

## 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



Helping Girls Dream Again

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

**OJJDP**

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention