



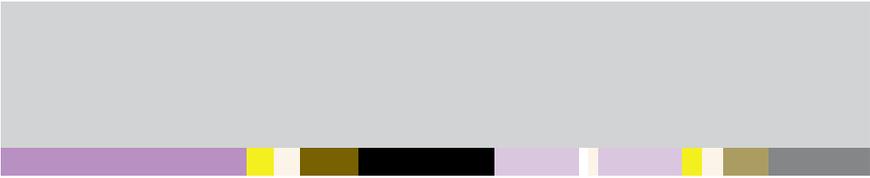
WORKING WITH GIRLS IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

A Guidebook for Practitioners

Justice for Girls Coalition of Washington State

Compiled by Karen Gough, Sarah Cusworth Walker, Susan Waild and Rebecca Via





FOCUSING ON GIRLS

The following national and international agencies have all created policies and made recommendations for reducing gender bias and providing appropriate services for females:

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Preventionⁱ

United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justiceⁱⁱ

American Correctional Associationⁱⁱⁱ

American Bar Association and National Bar Association^{iv}

WHY?

These agencies and other juvenile justice organizations across the world recognize that girls who come in contact with the juvenile justice system have the highest rates of mental health need, sexual abuse trauma, and unsafe home environments among youth in the system^v. Further, the proportion of girls in the juvenile justice system is growing. Girls now make up a full 1/3rd of the juvenile justice population^{vi}.

WHY NOT JUST IMPROVE THE SYSTEM FOR ALL YOUTH, REGARDLESS OF GENDER?

The purpose of focusing on girls is not to exclude boys. While the system can undoubtedly be improved for boys as well, much of the existing research on what works in juvenile justice corrections has been done with primarily male samples of youth. Focusing on girls provides an opportunity to think about ways that these policies do and do not appropriately apply to girls. Ultimately, however, we hope that focusing on better services for girls will result in better services for all youth.



Outline of the Booklet

This booklet is organized to provide a quick reference for how to work effectively with girls. The emphasis of the booklet is on practical strategies. Accordingly, we present commonly recognized principles for gender-responsive treatment and then discuss how these might look in actual practice.

- I.** Gender-Responsive Principles and Trauma-Informed Care
- II.** Courtroom Applications – Talking to Girls
- III.** Working in Group Treatment
- IV.** Talking About Difficult Issues
- V.** Gender-Matching, When and Where



Gender-Responsive Principles

“Gender-Responsive Treatment” is the term that is most often used to describe practices that are appropriate for females. There is general agreement on many of the basic principles one should consider when working with girls. Primary among these is recognizing the importance of emotional and physical safety, particularly if a girl has significant trauma in her past, as well as the primary role relationships may play in a girl’s life. Below are five core principles adopted by the Justice for Girls Coalition which reflects our review of over 35 different recommendations for gender-responsive care.

- 1. Be culturally responsive:** Address girls’ needs and risks based on the girls’ identified cultures, which may include gender, race, ethnicity, religion, class, ability and sexual orientation.
- 2. Build from relational theory:** Recognize healthy female development hinges on healthy, mutual relationships.
- 3. Address safety:** Integrate trust development, trauma-informed care and awareness of socially-based power differences.
- 4. Use a skills-based, strengths-based approach:** Increase engagement in services, increase confidence and develop multiple competencies.
- 5. Serve girls holistically.** Consider individual differences, build on natural supports and address needs in multiples areas of life, e.g., school, home, work and with peers.

The discussion in the following pages will provides examples of how these principles can be applied in practice.



“**Trauma-Informed Care**” reflects the degree to which an agency is actively screening for trauma symptoms and responding in ways that reflects an understanding of how trauma can influence youth behavior^{vii}. An awareness of trauma is central to understanding and responding appropriately to justice-involved girls because of the significant rates of trauma and sexual exploitation in this population. Below are statistics from Washington State and national data on girls and trauma.

29% of girls on probation in Washington State have been sexually abused (likely an underestimate)^{viii}

60% of girls in detention have likely been raped in their lifetime^{ix}

35-45% of girls in detention have had PTSD in their lifetime^x

Girls in detention are almost 6 times more likely than boys to have a panic disorder^{xi}

While a comprehensive discussion of trauma-informed care is beyond the scope of this booklet, there are a few key facts that are helpful as you try to balance youth needs with staff and community safety (more references on trauma-informed care are provided at the end of the booklet).

Fact 1: A traumatic event is different from a run-of-the-mill stressful event. A traumatic event threatens the life or physical integrity of the youth or someone who is critically important to the youth. The event causes an overwhelming sense of terror, helplessness, and horror. The body reacts automatically with increased heart rate, shaking, dizziness, rapid breathing and the release of stress hormones.

Fact 2: Trauma can take many different forms. Acute trauma is single event that lasts for a limited period of time (car accident, natural disaster, physical or sexual assault). Chronic trauma is when a youth experiences many traumatic events over a long period (prolonged physical or sexual abuse, or a series of different traumatic events).

Fact 3: The effects of chronic trauma build on each other. The brain and body of a child who has experienced chronic trauma for years may respond differently to a scary event than a normal child. Youth who have survived trauma often find it difficult to trust other people, feel safe, understand and manage their emotions, respond to life change and adapt to stress.

Fact 4: Every youth reacts to trauma differently. The youth’s response to trauma will depend on their age, basic temperament (some youth are more fearful or sensitive), their past experience with trauma and what happened after the trauma. Some youth develop a hostile, aggressive style (termed reactively aggressive) to manage their safety as a reaction to trauma.

(Acknowledgements to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network)



Courtroom Applications – How to Talk to Girls

MAJOR POINT

A variety of personal social information is shared in reports to the court. That information may include the disclosure of physical or sexual abuse, mental health status, family and peer relations, and the type of offense before the court, (e.g., prostitution, assault). Testimony sometimes includes sharing and having discussions about this information in order to make recommendations/decisions about the girl before the Court.

CASE EXAMPLE

Samantha ran from residential treatment after a staff member was confrontational with her, calling her a “whore” and “trash”. This triggered Samantha and she argued with the staff calling her names as well. The staff then challenged Samantha to hit her. Samantha did not hit staff and went to her room for the night. The next day she met with her therapist, case manager and advocate. She reported that she felt like running because she did not want to deal with this anymore. They agreed that she would go to respite at a youth shelter until a permanent plan could be developed. Samantha ran from the shelter that night. She returned 4 days later and a bench warrant quash hearing was scheduled.

(This matter was investigated by the residential treatment administration and the staff was released from employment after this incident).

In this situation, the judge was appropriately non-confrontational about the incident. The judge acknowledged the situation in the hearing, but seeing that Samantha was emotional, did not require her to explain in great detail. The judge discussed alternative ways to handle the situation, rather than running, and also praised Samantha for turning herself in.

1. If certain sensitive information needs to be discussed, approach the bench. Remember that all Courts are open.
2. Allow for the girls voices to be heard. They have a story to tell.
3. Be mindful of facial expressions, especially judgmental ones.



Working in Group Treatment

MAJOR POINT

When possible, efforts should be made to provide girls with a girls-only group or allow for some flexibility so that girls can work on skills independently.

CASE EXAMPLE

Andrea was 1 of 2 girls in an ART class with 10 boys. She came to class prepared and actively participated, but when the other girl dropped out, Andrea became the target of one of the boys. He made fun of and referred to her as a “whale,” and continued to bully her despite staff intervention. Through frustrated, Andrea continued to come to class to remain in compliance with her probation requirements. After one of the classes, while Andrea was waiting at a bus stop, the boy from class with some other boys approached her. They called her a “bitch” and threw a pop can at her. Out of concern for her safety, Andrea was removed from the class. She felt that this was unfair.

1. If at all possible consider having an all girls ART class. Girls are likely to feel more comfortable and talk more openly. It also gives girls an opportunity to build positive relationships with each other.
2. If an all girls ART class is not an option, consider having a more balanced number of male/female youth in class.

CASE EXAMPLE

Susan was arrested for an Assault in the Fourth Degree and was under the influence of alcohol at the time. During pretrial she was admitted to inpatient treatment but was unsuccessful. She left treatment as she had difficulties with some of the youth in the program. Upon her return home, Susan began individual counseling and had a good rapport with her counselor. Her mother reported that there were no other incidents of aggression and she was beginning to express herself more. This was significant progress. At sentencing, the Probation Officer had recommended that Susan continue in counseling and be monitored with urinalysis. The Probation Officer also recommended that if Susan had a relapse, that drug treatment would be explored again. The Court disagreed with this and ordered that Susan to return to drug treatment. This caused anxiety for Susan.

- 
1. Because of prior victimization/trauma, some girls may not be comfortable sharing in a group setting. Consider other resources such as individual counseling and working with them individually.
 2. A “one size fits all” approach regarding services may be counterproductive. Be responsive to the needs of the girl you are working with to promote behavior change and reduce recidivism.

Talking about Difficult Issues

MAJOR POINT

Difficult topics about abuse in current or past relationships may come up during assessments, during groups or in one-on-one conversations. To build a good, trusting relationship with a girl it is important to pay attention to the following things during these conversations:

1. **Adopt a non-judgmental, supportive voice.** When a girl discloses that she has gone through difficult experience (e.g., abuse, unhealthy relationship) offer support by saying “I’m sorry that happened to you, that must have been hard for you.”
2. **Assess safety.** The first priority in any conversation or assessment of abuse is whether the girl is currently in a safe situation. This involves both physical and emotional safety (i.e., is the girl in a situation where she is routinely disrespected or put down). Ask the girl whether she currently feels safe, if she has someone she can go to for help if she begins to feel unsafe and whether she needs you to help her find a more safe situation. If the girl is in detention and feeling unsafe, be an advocate for her with the necessary personnel in detention to resolve the situation.
3. **Listen for the important relationships in the girls’ life.** One of the distinguishing, general differences between the way males and females relate to the world is the greater emphasis females give to relationships when they make life decisions. This can be a significant strength, but can also hurt girls when they choose to stay in unhealthy relationships. It is important to recognize the power girls can give to these relationships. Acknowledge how hard it might be for a girl to walk away from an abusive relationship and help them to refocus on other, more positive relationships in their life.

Gender-Matching: When and Where

MAJOR POINT

Research indicates that girls have higher rates of trauma and previous sexual abuse. It is important to keep this in mind when assigning girls to services/probation officers within the juvenile justice system.

CASE EXAMPLE

Latisha is on community supervision for Theft in the Second Degree. The initial intake probation officer learned that Latisha, her younger sibling, and mother had been kidnapped by the mother's boyfriend. They were held hostage in a hotel room while the boyfriend beat the mother and sexually abused Latisha. He then threatened to kill them. Fortunately the police responded. This information was available in the social file. Latisha is assigned a male probation officer.

1. When assigning cases, be knowledgeable of the girls' social history. Inquire of them if they would feel more comfortable with a gender specific probation officer.
2. Be aware of your staff's strengths when matching cases. Who is the best fit for working with this girl?
3. When referred to counseling services, such as FFT, ask if they have a preference in working with a gender specific counselor. Don't make assumptions.
4. If a girl has a male probation officer and something traumatic occurs, he could consider having a female co-worker assist in addressing the situation.



Additional Resources

For Youth

Creating a Safety Plan www.loveisrespect.org

Getting involved – National Girls Institute www.nationalgirlsinstitute.org

For Practitioners

Research on Gender-Responsive Practices, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Model Programs Guide www.ojjdp.gov/programs

National Council on Crime and Delinquency, Center for Women and Girls, www.nccd.org

Literature Reviews and Resources – National Girls Institute www.nationalgirlsinstitute.org

NOTES



For more information about the Justice for Girls Coalition and how to receive copies of this guidebook email justiceforgirls.wa@gmail.com or contact Dr. Sarah Walker at the University of Washington (206) 685-2197, secwalkr@uw.edu.

The preparation of this booklet was aided by the Office of Juvenile Justice, DSHS, through a federal grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice, authorized under the Juvenile Justice, Runaway Youth and Missing Children's Act Amendments of 1992, through a grant approved by the Washington State Partnership Council on Juvenile Justice (WA-PCJJ).

Endnotes

- ⁱ Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (1998). *Guiding principles for promising female programming: An inventory of best practices*, prepared by Greene, Peters and Associates and the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice
- ⁱⁱ Beijing Rules (1985). *United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice: Beijing Rules*. Retrieved online at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/beijingrules.pdf> on March 29th, 2011.
- ⁱⁱⁱ American Correctional Association (2010). Public Correctional Policy.
- ^{iv} American Bar Association and National Bar Association (2001). *Justice by Gender: The lack of appropriate prevention, diversion and treatment alternatives for girls in the justice system*. Washington, D.C.
- ^v Walker, Muno, Sullivan-Colglazier (in press). Principles in practice: A multistate study of gender-responsive reforms in the juvenile justice system. *Crime and Delinquency*.
- ^{vi} Puzzanchera, C. (2009). Juvenile Arrests 2008. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. Office of Justice Programs. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Washington D.C.
- ^{vii} National Child Traumatic Stress Network (nd). www.nctsn.org
- ^{viii} Walker, S.C. (unpublished). Washington State Girl Offender Project.
- ^{ix} Cauffman, E., Feldman, S., Waterman, J., Steiner, H. (1998). Posttraumatic stress disorder among female juvenile offenders. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 37(11), 1209-1216
- ^x Teplin, L.A., Abram, K.M., McClelland, G.M., Mericle, A.A., Dulcan, M.K., & Washburn, J.J. (2006). Psychiatric disorders of youth in detention. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, April. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention: Washington, DC.

^{xi}IBID



Justice for Girls

COALITION OF WASHINGTON STATE

