

## What is Gender-Specific Programming for Girls?

For too long, female juvenile offenders have been virtually forgotten. The growing numbers of delinquent girls, however, demonstrate that our juvenile justice system cannot afford either to neglect their needs or to treat female juvenile offenders as an afterthought.

**G**irls travel a different path to delinquency than most boys. After years of struggling to squeeze girls into programs designed for boys, some agencies that work with girls are seeking effective programs that are rooted in the experience of girls and incorporate an understanding of female development.

Gender-specific programming for girls refers to program models and services that comprehensively address the special needs of adolescent girls. Such programs foster positive gender identity development. Gender-specific programs for girls recognize factors that are most likely to impact girls and that can build resiliency and prevent delinquency.

For a girl already in trouble or at high risk of delinquency, programs that incorporate gender-specific practices offer reason to hope for a positive future.

### Federal Policies

The 1992 reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of

1974 required states participating in the Formula Grants Program to examine their juvenile justice systems in one or more of 10 challenge areas.

Challenge Activity E of the reauthorized act encourages states to examine how they

deal with girls, and to make changes in their overall programming for girls.

Approximately 25 states have developed plans or established programs to address the needs of female juvenile offenders.

### Comprehensive Approach

Just as the problems and risks facing girls tend to be interrelated and complex, a comprehensive approach addresses issues in the context of girls' relationships to peers, family, school, and community. It helps each girl to focus on her individual needs, to understand how she has been affected by risk factors, and to address issues that arise in her relationships with others.

Gender-specific programs encourage healthy attitudes, behaviors, and lifestyles, and promote social competence.

### Program Elements

According to the Valentine Foundation, effective gender-specific programming for girls should:

- Create space that is physically and emotionally safe
- Provide time for girls to talk



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"I talk things out now. If I get angry. I take real deep breaths, or I go in my room and cool off."

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- Encourage girls to develop relationships of trust with women in their lives.
- Build on cultural strengths.
- Include appropriate mentors.
- Educate about women's health issues.
- Create opportunities for change on an individual level, within relationships, and within the community
- Include girls' voices in program design, implementation, and evaluation

• Secure adequate financing to ensure that comprehensive programming will be sustained long enough for girls to integrate the benefits

- Be involved with schools so that curriculum reflects experience and contributions of women

Leslie Asaca, director of the Women and Girls Institutes at the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, suggests a female-positive facility include: a humane, small-scale living environment; respectful interactions between staff and residents; and a positive atmosphere that fosters change.

## Risk and Resiliency

A comprehensive program addresses the risks and dangers girls face, and also fosters

protective factors that can help girls in the juvenile justice system.

*Risk factors include:*

- Early sexual experimentation
- Academic failure success
- History of sexual abuse
- Low self-esteem
- Dysfunctional family system
- Racism
- Sexism
- Substance abuse

*Protective factors include:*

"Before I came here I thought it was the woman's fault she got abused. Now I know that it's never her fault."

- Delayed sexual experimentation
- Academic success
- Positive sexual development
- Positive self-esteem
- Positive family environment
- Positive minority identity
- Positive gender identity
- Prosocial skills/ competence

Resiliency researcher Michael Resnick of the University of Minnesota Adolescent Health Program underscores that programming should:

- Provide girls with connec-

tions to adults in nonexploitative relationships

- Help girls achieve school success by providing academic programming best suited to their learning needs
- Offer girls a personal form of spiritual connectedness through formal or informal programming
- Reduce sources of family stress; teach girls coping skills to help them deal with stress caused by family dysfunction

## Summary

Encouraged by national policy, a number of states have taken groundbreaking steps to assist female delinquents by planning for gender-specific programs. Gender-specific programming keeps the specific needs of girls and an understanding of female adolescent development in focus throughout the planning process.

Gender-specific programs are comprehensive, providing services across a continuum of care. They are designed to recognize the risks and dangers girls face because of gender, especially a history of abuse or other forms of victimization.

Gender-specific programs encourage resiliency and life skills that help girls make a positive transition to womanhood and prevent future delinquency.

**For more information on this topic, consult *Guiding Principles for Promising Female Programming: An Inventory of Best Practices*, available from OJJDP and on the Web site.**

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## ASPECTS OF PROGRAMMING

The discussion of self-esteem development was grounded in research but crucially connected to examples drawn from a wide variety of programs and projects. The combined information led us to a number of conclusions regarding program development and evaluation of projects benefiting adolescent women.

1. Girls need space that is physically safe, removed from those who depend on them, and removed from the demands for attention of adolescent males.
2. Girls need time for talk, for emotionally "safe", comforting, challenging, nurturing conversations within ongoing relationships.
3. Girls also need programs that potentiate relationships of trust and interdependence with other women already present in their lives. Friends, relatives, neighbors, church and social group members can be critical providers of insight, strategy and strength.
4. Programs need to tap girls' personal and cultural strengths (such as building on Afro-centric perspectives of history and community relationships) rather than always focus primarily on the individual girl. The development of programmatic partnerships with Black and Hispanic churches is one response to this need. Programs that explore girls' inner knowing of who they are and who they want to be is another.
5. Girls need mentors that reflect a rootedness in realities of the girls' own lives. They need mentors who exemplify survival and growth, as well as resistance and change. Such role models must be drawn from the girls' particular communities as well as resistance and change. Such role models must be drawn from the girls' particular communities as well as from the wider world of women.
6. Girls need education about how their bodies function, about pregnancy and contraception, and about diseases and their prevention. OF EQUAL importance is the opportunity to explore the meaning and value of sexual pleasure, the establishment and nurture of committed relationships, and the exploration of conflicting cultural messages about sexual behavior. Such programming can help girls to "take back" their bodies to suit purposes of their own defining.
7. Ideally, all social programs for girls would contain three components: individual change (i.e. girls in drug treatment), relational changes (i.e. work with significant relationships that affect drug abusing girls), and community change (i.e. working to alter the cultural and material contexts surrounding the girls which may contribute to their problems and/or solutions).

8. Girls need a voice in the design, implementation and evaluation of programs if the proposed benefits are to have relevance for them.
9. "Self-sufficiency" is an illusory and ill-defined goal, often used to convey "no longer on welfare." "Self-sufficiency" as it is usually understood negates the value of networks and support systems of interdependence, the development of which would be more appropriate and realistic for low-income young women.
10. Programs need to be comprehensive, integrated, and sustained over time, or linked so as to achieve such criteria. Substantial evidence documents that young women tend to be very positively influenced by social programs – as long as those programs are sustained long enough for the participants to integrate the benefits. Many programs labeled a failure have simply not been funded long enough for the girls to achieve the program goals. This is a financing problem, not one of program design or inability of girls to respond.
11. Programmatic involvement with schools is critically needed. Curriculum must be reshaped to reflect and value the experience and contributions of women. Re-evaluation of school/community relationships and exploration of possibilities for collaboration are urgent priorities. The role of the low-income adolescent girl as childcare provider for a single employed parent or for her own child must be addressed if schools are to be responsive to girls' needs.

# Gender-Specific Programming for *Girls*

For too long, the needs of female juvenile offenders have been virtually forgotten. The growing numbers of delinquent girls, however, demonstrate that our juvenile justice system can not afford either to neglect their needs or to treat female juvenile offenders as an afterthought.

In the past, most girls who came into contact with juvenile courts did so for nonviolent status offenses such as curfew violations and running

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away from home. Today, girls are entering the justice system at younger ages and for more violent offenses.

Although girls still commit far fewer crimes than boys, they constitute about two out of eight juvenile offenders. Violent crime has increased nearly four times as much among girls (16.5 percent) as it has among boys (4.5 percent) during the past decade.

## **What is Gender-specific Programming?**

Girls travel different developmental pathways to delinquency than boys. Gender-specific programming is "comprehensive programming which addresses and supports the psychological development process of female adolescents while fostering connection within relationships in the context of a safe and nurturing environment." S.I. Lindgren.

Gender-specific programming is designed to meet the unique needs of young delinquent and at-risk females. Staff value the female perspective and experience, take into account female development, and empower young women to reach their full potential.



## **Web Site**

The Gender-Specific Programming for Girls Web site:

- ~ Provides up-to-date information to prevent female delinquency and related problems
- ~ Maintains links to research and best practices in the field
- ~ Allows Internet users to send online queries
- ~ Houses a listserv where professionals can conduct ongoing discussions

The Web site is continually updated with additional resource links, bibliographies, articles, abstracts, program descriptions, etc. Be sure to visit often to get the latest information.

**[www.girlspecificprogram.org](http://www.girlspecificprogram.org)**

The Office for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice funds the Project through a cooperative agreement with Greene, Peters & Associates, P.C. (GPA), Nashville, Tennessee. The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL), Portland, Oregon, through a contract with GPA, provides additional support and technical assistance to the field. Gender-Specific Programming for Girls, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 101 SW Main Street, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204-3297. Phone: (503) 275-9693; Fax (503) 275-0452, Email [warrenb@nwrel.org](mailto:warrenb@nwrel.org).



## Profile of a female offender

Although every girl in trouble is unique, she is likely to share elements of the following profile with other female juvenile offenders:

- She is now 13 to 16 years old, although she may have started acting out a few years earlier
- She's poor and has grown up in a neighborhood with a high crime rate
- She's likely to belong to an ethnic minority group (50 percent of female juveniles in detention are African American, 13 percent are Hispanic, 34 percent are Caucasian)
- She's had a history of poor academic performance, sees school as a battlefield, and may drop out as a means of escape
- She's been a victim of physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse or exploitation

- She has used and abused drugs and/or alcohol
- She has gone without attention for medical and mental health needs

- \* Her family life likely has been fraught with stress and instability (possibly related to parents' divorce, single parent issues, estrangement from one or both parents, arrest and/or incarceration of family members, death of parent or other close family member)

- \* She may have entered the juvenile justice system as a runaway (or for such status offenses as truancy or curfew violations), seeking to escape abuse at home

- \* If she is a mother, she probably lost contact with her infant within the first three months of the child's life

- She feels that life is oppressive and lacks hope for the future

## Monograph

The monograph, *Guiding Principles for Promising Female Programming: An Inventory of Best Practices*, outlines the current status of girls in the juvenile justice system and describes promising practices in gender-specific programming for girls. The monograph is available on the Web site (<http://www.girlspecificprogram.org>), and an updated version will be available this summer.

## History of the Project

In 1996, the Gender-programming Training and Technical Assistance Initiative began under a cooperative agreement between the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and Greene, Peters & Associates, P.C. The Initiative provides comprehensive training and technical assistance to programs serving incarcerated

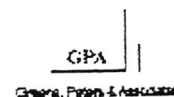
female juvenile offenders and females at risk of offending. As of March 2000, the Initiative has provided several tools to the field:

- ~Development of the *Guiding Principles for Promising Female Programming* monograph

- ~Training for practitioners, administrators, and policymakers across the nation on the need for gender-specific programming for girls

- ~Training for service providers in using gender-specific practices to help young women develop positive attitudes toward womanhood

As policymakers and practitioners recognize the challenges facing female adolescents, many jurisdictions are systematically addressing the issue of gender inequity in the juvenile justice system. The continuing efforts of the Initiative provide the field with comprehensive information and resources on gender-specific programming for girls.



## Fostering Positive Relationships with Girls

For too long, female juvenile offenders have been virtually forgotten. The growing numbers of delinquent girls, however, demonstrate that our juvenile justice system cannot afford either to neglect their needs or to treat female juvenile offenders as an afterthought.

**M**ost girls in the juvenile justice system are attempting to overcome physical, sexual, or emotional abuse from family members or adults they trusted. Many become incarcerated for status offenses such as running away, curfew violations, and homelessness, rather than criminal activity. They may be teen parents or have ended a pregnancy. They may use drugs or alcohol to flee from the problems in their lives.

No matter what role you may play in the life of a young female offender—staff member, counselor, tutor, mentor, or advocate—keep in mind that you are a role model and may be one of few caring adults in her life. The following tips are intended to enhance a one-on-one relationship with young women in the juvenile justice system.

### Develop trust

- Be sure you have the time to commit before you volunteer. You do not want to add

"Because what I see is the wonder in the human spirit. What I see is the potential in the human spirit. Some people will really try to live up to the level upon which you address them"

-Maya Angelou



Helping Girls Dream Again

"We can strengthen girls so that they will be ready. We can encourage emotional toughness and self-protection. We can support and guide them."

-Mary Pipher

one more heartbreak to a life fraught with disappointment.

- Make and honor reasonable commitments and don't promise more than what you can do. You can unwittingly add to her pain by promising more than you can deliver.
- Establish specific and regular times to meet. Not only are you establishing trust, but you are showing her how to meet time commitments.
- Remember that establishing trust is a slow process and you may not get immediate results.
- Initially, it may seem that you are extending energy that she cannot reciprocate. As most girls have been abused, it will take your steady, patient commitment to help her make changes.

### Communicate clearly

- Help convert unpleasant behaviors—aggression, etc.—into more appropriate behavior. Let her calmly how you feel without taking the behavior personally and

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being judgmental or accusative (e.g., "When you say or do \_\_\_\_, I feel hurt"). Your actions model a positive way of dealing with an unpleasant situation.

- Praise her for the positive changes she is making rather than emphasizing negative behaviors or responses.

- Remember that many such behaviors have been developed to cope with challenging situations and that it takes time to replace them with healthy responses.

- Be aware of how you communicate. Body language and facial expression can carry strong messages that support, clarify, complicate, or contradict your words.

- Keep verbal communication, particularly your expectations, simple. Too many words can confuse your message and increase the possibility of misunderstandings.

- Provide opportunities for her to voice her opinion. Really listen to what she has to say and don't silence or censor her because you feel uncomfortable with opinions different than yours.

## **Establish clear boundaries**

- Share the lessons—not the details—of the challenges in your life. Be sure to emphasize the support you received. She can benefit from knowing how supportive relationships can help solve obstacles and problems.

"As with young people of both genders, letting girls know that you are interested in them as people, being playful, showing your human side, telling stories, and especially listening, are all ways to start building a relationship. Respect, above all, is critical."

—Charlottle A. Ryan, Sandra J. Lindgren

- Reinforce positive behavior through tone of voice, praise, and encouraging facial expressions. Many girls have been abused, so even casual touch may send confusing messages.

- Avoid becoming embroiled in disputes with staff members, girls, or parents. Rather

than take sides, help her to identify and solve the problems.

- Don't apply your mores and values to her life. Many complex issues have affected her life, and she won't benefit from you imposing your own value system on her unique situation.

- Remember that true compassion is not the same as pity. She needs you to support the good in her life, not for you to try to "save" her.

## **Support strengths**

- Engage her in activities that support her interests and strengths. This may mean using a variety of methods to discover what interest her.

- Introduce her to new experiences and activities. While you want to spark her curiosity and encourage her self-esteem, you don't want to force her into situations that she may not yet have the skills or confidence to successfully experience.

- Share a skill or hobby. Your enthusiasm can foster hope that she can participate in constructive, meaningful experiences.

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# Internet World Wide Web Resources

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Adolescent Directory ([www.education.indiana.edu/cas](http://www.education.indiana.edu/cas))  
American Association of University Women ([www.aauw.org/index.html](http://www.aauw.org/index.html))  
American Family Association ([www.afa.net](http://www.afa.net))  
Americans for Hope, Growth and Opportunity ([www.ahgo.org](http://www.ahgo.org))  
An Income of Her Own ([www.anincomeofherown.com/](http://www.anincomeofherown.com/))  
Center for the Future of Children ([www.futureofchildren.org](http://www.futureofchildren.org))  
Center for Youth Development and Policy Research ([www.aed.org](http://www.aed.org))  
Daughters' Newsletter  
(<http://webclay.net/Menu.cfm?SiteID=daughters&SectionID=95>)  
Expect the Best from a Girl ([www.members.aol.com/brvgirls/](http://www.members.aol.com/brvgirls/))  
Focus on the Family ([www.fotf.org](http://www.fotf.org))  
G.I.R.L. ([www.worldkids.net/girl/](http://www.worldkids.net/girl/))  
Girls' Circle Association ([www.girlscircle.com](http://www.girlscircle.com))  
Girl Net ([www.thefoundry.org/~girlnet/](http://www.thefoundry.org/~girlnet/))  
Girl Power ([www.health.org/gpower/](http://www.health.org/gpower/))  
Girl Scouts of the USA ([www.girlscouts.org](http://www.girlscouts.org))  
Girl Tech ([www.girltech.com](http://www.girltech.com))  
Girls Inc. ([www.girlsinc.org](http://www.girlsinc.org))  
GURL ([www.gurl.com/](http://www.gurl.com/))  
I Am Your Child ([www.iamyourchild.org](http://www.iamyourchild.org))  
Movie Mom ([www.moviemom.com/](http://www.moviemom.com/))  
Ms. Foundation ([www.ms.foundation.org/](http://www.ms.foundation.org/))  
National Coalition of Girls' Schools ([www.ncgs.org/](http://www.ncgs.org/))  
National Multicultural Institute ([www.nmci.org](http://www.nmci.org))  
National Network for Youth ([www.nn4youth.org](http://www.nn4youth.org))  
National Parenting Information Center ([www.tnpc.com](http://www.tnpc.com))  
National Women's History Project ([www.nwhp.org/](http://www.nwhp.org/))  
National Youth Employment Coalition ([www.ttrc.doleta.gov/pepnet](http://www.ttrc.doleta.gov/pepnet))  
Smart Girl ([www.smartgirl.com/](http://www.smartgirl.com/))  
Teen Voices Magazine ([www.teenvoices.com/](http://www.teenvoices.com/))  
Youth Assistance Organization ([www.youth.org](http://www.youth.org))  
Youth Change ([www.youthchg.com](http://www.youthchg.com))  
Youth Tree USA ([www.youthtreeusa.com](http://www.youthtreeusa.com))