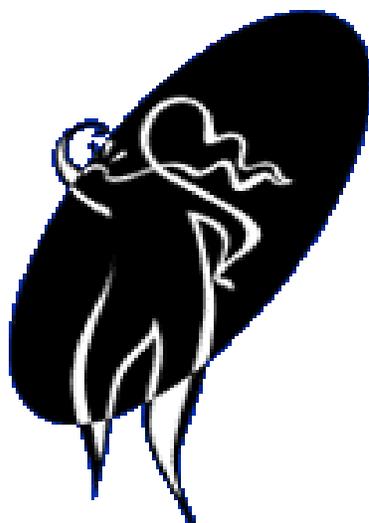


The Girl Connection Collection



December 2002 ~ December 2003

A publication of the
Iowa Gender-Specific Services Task Force
Iowa Commission on the Status of Women



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 /DECEMBER 2002

Is the Internet a Threat to Girls?

The Crimes Against Children Research Center, funded by the U.S. Congress through a grant to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, came out with research in June 2000 that explored the negative impact of the Internet on children. They interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,501 male and female young people age 10 to 17 who used the Internet regularly. Sexual solicitation, exposure to unwanted sexual material, harassment and parental awareness were the primary areas explored.

The following is a synopsis of some of their findings. The full report (62 pages) can be viewed at unh.edu/ccrc/index.html

Total Youth Surveyed	1501
Reported Incidents of Solicitation	286 (19%)

Gender of Youth Solicited	
Female	66%
Male	34%

The report stated that "girls were targeted at almost twice the rate of boys (66% vs. 34%), but given that girls are often thought to be the exclusive targets of sexual solicitation, the sizable percentage of boys is important."

Gender of Solicitor	
Male	67%
Female	19%
Don't know	13%

(It is important to note here that it is easy to misrepresent your gender online.)

Place on Internet of incident	
Chat room	65%
Instant messages	24%
Other	11%

Some of the conclusions drawn in the report regarding sexual solicitation include:

"Not all of the sexual aggression on the Internet fits the image of the sexual predator or wily child molester. " (generally the adults young users were involved with were young adults - age 18 to 25) "A lot of it looks and sounds like the hallways of our high schools."

"Girls were somewhat more likely than boys (59% vs. 41%) to have formed a close online friendship with an adult." *(these were relationships formed regardless of the nature of the relationship)*

What did kids do when they were sexually solicited online?

According to the report, 49% of the young people solicited did not tell anyone. This number decreased to 36% when the solicitation was aggressive. An aggressive solicitation involved meeting off line or being asked to meet off line. Only 10% reported the incident to an authority (law enforcement, Internet service provider, etc.) This increased to 18% when the solicitation was aggressive. The rest reported to parents, friends or siblings.

The following speculations were made about why kids did not report solicitations:

- ◆ they were not alarmed
- ◆ they didn't know or doubted anyone could help
- ◆ they were embarrassed/ashamed
- ◆ they feared losing computer privileges
- ◆ they accepted it as part of the Internet experience

Major findings and conclusions

- ◆ A large fraction of youth are encountering offensive experiences on the Internet.
- ◆ The offenses and offenders are even more diverse than we previously thought.
- ◆ Most sexual solicitations fail, but their quantity is potentially alarming.
- ◆ The primary vulnerable population is teenagers.
- ◆ Sexual material is very intrusive on the Internet.
- ◆ Most youth brush off these offenses, but some are quite distressed.
- ◆ Many youth do not tell anyone.
- ◆ Youth and parents do not report these experiences and do not know where to report them.
- ◆ Internet friendships between teens and adults are not uncommon and seem to be mostly benign.

- ◆ We still know little about the incidence of traveler cases (where adults or youth travel to physically meet and have sex with someone they first came to know on the Internet) or any completed Internet seduction and Internet sexual exploitation cases including trafficking in child pornography.
- ◆ Nothing in the survey should dampen enthusiasm about the potential of the Internet.

--From *Online Victimization: A Report on the Nation's Youth: 2000*

What can we do?

Security measures and law enforcement are an important when the law has been broken, but as the Online Victimization report indicated, frequently the online incidents resemble "the hallways of our high schools" and laws aren't necessarily being broken.

We can empower girls by teaching them the skills they need to navigate the "halls" of the Internet. Assertiveness and confidence make girls an unappealing target to a would-be predator, whether online or not.

How can we do it?

Validate the relationships. They are paramount to girls, including relationships they form online. Open the door to discussing on line relationships by taking them seriously. If they know you see the relationship as "real", they will be more willing to listen and talk about it.

Realize that "Just Say No" to the Internet is not enough.

Assertiveness is just one of the skills to teach girls that will effect all of their relationships. Guilt-free, unapologetic and compassionate assertiveness is invaluable. Her ability to defend herself against online predators will be only one of the benefits. The confidence she gains will have a ripple effect in all that she does.

Communication Style Activity

Here's an activity you can do with a group or individual girl(s) to work on assertiveness.

Communication Styles

Passive-----Assertive-----Aggressive

Passive-Aggressive

Step 1. Discuss how these forms of communication fall on a continuum with passive-aggressive communication turning the continuum into a triangle.

Step 2. Gather answers from the group/ individual about how each style of communication might look in practice. (e.g. what does a person who is passive act like?)

Step 3. Have them place themselves on the continuum/triangle. What kind of communicator do they perceive themselves to be?

Step 4. Ask participants what kind of animal, plant, etc. each type of communication resembles. Use the metaphors any time you mention that type of communication.

Utilizing the groups' creativity rather than having pre-determined images gets them involved. Their "ownership" of the metaphors increases their investment in and understanding of the concept of assertiveness and other forms of communication.

Example of completed communication styles group exercise

In a small group exercise, participants determined the following metaphors:

Passive = doormat

Passive/Aggressive = weed/ivy

Aggressive = bear

Assertive = shrub

Following the activity/discussion, this group incorporated the metaphors daily. They described the shrub as compact enough that it did not keep light from the other plants in the forest. The shrub was unpleasant to sit on because it was prickly. If it was sat on, it perked right back up because it was strong underneath and its roots were strong enough to withstand the weeds that tried to tangle them up.

These were just some of the concepts they produced. The shrub metaphor in particular was brought up for weeks after the activity was completed. When the girls would talk to each other about needing to be assertive in a given situation they would say, "Be A Shrub!".

Once the girl(s) have decided on a metaphor, use that as a jumping off point to create further activities based on their metaphors.



The Girl Connection

For those who serve adolescent females
Iowa Gender Specific Services Task Force
February 2003

"Among teens in juvenile detention, nearly two thirds of boys and nearly three quarters of girls have at least one psychiatric disorder. These rates dwarf the estimated 15 percent of youth in the general population". (NIMH, 2002)

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) is the preeminent reference for diagnostic criteria. However, "some experts have charged that especially for women the DSM-III-R inappropriately blames victimized clients rather than their traumatic life experiences for their distress. Only [the diagnosis] PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) explicitly recognizes the occurrence of life events that by their very nature are traumatic." (Cook, 1993) All other diagnoses pathologize the individual.

In addition to problems with insufficient recognition of traumatic life experiences, the DSM is based on the male experience alone. "Traditionally, professionals have used male-based norms to define healthy versus pathological behavior." (Cook, 1993) This means that the bulk of the research is on males as well.

Although literature and research on the diagnosing of adolescent girls is scarce, there has been some information that confirms what those of us who work with girls already knew:

"...many of the tens of thousands of children with disruptive behavior disorders [oppositional defiant disorder-ODD and conduct disorder-CD] may have been exposed to traumatic maltreatment and may experience undetected PTSD symptoms." (Ford, 2000)

"...a considerable number of adolescent girls who exhibit violence and lack impulse control have been victims of sexual abuse." (Kann, 2000)

The interpretation of the limited research is suspect in its consideration of what is best for girls as well. It has been suggested that due to girls who are diagnosed

with CD having more severe behavior problems, the DSM needs "gender-specific criteria in diagnosing children with conduct problems, including a 'lower threshold of aggressive behavior' for girls". (Kann, 2000) We have seen what this type of attitude has done for girls in the juvenile justice system. Physically aggressive behaviors that were previously not criminalized have become so. As a result, there is the illusion that girls' aggression is out of control. Lowering the threshold of aggressive behavior for girls in diagnostic criteria would have a similar impact. Girls would be perceived as more mentally ill when the change would in fact have occurred in the system that diagnoses them. This would also exacerbate the existing risk of their being misdiagnosed and then treated for only their behaviors and not their trauma.

Upon examination of the diagnostic criteria for PTSD, ODD and CD there are significant similarities; there are, however, dramatic differences in their treatment. Not only is the professional approach necessarily different, but personal biases also differ often to the detriment of those diagnosed. The reality is, a girl is apt to experience negative attitudes from professionals based on preconceived notions linked with an ODD or CD diagnosis. PTSD and ODD or CD may have many similarities when it comes to diagnosing but PTSD is equated with victimization and ODD or CD are equated with perpetration. Even with every effort to remain unbiased, attitudes about and behavior toward girls diagnosed and misdiagnosed has a tremendous impact on their success.

February 2003

Social workers, parents, teachers and clinicians must ask themselves if it is fair to label a girl ODD, CD and the like when her behaviors may be an appropriate and even adaptive strategy to dealing with a trauma. Girls are more than a diagnosis whether it is accurate or not and they are more than the trauma they have experienced in life. We must view them that way.

The gender specific approach encourages us to treat all girls holistically. Programs must employ staff who are able and willing to leave behind "the diminishing and shameful labels that so often limit adults' abilities to see the resiliency and strengths of girls." (ICSW, 1999) We can and should advocate for caution in diagnosing. When a girl must be diagnosed, we can encourage a diagnosis that takes into account all of who she is and what she has experienced. Perhaps most important, we can help girls learn to raise their own voice against being inaccurately labeled as mentally ill.

References

- Cook, E.P., Wamke, M. (1993). Gender Bias and the DSM-III-R. *Counselor Education & Supervision*, Vol. 32 Issue 4.
- Ford, J.D., Ruscusin, R., Ellis, C.G., Daviss, W.B., Reiser, J., Fleischer, A., Thomas, J., (2000). Child Maltreatment, Other Trauma Exposure, and Posttraumatic Symptomatology among Children with Oppositional Defiant and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders. *Child Maltreatment*, Vol 5 Issue 3.
- Iowa Commission on the Status of Women. (1999). *Providing Gender-Specific Services for Adolescent Female Offenders: Guidelines & Resources*. 15.
- Kann, R.T., Hann, F.J. (2000). Disruptive Behavior Disorders in Children and Adolescents: How Do Girls Differ from Boys? *Journal of Counseling & Development*, Vol. 78 Issue 3
- National Institutes of Mental Health. (2002). *Psychiatric Disorders Common Among Detained Youth*.

"If we learn from the experience, there is no failure, only delayed victory."

Carrie Chapman Catt

The Girl Connection

For those who serve adolescent females
Iowa Gender Specific Services Task Force
April 2003

"True peace is not merely the absence of tension, it is the presence of justice."

~Martin Luther King Jr.

Most people agree, girls are raised to take on traditionally feminine roles. But what happens to girls' peace of mind when they experience this grooming in a culture that routinely mocks, marginalizes and devalues the feminine?

Consider Jessica and Heather, who are preparing for careers after high school:

~Jessica wants to be an electrician. She is steered away from the necessary preparatory classes by her guidance counselor and parents. Her friends and teachers make jokes at her expense. She notices that the math and science classes only talk about the contributions of men. She decides girls are not supposed to be electricians.

~Heather wants to be a child-care provider. Her guidance counselor and parents support her. Her friends and teachers praise her for her choice. She notices that "mother and child" is a concept she sees much more often than "father and child". She decides that girls are supposed to be child-care providers.

Jessica missed the opportunity to pursue a career she was interested in because of the effort to win approval by meeting gender role expectations she had learned. Heather was affirmed for meeting gender role expectations but will learn later that this career field, dominated by women, is not valued by society (male electricians average \$19.29/hour and female child-care providers average \$7.43/hour).

April 2003

Jessica and Heather were both shortchanged.

They and millions of girls just like them see and understand that boys are given preferential treatment and standing in society well before it is time to make career choices. Ask girls who have better locker rooms and equipment to use at school. Ask girls who are the adult decision-makers in their places of worship or in the government. The messages they get about who comes first and who comes second are pervasive.

How can girls be at peace with themselves when they clearly get the message that girls and women are inherently less important than men? What can we do?

We can begin by understanding that peace does not mean passivity. Although it is often equated with the absence of conflict, striving for peace entails struggle.

Some things you can do

~Know that what you model to girls has enormous consequences. If you only talk about women and girls being devalued and never do anything to challenge it, they will learn to be passive. Adults must take action.

~Use existing resources. For example, Title IX, which requires any school receiving federal money to maintain academic and athletic gender equality.

~When you are asked “what about the boys?” remember that valuing people is not a zero sum game. Respect is not finite with only so much to go around. Valuing girls more doesn’t mean you have to value boys less.

~Get comfortable with girls’ emotional responses. Adults must understand that young girls don’t always have the skills to express their anger in a way that is palatable to adults. This doesn’t make their anger or other feelings any less valid.

Peace for girls has often been more about the adults around girls having peace and quiet. It’s been about adults having “peace” from the discomfort of dealing with an angry or depressed girl. It has also been about adults having “peace” from confronting the injustices they see and the guilt they feel about doing little to change them.

Girls having peace in their lives isn’t about keeping girls passive and quiet. It’s about taking action ourselves and empowering girls to fight with courage and honor for what they deserve.

*The right to be
seen, heard and genuinely valued as an
equal.*



Critical Thinking and Female Responsive Services

There are variations in the definition of critical thinking, but conventional standards agree - critical thinking is the evaluation of ideas and experiences. Ask anyone who works with girls if they teach critical thinking skills, they will emphatically tell you “yes”. Such is the importance placed on reason, logic and decision making. However, upon closer examination, one comes to understand that critical thinking is a highly individualized process that involves filtering information through personal belief systems as well as any intellectual process of reason or logic. A girl’s gender and life experience influence her beliefs and as a result, her critical thinking.

Our determination to protect and help girls can turn teaching critical thinking skills into imparting our own or society’s values instead. For example, when we ask them to critically think about lying for a friend, the response we anticipate is a foregone conclusion. We guide them to what we consider the ideal response, rather than educate them about the process itself - the more valuable life-long tool.

The Girl Connection

for those who serve adolescent girls
Iowa Gender-Specific Services Task Force
June 2003

June 2003

When examining critical thinking in the above example, through one of the premises of female responsive services – *girls are relational* - we see that we must consider the importance of the girl's relationship with her friend because she most certainly will. It is a mitigating factor and her thinking process will lead her to a logical conclusion *for her* – cover for her friend and preserve their relationship.

It is easy to oversimplify and dogmatize the critical thinking process in what is a well-intentioned attempt to be efficient in changing the behaviors of girls in our charge. However, once they are no longer within our influence they need to be able to make effective judgments for themselves and they will do that based on their own experiences, values and intellectual processes. We cannot change past experiences and we may have little impact on values but we can help them learn more about how they process, and with girls there are ample opportunities to process.

Two Seniors had this to say about their experience with critical thinking in a school setting:

“**Emma:** It's such a bizarre thing to go to school and sit in a chair and listen to somebody spilling off what they know...and just, you know, rote learning big chunks of information but not thinking about it, or saying it in your own way or analyzing it or evaluating it – which is probably the most important. You don't have a right to say your own perspective.

Joan: Because if you take on their perspective then you're on the right track!” (McGregor, 2000)

Emma and Joan (insert) describe a dynamic that can prevent the girls in our care from developing higher order thinking skills, like critical thinking. If they are expected to simply take in information and return that exact same information on demand, they have not learned critical thinking skills. They have learned memorization and compliance.

The critical thinking process, as a higher order thinking process, is unique to each individual and must be taught with this in mind. We must not judge girls when their critical thinking leads them to a different conclusion than we would come to - what is a “wrong” conclusion to us, may make perfect sense to them. You may not approve of their every decision. You may not refrain from administering consequences for behaviors resulting from their decisions. But, a discussion about the thinking process that led to the decision in the first place is crucial. Done from the girls' perspective, it will have a greater impact. She is the primary decision maker in her life and teaching her to think critically will help her with that responsibility in the future.

What else needs to be considered when teaching critical thinking skills to girls?

- § Remain value neutral. If a girl feels you are judging her, she will resist your instruction. Save sharing your values for a different time.
- § Honor her life experiences. She wants to know that you have an understanding of where she is coming from and arriving at the “right” conclusion isn't always the same for her as it is for you.
- § Honor her struggles with gender role expectations. Sacrificing relationships to make a “right” decision is difficult for girls and they may determine that it isn't worth the risk.
- § Be ready for challenges to the order of things in your program. As uncomfortable as this might get, it is a sign that she is successfully developing and using her critical thinking skills.

The Girl Connection

for those who serve adolescent girls
Iowa Gender-Specific Services Task Force
August 2003

~~~~~  
“The mother-daughter bond is so strong, so visceral,  
it can’t really be explained just intellectually,”  
~~~~~

... says Evelyn Bassoff, a Boulder, CO., psychologist who has written extensively on the subject. For a girl, “her mother is her identity. Even if that identity is one of a criminal or a drug user. The profiles of a typical adult female offender and a female juvenile delinquent are strikingly similar. Both are poorly educated, live in poverty, and make dismal choices in men. Both have been physically and sexually abused. Both have problems with drugs and alcohol, which they often use to medicate the pain of what has been done to them. History is repeating itself –only faster” (Locy, 1999).

Although little research exists that increases our depth of knowledge about mother-daughter intergenerational crime, the reality is that our experience validates its existence. Based on the assumption that girls and women place particular emphasis on the relationships in their lives, it follows that the impact of an incarcerated mother on her daughter is dramatic.

In a poll of juvenile justice agencies nationwide, 21 states responded and ten provided data on both boys and girls. “All but one reported that more girls proportionally than boys had mothers who had been previously arrested. One state, Iowa, reported that 64 percent of its female juvenile delinquents said their mothers had criminal records. ‘Initially, I was surprised,’ said Meda Chesney-Lind of the University of Hawaii, one of the country’s leading researchers on girls and crime. ‘There’s no data on this issue. What you have done is illustrate that the damage done to girls is arguably more traumatic than it is for their brothers in having their mother incarcerated’ (Locy, 1999).

In a study that included young women, ages 14-17, who were incarcerated in Iowa and Montana, the most significant family profile issue was “mother-daughter relationship problems.” This same study reported that “although familial abuse and modeling of criminal activity is typical in the history of most delinquents,

what was most striking in profiling family dynamics of the juvenile females studied was the stormy relationship with adult females, such as mothers or teachers. Failed female-female relationships appear to be a discriminating factor in the histories of social dysfunction of female offenders. Compared to non-delinquents, delinquent girls have been shown to be more alienated from both their mothers and best friends, yet show relatively few differences in intrapersonal characteristics” (Fejes, 1995).

~~~~~  
“I’ve been in corrections for 18 years and I’ve seen three generations of people in facilities – grandmother, mother, daughter at the same time. I’ve seen where the mother was here, gave birth to a child, and the child is now here.”

Maryland’s Deputy Commissioner of Corrections  
Melanie C. Pereira  
~~~~~

Maryland’s effort to address the problem, so effectively described by Commissioner Pereira, involved initiating an inmate mother-child visitation project, in 1992. This pilot project, *Girl Scouts Beyond Bars*, began at the Maryland Correctional Institute for Women and won the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges’ “Unique and Innovative Project” award in 1993. It has since expanded to at least eight other states (Moses, 1995). If you are interested in a Girl Scouts Beyond Bars partnership, contact the National Institute of Justice, 202/514-6205.

The premise that relationships are paramount in the lives of girls leads us to the conclusion demonstrated by programs like Girl Scouts Beyond Bars: attempting to disconnect girls from their incarcerated mothers, who are often perceived as solely a negative influence, will not ensure positive progress and may in reality inhibit it.

Incarcerated

Mothers

&

Daughters



What Can Be Done?

1. Work with mothers and daughters together. Make it a priority. It is crucial to the success of young women.
2. If the pattern encompasses the previous generation *and even if it doesn't*, work with the grandmother, too!
3. Advocate for more research. There is a critical lack of pertinent research on the impact of a mother's incarceration on her daughter's potential for criminal behavior and how to address it.
4. Advocate for mothers and daughters who are incarcerated to be held as near to home as possible.
5. Look into programs like *Girl Scouts Beyond Bars* for ideas.
6. Avoid approaches that seek to separate daughters and mothers emotionally. It guarantees failure.

References

- Locy, Toni. (1999). Like Mother, Like Daughter. *U.S. News & World Report*, Vol. 127 Issue 13, p18.
- Fejes-Mendoza, Kathy. (1995). Portraits of Dysfunction: Criminal, Educational, and Family Profiles of Juvenile Female Offenders. *Education & Treatment of Children*, Vol. 18 Issue 3, p309.
- Moses, Marilyn. (1995). Keeping Incarcerated Mothers & Their Daughters Together: Girl Scouts Beyond Bars. *NIJ Program Focus*.



THE GIRL CONNECTION

FOR THOSE WHO SERVE ADOLESCENT FEMALES
IOWA GENDER-SPECIFIC SERVICES TASK FORCE / OCTOBER 2003

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), any Personality Disorder, including Borderline Personality Disorder should not be diagnosed until after a child turns age 18.

This is the single most important piece of information you can gain about Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) from this edition of the Girl Connection newsletter.

Why is it so crucial? Some answers can be found by looking at a partial definition for a diagnosis of BPD:

A pervasive pattern of:

- ✓ Unstable interpersonal relationships
- ✓ Unstable self-image
- ✓ Unstable affects (moods)
- ✓ Marked impulsivity

Does this sound like any adolescent you know?

Even if clinicians use caution and reference "Borderline Traits" in their diagnosis rather than making a diagnosis of BPD, this can have a lasting impact on a girl's future as the diagnosis follows her through life. Young women come into the system with labels that evoke automatic responses from the professionals who work with them; a BPD label is no exception. It is widely believed that those diagnosed with BPD are notoriously difficult to work with and are at best a serious challenge for long term success. Curtailing the diagnosis from BPD to Borderline Traits will not change that attitude. If girls do have Borderline Traits, we still need to remember that they are much more than their diagnosis.

Related issues:

Suicide

The suicide rate among those with BPD is the same as for Major Depressive Disorder (9-15%). The difference is that with BPD, they often don't genuinely want to die but instead they underestimate the lethality of their chosen method.

~~~~~

Some Good News

**More than half of a group of adult women who had previously been diagnosed with BPD were later found to no longer meet the criteria to be considered BPD.**

(Current research out of Montreal, Canada)

**Self-injury**

General profile of a self-injurer:

- ▲ Secretive
  - ▲ Starts at age 14 continues into 20s
  - ▲ Likely to have other compulsive disorders (Bulimia, Alcoholism)
  - ▲ Associated with anger, sadness & abandonment
  - ▲ Addictive quality - must injure more severely & more often to get relief
  - ▲ Ratio of males to females is equal in adolescents, after that it is primarily females
  - ▲ History of sexual abuse (Strong correlation with later BPD diagnosis)
  - ▲ Others are perfectionists and/or over-achievers
- Female (as well as male) adolescents who self-harm but come from relatively stable lives otherwise will generally quit self-harming.

**Suggestions**

- 1) Research any diagnosis of BPD or Borderline Traits. Axis I diagnosis (e.g. Depression, Anxiety), for which girls are often referred, can look like BPD or Borderline Traits when in fact they are not.
- 2) Be aware and combat stereotypical beliefs and attitudes about girls suspected to have BPD or Borderline Traits. The "diagnosis" may not be official, but that does not stop assumptions from being made. Putting an end to automatic negative reactions among adults will promote an environment where positive relationships between adults and girls can flourish, a crucial element if girls are to succeed.
- 3) Remember that many of the behaviors that meet the criteria for diagnosing a young woman with BPD or as having Borderline Traits are NORMAL for adolescents. Be cautious about labeling girls!

*Information in this month's newsletter was taken from the training provided at the annual Task Force retreat by Nancee Blum, MSW, LISW, MAC, clinical faculty member in the Department of Psychiatry, University of Iowa College of Medicine.*

# THE GIRL CONNECTION

FOR THOSE WHO SERVE ADOLESCENT FEMALES  
IOWA GENDER-SPECIFIC SERVICES TASK FORCE / DECEMBER 2003

## “Programs must be relationship based...”

A component of gender-specific programming for girls with which few would argue. However, when asked to put it into practice, the questions begin to surface. Does this mean we have to throw out our current system? What about goals? What about boundaries?

What follows are programmatic and individual suggestions for increasing the relational nature of your work with girls.

### Programmatic Things To Do

Intake/initial meetings are a time for first impressions and relationship building. Rather than sit behind a desk and launch into a barrage of extremely personal questions, find a comfortable spot and begin instead by asking how she's feeling and validating it. Then forewarn her about tough questions when you do have to start asking them. Empathy and listening can be built in to the structure of your program.

Celebrate birthdays and other individual milestones in ways that are meaningful to individual girls.

Don't send girls home or to another placement with their belongings in a garbage bag. The message is unequivocally negative. Find a local business to donate an alternate form of luggage.

Assign staff to the girls with whom they have the best relationship.

Make sure that the staff are sitting at the table eating meals with the girls and encourage staff to play games and do other fun activities with them as well.

### Some questions to ask about your program

In what ways do we, as a staff, stifle or encourage one another's true selves? How do our relationships impact our relationships with the girls we serve?

Are there program rules that prevent girls from building appropriate, nurturing relationships with staff? Are girls encouraged to build supportive relationships with one another?

How are behavior expectations communicated to girls in the program? Is the purpose of the expectation clear and meaningful to staff and the girls? How do we

respond when those expectations are not met? How could we respond in a way that would communicate to girls that we are disappointed, but that we believe they can meet the expectations?

### Individual Things To Do

Put yourself in their shoes - increase your empathy.

Share things about yourself and show an interest in things about them (e.g likes, dislikes, hobbies).

Do what you say you are going to do.

Express to them that they are important and that you care about what happens to them.

Recognize that the girls you work with may have a hard time trusting you. Be patient. If you expect girls to prove they are trustworthy you should do the same.

Be genuine, candid, use humor and LISTEN.

### Some questions to ask yourself

Do I hide my true self from the girls with whom I work? How does this affect my ability to form honest relationships with them? How can I be a more supportive, caring, candid adult and still maintain my role?

In what specific ways do I nurture non-exploitive relationships with girls and all other staff?

Does my relationship with girls provide a balance of encouragement, safety and challenge for them?

With what attitude do I communicate with girls when they fail to fulfill expectations? Does my demeanor shame, embarrass, demoralize, support, encourage, trust?

**The biggest mistake is believing there is one right way to listen, to talk, to have a conversation — or a relationship.**

Deborah Tannen

December 2003

Component #3: “Programs must be relationship based.”

from the Iowa Commission on the Status of Women publication *Providing Gender~Specific Services for Adolescent Female Offenders: Guidelines & Resources* available on line at [www.state.ia.us/dhr/sw/girls](http://www.state.ia.us/dhr/sw/girls) (publications).

“An important goal of gender~specific programs with girls is that of improved relationships. This does not necessarily mean that girls simply learn to get along better with others. For most girls, this approach reinforces the traditional female role expectations of passivity, subordination, and self-sacrificing. Instead, girls must learn skills of assertiveness, appropriate expression of anger, and selection of healthy relationships. Furthermore, programs must shift the primary discussion of relationships off of girls’ relationships with males. While those relationship issues are important, girls often lose themselves in those relationships and/or create false selves that focus on the needs of others. Instead, girls need guidance to develop identities that extend beyond their connection to males...It is important that staff possess the skills to share, without belittling the girls, their observations regarding girls’ relationship behaviors...This approach requires that the process be led by adult women who model genuine respect, trust and caring for other women and girls. It requires women who, in ongoing relationships with the girls, can create an emotionally safe space for comforting, challenging, nurturing conversations. To be sure, the girls must see this component piece mirrored in the lives of female staff and in the relationships among those female staff.” (p. 12)

*See the November 2001 issue of the Girl Connection for more information about men’s roles in providing Gender~Specific Services to girls: [www.state.ia.us/dhr/sw/girls](http://www.state.ia.us/dhr/sw/girls) (publications)*

---

---

All issues of the Girl Connection newsletter as well as the publications listed below and other information pertaining to female responsive services and the Iowa Gender~Specific Services Task Force can be found on the Iowa Commission on the Status of Women’s website:

[www.state.ia.us/dhr/sw/girls](http://www.state.ia.us/dhr/sw/girls)

Publications

Providing Gender~Specific Services for Adolescent Female Offenders: Guidelines & Resources

Female Juvenile Justice

Promising Directions: Programs that Serve Girls in a Single-Sex Environment

To be put on the email or postal mailing list for the Girl Connection newsletter contact:

Iowa Commission on the Status of Women  
Lucas State Office Building  
Des Moines, IA 50319  
800/558-4427  
[dhr.icsw@iowa.gov](mailto:dhr.icsw@iowa.gov)





