



The Girl Connection

FOR THOSE WHO SERVE ADOLESCENT FEMALES INVOLVED WITH OR AT RISK FOR INVOLVEMENT WITH THE JUSTICE SYSTEM
THE IOWA GENDER-SPECIFIC SERVICES TASK FORCE / NOVEMBER 2001

The Role of Men in Providing Gender-Specific Services to Girls

W hispers & Screams, the fifth annual conference on adolescent females held May 1-2 in Ames, drew an unprecedented number of men who work with girls and young women across Iowa. A keynote presentation by Dads and Daughters Executive Director and girls advocate Joe Kelly addressed the damaging impact of the media on girls and spoke about the difference men can make by countering those messages. Several panel discussions and workshops looked at the challenges and opportunities men experience working with girls in the juvenile justice system. This issue of the Girl Connection draws on the ideas presented at the conference and some of the questions raised about men's positive involvement in the lives of girls.

Who Are The Men?

There is no shortage of men involved in the lives of adolescent girls at risk. Too often the most important men in girls' lives are those abusing them, abusing their mothers, or taking advantage of their vulnerability as sexual partners or boyfriends. Because of the damaging effects of these men, most of our attention is focused on the adult male as a risk factor for girls – as an actual or potential perpetrator.

Yet, there is another group of men who can and do impact the lives of girls and young women in very positive ways. Foster Fathers. Juvenile Court Officers. Judges. Attorneys. Group Home Staff. Case Managers. Therapists. Detention Center Staff. Group Facilitators. School Liaison Officers. Teachers. Substance Abuse Counselors. Spiritual Leaders. Coaches. Decat Coordinators. DHS Case Workers. Mentors. Supportive Dads.

From a Male Perspective

As a man working with adolescent females, my experience has taught me how important it is that we acknowledge the differences in societal expectations for both girls *and* boys. Men need to recognize their own viewpoints, stereotypes, and possible misconceptions about working with girls. Men who work with adolescent girls must...

- Encourage girls to find, accept, and trust approval from one another and other women.
- Understand their own gender role socialization and expectations. Do not allow these to interfere with their work.
- Establish and maintain clear boundaries around verbal and physical interactions.
- Be sensitive to girls. Encourage clear and direct communication from individuals and within the group.
- Model non-exploitive relationships with female staff.

- Anonymous

I can think of no trait whatsoever that only boys categorically have and girls don't or that girls categorically have and boys don't. What we know is that girls as well as boys are hardwired to be competent, creative, and competitive. What we know is that boys as well as girls are hardwired to be caring, nurturing, and compassionate. The question is not whether or not we are hardwired. I agree that there are hardwired traits. The question is which ones we value and nurture in which gender that makes these relatively related people seem so different.

- Michael Kimmel

In *Beyond the 'Gender Wars': A Conversation about Girls, Boys, and Education*
AAUW Educational Foundation, 2001

Ten Tips for Dads with Daughters

1. Listen to girls. Focus on what is really important – what my daughter thinks, believes, feels, dreams and does – rather than how she looks. I have a profound influence on how my daughter views herself. When I value my daughter for her true self, I give her confidence to use her talents in the world.
2. Encourage her strength and celebrate her savvy. Help my daughter learn to recognize, resist and overcome barriers. Help her develop her strengths to achieve her goals. Help her be what Girls Incorporated calls Strong, Smart and Bold!
3. Respect her uniqueness. Urge her to love her body and discourage dieting. Make sure my daughter knows that I love her for who she is and see her as a whole person, capable of anything. My daughter is likely to choose a life partner who acts like me and has my values. So, treat her and those she loves with respect. Remember 1) growing girls need to eat often and healthy, 2) dieting increases the risk of eating disorders (and usually doesn't work), and 3) she has her body for what it can do, not how it looks. Advertisers spend billions to convince my daughter she doesn't look "right." I won't buy into it.
4. Get physically active with her. Play catch, tag, jump rope, basketball, Frisbee, hockey, soccer, or just take walks...you name it! Help her learn all the great things her body can do. Physically active girls are less likely to get pregnant, drop out of school, or put up with an abusive partner. Studies show that the most physically active girls have *fathers* who are active with them. Being physically active with her is a great investment!
5. Get involved in my daughter's school. Volunteer, chaperone, read to her class. Ask tough questions, like: Does the school have and use an eating disorder prevention or body image awareness program? Does it tolerate sexual harassment of boys or girls? Do more boys take advanced math and science classes and if so, why? (California teacher Doug Kirkpatrick's girl students weren't interested in science, so he changed his methods and their participation soared!) Are at least half the student leaders girls?
6. Get involved in my daughter's activities. Volunteer to drive, coach, direct a play, teach a class – anything! Demand equality. Texas mortgage officer and volunteer basketball coach Dave Chapman was so appalled by the gym his 9-year-old daughter's team had to use, he fought to open the modern "boy's" gym to the girls' team. He succeeded. Dads make a difference!
7. Help make the world better for girls. This world holds dangers for our daughters. But my over-protection doesn't work, and it tells my daughter that I don't trust her! Instead, work with other parents to demand an end to violence against females, media sexualization of girls, pornography, advertisers making billions feeding on our daughters' insecurities, and all "boys are more important than girls" attitudes.
8. Take my daughter to work with me. Participate in every April's official Take Our Daughters to Work Day and make sure my business participates. Show her how I pay the bills and manage my money. My daughter will have a job and pay rent some day, so I need to introduce her to the world of work and finances!
9. Support positive alternative media for girls. Join with your family to watch programs that portray smart, savvy girls. Subscribe to healthy girl-edited magazines like *New Moon* and visit on-line girl-run "zines" and websites. It's not enough to condemn what's bad, I must support and use media that support my daughter!
10. Talk to other fathers. Together, we fathers have reams of experience, expertise and encouragement to share. There's a lot we can learn from each other. And we can have a lot of influence – for example, Dads and Daughters protests stop negative ads. We can make the world better for girls when we work together!

Courtesy of DADS. On-line at www.dadsanddaughters.org



Save the Date

In its sixth year, "**Whispers and Screams are hard to hear: Creating an audience for girls' voices**" continues to widen the audience of Iowans who are committed to listening to the voices of adolescent girls. This conference connects professionals who desire equitable, gender-responsive services for adolescent girls involved with or at risk for involvement with the juvenile justice system. It will be held **May 16-17, 2002** at the **Hotel at Gateway Center in Ames**. The theme of the conference will be *Developing Lasting Commitments to Girls – Communities, Programs, and Leadership*. Additional details will follow in the next Girl Connection.

Ten Tips for Live-Away Dads

(Dads who live away from their children due to divorce, separation or conflict with the child's mother.)

1. Hang in there for the long haul. My involvement in my daughter's life may be different than my dreams for the two of us when she was little, but it is no less important. I remain a tremendous influence in her life and need to stay involved in a calm, loving and committed way forever.
2. Develop healthy social and emotional supports for myself. Some live-away dads struggle to handle anger and loneliness with maturity. These feelings are normal, but I must be careful not to become emotionally dependent on my daughter. Instead, I need to spend time with healthy adults and get my emotional and social needs met through them.
3. Remember that my daughter lives in two homes. I need to be patient if my daughter doesn't do chores or follow rules the way I want. She has different rules in her mother's house. She may sometimes be upset or moody when she leaves my home or her mother's home. I need to remember that my relationship with her is much more important than getting her to do things the way I think she should.
4. Father the best I can when she is with me. I cannot change how her mother raises her or make up for what her mother does or doesn't do. I can't correct excessive leniency by her mother with excessive strictness on my part. Instead, I need to father her calmly. Give her choices. Be a patient and loving father, not a demanding and critical perfectionist. Be the dad she can always talk to and trust to support her — even when she makes mistakes.
5. Keep my daughter out of the middle — even if her mother doesn't. Talk well about my daughter's mother even when I'm angry at her — and even if she talks poorly about me. Negative talk about my daughter's mother is a little wound to my daughter, and causes her to think less of herself, her mom and me. I'll resolve adult conflicts away from my daughter and allow her to be the child.
6. My daughter and her mother are different people. I'll not misdirect anger at my daughter's mother toward my daughter. When my daughter does not listen to me, does less than her best in school or makes other mistakes (normal behaviors for most kids), I'll be careful not to confuse my daughter's mistakes with her mother's actions, and instead, see what I can do to make things better.
7. Give my daughter consistent time and attention. My daughter needs my healthy attention in person, on the phone, over the internet, through the mail, or any other way. I can't try to buy her love with things — even if her mother does. My daughter needs my presence not my presents.
8. Listen to my daughter. Lecturing and arguing get me nowhere. It does not help if I minimize my daughter's feelings or falsely tell her everything will be okay when I can't guarantee that it will. Instead, I need to listen and be there for her. Accept my daughter for who she is; not who I want her to be, think she should be, or think she would be if she were raised only by me. I'll take the lead in communicating — even when I feel unappreciated. I may not agree with everything she says or does, but when I listen, I build the emotional connection that will help her listen to me when it really counts.
9. Focus on my daughter's positives. Many men were raised by fathers pointing out what we did wrong, so we could fix it. That may work on the job, but intimate personal relationships are not like a job. Focusing on negatives undermines her strength and confidence — already stretched by living in two homes.
10. Be her father, not her mother. I am a powerful and encouraging role model, and I'll tell her that she has a special place in my heart. My masculine actions and loving words can help her realize that she too can be adventurous, playful and successful — and should expect respect from affectionate, honorable men.

Created by DADs advisor William C. Klatte, author of *Live-Away Dads* (Penguin, 1999). On-line at www.dadsanddaughters.org

“Gender-specific programs let me know that even in a ‘man’s world,’ a lot can be accomplished by women, and someday it might not be a man’s world.”

- Participant, Harriet Tubman Residential Center, a residential facility for girls in Auburn, NY
In *Guiding Principles for Promising Female Programming*,
Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention,
October 1998

The Girl Connection is provided as a service of the Iowa Gender-Specific Services Task Force, coordinated by the Iowa Commission on the Status of Women, Department of Human Rights.

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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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