

PREVENTION STRATEGIES FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

THOSE OF US who work in programs that support girls and young women have often been asked about gender specific strategies and programs. How do the lives of girls and young women differ from those of boys and young men? What alcohol and other drug (AOD) prevention strategies have been found to be especially effective with girls and young women? What kinds of prevention strategies and activities can be integrated into a particular prevention program or into any work with adolescent girls and young women? This article will attempt to give some answers to these important questions.

Alcohol and drug problems are connected with a wide range of issues impacting young women. Those issues include family violence, unwanted pregnancy, sexual assault, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, and a media that fosters the development of a negative body image.

For example, girls are 3 times more likely as boys to have a negative body image (Page, 1993). Girls as young as twelve are concerned about weight control while most are not very concerned about healthy eating. Girls with the most pathological attitudes about eating were most likely to use AOD and have more sexual

experiences (Goldbloom et al., 1992). Girls are 4 times more likely as boys to be physically or sexually abused and abuse history is strongly correlated with AOD use. Given the many serious challenges facing today's young women, what can we do as their allies to help them successfully navigate through difficult situations?

The research has identified three overarching protective factors necessary for positive development:

- Caring Relationships
- High Expectations
- Opportunities to Excel



by **Carol Burgoa**

As a former middle school teacher for 15 years, Ms. Burgoa has worked with hundreds of adolescent girls. Today, she is widely known for her groundbreaking work in providing staff development in fostering resiliency of youth and her expertise in violence prevention.

Approaches and strategies that are based on the research of positive youth development, resilience, and asset building should be the first place we start. These thoroughly researched approaches give schools and communities opportunities to provide youth with the environmental supports that foster healthy human development and tap into their innate resilience.

The research has identified three overarching protective factors necessary for this positive development: (1) caring relationships which convey compassion, understanding, respect, and establish basic trust; (2) high expectations that provide challenge, motivation, positive beliefs, and send the message of "You can do it!" and (3) opportunities for participation and contribution that give the message that youth belong and are valued in their community. Girls and young

women facing many risks and perils particularly need these important supports to help them tap into their natural resilience and grow up to be happy and healthy adults.

These research-based strategies can be seen on many different levels in a community. One approach, public policy, can provide a broad impact. An example of a public policy approach involves youth in changing laws and ordinances concerning the number and placement of billboards that advertise alcohol and tobacco. More community based public policy examples might include a school for pregnant and/or parenting teens or the guarantee of free childcare at all public events. By publicizing the good works that youth can do, the approach of changing public policy generates a lot of excitement and enthusiasm in the involved youth, the local lawmakers, and the general public. Giving girls and young women the opportunity to identify public policy that directly impacts their lives and then the opportunity to improve that impact can be a powerful experience.

Most programs are not involved in changing public policy, but in providing other positive experiences for youth. There are many programs that incorporate asset-based and resiliency research in some way. However, what we really need to know to make these programs more effective is which protective factors are most significant for girls? Werner and Smith found in their landmark Kauai study (1982, 1992,

Does Your Program Promote These Messages?

“You are loved and special.”

“You can do anything you want.”

“You can take risks.”

“You can use and enjoy your creative aggression.”

“You are entitled to dream of greatness.”

Source: Women in Power by D. Cantor and T. Bernay, 1992**

2001) that boys were more vulnerable in the first decade of life, girls in the second (adolescence), and boys again in the third. During adolescence, girls were more at risk for behavioral and coping problems. It is in adolescence that girls must begin to deal with their sexuality and the cultural sex role expectations that do

not encourage a strong sense of self-esteem that is so protective in their earlier and later years. Programs that contribute to building a strong sense of self in adolescent girls will inevitably support their resilience (Gilligan, 1982).

Another area of research identified as being particularly relevant for girls, especially those who have been abused, is the ability to plan. Programs that provide frequent opportunities for decision making and planning also foster resilience (Rutter et al, 1979). Programs that provide participants with a wide range of experiences of being autonomous and successful while being supported by a warm and close personal relationship with an adult appear to be extremely successful as well (Werner, 1989, 1992, 2001).

Being surrounded by a family, school, and community that is rich in all three protective factors will ensure that girls who begin to doubt their self worth and their

role in society will soon have a clear, positive self-image. In doing so, they can shift the balance from vulnerability to resilience.

**“Publicize the good works
that youth can do!”**

SUCCESSES IN ENVIRONMENTAL SUPPORTS

THE FOLLOWING RESEARCH based approaches are effective with all youth but have been particularly successful with girls and young women. The approaches incorporate three (3) major protective factors that provide environmental support: caring relationships, high expectations, and opportunities to participate. These environmental supports all facilitate the positive individual outcomes associated with healthy development and life success.

Circles

Cooperative Learning, Group Process, and Group Therapy are all variations on the theme of small groups or circles. Effective programs don't attempt to compete with girls' need for relationships. Instead, they use circles, that is small groups, which build on girls' tendency to listen to and nurture others in interpersonal relationships. Group settings provide the background context for most of the programs.

Cooperative learning is a pedagogical approach in which a teacher structures learning so that heterogeneous groups of students work together to achieve a shared learning goal. Over a thousand studies, according to the International Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education, now corroborate the power of this educational intervention to produce both academic and other broad developmental outcomes – emotional, social, moral, and spiritual. Cooperative learning especially fits girls more relational styles of living and learning.

The seminal work of educational and social constructivist theorists Dewey and Vygotsky has formed a movement within education that believes *small-group process* contributes to the



development of higher order thinking skills as well as positive social outcomes. The theory has been that through a process of small group discussion and discovery experiences, students construct their own knowledge as well as learn citizenship skills. Three meta-analyses examining over two hundred school-based alcohol, tobacco and other drug abuse (ATOD) prevention programs, found that interactive group process programs are far more effective in reducing actual ATOD use than non-interactive ones.

In particular, *group therapy* provides a safe, secure place for girls to address painful experiences related to family dysfunction, sexual abuse, substance abuses, or other situations in which they may have felt isolated, ashamed, or at fault. Within group work, girls discover that they are not alone in dealing with these issues. They can safely break their silence and express themselves openly.

Arts & Creative Expression

Several national, large-scale research studies have found that young people involved in the arts, either in their schools or through community-based

organizations, regardless of educational and economic backgrounds, do better academically, socially, and behaviorally. Effective arts programs offer girls a chance to overcome patterns of silence or passivity. Alternative modes of expression, such as those incorporated into an arts-based curriculum, offer girls a way to find their voice and express themselves creatively.

Health Education

Girls deserve comprehensive health education that provides accurate, honest, and complete information about physical development, AIDS/HIV, contraception/STDs, alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, nutrition, eating disorders, depression, anxiety, and other stress-related problems. They also deserve accessible, affordable, and respectful services promoting physical and mental wellness. Many adolescent girls have a history of unmet health needs, especially those who have been runaways, homeless, or living in poverty. These girls especially need individualized treatment, monitoring, and follow-up.

Community Service/Service Learning

Community service - also called service learning - is an educational process that integrates students academic learning with service that meets actual community needs. It combines two effective approaches to education and youth development: experiential learning and community service. Several evaluations, including one on CalServe, California's statewide service-learning effort, have now documented positive impacts on students academically and developmentally (socially, emotionally, morally, and spiritually), on teachers, on school climate, and on communities.

Mentoring

Mentoring, the providing of an adult-to-youth or older youth-to-younger youth relationship, is a powerful youth development strategy. Mentoring is

Big Brothers/Big Sisters

In a study of 1,000 adolescent boys and girls applying to Big Brothers/Big Sisters Programs; those who were matched with caring, respectful, and reciprocal mentors were significantly less likely to use AOD, hit someone, skip class or school, and more likely to get along with their parents and peers. Notable gender differences were that minority "Little Sisters" were substantially less likely than minority girls in the control group to start using illegal drugs or alcohol. They also had significantly higher grades, felt more confident of their ability to do their schoolwork, skipped fewer days of school & classes, and lied to their parents less often.

Antisocial Activities

• Initiating Drug Use	-45.8%
• Initiating Alcohol Use	-27.4%
• Hit Someone	-31.7%

Academics

• Grades	3.0%
• Scholastic Competence	4.3%
• Skipped Class	-36.7%
• Skipped School Day	-52.2%

Family Relationship

• Quality Relationship to Parent	2.1%
• Trust of Parent	2.7%
• Lying to Parent	-36.6%
• Peer Emotional Support	2.3%

SOURCE: Tierney, J. et al., Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Public/Private Ventures, 1995. **

one programmatic approach that has recently proven its power to positively affect AOD use, violence, and academic outcomes in adolescents. In particular, girls benefit from programs that incorporate gender-based role models that demonstrate women's resilience and provide opportunities for older girls with positive social skills to act as mentors to younger girls.

School-To-Work

School-to-Work programs are a proactive, systematic, and comprehensive community-wide effort to help students prepare for high-skill careers, receive top quality academic instruction, and gain the foundation skills necessary to pursue post-secondary education and/or entry into the work force. Ideally, they involve classroom instruction and opportunities for students to experience various job markets in their community. A study of magnet schools in New York City found that girls' teen pregnancy rates were reduced to zero in a school that focused on connecting them to a bright future.

**“Youth learn to be Leaders
by having the opportunity
to be Leaders!”**

Women's History, Culture, And Issues

Research has shown that girls may not be aware of how they have been impacted by sex-role messages. Programs with a focus of women's issues in a historical and cultural context offer an opportunity for girls to develop a critical consciousness, a chance to see how their lives have been shaped by economic disparity and poverty, victimization, relationship dynamics, lack of positive role models, and cultural expectations and messages. Examining the lives of girls and women who throughout history challenged the dominant culture adds to girls appreciation of their own identity, heritage, and strength.

Sports

Involvement in sports is associated with positive emotional and physical health benefits for all



adolescents. Studies have found participation in physical activity increases adolescents self-esteem and reduces anxiety and stress – concerns especially critical to girls. According to the 1997 President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports report, “Physical Activity and Sports in the Lives of Girls,” programs that serve girls should provide instruction and experiences that increase their confidence, offer ample opportunities for participation, and establish social environments that support involvement in a range of physical activities. Several studies have documented the benefits of girl-only sports for girls healthy development.

Leadership Opportunities

The actual taking on of leadership roles is critical for young people if they are to develop their leadership capacities. This translates to giving young people the chance to do the work of program leaders – leading others in an outdoor adventure, speaking before the school board, facilitating and co-facilitating meetings with the adult facilitator, etc. Youth learn to be leaders by having the opportunity to be leaders! Providing opportunities for activism, such as the chance to get meaningfully involved in social and environmental justice, is becoming an increasingly powerful programmatic approach to engaging girls deep sense of equity and fairness.

SPECIFIC PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

THESE ARE ONLY a few of the many wonderful programs available for girls. Your local Camp Fire Girls, Girl Scouts, and Boys & Girls Clubs also offer gender specific programs.

1. Project Chrysalis

Project Chrysalis is a federally funded school-based project that offers services to female students who are enrolled in Portland High Schools and have a history of childhood sexual/physical abuse. Funded in 1994 through the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) High Risk Youth Demonstration Grant Program, the purpose of this project is to demonstrate that school services can reduce the negative effects of childhood trauma. Project Chrysalis provides an integrated web of services to foster students' resiliency characteristics. Through Project Chrysalis, students encounter weekly support group sessions and periodic open sessions that augment their knowledge of issues such as HIV/AIDS, ATOD, and alternative health care such as yoga and massage. These interventions influence the individual, peer, school, and community domains.

2. Circula de Expejos

Circula de Expejos mentoring program partners adult and adolescent Latinas to create friendships that will last a lifetime. Friendships through which Latinas can receive the guidance and support they need to make the right decisions regarding the issues that confront them every day. Mentors, or Hermanas, are Latinas 21 years or older who have a culturally positive self-image and who are willing to make a two year commitment, spend time with a Hermanita (adolescent participant) three times a month, and participate in a six session self-empowerment training. Hermanitas in the program are preadolescent Latinas entering sixth grade at a local Middle School in Oakland, CA.

Contact: National Latina Health Organization, P.O. Box 7567, Oakland, CA 94601. (510) 534-1362.

3. Bay Area Girls Center

Bay Area Girls Center (BAGC) is a nonprofit organization that serves girls, teachers, parents and those who care about girls in the Bay Area. The mission of the BAGC is to help each girl maintain her natural strengths – creativity, courage, leadership, body wisdom, compassion, curiosity, resilience, communication, self-definition, and intuition – in the face of social and cultural barriers to her success. The methods BAGC uses focus on exploring self, community, and the natural world through creative expression, group experiences, and outdoor adventure. Services provided by BAGC include resources about girls' development and educational curricula, a newsletter, school-based programs, after-school groups, leadership programs, mentor projects, outdoor expeditions, summer and weekend programs, conferences and community outreach.

Contact: The Bay Area Girls Center, 2940 16th Street, San Francisco, CA 94103, (415) 864-0780. Website: www.bayareagirlscenter.org

4. Girls Incorporated

Girls Incorporated is a national organization providing research based, innovative programs that encourage girls to take risks and master physical, intellectual, and emotional challenges. Most centers are located in low-income areas and provide a weekly average of 30 hours of after-school, weekend, and summer activities. Most programs address math and science education, pregnancy prevention, media literacy, adolescent health, substance use & prevention, and sports participation.

Contact: National Headquarters at 120 Wall Street, New York, NY 10005. (800) 374-4475. Website: www.girlsinc.org

SAMPLE PROGRAM RESOURCES

Berkeley Policy Associates (1996). Including Girls with Disabilities in Youth Programs. Berkeley: PRTA.

This manual was written to help directors and staffs in youth programs succeed in their efforts to include girls and young women with disabilities between the ages of 6 and 21. The document is a useful tool for any social and educational program. Availability: BPA, 440 Grand Ave, Suite 500, Oakland, CA 94610. Phone: (510) 465-7884 or (510) 465-4493 (TDD).

Bingham, M., Edmondson, J., and Stryker, S. (1995). Choices: A Teen Woman's Guide for Self-Awareness and Personal Planning. Santa Barbara: Girls, Inc.

This workbook has exercises on assertiveness, values clarification, decision-making and a number of sections that focus on planning for the future.

Coalition of Hispanic Health and Human Services Organization (1999). The State of Hispanic Girls. Washington D.C.: COSSMHO Press.

A terrific report of the Coalition of Hispanic Health and Human Services Organization that summarizes the latest research on a population of girls that is increasingly evidencing high levels of health-risk behaviors. Available at www.hispanichealth.org

The Girl Power Media Campaign.

Sponsored by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP), this multi-phase public health initiative was launched in November of 1996 to help 9-14 year old girls turn down drugs and avoid other risky behavior. The campaign has: fact sheets, sample media materials, media tips, and Girl Power novelty items for girls. For more information, call (800) 729-6686 or email gpower@health.org. Web site: www.health.org/gpower.

Girl Source, Inc. (2000). It's About Time. San Francisco: Girl Source.

Developed by an editorial team of young women ages 14 to 18, this book offers straightforward answers to young women's most pressing questions about significant life and health issues. More than 300 urban young women were surveyed and participated in focus groups to discover their most frequently identified concerns.

Glennon, W. (1999). 200 Ways to Raise a Girl's Self-Esteem. Berkeley: Conari Press.

This handy book gives teachers and parents great ideas and straightforward advice on how to build strength and confidence in the girls they care for.

Kilbourne, J. (1999). Deadly Persuasion: Why Women and Girls Must Fight the Addictive Power of Advertising. New York: Free Press.

In this lively expose Jean Kilbourne, the pioneer of media literacy for girls in the area of alcohol and tobacco advertising, reveals how deeply advertisers insinuate themselves into our daily lives as women. Kilbourne depicts how advertisers target women and girls at all stages in their life journeys, offering comfort, power, and gratification through their products.

Mead, M. (2000). Integrating Vision and Reality: Possibilities for Urban Girls Programs. Boston: Boston Women's Fund.

This document describes best practices of urban girls programs as seen from peer-to-peer interviews with girls across the country.

Milholland, C. (1999). The Girl Pages: A Handbook of the Best Resources for Strong, Confident, Creative Girls. Westport: Hyperion Press.

This book offers thousands of ideas and practical information for enhancing girls' self-esteem and reaching their dreams. From interviews with women of achievement to magazines and web sites geared for strong and smart girls, to practical advice, this is a how-to guide for raising and educating girls.

National Women's History Project.

This group provides resources that recognize and celebrate the diverse and historical accomplishments of women. Extensive free catalogue available. 3343 Industrial Drive, Suite 4, Santa Rosa, CA 95403. Phone: (707) 636-2888. www.nwhp.org.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP).

This federal agency produces a variety of publications that are available through its Clearinghouse. Several great reports are available which draw attention to the special needs of females in the juvenile justice system. Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, P.O. Box 6000. Rockville, MD 20849-6000. Phone: (800) 638-8736. Fax: (301) 519-5212. Web site: www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org. To order materials email: puborder@ncjrs.org. To ask questions regarding materials, email: Askncjrs@ncjrs.org

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WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

Prevention Strategies for Adolescent Girls and Young Women is a **FREE** workshop designed to provide an overview of considerations and potential strategies in preventing alcohol and other drug problems among young women and girls. The workshop is for helping professionals and community members who would like to strengthen their abilities as allies in preventing alcohol and drug problems in this population. Youth are encouraged to attend, especially girls. Training topics include: common realities and experiences of girls/young women, current patterns of alcohol and drug use, and prevention strategies that really work. Participants will have an opportunity to explore as well as plan specific prevention approaches and activities that contribute to school and community protective factors that enhance girls resilience.

For information about scheduling a **FREE** workshop in your area contact Heather Vasquez at **916 983-9506** or heather@emt.org

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LET'S HEAR FROM YOU!

We welcome readers' comments on topics presented.



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Tactics (tak'tiks) n. **1.** a plan for promoting a desired end.
2. the art of the possible.