

Guidelines “At a Glance”

Effective Gender-Specific Programming For Delinquent and At-Risk Girls



Introduction

Girls Equitable Treatment Coalition (E.T.C.), formed in 1996 to address the needs of females, believes that when quality gender-specific services are provided, girls’ needs will be met and the likelihood of them re-offending or committing an initial offense will decrease. *Colorado Guidelines for Effective Female-Specific Programming for Delinquent and At-Risk Girls* was designed to provide information and suggestions to assist agencies, staff and youth personnel that work with girls ages 10-19 to enhance the quality and effectiveness of services for juvenile female offenders and for girls at risk of entering the juvenile justice system.

The guidelines are not intended to be all-inclusive, but rather to serve as a catalyst to encourage professionals to look critically at how services are provided to girls in gender-specific and mixed gender programs. The guidelines are based on promising models and reflect current research on what is considered good practice for females, and, therefore, will always be evolving and improving. The guidelines are interconnected and build on each other to create an environment that can enhance and maximize program effectiveness for girls and young women.

Gender-specific programming for girls is a comprehensive approach to female delinquency based on an understanding of female development and experiences. To develop quality female-specific services, it is necessary to not only understand what constitutes best practices for girls, but also criteria associated with general good service delivery. All youth programs should be: strength-based; accurately designed around statistical data and developmental research; focused on measurable, clear and focused objectives; affirming of the worth of individuals whatever their background or offense history; representative in staff and approach, balancing multiple perspectives including those of race, gender, and ethnic background; and offered within safe and secure environments. These standards are included in the following guidelines and discussed in relation to juvenile females.

Girls E.T.C. recognizes that implementing these guidelines is a process that will occur over time. Therefore, allow flexibility as you work toward fully integrating the guidelines into the culture, policies, programming, and outcome evaluations of your organization.

This document provides an overview of the guidelines. The *Colorado Guidelines for Effective Female-Specific Programming for Girls Manual* provides more detail for implementation including examples and lessons learned from existing programs. Colorado would like to acknowledge those who worked so hard in Colorado to establish the original guidelines and note that their work is still strongly represented here. We would also like to thank the many states that offered their material and resources for this document and the implementation manual to follow.

OVERARCHING GUIDELINE: IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS



For effective programming to occur with girls, the importance of positive relationships must be realized and integrated into every component. Carol Gilligan, prominent researcher in gender issues, stated, “Attachment, interdependence, and connectedness to a relationship are critical issues that form the foundation of female identity.” This means that healthy, positive relationships among staff, between the girls in the program, and between girls and staff are fundamental. Program staff also need to respect relationships that girls have outside the program. These relationships, healthy or not, have value and meaning to a girl. The importance of relationships is an overarching and underlying principle woven into all of the following guidelines.

Organizational Policies

Importance of Relationships

GUIDELINE 1: ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES

Develop gender-specific policies and procedures for programs. This ensures that administration and staff are informed and follow the same procedures, understand the philosophy and commitment to girls' gender-specific needs, and create a culture where gender issues are integrated into the organizational structure. Written policies and procedures include guiding principles and program values. Gender-specific policies and practices become integrated into all parts of the program continuum from intake through follow-up/aftercare. This also includes job descriptions and employee review processes. All levels of an organization should also receive information and training on the specific needs of females.

Program Environment

Importance of Relationships

GUIDELINE 2: PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

Create an environment for girls that is physically and emotionally safe and one that values females. The surroundings 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.

A: Physical Safety

Create an environment (and method of transportation to and from these locations) safe from violence, physical, emotional and sexual abuse, verbal harassment, bullying, teasing, and stalking. Physical privacy of girls is respected and their physical comfort is considered.

B: Emotional Safety

Create an environment that is emotionally safe and nurturing, encouraging girls to express themselves, share feelings and allows time to develop trust, all within the context of building ongoing positive relationships. Girls are also encouraged to develop trust in one another as well as in themselves.

C: Single-Gender Programming

Maintain girls-only programming. While there is often resistance on the part of girls to be isolated from boys or participate in programs solely with members of their own sex, girls-only settings 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.

Program Staffing

Importance of Relationships

GUIDELINE 3: PROGRAM STAFFING

Understand that girls and young women have needs different from boys. Specific staffing and training may be required to address issues such as: relationships, communication, the importance of modeling good behavior, gender issues in delinquency, developmental stages of females and appropriate programs for girls. It is also important for staff to understand that working with girls can be challenging at times but very rewarding. They must be encouraged to support each other and to care for themselves.

A: Hiring

Interview applicants with some questions that focus on gender issues, including questions on the applicant's interest in working with girls, his/her experiences with gender-specific service delivery, perspective of how girls enter the system and knowledge of female development. Staff must support organizational policies and values described above.

B: Staff Diversity

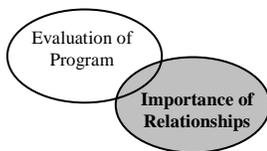
Maintain staffing, to the extent possible, which reflects the race and ethnic backgrounds of the girls being served to ensure that multiple perspectives are included and integrated into the program. Programs are inclusive, welcoming, and culturally appropriate for all girls and staff members. Staff are open to learning about different cultures from the girls and skilled in maintaining personal boundaries within the context of relationships.

C: Training

Provide program orientation, gender-specific training, and follow-up training opportunities for all staff, supervisors, administrators and board members. This may include, but is not limited to, current research on girls and young women, female issues and needs, unique issues for girls of color, communication, staff boundary issues, sexuality, and gender identity. Training also emphasizes the importance of providing staff a place to debrief issues and daily interactions with girls.

D: Continuous Journey of Self-Awareness

Develop awareness among staff that they are role models who must be willing to work on themselves to grow and change, and care for themselves and each other. Staff model teamwork, cooperation, positive interaction and use language that respects the gender and culture of program participants.



GUIDELINE 4: EVALUATION OF PROGRAM

Use effective evaluation to help demonstrate which approaches work best with girls. This drives funding, program goals and political and community support. Often, evaluation is an afterthought during program development. Conversely, in order to obtain a solid evaluation, data collection methods and design are built into programming during the earliest stages of program development. There are two components of evaluation. For process evaluations, staff collect and analyze data that describes a program and its participants, for example, the number and types of services delivered, demographics of the service recipients or the duration of the program. An outcome evaluation allows us to make inferences about the program, provide insight on the problem being addressed and to suggest how effective the services were. Examples of this type of evaluation include assessing whether a girl’s behaviors or attitudes have changed since she attended your program.

A: Collecting Data on Girls

Collect profile information relevant to the population being served, including offense, victimization information and an intervention services history. Possessing data on risk and protective factors or strengths/assets and needs is also important. These data ensure that policies, procedures and services are based on data-driven information. If serving both females and males, ensure that data can be separated by gender, race, ethnicity and age. For comparison purposes, if possible, collect parallel information on girls with similar characteristics in the juvenile justice system not participating in gender-specific programming.

B: Process Measurements

Document issues such as program length, types of service, intensity level and target population. It is also important to identify which of the Girls E.T.C. guidelines have been integrated into the program. Such information provides grounding for outcome evaluations and a thorough description of the program.

C: Outcome Measurements

Develop outcome measurements and evaluation methodologies that are gender appropriate and relate to program intervention. Identify goals or outcomes that are meaningful for the girl by including her in program design and evaluation. The measurement tool is free from bias and accommodates differences in communication, interpretation, and subject sensitivities. Data collection and interpretation include qualitative and quantitative methods.

GUIDELINE 5: PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Use best practices that have been proven effective with girls. Designs include an understanding of a girl's development, including risk/protective factors, resiliency, strengths/assets, financial independence, self-esteem, life skills, and how girls are socialized within the context of their society and culture. Additionally, flexibility allows girls the opportunity to participate actively in the development of the services they receive.

A: Assessment Tools, Screening Instruments, and Intake Practices

If possible, use existing instruments and practices that have been validated and are responsive to the needs of females. Formal and informal decision points throughout the system (places where decisions are made by staff and other professionals that impact the girl) are examined for gender-bias practices. Listing girls' strengths must be a part of all intake procedures.

B: Quality Assurance and Continuous Feedback Loop

Include girls in evaluating service delivery, program content, and program effectiveness through feedback and suggestions. Programs support formal and informal feedback processes with staff and girls on a regular basis. The issues and concerns identified are reviewed and, where appropriate, are incorporated into program changes. A program's effectiveness and relevance to girls and their diverse life experiences are continually evaluated.

C: Holistic Programming

Address 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 also integrates the contributions each staff member makes in creating a gender-responsive environment and fostering positive identity development for girls. Girls learn well through hands-on applications and when sufficient time is given for response to questions. Education components of programs must address these needs.

D: Giving Girls Control and Power

Provide girls appropriate help in developing a plan for the future and an opportunity to practice the skills that will help them realize their goals. Staff develops programs that support and encourage girls to have goals, realistic expectations, and the specific skills needed to reach their goals. Girls are shown that they can positively affect the course of their lives. Programs help girls find their voices and become expressive and powerful in positive, respectful and productive ways while understanding that critical thinking is not just trying to challenge staff. All of these efforts provide girls with control in their lives and help them understand that their decisions impact other individuals.

E: Aftercare/Follow-Up

Ensure that girls receive relationship-based aftercare/follow-up services. The transition of trusting relationships built between a girl and staff to a new setting is critical. This includes the need for staff to form a relationship with someone at a girl's prior placement if appropriate. Because girls need stability and trusting relationships at all times, plan for this from the moment a girl enters the program and continue until the girl successfully completes her transition into the community.

GUIDELINE 6: PROGRAM CONTENT

Address girls' and young women's desire and need for programs that promote their active involvement in addressing their problems. Knowing that girls have unique issues and require responsive services, gender differences are considered when designing programs. Focusing primarily on girls' strengths and developing their social support systems and skills has proven to be an effective approach in service delivery.

A: Significant Relationships with Caring Adults

Address girls' desire and need for significant relationships with caring adults. 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 adults 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.

B: Teaching Personal Respect

Teach girls to appreciate and respect themselves rather than relying on others for validation through self-esteem enhancement programs. Self-monitoring skills can be incorporated into girls' programming, including teaching girls how to "check-in" with themselves and learning to monitor their behavior. Treatment also provides opportunities for young women to actively engage in and take responsibility for their own healing and growth.

C: Victimization and Trauma

Address the sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, emotional/verbal abuse, trauma, domestic violence, grief and loss that many girls face. These issues deeply affect many parts of a girl's life and how she views herself as a female. Staff needs to be prepared for girls reacting to trauma and to any secondary victimization issues by being familiar with presenting behaviors.

D: Opportunities that Value Young Women's Cultural Background

Discuss how culture is an important aspect of our lives. Girls deserve and thrive in an environment that shows respect for their cultures and gives them the opportunity to express and celebrate them. Programs draw on the experience and knowledge of girls and staff.

E: Treatment Relates to Larger Societal Issues

Identify topics that directly affect the quality of young women's lives. Groups on body image, self-esteem, messages of sexuality, issues of violence against women, self-confidence and life skills are included. Each of these topics is discussed in the context of the messages young women receive from society.

F: Parenting

Teach girls about parenting and relationships with children through an academic and realistic approach. Topics include the developmental stages of children, gender differences, bonding, and unrealistic expectations, to name a few. Programs also encourage girls to spend time with their children to practice these skills and concepts

G: Academic and Vocational Programming

Include research and literature on academic and vocational programming for young women and the need to confront gender bias in the educational system. Staff are familiar with this literature and develop strategies to create gender fair educational and vocational environments. Girls learn well through hands-on applications and when sufficient time is given for response to questions.

H: Teaching New Skills Built on Existing Strengths

Expand girls' opportunities to become less dependent on old, non-productive, and/or harmful ways of behaving. Create opportunities for girls to learn and practice new skills. Staff is aware that, when girls practice new skills, they are not necessarily challenging their authority. Also, teach skills that build on a girl's existing strengths listed during the intake process. Be aware that strengths may become apparent as relationships are established. Gaining competence in new areas can build self-esteem, self-control, and positive social behaviors.

I: Treatment Builds in the Involvement of Family Members

Discuss the importance of family member involvement. Because young women do not grow or live in a vacuum, the role of their families is key to a successful program completion. When appropriate, families, including significant others and extended family members, are involved in treatment on an on-going basis. Building in structured family activities that allow for open communication and support for the mother/father-daughter relationship whenever possible is critical. If the involvement of family members is not appropriate, staff need to teach girls how to create a positive support system.

J: Inclusion of Community Service Learning Projects

Include opportunities for young women to gain an understanding of the impact of their crime or behaviors on a community. Young women are socialized to see the world in terms of relationships. Restorative justice stresses that all persons have value within the community and have equal responsibility for the health and well being of the community. Girls gain an understanding of how to give back to and contribute positively to the community. Through this process, girls need to let go of their personal victimization and seek their own healing.

GUIDELINE 7: ADDRESSING HEALTH NEEDS

Understand that young women typically enter the juvenile justice system with untreated health conditions. Effective programming includes a holistic approach to addressing these health needs, including physical, nutritional, sexual, emotional, and mental health. Special needs, specific to female development, are also addressed. Girls should also become astute and savvy medical consumers and learn to take personal responsibility for their own health and wellness.

A: Physical Health

Address the complete physical health needs of girls, not just whether she is or is going to become pregnant. Information is shared with girls about female physical health development, personal care, nutritional needs, exercising, menstruation, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, contraception, and sexuality. Offering non-competitive activities for exercise, as well as instruction for competitive sports, is desirable.

B: Meet Nutritional Needs of Young Women

Recognize that adolescent young women do not have the same nutritional needs as adolescent young men. Food service personnel are well acquainted with national dietary guidelines for adolescent females. Food service and nutrition connect to treatment services provided in all other aspects of the program. When programs provide meals or snacks, they are chosen with care and are nutritionally sound for girls.

C. Sexual Health

Understand that sexual health is related to every component of a girl's health. Research has shown that the majority of girls in the juvenile justice system have been sexually abused which has a profound impact on a girl during adolescence, resulting in lessened self esteem, inability to trust, academic failure, eating disorders, teen pregnancy and other serious concerns. Programs should teach girls about sexual health, boundary issues, and how to manage power in relationships.

D: Emotional and Mental Health

Provide accurate information about female emotional and mental development, grief and loss, eating disorders, body image, addiction, depression, and self-care. Girls are assessed for emotional and mental health needs and referred to counseling or therapy with a professional who is educated about female needs.

E: Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drug-Free Health

Develop programs that address the use of and relationship to alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. A recent study found that girls become addicted to cigarettes, alcohol and drugs more quickly and for different reasons than boys. Girls often begin using substances to reduce stress or alleviate depression rather than social status. 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 incorporate programming that is specifically responsive to females.

D: Spiritual Health and Celebrations

Share information and set aside time 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, values, morals, and ethics. For example, develop celebrations for significant events or milestones found in a girl's daily routine.

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