequently on individual and relational change. It is important, however, to recognize societal changes that need to be addressed as well. Working with young women is a multi-level task and the societal context they live in contributes, sometimes significantly, to their challenges.

Here are some suggestions for societal level advocacy on behalf of girls

1. Challenge gender role stereotypes in your personal life and community.
2. Celebrate girls' and womens' achievements - past and present.
3. Support research on girls' lives.
4. Raise awareness about the use of words and phrases that further sexist attitudes. For example, do you know the origins of the phrase "rule of thumb"? Are you courageous enough to challenge others to stop when they say something like "you throw like a girl"?
5. Support comprehensive sex education.
6. Make use of days like International Women's Day and Take Our Daughters/Sons to Work Day.
7. Champion state/federal legislation that supports equality for young women. For example, encourage funding of Title IX enforcement at a level that permits increased compliance reviews and full and prompt investigation of complaints.
8. Join girl-friendly organizations.
9. Use the power of your money - don't purchase anything that demeans young women; alternately, donate to organizations that advocate for young women.
10. Ensure school districts follow requirements regarding multicultural and gender fair curricula.
11. Act on behalf of girls – write letters to the editor, talk to legislators, make noise!
12. Support cooperative, as well as competitive, learning models.
13. Fight to end poverty – most of those living in poverty are women and children.
14. Hold organizations/schools/communities accountable for maintaining girl-friendly climates.

Advocating on behalf of girls means being willing to ask the question "what about the girls?" in every gathering, not just the meetings at work that are specifically about girls. It means being willing to say "it's time for the girls" in your city, your neighborhood, your school, your spiritual community, every place young women are found. Advocating on behalf of girls means being willing to be the "uh-oh, here they come" person. The person who contests complacency and reminds everyone that they need to understand and consider the needs of young women.

Advocating on behalf of young women means rocking the boat when it is called for, exposing the truth, raising awareness and creating change in places that don't always welcome change. Without advocacy at the societal level, the individual and relational work done with young women has a diminished chance of long term success.

Young women are powerfully impacted by societal influences, often to their detriment. We, who care about young women, need to act as champions on their behalf while fortifying young women to themselves challenge that which would harm them.

"Speak your mind...
even if your voice shakes."
~Maggie Kuhn

The following is taken from a list of female responsive values written by Rebecca Maniglia for the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) as part of a re-designing effort for the training curriculum NIC has been using for its national female responsive training.

Female responsive services are multi-leveled.

Female responsive services recognize that the lives of girls in the juvenile justice system mirror the experiences of all girls in our society. What happens on a local, national and international level economically, socially and politically impacts girls everywhere.

Female responsive services seek to educate girls and juvenile justice professionals about these connections.

Female responsive services seek to promote advocacy for girls and juvenile justice professionals on these global connections while also encouraging them to work at various levels to create change in the entire continuum of services for girls in juvenile justice.

December 2004 ~ Advocacy

The Girl Connection

newsletter is provided as a service of the Iowa Gender-Specific Services Task Force. For back issues of *The Girl Connection*, more information about the Gender-Specific Services Task Force, or if you are willing to receive future issues via e-mail to save mailing costs, please contact us:

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