

Girl Connection

For those who serve adolescent females

October 2010

Written by: Kathy Nesteby

Iowa Task Force for Young Women



Thankful 'Shmankful'

We have survived Halloween. And though it is my favorite holiday of the year, I suspect those of you who ended up arguing with teenage girls about what exactly is appropriate to wear as a costume and what is not, are glad it's over.

And now, we look forward to Thanksgiving.

Meaningful discussions about gratitude with young women in the juvenile justice system can be a daunting task. After all, most have had life experiences that have taught them there is little for which they should feel thankful. You can sense the wave of disbelief rolling in when you open up the discussion in a group. "Is she serious? I'm sitting here in a shelter at the holidays and I'm supposed to be *thankful*? Whatever."

Yes, gratitude can be a tough sell, even for those of us not sitting in a shelter or detention. It can even feel like we, as adults, are being disingenuous with young women or not validating their real feelings of anger or hopelessness when we ask them to consider gratitude.

Thankfully, we can both validate a negative experience and encourage a focus on the positive. Want to test the theory? The next time you are in your car and someone cuts you off or does something else rude, note the negative experience and then find one or more positive things too. Maybe you demonstrated your excellent defensive driving skills or it forced you to slow down, thereby avoiding the speeding ticket you might have gotten.

You get the idea. Where we place our attention becomes our reality. So, why not focus our attention on the positive and teach our young women they can do the same?

A friend recently told me of this experience her father had while officiating a Special Olympics event:

Members of each team for the event were called together for the coin toss.

Although all the participants were excited, one young woman in particular was showing her excitement by jumping, clapping, raising her hands in the air and giggling with joy.

The coin was tossed. The young woman called it, "Heads!"

My friend's father caught the coin and turned it over on the back of his hand, "Tails."

He then heard a yelp from the young woman of the losing call, "Yes! Yes! YES!" He looked up to see her doing a victory dance, complete with accompanying gyrations of joy.

Perplexed, he explained to her that "tails" meant she had, in fact, lost the coin toss. As she continued to celebrate and without missing a beat, the girl replied, "I know, but I was sooooo close!"

Adversity is going to happen to everyone. Sometimes life tosses a coin and the result is out of our hands. How we chose to respond to the outcome can make all the difference in the world. Do we hang our heads and sulk or do we find something to be grateful for, no matter how small, and do a victory dance?

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In its ongoing effort to facilitate fundamental changes in the juvenile justice system that enhances the understanding and utilization of innovative gender-responsive approaches in all programs and services, particularly those that serve the adolescent female population of Iowa's juvenile justice system, the Iowa Task Force for Young Women presents its newest publication:

"Female Responsive Protocol for Adolescent Offenders"

This guide can be used as both a tool to initiate provision of female responsive services, as well as to examine existing female responsive services for strengths and weaknesses. It can be found on the "Task Force Publications" page of our website:

[www.women.iowa.gov/girls](http://www.women.iowa.gov/girls)

As always, the Iowa Task Force for Young Women is available to provide training/technical assistance with any issue related to young women involved in or at risk for involvement in the juvenile justice system.

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**Kathy Nesteby, Coordinator**  
**Iowa Task Force for Young Women**  
**(515) 281-6915**  
**Kathy.Nesteby@iowa.gov**  
**[www.women.iowa.gov/girls](http://www.women.iowa.gov/girls)**

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Iowa Task Force for Young Women  
Department of Human Rights  
Lucas State Office Building  
Des Moines, IA 50319