

**Juvenile Justice Vision 20/20 October 2016 Training Event
Things Make Sense: Understanding and Treating Adolescent Girls
October 27, 2016**

Presenters: Dr. Kathleen Bailey and Dr. Suzanne Wolfe

This simple but powerful new approach to understanding and treating depression and other issues in adolescent girls was presented in an interactive format. From the lens of entitlement theory, developed by Dr. Suzanne Wolfe, depression is an expectable result of a set of deeply-held beliefs about one's place in the world of others. These beliefs can be easily identified, and usually arise from early experiences with caregivers. Based on Dr. Wolfe's 27 years of clinical practice, long-lasting and positive adjustment can be facilitated by providing a "corrective relationship" that changes those core beliefs. Participants explored what those beliefs are, how they developed, what behaviors are associated with them, and what they can do to help change them.

Presenters used the analogy of a tree, where the trunk of the tree was represented by personal qualities and core beliefs, and the leaves of the tree—which sprout from the trunk—are behaviors. Following the theme of entitlement theory, qualities of an appropriately entitled adolescent girl would include honesty, confidence, and an overall positive attitude. Activities for this girl would tend to surround school, family, hobbies or sports, and possibly work.

An under-entitled girl would have qualities that included unworthiness, helplessness, shame, and negativity. Behaviors would tend towards substance abuse, sleep disorders, irritability, and isolation. An over-entitled adolescent girl would have qualities that included poor boundaries and low self-esteem, and behaviors that included fighting, dishonesty, risk-taking, substance abuse, and truancy from home.

In all three categories it is past relationships and experiences with others that determine the adolescent's beliefs about their own worthiness and value, and those beliefs in turn determine the girl's choices and behaviors. In either case—under-entitled or over-entitled—the self-view of the girl is that "I don't matter". Factors that contribute to delinquency in females more than in males include:

- Delinquent girls come from more disorganized and less socially adequate families.
- Families of delinquent girls appear to be more dysfunctional than families of their male counterparts and that dysfunction has a greater impact on girls than boys; delinquent girls often come from homes where there is a greater frequency of broken homes and family dysfunction.
- Compared to a control group, families of delinquent girls are characterized by multiple parental disabilities, parental criminal history, parental psychopathology and substance abuse, and/or lack of family cohesion.
- Fathers of delinquent girls were more neurotic and dominant than parents in a control group.
- Abuse or neglect in childhood increased the likelihood of arrest for females by 77% over a comparison group of females.
- Female delinquents reported much higher rates of sexual victimization than males.

The treatment model for an under-entitled girl includes identifying the “rules for living” imposed or self-imposed on the girl, and encourage breaking those rules of living. Treating the girl as a person that matters helps with this process. Treatment for the over-entitled girl is a two-layer process. Since, in the end, both under-entitled and over-entitled girls arrive at the same place of feeling undeserving of love, acceptance, and good things out of life, the over-entitled girl needs to learn to keep their healthy emotional boundaries (in other words “don’t buy in to how they try to make you feel”) and needs to learn how their behaviors keep others at a distance, and correct those behaviors. When that is accomplished, treatment reverts to the same treatment provided to an under-entitled girl.

If relationships are the problem, or have created the problem, then relationships can also be the cure. Clinicians are advised that the most important task of a person in a helping relationship is to provide corrective experiences. The worst thing that a person in a “helping” capacity can do is to replicate past injuries.