

Gender-Responsive Programming in the Justice System— Oregon's Guidelines for Effective Programming for Girls

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IN 1993, AN organization called the Coalition of Advocates for Equal Access for Girls helped pass a unique gender-responsive bill in Oregon. The bill resulted in Oregon becoming the only state in the nation with a law (ORS 417.270) that requires state agencies serving children under 18 years to ensure that girls and boys have *equal access* to appropriate services, treatment, and facilities. State agencies are also required to implement plans to ensure that girls receive *equity* (which does not mean “identical” treatment) in access to social, juvenile justice, and community services statewide; that barriers to these services are removed; and that the services provided are appropriate and equally meaningful to each gender.

Because of this law and the heightened awareness of girls' issues, the State Commission on Children and Families and the State Criminal Justice Commission in Oregon funded the development of guidelines and an accompanying manual on implementing gender-responsive programming. This article will review issues facing girls today and examine how Oregon's gender-responsive guidelines address these issues.

Girls Face Different Challenges

Eating Disorders

One in every 12 females who took the 1999 Youth Risk Behavior Survey in Oregon reported taking diet pills or laxatives, or vomiting in order to lose weight. Sixty percent of girls who participated in the survey reported trying to lose weight versus 24 percent of male survey participants.¹ Self-confidence declines with age for girls, but not as much for boys.²

Depression

Nationally, girls are 50 percent more likely to suffer from depression than boys.³ Nearly one in four girls⁴ in Oregon state they frequently feel sad and depressed. Twenty-one percent of girls in middle school reported seriously considering suicide in the past year. Seventy-six percent of the suicide attempts by 13 to 18-year-olds in Oregon were females.⁵

Using and Abusing Alcohol, Drugs, and Tobacco

Twenty-six percent of eighth graders and 42 percent of eleventh graders in Oregon report having used alcohol during the past month.⁶ Girls start smoking at a greater rate than boys and are more influenced by peers to use controlled substances than boys.

Violence and Abuse

A 1998 self-report study in Portland, Oregon found that one in three female high school students are or have been in an abusive relationship. A Harvard School of Public Health analysis of the 1997 and 1999 national Youth Risk Behavior Survey conducted in Massachusetts, states that one in five girls 14 to 18 years of age report having been abused by a dating partner. This abuse is linked to teen pregnancy, suicide attempts, and other health risks. One out of three girls will experience sexual or physical abuse in their childhood, almost three times more often than boys.⁷ Forty-three to sixty-two percent of teen mothers report a history of being abused.⁸ Seventy-three percent of girls in the juvenile justice system have been abused.⁹

Homelessness, Runaways, and Prostitution

In Oregon, 64 percent of runaways and 40 percent of homeless youth are girls. Nationally, 70 percent of girls on the street run away to flee violence in their homes.¹⁰ Many of these girls are at risk of entering prostitution. The majority of prostitutes are influenced by their early experiences of sexual abuse.¹¹ The average age for entry into prostitution is thirteen.¹²

This risk data shows that the pressure girls experience to conform, and the pathways to crime and other self-destructive behaviors, are often very different for girls than they are for boys.

The Guidelines

Oregon's Guidelines for Effective Gender-Specific Programming for Girls (2000) and the accompanying manual, *How to Implement Oregon's Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Programming for Girls* (2002) are designed to assist organizations that work with girls ages 10–19 in the construction of program design, practices, and evaluation. These guidelines are not intended to be all-inclusive, but to encourage professionals to look critically at how services are provided to girls. All the guidelines are interconnected and build on each other to create an environment that can enhance and maximize program effectiveness for girls.

The guidelines are applicable to a wide variety of services, from community-based prevention programs for at-risk girls to intensive residential programs, detention, and state institutions for girls and young women. Whether a given program is small or large, it

can meet the guidelines outlined in this guidebook at some level, creating an effective continuum of care for girls. In the process, Oregon's programs for girls will reinforce one another through clear and consistent gender-responsive programming for girls and young women.

Defining Gender-Specific Services for Girls

Services for girls need to be gender specific because girls and boys are socialized differently. Many things influence the definition of what it means to be male (masculine) and what it means to be female (feminine) in the United States. Culture, the media, and the family all play significant roles in girls' and boys' socialization and perceptions of self. As girls and boys mature, they experience things differently, chart different pathways to problem behaviors, and face different issues and challenges. Therefore, the models for responding to girls' and boys' needs must be different in order to be effective and gender-specific.

Gender-specific services comprehensively address the needs of a gender group (female or male), fostering positive gender identity development. Gender-responsive programming for girls intentionally allows gender to affect and guide services in areas such as site selection, staff selection, program development, content, and material to create an environment that reflects an understanding of the realities of girls' lives, and is responsive to the issues and needs of the girls and young women being served.

Programs often state that they are "gender neutral." However, on closer examination, many times these programs' approaches are based on a male model. That is, they respond more to the traditional needs of males. If we examine why many programs serving youth are based on a male model, we find that education, juvenile justice, and social services have historically served more boys because of their aggressive acting-out behaviors, while giving less attention to girls' self-destructive, internal behaviors. Therefore, boys were the population primarily reflected in the studies and research that drove program design. Current publications on boys tend to focus on changing male stereotypes and boys' roles in society rather than changing male-modeled programming. When gender-responsive programming concepts are understood and used with girls in a holistic manner, individual programs can begin the fundamental change of how the general service system responds to

the needs of girls. And evaluations show that the integration of gender-specific approaches with girls also broadens our approaches with boys to better meet their needs--especially the needs of those boys who don't respond to the male model.

Girls' Adolescent Development

In her book, *In a Different Voice* (1982), Carol Gilligan states that:

- Relationships are important and give girls a sense of connection.
- Girls relate and work one-on-one.
- Females tend to internalize failure (assume it is their fault) and externalize success (have difficulty taking credit for success).
- Females look to external sources in building their own self-esteem.

Gilligan also found that a fundamental shift in self-perception takes place when girls reach adolescence (*Meeting at the Crossroads*, 1992). Around age 13, girls "hit the wall," Gilligan argues. At this stage, girls give up self in order to be in a relationship. Their self-esteem diminishes, and they lose their voices, inner strength, a sense of who they are as an individual, and what they want to be. For many girls, social expectations crush their spirit. Peer pressure, trying to be attractive to boys, and becoming competitive with other girls for the attention of boys dominate girls' focus.

Important differences appear among girls when data is analyzed by race. Race and gender are separate issues, yet intricately intertwined in a girl's life. Girls live in complex and dynamic social contexts and receive contradictory mixed messages that can vary across race, class, culture and sexuality as well as gender.

As girls develop, they form their identity primarily in relation to other people. In general, they are interested in what a relationship means and how it works. They define themselves through their relationships and by how well they get along with others. A model that works best for most girls would have a structure where they can build relationships, have time to process and talk about issues, have one-on-one opportunities, and feel connected to people.

As boys develop they form their identity primarily in relation to the greater world. In general, they are interested in the rules of that world, their place in the structure of that world, and ways to advance or gain power

within that structure. A model that works best for most boys has compartmentalized hierarchical structures with clear rules that allow them to conduct direct problem-solving and participate in group activities.

Mary Pipher's national bestseller *Reviving Ophelia* (1994) brought information to the general public about the issues girls face as they travel through adolescence. Dr. Pipher says that "girls today live in a more dangerous, overly-sexualized and media-saturated culture...and as a society we protect our girls less in how we socialize them and at the same time we put much more pressure on them to conform to the female role prescriptions."

1998 Search Institute research shows that girls, compared to boys, are 50 percent more likely to suffer from low-self esteem (lack of belief in one's self) and a poor sense of self-efficacy (self-perceptions of effectiveness). According to their data, girls have more developmental assets related to caring about and helping others. However, girls report lower self-esteem, loss of a sense of purpose in life, and are significantly less likely than boys to say they like themselves or have a lot to be proud of. The concern for girls is the degree to which they internalize their perceived inadequacies and their consequential behaviors.

Guidelines

The Guidelines are divided into two sections: 1) Administration and Management of Gender-Specific Programs and 2) Program Content.

Administration and Management of Gender Specific Programs

A. Program Structure

- **Guideline: Program Policies.** *Develop gender-specific policies for programs serving girls. This ensures that administration and staff are informed and follow a similar set of work practices, understand the philosophy and commitment to girls' gender-specific services, and create a culture where gender issues are integrated into the organizational structure. Policies need to be in writing and should include guiding principles and program values. It is important that gender-specific policies and practices are integrated into all parts of the program continuum, from intake to follow-up/aftercare. Gender-specific program policies should be consistent with the agency's/organization's policies and with the county and state's. Mis-*

sion statements, contract language, and grant or contract proposals are other areas where gender-specific language can be incorporated.

Policies are values put into words to guide services and peoples' actions. Historically, girls' treatment programs or juvenile justice programs were designed to return girls to a morally acceptable path defined by society's general values and expectations of women. Often these programs dealt with a symptom rather than a cause, missing the holistic picture of a young woman within her social context. Examine the values driving your policies (e.g., to guide, understand, empower, rehabilitate, confine, punish, sanction, or cure). Programs need to be clear about the values and attitudes that affect policies. When possible, programs should involve girls in the development of policies.

- **Guideline: Collecting Data on Girls.** Document demographic profile information relevant to the population being served. For comparison, collect parallel information on girls of similar age in the general community. Possessing data on risk and protective factors, or strengths/assets and needs of both populations is also important. This ensures policies and services are targeted and based on data-driven information. If serving both females and males, ensure data can be separated by gender and race/ethnicity.

Good data is the empirical foundation for effective programs. Profile data about girls is important because it is an objective source of information and it can be reliably measured over and over again to monitor progress. Without it, only anecdotal evidence leading to decisions based on hunch rather than fact can be made. Model programs target girls' key issues. It is difficult to target the critical issues if you do not have the data to identify them.

- **Guideline: Program Design.** Include girls in the design or redesign of programs and services. If appropriate, programs need to review best practices or promising gender-specific programs, and incorporate effective program components. The design should include an understanding of a girl's development including risk/protective factors, resiliency, strengths/assets, independence, self-esteem, life skills, and how girls are socialized within the context of their society and culture.

Even if a program is designed solely for girls, it does not necessarily mean that it is

gender-specific. Traditional programming is frequently based on a male model that is responding more to male needs rather than female needs. To determine if a program is gender-specific for girls in its context, content, and approach, the program should be assessed to see if the design is incorporating skills and methods that work well for the needs of girls. As mentioned previously, boys generally work best (i.e., their general needs are met) in structures that are hierarchical and linear in perspective, while girls generally work best (i.e., their needs are met) through a relational view of the hierarchical structure, a more circular perspective. Boys like the rules of a program to be clear and compartmentalized. Girls need program rules to be consistent for reasons of safety and stability. Most boys like to work in groups/teams and are naturally competitive. Girls need one-on-one time, as well as group activities, and work best when offered both. Girls do compete, but frequently this competition is over boys or for boys' attention, rather than for personal power. Girls often use communication to build relationships and trust. When girls problem-solve, they need time to process. Boys often use communication for problem solving and information gathering, preferring to solve problems independently with little process time.

- **Guideline: Assessment Tools, Screening Instruments and Intake Practices.** Develop instruments and practices that are responsive to the needs of females and are designed to eliminate barriers, cultural bias, and gender bias. Formal and informal decision points throughout the system (places where decisions are made by staff and other professionals that impact the girl) should also be examined for gender-bias practices.

Established screening policies and practices can create gender-based barriers blocking a girl's access to needed services, and may inherently involve gender-based bias. For example, in the child welfare system, it may be assumed that young children need protection more than older youth. Therefore, female teens who have no safe place to live (runaways) or who are involved in prostitution, may not get access to services. Additionally, in the juvenile justice system access to services is based upon a youth's risk factors to re-offend. Since boys commit more serious crimes and present a higher risk to public safety, girls get less access to services.

It often takes longer to complete intake assessment with girls than boys because girls have a greater need to talk, process, connect, feel safe, and build trust. Assessment instruments need to be validated, normed and timed for females. Classification instruments should include items that fit the female population. For instance, there should be a distinction between an assault charge based on safety reasons and a disciplinary infraction.

- **Guideline: Outcome Measurements.** Develop outcome measurements and evaluation methodologies that are gender appropriate. Identify goals or outcomes that are meaningful for the girl. The measurement tool you use should be free from bias and accommodate differences in communication, interpretation, and subject sensitivities. Data collection and interpretation should be appropriate for females and include qualitative as well as quantitative methods. It should also incorporate the current research on girls noting a research sample's breadth in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status. Success is not just the absence of negatives. Because many girls' issues and problems are hidden and internalized, a girl's visible expressions of success do not necessarily mean she is healthy on the inside. Both quantitative and qualitative data should be used to identify multiple indicators of success in a girl's life.

Quantitative data that evaluates re-arrest rates, dropout rates, or lengths of time with clean urinalysis checks, is a more traditional approach to measuring outcomes. Often success is measured by recidivism rates, yet that may not be the best measure and certainly should not be the sole measure of success for girls.

Success for girls must include the presence of "internalized positives." That is, competencies/skills a girl has developed and internalized, such as her ability to maintain healthy relationships and make healthy lifestyle choices, need to be evaluated. Success factors may be observable as well as non-observable. Programs need to consider goals and outcomes that are meaningful to the girl. This includes an understanding of culturally-based behaviors as well as the culture to which a girl identifies.

B. Staff Qualifications Regarding Female Gender Issues

- **Guideline: Hiring.** Interview applicants with questions that focus on gender issues. When interviewing potential staff for girls' programs, include questions on the applicants' interest in working with girls, their experiences with gender-specific service delivery, and their knowledge of female development.

It is important to find staff who not only have a genuine interest in working with girls, but are also effective in such work. Existing research shows that youth workers "commonly lament that girls are more difficult to work with" than boys, (Belknap, et. al., 1997; Baines & Alder, 1996; Kersten, 1990). Meda Chesney-Lind states that more recent studies have found that "most participants did not regard girls as more difficult. In general, practitioners recognized that girls were indeed different to work with in comparison to their male counterparts...But many found it was easier to work with girls...girls are more open minded, able to sit and listen and hear what you're proposing to them, less accusational to staff" (*Women, Girls & Criminal Justice*, August/September 2001).

It takes an understanding of female and adolescent development to feel confident in work with girls because relationships play such significant roles for them. Staff cannot escape dealing directly with young women. Therefore, it is also important that as soon as possible after hiring, staff receive training on understanding and becoming aware of their own gender and cultural biases. Some female staff may have confronted the same challenges in their lives that the girls they are working with are facing. And it is possible that these staff members continue to struggle with the residual effects of those life challenges. They may find it difficult to constantly relive their experiences or be directly confronted by young women adept at publicly exposing weaknesses in others, including adults. Some male staff may label the behavior of young women as sexual or manipulative if they do not understand their own male socialization about females, or that for many young women their history of abuse and trauma is linked to current behaviors. Young women need to be supported by both female and male staff members who can model appropriate female and male roles, behaviors, and interactions. It is critical that girls, many of whom were abused or exposed to violence by males, in-

teract with male staff members who are caring, trustworthy, and nurturing.

It is also important to remember the crucial role staff members can play in a girl's healthy progress and personal growth.

1. Does the applicant's past experience and training exhibit equally effective and healthy interactions with females and males?
2. Is the individual willing to form healthy relationships with girls who are considered difficult?
3. Is the applicant willing to serve as a role model, exhibiting the gender-sensitive behaviors advocated by the program?
4. Is the applicant willing to model how a person can grow and change?
5. Is the applicant aware of their own gender issues and the values they bring to the program?
6. Is the applicant able to serve as an advocate for girls and girls' issues?
7. Is the applicant non-judgmental when dealing with the families of girls? Is the applicant a good listener?

- **Guideline: Staff Diversity.** Maintain staffing that reflects the race and ethnic backgrounds of the girls being served to ensure that multiple perspectives are included and integrated into a program's services. Programs should be inclusive, welcoming, and culturally appropriate for all staff members. Hiring practices and continual training on socio-cultural issues can have a powerful impact on the quality of a program. The staffing of a program should reflect the demographics of the population(s) being served. This reduces barriers and opens doors to understanding and trust, allowing staff and the program to authentically honor the diverse cultures represented in the group. A diverse staff can help a program understand and integrate multiple cultural perspectives and information into daily programming, as well as increase the opportunity of connecting young women of a similar culture. Building a diverse staff reflective of the populations served may be challenging for programs serving a small number of girls from a specific ethnic group. However, recognizing this difficulty does not change the importance of establishing a culturally diverse staff. It is important to have qualified staff that support and encourage cross-cultural dialogue. The sexual orientation of gay, les-

bian, bisexual, and transgender girls, no matter what race or ethnicity, also needs to be recognized as a diversity issue to ensure programs are inclusive, welcoming, and culturally appropriate.

- **Guideline: Training.** Provide new employees with a program orientation and follow-up training opportunities for all staff, supervisors, and managers on gender-specific issues. This may include, but is not limited to, current research on girls and young women, books on adolescent female development, female issues and needs, unique issues for girls of color, communication, staff boundary issues, sexuality, and gender identity.

Staff members need to be well versed on female development, as well as gender issues as they relate to alcohol and drug use/abuse, domestic violence, trauma, and loss. There also needs to be ongoing training and supervisory support on culturally specific services, with a particular focus on the gender-specific needs and issues within the cultures of the females being served.

Training should also be evaluated for relevance, impact on staff behavior, and retention of knowledge. Additionally, staff members need to be informed about gender-specific policies and guidelines regarding program philosophy and program content. This can be done, for example, through orientation videos and manuals, training, e-mails, and postings.

It is important for programs to recognize the importance of staff boundary issues and to provide ongoing training and support for staff in this area beyond a written policy. This may include the acquisition of healthy and consistent language for dealing with boundary issues, as well as supervised practices in this area.

(2) Program Content

- **Guideline: Environment—Physical Safety.** Create an environment for girls that is physically safe. The location where girls meet or reside should be safe from violence, physical and sexual abuse, verbal harassment, bullying, teasing, and stalking. Management and staff need to create a safe environment where boundary issues are clear, acting out behavior is consistently addressed, and physical safety is taken seriously. Since many girls have been victimized, experienced a trauma or loss, or feel powerless, programs need to establish an environment where girls

feel safe. Girls not only need to be safe, but need to feel safe in their physical surroundings. This effort goes beyond the physical design of the building. If the basic need of both being safe and feeling safe is not addressed, the effectiveness of programming for girls is seriously impeded.

Physical safety needs to be considered in the facility design and in the selection of community meeting locations. A program's facility needs to protect girls' privacy for hygiene activities and the physical checks associated with intake. Meeting locations need to be protected from populations that may threaten a girl's progress (e.g., male peers, girls outside the group, and other outsiders that may endanger a girl's physical privacy and space). Many girls feel physically unsafe on school grounds or walking to and from school when they encounter males making sexual comments to them. Physical comfort should also be considered within a program's meeting space(s). Use of beanbag chairs or pillows in a circle formation creates a comfortable setting. Limit the size of groups so that issues of physical safety can be easily managed. Wall colors and wall art can influence the feel of a room (e.g., stark white is not very soothing).

- **Guideline: Environment—Emotional Safety.** *Create an environment for girls that is emotionally safe. The location where girls meet or reside should be nurturing and safe. This environment should encourage girls to express themselves and share feelings and allow time to develop trust, all within the context of building on-going relationships. Girls need time to talk and to process. They need to feel emotionally safe and free from negative or coercive behaviors, bias, racism, and sexism. When possible, their spaces should be free from the demands for attention produced by adolescent males. A setting that is emotionally safe for girls may be more difficult to recognize than an environment that is physically safe. Yet, it is just as important.*

Programs need to ensure girls are emotionally safe from themselves. A program's environment must protect girls from self-destructive behaviors such as mutilation, suicide attempts, eating disorders, or drug and alcohol abuse. Programs need to ensure girls are emotionally safe from other girls. Programs need a low staff-to-participant ratio due to the significance of relationships in a girl's life, and their role in a girl's ability to establish trust and successfully move through

the program. The staff/program must develop a structure where it is not only unacceptable for girls to physically hurt each other, but to emotionally hurt each other through "relational aggression" (i.e., rolling eyes; verbal put downs; gossip; manipulating relationships by threatening to damage a girl's relationships by spreading rumors; purposely ignoring someone when angry; or telling others not to associate with a certain person as a means of retaliation). It is important to remember programs must establish a safe environment for lesbian and bisexual young women.

Girls must feel safe in their interactions with a program's staff. In return, staff must be aware of their own biases and boundaries.

- **Guideline: Environment—Surroundings That Value Females.** *Create an environment that values females. Facilities, classrooms, and other program settings should have books, magazines, posters, videos, wall decorations, and other items that celebrate females' current and historical achievements and contributions to the world. The surroundings should enhance a girl's understanding of female development, honor and respect the female perspective, respond to girls' diverse heritages and life experiences, and empower young women to reach their full potential. What girls see in their environment affects their attitude towards themselves, the program, and the world. Creating an environment that supports females can open up a girl's world to many options.*

Have books about strong females readily available for use by girls. Be sure they are gender, age, culture, and language appropriate books. Have books on tape about strong females readily available for use by girls. This is an especially important medium if girls cannot read or are delayed in their reading abilities. Display inspirational posters that are gender-specific. Display pictures of outstanding and inspiring women and girls and have materials or events that celebrate females of different cultures. Have age and message appropriate magazines readily available for girls. Include magazines written and produced by young women (e.g., *New Moon*). Cut out ads with girls, and then discuss them to help girls be aware/conscious of unhealthy images and messages they find in magazines. Or, discuss the inappropriate and/or stereotypical female images found in some magazines. Maintain a video library of programs with positive female role models. Incorporate these events or materials into your program's regular activities.

Support activities that focus on positive female development and womanhood.

- **Guideline: Addressing the Whole Girl with a Holistic Approach.** *A holistic approach to the individual girl addresses the whole girl within the social context of her life, her relationships, the systems she encounters, and the society in which she lives.*

A holistic approach to programming integrates the contributions each staff member makes in creating a gender-responsive environment and fostering positive identity development for the girls in the program. One of the ways to describe the whole girl within her social context is to picture the individual girl in the center of concentric circles. These circles represent relationships, systems, and society. A holistic approach to a girl's life experiences takes into account each context or circle in which a girl lives, and provides her with messages that contribute to how she defines who she is as an individual and a female.

A. Relationship-Based Programming for Girls

- **Guideline: Understanding Girls Need Relationships.** *Develop programs that embody an understanding of the significance of relationships and connections in the lives of young women. Healthy relationships and positive connections should be at the core of a program. It is important to incorporate the importance of girls' relationships into every part of the program, from intake to follow-up. Carol Gilligan states, "attachment, interdependence, and connectedness to a relationship are critical issues that form the foundation of female identity." For programs, this means that a girl's relationship with staff, and a staff's relationship with a girl, are fundamental to a program's effectiveness. Therefore, how staff manages and expresses relationships is significant, and warrants ongoing training and support.*

Programs need to teach skills and present options to girls on how to replace harmful relationships with positive ones, and address negative behaviors in relationships. Community programs can provide opportunities for girls to reflect upon the role of relationships in their individual lives through all-girl groups, workshops, challenge activities, coordinated service activities, and outdoor expeditions that focus on relationships. These opportunities can expose girls to different

environments, helping them build confidence in themselves and one another.

The quality of staff-to-client relationships is critical to a girl's success in any program. If a girl does not connect with staff, she may feel alienated and jeopardize her success by acting out or running away. Distrust is common among girls who have been emotionally and physically hurt by adults, so developing healthy connections can be challenging. When possible, match girls with counselors or case managers who can effectively respond to their needs and personality. Develop a process for resolving conflict and bad feelings between girls and staff. Give girls the opportunity to visit your program so they may begin developing relationships with staff and peers. Conduct a similar process when a girl exits your program, allowing her to make new relationships in the environment she is about to enter. Taking the time to help girls build and maintain relationships assists in program success and the transition process.

Some girls have used social relationships as a vehicle to harm other girls. Girls need to learn how to have healthy relationships with other girls. "Relational aggression" towards other girls includes behaviors that discount others or minimize their importance, such as: rolling eyes; verbal put-downs; manipulative behavior with peers; threats to damage relationships by spreading rumors; gossip; purposely ignoring someone when angry; or telling others not to associate with a certain person as a means of retaliation.

Touching between staff and girls is a boundary issue that can pose significant issues for at-risk girls because of their personal histories of abuse. Appropriate touching needs to be addressed pro-actively through training, policy and practice. This includes male and female staff-girl interactions. Touch can be misinterpreted. Staff need to be aware that girls may not know how to interact in healthy ways with members of the opposite sex or with other females.

- **Guideline: Taking Time for Relationships.** *Create opportunities for staff and girls to talk and process their feelings and issues. Formal mechanisms need to be built into a program to enhance relationships and trust through one-on-one interactions. Young women need to verbally communicate with one another as well as with adults (including staff). Programmatically, this does not mean staff members need to listen to young women at every moment they feel the need to talk. The*

key is to have space in the programming schedule that allows for this type of interaction. If staff members are respectful and committed to following-up with program participants, girls will use the appropriate time to talk and process. When working with young women, it is important to understand and respect their communication style and to know that part of their purpose in communicating is to build trust and relationships. It is also important to understand female communication styles in order to effectively listen to and hear young women.

Communication literature such as Deborah Tannen's *You Just Don't Understand* states that men and women often use language for different purposes, sometimes leading to miscommunication. For example, men often use communication to get information to solve problems. Women often use communication to build relationships and to work on problem-solving more collaboratively. Men may get frustrated in conversations with women when they cannot see the problem to be solved, and thus do not understand the point of the discussion. Women may get frustrated with men who do not listen to or connect emotionally with them, but instead offer solutions when they are not solicited.

- **Guideline: Single-Gender Programming.** *Create opportunities for girls-only programming. While there is often resistance on the part of girls to be isolated from boys or participate in programs with solely members of their own sex, girls-only programming is an important part of a gender-specific approach. It gives young women the time, environment, and permission to work on overcoming a value system that commonly prioritizes male relationships over female relationships. Many girls are taught to accommodate and please males, putting their own needs aside. Consequently, girls need to have time by themselves, to be themselves, and focus on their own issues and growth. This means that they need to be taught that relationships with self and others are just as important as being with boys, and that it is okay for them to make self-care a priority.*

Girls-only programs or groups teach girls to cooperate with and support one another. Unless girls learn healthy ways to interact, many will use the unhealthy ways they know, which include being competitive, holding grudges, being cruel to each other, gossiping, and/or passive aggressive and emotionally hurtful behavior.

- **Guideline: Significant Relationships with Caring Adults.** *Help girls establish significant relationships with caring adults through mentor programs. Matching a girl with a mentor who has a similar ethnic heritage, culture, and background is encouraged. Mentors can play a significant role in a girl's success, especially with continual, reliable contact that avoids competition with a girl's mother/family. Girls also need adult females who can model and support survival and growth along with resistance and change. Staff members as well as adult mentors can play this role in a girl's life.*

Mentorship should be a component of all programs, connecting mentors/volunteers with girls during the program, and certainly before they transition out of it. It is critical that girls have adult women in their lives who can serve as examples of internal strength and ability. Adult women can exemplify survival and growth as well as resistance and change. Program mentors, teachers, and female staff can certainly play that role as well as women already in the lives of girls.

Most young women have someone in their lives who can serve as an ongoing, positive model of womanhood and function as a mentor. For some young women, the most effective mentorship relationship is one in which the mentor works with both the girl and her mother. There is a particularly important place in this role modeling process for mothers. We know a lot of young women in programs do not have mothers they can rely upon for support. However, we need to utilize the relationship when possible. Unfortunately, many young women first acquire negative, female-to-female competition through their relationships with mothers. To counteract this behavior, girls and their mothers need to recognize the common issues and struggles they both face as females, and how they may join together to fight adversity.

When possible, we need to empower girls and their mothers by helping them build healthy relationships instead of protecting girls from their mothers. For example, we could teach a girl about her own personal strength as a female through the identification of her own mother's personal strengths. If possible, include mothers in this process.

Female staff members can also serve as role models to girls regarding how to be female, develop healthy female-to-male and female-to-female relationships, and treat people in positions of power (management) and in po-

sitions of less power (staff). Staff can also play an important role as a significant adult in a girl's life.

B. Strength-Based Programming for Girls

- **Guideline: Teaching New Skills Built on Existing Strength.** Create opportunities for girls to learn new skills. Also, teach skills that build on a girl's existing strengths. Gaining competence in new areas can build self-esteem, control, and positive social behaviors. When girls master new skills that are healthy and productive, they expand their opportunities and become less dependent on old, non-productive, and/or harmful ways of behaving. Teaching girls new skills based on their personal and cultural strengths is important. Tapping into a girl's socio-cultural roots, her life story, memories, and ancestors can provide a girl with opportunities to increase her sense of value and competency. Utilizing these authentic elements in a girl's life can be important because many adolescent girls have low self-esteem and feelings of powerlessness.

Skill building based on a girl's strengths crosses over all parts/levels of programming. The more girls have a sense of control/competence in multiple areas, the stronger their self-esteem will be.

Goals that girls set for themselves can be limited by their world experience. They may want to be like their mom or like the celebrities they view in the media. Sometimes neither option is a good one, or very realistic. Girls need support expanding their worldview and life's possibilities. They need to be taught new educational, job, and social skills to help them succeed in the world and reach their full potential. Additionally, girls need to have the opportunity to practice these life skills in a safe environment.

- **Guideline: Teaching Personal Respect.** Develop self-esteem enhancement programs that teach girls to appreciate and respect themselves rather than relying on others for validation. Self-monitoring skills can be incorporated into girls' programming. We need to give girls the language and the skills to develop personal respect. Personal respect assists girls in respecting others. Staff members' modeling of personal respect for themselves and others is also a teaching tool. Since females in general externalize success (i.e., have difficulty taking credit for success), and

look to external sources to define self-esteem, it is imperative that programs do not reinforce such patterns. Instead, programs must integrate programming approaches that teach young women how to value their perspective, celebrate and honor the female experience, and respect themselves for the unique individuals they are and who they are becoming.

Self-monitoring skills, such as positive self-talk, journal writing, and the recognition of triggers help girls learn personal respect.

- **Guideline: Giving Girls Control.** Develop programs that support and encourage girls to have hope, realistic expectations for the future, and the skills needed to reach their goals. Girls need help in developing a plan for the future, and given an opportunity to practice the skills that will help them realize their goals. Girls need to be shown that they can affect how things happen in a way that is empowering. Programs need to help girls find their voices and to be expressive and powerful in positive and productive ways. All of these efforts provide girls with a sense of control in their lives. Learning how to make good decisions, practicing making decisions in a safe environment, and learning from the consequences or outcomes of personal decisions in a supportive environment assists girls in understanding that they can impact their own lives in healthy ways.
- **Guideline: Victimization and Trauma.** Develop programs that address the sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, emotional/verbal abuse, trauma, domestic violence, and loss that many girls have faced. These issues deeply affect many parts of a girl's life and how she views herself as a female. Many girls have been victims of crimes of abuse, and they need help in learning not to view themselves as victims, but instead, as "survivors" and "thrivers." Program staff need to support girls in understanding the connection between their anger and acting out or acting in (i.e., self-destructive) behaviors, their reluctance to trust others, and their victimization. As mentioned previously, girls need to learn how to develop and maintain healthy boundaries and how to develop healthy relationships (i.e., non-sexual, mutual, and empathetic).

Females' pathways to crime, violence, substance abuse, exploitation, prostitution, pornography and other problems often stem from an experience of abuse or trauma. For

programs to build on a girl's strengths, they must first understand and address issues of victimization to get at the root of a girl's attitudes and behaviors. Victimization issues should be discussed one-on-one or in single-gender groups.

C. Health-Based Programming

- **Guideline: Physical Health and Sexual Health.** Develop programs that address physical health as well as sexual health. (We should care about the whole girl, not just about whether a girl is or is going to get pregnant.) Information needs to be shared with girls about female development, personal care, exercising, physical health, as well as menstruation, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, contraception, and sexuality.

Girls have four times as many health issues as boys. Girls need real knowledge about their bodies in order to take ownership over their physical being. Because body image is important to young women, it is essential to consider the process of physical development in young women. As girls' bodies develop, they change outwardly as well as inwardly. The result is that young women not only have to deal with their own feelings about these changes, but have to respond to everyone else's comments and opinions. For example, as many young women develop breasts they are plagued by comments from peers, especially boys. All around her she sees images of women who are sexualized. These confusing images can pressure her into unhealthy and risky situations.

Programs need to be aware of the connection between physical and emotional health as it relates to somatic issues for young women. It is important that a medical opinion is acquired before staff members assume a girl's physical issues are all in her head.

Eighty percent of girls in high school are concerned about their body image. Girls need to be able to love themselves no matter their size, shape or looks. They need to feel comfortable with their bodies and their physical development. Consequently, many programs for girls offer classes or groups on body image. These sessions examine female images displayed in the media and balance these visions with reality. They discuss the "beauty myth," the concept of beauty found within, rather than just focusing on exterior physical features. Girls have an opportunity to share their thoughts, concerns, and fears of not being accepted, popular, or dateable. This open-

ness, coupled with other self-esteem building exercises, perspective, and humor, helps girls attain a more balanced picture of what it means to be female.

- **Guideline: Emotional and Mental Health.** *Develop programs that address emotional and mental health. Girls need good and accurate information about emotional and mental health, eating disorders, body image, addiction, depression, and self-care. Girls should be assessed for emotional and mental health needs and referred to counseling or therapy with a professional who has experience working with female adolescents.*

Emotional health is an important part of holistic health. Girls' emotional health is at risk with society's expectations for females to follow a masquerade of conformity by being beautiful, thin, sexually appealing, perfect, and smart-but-not-too-smart. Many physical and mental health issues stem from the emotional pressure put on young women from society, systems, and relationships.

Girls should be given psychological assessments and evaluations that look at the whole girl, taking into account her social contexts in order to obtain an accurate diagnosis. Counseling services should be conducted with a professional who has knowledge of and experience working with adolescent females. Too often the failure of mental health treatment is blamed on the young woman without a clear assessment of the system's role in treatment outcomes. For example, is the girl receiving an adequate number of counseling sessions based upon her needs? Does her counselor have the appropriate training to work with her?

Also, because service systems are still placing youth in programs that are problem-based, girls with a dual diagnosis (e.g., mental health and chemical dependency) find themselves working with staff members who have only been trained in one discipline (e.g., chemical dependency treatment). Programs need to identify this gap in programming and develop a plan to also address all of a girl's mental health needs.

- **Guideline: Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drug-Free Health.** *Develop programs that address the use and abuse of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. The connection between drug use and self-medication by girls to deal with abuse and depression issues is best addressed in single-sex treatment programming. Prevention and intervention programs need to*

understand female adolescent development and incorporate programming that is specifically responsive to females.

Alcohol, drug, and tobacco treatment programs need to be delivered in a context that is compatible with females' experiences. This type of programming must address safety issues, relationships, and empowerment. Staff members need to reduce barriers to recovery from drug/alcohol dependence that are more likely to occur for females. Programming should also take into account females' roles, socialization, and status. It should empower, not dis-empower, girls. Single-sex groups help girls feel safe, especially in the early stages of recovery when girls are trying to be heard, building trusting relationships, or dealing with issues of abuse and trauma. Research has shown that while men do better in co-ed alcohol and drug groups, females do worse. Therefore, when providing or referring young women to alcohol or other drug treatment, it is best to place them where they can receive single-gender programming. Equal treatment services for females and males means providing opportunities that are customized to work best for each gender.

- **Guideline: Spiritual Health and Rites of Passage.** *Develop programs that allow time for girls to address their spiritual health. Information needs to be shared and time set aside for girls to explore their spirituality and inner strength; to develop hope; and to become strong, centered, and at peace. This might include time for personal reflection; cultural traditions; and discussions about life, meaning, guidance, values, morals, and ethics. Develop rites of passage celebrations for significant events, or milestones found in a girl's daily routine.*

Spiritual health is not the same as religion. This is an important distinction, because governmental programs need to respect the basic separation between church and state. Some people practice spirituality through religion, but that is their personal choice. Spirituality may take many forms. Many girls are drawn to ritual and spiritual activities that bring a richer meaning to their lives. These activities are often connected to culture and have a spiritual nature.

Research suggests that spiritual connectedness is one factor that enables a young woman to maintain self-esteem and a sense of self during difficult developmental periods. Many girls do not take quiet time to come

face-to-face with difficult issues or with their personal strengths. In addition, spiritual health is one factor to combat running and hiding through drugs and alcohol. Quiet time, meditation, centering activities, music, singing, bedtime stories, field trips in the woods and keeping journals are all examples of ways to help girls nourish their spiritual health. Personal altars in a residential setting can be made out of things that are meaningful to the girl, such as a sea shell from a memorable walk on the beach, a collar from a beloved pet, a photo of a significant person, a pine cone from a hike, a family photo, or a prize from a fair. Publicly displaying what is meaningful and special to a girl can help her feel connected and give her a place to pause and reflect. Holding a quiet, safe, respectful time where girls can share their hopes, dreams, and things that are meaningful to them is empowering. This is a time girls can learn from one another.

Lastly, integrate celebration, ritual, and traditions into the daily routine of your program. Teach girls to celebrate themselves, even when they are alone. One example is instituting a rite of passage or milestone celebration. Many cultures celebrate significant life milestones. It gives structure and meaning to important times in one's life. Examples include ceremonies for a girl's first menstrual period, graduation to the next level in school, receiving a high school diploma or GED, staying clean and sober, or birthdays. Recognizing significant physical, sexual, emotional, and spiritual milestones for girls is important. These rites of passage can provide girls with stability, connection to their roots, and direction. Rites of passage celebrations are also a way to reinforce positive conceptions of womanhood.

Helping a girl find and keep her spirit, discover meaning in life, understand how she fits into the world, embrace the shared experiences of womanhood, gain confidence, and celebrate opportunities that lay ahead, sets a foundation of hope for the future.

These guidelines for effective programming for girls have only been in place a little more than a year. Yet, programs in Oregon have reported the guidelines have assisted them in writing policy when none existed, provided an outline for staff training, and created a template for program changes. The guidelines have been an important first step for a state that wants to be responsive and effective in working with girls.

Endnotes

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