

Gender-Specific Services for Girls Guidelines at a Glance

The Administration and Management of Gender-Specific Programs

Guideline: Policies. Develop gender-specific policies for programs serving girls. This ensures that administration and staff are informed and follow a similar set of work practices, understand the philosophy and commitment to girls' gender-specific services, and create a culture where gender issues are integrated into the organizational structure. Policies need to be in writing and should include guiding principles and program values. It is important that gender-specific policies and practices are integrated into all parts of the program continuum from intake to follow-up/aftercare.

Guideline: Collecting Data on Girls. Document demographic profile information relevant to the population being served. For comparison, collect parallel information on girls of similar age in the general community. Possessing data on risk and protective factors, or strengths/assets and needs of both populations is also important. This ensures policies and services are targeted and based on data-driven information. If serving both females and males, ensure data can be separated by gender.

Guideline: Program Design. Include girls in the design or redesign of programs and services. If appropriate, programs need to review best practices or promising gender-specific programs, and incorporate effective program components. The design should include an understanding of a girl's development including risk/protective factors, resiliency, strengths/assets, independence, self-esteem, life skills, and how girls are socialized within the context of their society and culture.

Guideline: Aftercare/Follow-Up. Ensure that girls get aftercare/follow-up services, and that these services are relationship-based. Girls need stability and relationships in all transitions. Integrate these needs into aftercare/follow-up plans from the moment a girl enters the program, and continue these services until the girl successfully completes her transition into the community.

Guideline: Assessment Tools, Screening Instruments, and Intake Practices. Develop instruments and practices that are responsive to the needs of females and are designed to eliminate barriers, cultural bias, and gender bias. Formal and informal decision points throughout the system (places where decisions are made by staff and other professionals that impact the girl) should also be examined for gender-bias practices.

Guideline: Outcome Measurements. Develop outcome measurements and evaluation methodologies that are gender appropriate. Identify goals or outcomes that are meaningful for the girl. The measurement tool you use should be free from bias and accommodate differences in communication, interpretation, and subject sensitivities. Data collection and interpretation should be appropriate for females and include qualitative as well as quantitative methods. It should also incorporate the current research on girls noting a research sample's breadth in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

Guideline: Quality Assurance and Continuous Feedback Loop. Include girls in evaluating service delivery, program content, and program effectiveness through feedback and suggestions. Programs need to support formal and informal feedback processes with staff and clients on a regular basis. The issues and concerns identified should be reviewed and incorporated into program changes and redesigned where appropriate. A program’s effectiveness and relevance to girls and their diverse life experiences needs to be continually evaluated.

Guideline: Hiring. Interview applicants with questions that focus on gender issues. When interviewing potential staff for girls’ programs, include questions on the applicant’s interest in working with girls, their experiences with gender-specific service delivery, and their knowledge of female development.

Guideline: Staff Diversity. Maintain staffing that reflects the race and ethnic backgrounds of the girls being served to ensure that multiple perspectives are included and integrated into a program’s services. Programs should be inclusive, welcoming, and culturally appropriate for all staff members and girls.

Guideline: Training. Provide new employees with a program orientation and follow-up training opportunities for all staff, supervisors, and managers on gender-specific issues. This may include, but is not limited to, current research on girls and young women, books on adolescent female development, female issues and needs, unique issues for girls of color, communication, staff boundary issues, sexuality, and gender identity.

The Program Content for Gender-Specific Programming

Guideline: Environment, Physical Safety. Create an environment for girls that is physically safe. The location where girls meet or reside should be safe from violence, physical and sexual abuse, verbal harassment, bullying, teasing, and stalking. Management and staff need to create a safe environment where boundary issues are clear, acting out behavior is consistently addressed, and physical safety is taken seriously.

Guideline: Environment, Emotional Safety. Create an environment for girls that is emotionally safe. The location where girls meet or reside should be nurturing and safe. This environment should encourage girls to express themselves and share feelings and allow time to develop trust, all within the context of building on-going relationships. Girls need time to talk and to process. They need to feel emotionally safe and free from negative or coercive behaviors, bias, racism, and sexism. When possible, their spaces should be free from the demands for attention produced by adolescent males.

Guideline: Environment, Surroundings That Value Females. Create an environment that values females. Facilities, classrooms, and other program settings should have books, magazines, posters, videos, wall decorations, and other items that celebrate females' current and historical achievements and contributions to the world. The surroundings should 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.

Guideline: Holistic Programming, Addressing the Whole Girl with a Holistic Approach.

A holistic approach to the individual girl addresses 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 integrates the contributions each staff member makes in creating a gender-responsive environment and fostering positive identity development for the girls in the program.

Guideline: Understanding Girls Need Relationships. Develop programs that embody an understanding of the significance of relationships and connections in the lives of young women. Healthy relationships and positive connections should be at the core of a program.

Guideline: Taking Time for Relationships. Create opportunities for staff and girls to talk and process their feelings and issues. Formal mechanisms need to be built into a program to enhance relationships and trust through one-on-one interactions.

Guideline: Single-Gender Programming. Create opportunities for girls-only programming. While there is often resistance on the part of girls to be isolated from boys or participate in programs with solely members of their own sex, girls-only programming 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.

Guideline: Significant Relationships with Caring Adults. Help girls establish significant relationships with caring adults through mentor programs. Matching a girl with a mentor who has a similar ethnic heritage, culture, and background is encouraged. 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 adult females 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.

Guideline: Teaching New Skills Built on Existing Strengths. Create opportunities for girls to learn new skills. Also, teach skills that build on a girl's existing strengths. Gaining competence in new areas can build self-esteem, control, and positive social behaviors. When girls master new skills that are healthy and productive, they expand their opportunities and become less dependent on old, non-productive, and/or harmful ways of behaving.

Guideline: Teaching Personal Respect. Develop self-esteem enhancement programs that teach girls to appreciate and respect themselves rather than relying on others for validation. Self-monitoring skills can be incorporated into girls' programming.

Guideline: Giving Girls Control. Develop programs that support and encourage girls to have hope, realistic expectations for the future, and the skills needed to reach their goals. Girls need help in developing a plan for the future, and an opportunity to practice the skills that will help them realize their goals. Girls need to be shown that they can affect how things happen in a way that is empowering. Programs need to help girls find their voices and to be expressive and powerful in positive and productive ways. All of these efforts provide girls with a sense of control in their lives.

Guideline: Victimization and Trauma. Develop programs that address the sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, emotional/verbal abuse, trauma, domestic violence, and loss that many girls have faced. These issues deeply affect many parts of a girl’s life and how she views herself as a female.

Guideline: Physical Health and Sexual Health. Develop programs that address physical health as well as sexual health. (We should care about the whole girl, not just about whether a girl is or is going to get pregnant.) Information needs to be shared with girls about female development, personal care, exercising, physical health, as well as menstruation, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, contraception, and sexuality.

Guideline: Emotional and Mental Health. Develop programs that address emotional and mental health. Girls need good and accurate information about emotional and mental health, eating disorders, body image, addiction, depression, and self-care. Girls should be assessed for emotional and mental health needs and referred to counseling or therapy with a professional who has experience working with female adolescents.

Guideline: Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drug-Free Health. Develop programs that address the use and abuse of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. 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 need to understand female adolescent development and incorporate programming that is specifically responsive to females.

Guideline: Spiritual Health and Rites of Passage. Develop programs that allow time for girls to address their spiritual health. Information needs to be shared and time set aside 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, meaning, guidance, values, morals, and ethics. Develop rites of passage celebrations for significant events, or milestones found in a girl’s daily routine.

<u>For more information contact:</u>		<u>For a copy of “How to Implement Oregon’s Guidelines”:</u>
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