it's a girl thang!
A Manual on Creating Girls Groups

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Brief Overview

The girls group framework presented in this manual is intended to provide marginalized and at-risk pre-adolescent and adolescent females, ages 12-19, with a space to explore a wide range of issues that impact their daily lives. The groups provide the girls with the opportunity to explore their experiences of abuse, sexual exploitation, body image and violence, as well as their strengths and daily lived realities in a safe and non-threatening environment. Girls groups nurture and reinforce femaleness as a positive identity with inherent strengths to support healthy self-expression. They also provide decision-making models and life skills to aid in transition to womanhood. The framework utilizes a relational/cultural model that can be applied to girls in a variety of contexts, including rural girls, aboriginal girls, and girls dealing with issues of marginalization including poverty, homelessness, exploitation and the intersections of oppression.

This document presents an innovative girls group program model which provides a framework to guide the prevention and intervention of at risk and marginalized girls. The material in this manual is grounded in the real life experiences of adolescent girls and our work with them over the years. Focus groups were held in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland with girls who have experience participating in girls groups and their voices are found throughout this manual in the sidebar quotes. Our own “notes from the field” are also found in sidebar quotes, providing you with experiential knowledge and antidotes.

This document consists of the following sections:

- **Introduction** presents a brief history of our experience designing and facilitating girls groups as well as the rationale for developing this manual.
- **Adolescent Female Development in Context** reviews various theoretical models of adolescent development, taking a critical approach for addressing gender, race, culture, class, and sexuality in girls’ development. Issues such as high-risk behaviours, trauma, and sources of resilience and strength are reviewed in relation to models of adolescent female development. The Relational Cultural Model is reviewed as a foundation for girls group models within an analysis of gender identity formation.
- **Challenges: Assisting girls with Addictions, Self-harming and Trauma** provides a critical overview of some of the tough issues facing adolescent girls.
- **Girls Group: Setting Up for Success** outlines some of the key phases of developing and running girls groups. The information here will set you up to successfully guide your group through the stages of pre-relationship development, maintaining and deepening your connections, and how to end your relationships with girls once they are too old to attend or the group has to end. With antidotes from Natalie’s work “in the field”, this section also provides important tips and tools for your group work.
• **Session Outlines for Girls Groups** provides you with ten sample sessions, walking you through the goals, rationale and concrete tools needed to run these sessions. The sessions are arranged along a continuum of relationship development from relationship to self and peers, to family and society. By reviewing and using these models, you will be able to build your group from the foundational aspects of trust and containment through to creative expression and community building.

Throughout the body of the manual, you will find references to resources and information contained in the Appendices. They have been organized and labeled to correspond to the *Session Outlines for Girls Groups*, and hope that you will easily find the materials as they are referenced in the manual.

- **Appendix A: Resources** includes a list of resources on girls groups, resources for facilitators and resources for youth. We have included information on many of the issues raised in this manual, including female adolescent development, sexual exploitation, eating disorders, culturally-relevant programming, and other issues.
- **Appendix B: Worksheets and Activities** provides you with the practical tools needed for the session outlines provided in this manual, as well as further ideas for stress management, relaxation and creative activities for your girls groups. These are intended to provide you with concrete tools to adapt for your own group, depending on their interest and needs.
- **Appendix C: Skill Building for Facilitators** includes worksheets and information for facilitators to build their own capacities and knowledge on a range of issues affecting their work.
- **Appendix D: Case Study – Sample Girls Group** contains in-depth information from the girls group *It's a Girl Thang* that Natalie facilitated for over ten years at the Edmonds Youth Resource Centre. You will find background information, a calendar of events, and an outline of the group’s goals. This section may be particularly useful as you apply for project funding for your group, as it provides you a sample of the information required by funders.
- **Appendix E: FREDA Statistics – Violence Against Girls** provides statistical information about violence against girls as gathered by the FREDA Centre. These statistics provide a solid rationale for the development of safe places to explore issues of violence, racism and oppression.
Continuum for Trauma Intervention: Our Framework

Girls groups are useful along the continuum of trauma intervention and prevention, as you can see outlined in the chart below. The models that are presented here fit primarily within the “Harm Reduction and Crisis Intervention” section of the trauma continuum, with a focus on providing concrete tools to front-line workers who may or may not have formal training in counseling and trauma intervention. Although some of the activities also fit within the other points along the continuum, only trained therapists should run groups that are aimed at the “Treatment” level of connection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Prevention Based</th>
<th>Harm Reduction Crisis Intervention</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Exiting</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls groups</td>
<td>Open, unstructured</td>
<td>Structured treatment groups</td>
<td>Level II exiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary school/early secondary</td>
<td>Drop-in, ongoing</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structured activity based</td>
<td>No screening</td>
<td>Screening process</td>
<td>Connection for social action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less process-oriented</td>
<td>Activities related to issues, driven by girls</td>
<td>Time-limited (for a certain # of weeks)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psycho-educational</td>
<td>Lots of crisis intervention</td>
<td>Agenda driven by facilitator with some inputs from participants</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>o Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td>Psycho-educational</td>
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<td>o Violence</td>
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<td>Process oriented-experiential (art, guided imagery, writing exercises, etc.)</td>
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<td>o Anger, self-esteem</td>
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Introduction

Based on their shared experience facilitating and designing girls groups in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland area, Cheryl Bell-Gadsby and Natalie Clark have gathered a wealth of experience and knowledge about the theory, practical tools and attitude necessary for successful girls groups. This manual is intended to provide a framework for existing and emerging girls groups in BC and beyond, and to ultimately affect the opportunities for girls in BC to build healthy relationships, decrease their risk factors and build self-esteem.

Natalie Clark, M.S.W., R.S.W., is a skilled social work clinician, educator, community researcher and manager of services with extensive experience in the area of trauma, family violence, sexual exploitation, abuse, and child and adolescent development. Natalie’s current role is as faculty within the School of Social Work and Human Services at Thompson Rivers University where Natalie is teaching as well as being responsible for field education in the human service programs. Natalie has developed and facilitated girls groups for the past 10 years, including several trauma treatment groups, and an innovative girls group for adolescent girls she designed and delivered called *It's a Girl Thang*, which ran for over ten years out of the Edmonds Youth Resource Centre. This group has demonstrated success in intervening with girls who are struggling with issues including substance abuse, sexual exploitation, violence, and oppression. Natalie also co-developed a girls group for immigrant girls of colour which ran out of John Oliver School in Vancouver.

Natalie’s research and teaching is grounded in current theories of social justice, adolescent female development, trauma theory, and a relational/cultural model. In her work with community groups and agencies throughout the province Natalie maintains a culturally competent, gender and age-sensitive model – with the goal of creatively and responsibly addressing the prevention and intervention needs of youth in the areas of violence and trauma with a specific focus on reducing risk and increasing protective factors. In her role as Program Coordinator in the Centre for Leadership and Community Learning at the Justice Institute of BC, Natalie coordinated several provincial task forces and forums in BC on the topic of sexual exploitation, as well as two provincial best practice manuals for sexually exploited youth and prevention of disordered eating.

Cheryl Bell-Gadsby, M.A., R.C.C., is a psychotherapist, clinical supervisor and educator with over 20 years of experience specializing in trauma therapy from an Ericksonian and solution-oriented perspective. Cheryl studied and practiced child and family therapy in California before coming to Vancouver to work as a coordinator, therapist and clinical supervisor at Family Services of the North Shore, as Program Coordinator at the Justice Institute of BC, and now as a private practitioner and member of the teaching faculty at City University and British Columbia Institute of Technology. Cheryl is the author of the book “Reclaiming Herstory: Ericksonian Solution-focused Therapy for Sexual Abuse”. Cheryl’s expertise includes the creation of an innovative and interactive educational program for
adolescents on the North Shore of Vancouver to increase awareness and prevention concerning issues of sexual abuse, family violence, date rape, self-esteem and healthy relationships. Cheryl recently designed and delivered a “Girl Power” group for at-risk aboriginal girls ages 10-15 from the Burrard Band in North Vancouver.

Sarah Hunt, who assisted in the editing, writing and design of the manual, has experience running girls groups during her past position as an outreach worker in Vancouver with Aboriginal girls, ages 10 to 16. Sarah also brings to this project her experience as a community-based writer and researcher with the Justice Institute of BC on issues such as sexual exploitation, violence, and Aboriginal youth issues. Sarah is currently completing an interdisciplinary masters degree at the University of Victoria.

The need for this training manual is evident in the requests Natalie and Cheryl have received for training and delivery of the unique peer-based mentoring model they have developed. In BC there have been girls groups run over the past four or five years which have begun to demonstrate anecdotal effectiveness of these programs. In many instances groups were able to secure project or seed funding for a year and then either disbanded or the facilitator undertook the work on a Volunteer basis. We hope that this manual will provide you with further ideas, inspiration, and information for sustaining your work with girls in your community.
The theory which guides our work of engaging with adolescent girls is informed by research and theory which address the experiences of adolescent females, with a focus on the role of voice. We are also guided by theories which look at the multi-level impact of disconnection in relationships as a significant factor in the development of negative outcomes for adolescent girls, including the development of depression, eating disorders, self-harming behaviors and suicidality. Specifically, disconnections for girls may occur in girls relationships with society, family, peer group, school, community and with herself as she disconnects from what she knows to be true in order to fit into destructive but necessary relationships. Key in the process of disconnection for girls is the dynamics of silencing that occurs within relationships when issues girls experience, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and the intersection of these issues in their lives, challenges a girl’s connection to her truth and her connection to society. Girls will engage in strategies of disconnection in order to stay in destructive but necessary relationships where her experiences are not given voice. Ongoing supportive relationships have been found to be key for girls in exiting unhealthy, violent or exploitative relationships and positive outcomes for youth who have experienced trauma and violence. (adapted from Clark et al). In this section, we hope to provide an overview of these useful theoretical frameworks and outline their effectiveness in a girls group setting.

Theory and Adolescent Girls

Theorists throughout history have identified adolescence as a particularly challenging time for adolescent girls. In a recent study of adolescent health in British Columbia, the McCreary Centre found that girls are more likely to feel distressed than boys, a finding which has been consistent over the last ten years (McCreary, 2004). Areas of challenge for girls during adolescence include dating and sexuality, body image and eating disorders, self-esteem, and achievement (Basow and Rubin, 1999).

Theorist and researcher Carol Gilligan challenged the historical exclusion of girls from developmental research and the emphasis on separation as the primary goal of adolescent development as postulated by psychologist Erik Erikson. Gilligan noted in her research that for adolescent females, their identity was developed in the context of their relationships with others. Gilligan identified the central dilemma of adolescence for girls as the following: “was it better to respond to others and abandon themselves or to respond to themselves and abandon others?” Gilligan defined the term “psychological dissociation” to represent the crisis whereby girls silence their voices or their knowledge of their feelings, desires and opinions in order to stay connected in relationships. Gilligan’s research found that
relationships with women protected young women and girls from the disconnection from them selves and others. Specifically, “a resonant relationship with a woman, meaning a relationship in which a girl can speak freely and hear her voice clearly resounded as a voice worth listening to and talking seriously – a voice that engages the heart and mind of another and calls forth response – was associated with psychological health and development” (Gilligan, 1990).

Building on Gilligan’s work, psychologist Mary Pipher described adolescence as the “Bermuda triangle” for girls’ selves, and noted the importance of shifting from seeing the individual girl as the problem and to instead pointing the finger at society, specifically the media, as the primary factor impacting adolescent girls’ health and wellbeing. She argues that “the culture is what causes girls to abandon their true selves and take up false selves”.

Similarly, Resiliency Theory and Strengths-based theories, such as the work of Dr. Dan Offord, has supported the role of relationships in positive mental health outcomes. He noted that two items were key in this: first, a long-term positive relationships with one adult, and secondly, the development of an “island of competence”, or an area of strength for the youth.

Canadian researcher Marge Reitsma-Street highlighted the fact that for girls involved with the justice system, “the more a girl fights against how she is expected to care for others and for herself, the greater the cost she is likely to bear”. Her study found three lessons that girls were taught about the expectations for their role as young women: females as the caregivers; learning to look nice and be nice, and; boyfriends as the primary objects of that caring at the expense of their own needs. She notes that girls are policed to care for others through judgment of their reputation, through threat or use of force by men in their lives and by the law itself, which criminalizes their acts of survival and resistance.

Race and the Inclusion of Girls of Colour

In response to the exclusion of girls of colour from the early work of Gilligan and other feminist theorists, newer studies have pointed out that Gilligan’s research was primarily with white, middle-class girls and failed to consider the impact of other variables of oppression including race, class and culture on female adolescent development. Working from Gilligan’s theory, researchers such as Marguerite Wright and Beverly Daniel Tatum assert that the developmental experiences of girls of color are unique in that “issues related to racial identity take centre stage”. Adolescence girls of color begin to identify themselves by their race at a time when there are strong societal messages about who is or is not desirable. Tatum identifies an important developmental task as “resisting the stereotypes and affirming other definitions of themselves”.

The work of Tracey Robinson and Janie Victoria Ward is key in encouraging women who work with girls to support them in developing what bell hooks calls an “oppositional gaze”, that is “a way to observe the social world critically and to oppose those ideas and ways of being that are disempowering to the self” (hooks, 1992). Their work suggests ways to support girls to move from “resistance for survival” or coping that has short-term gains and
long-term consequences, such as dropping out of school to avoid racism, to “resistance for liberation” which has long-term gains and which demands change in the external environment. This move from survival to liberation can be encouraged along with the cultivation of “a belief in self far greater than anyone’s disbelief”.

“High Risk Behaviors”

In addition excluding the experiences of girls of colour, adolescent development research and theories have tended to leave out the voices of marginalized and “at-risk” girls. When their experiences are included, these girls and their problems are often framed as “bad behaviors”, while sources of resistance, strengths and resilience within these girls and their coping strategies are ignored. Risk-taking is essential to growth and development and it is important that girls choices and experiences are not labeled and judged. However, the youth justice system and the health care system often label girls’ survival as delinquent, criminalizing or diagnosing them by labeling their survival as individual medical or mental health problems.

Additionally, literature which focuses on resiliency has tended to locate the source of the problem and the solution within the girl, rather than locating the source of girls challenges within structural and systemic problems such as poverty, racism, and sexism.

Adolescent Girls and Trauma

Researcher Laura Brown points to the constant presence of trauma in girls lives, as evidenced by the statistical reality that violence is within the range of human experience for most women and girls (see FREDAC statistics in Appendix E). Brown therefore instructs that the definition of trauma not only include direct physical violations but also “living with the chronic stress of racism, sexism and intersections of these” which can create traumatic reactions. She goes on to say that the “experience of trauma cannot be framed as abnormal and individualized….We must recognize the effects of trauma and create opportunities that are viable for girls who are familiar with trauma which will enable them to learn while they continue to live beside violation”.

In addition, Brown states that we need to see trauma as a “continuing background noise rather than unusual event” in the lives of girls we work with. Brown suggests we work with girls on dealing versus healing. T. Lewis notes that a girl’s familiarity with violence (trauma) contributes to her knowledge, her sense of strength, and her capacity for empathy, rather than being something tainted with pathology that must be overcome (Lewis, 1999).

For girls who have experienced the trauma of abuse, adolescence is a time where the emergence of coping mechanisms, which are attempts to regulate emotions, can create challenges for the girl in her relationship with herself and others. Judith Herman and others note that “self-injury,…purging and vomiting, compulsive sexual behavior, compulsive risk taking…and the use of psychoactive drugs become vehicles by which abused children attempt to regulate their emotional states. These self-destructive symptoms…become much more prominent in the adolescent years” (Herman, 1992).
Adolescent Girls Identities: Self-In-Relation Model

“Race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual identity all shape and define opportunities… and need to be acknowledged for both the strengths and the stresses they bring into girls’ lives” (McLean et al, 1995)

Relational Model: self in relation to community and society
The Self-In-Relation Theory, developed by Jean Baker Miller and her colleagues at the Stone Centre, supports the work of Gilligan and others in challenging the notion of individuation, noting that with respect to adolescence, “it is not through separation but through more highly articulated and expanded relational experience that individual development takes place”.

Traditional theories of psychology have described development as a progression from childlike dependence to mature independence. According to these theories, an individual’s goal is to become a self-sufficient, clearly differentiated, autonomous self. Therefore, a person should spend his or her early life separating and individuating in a process leading to maturity, at which point he or she will be equipped for intimacy. Jean Baker Miller (1976, 1986) is one theorist who challenged this assumption, by suggesting that these accepted theories describe men’s experience, while a woman’s path to maturity is different. A woman’s primary motivation, said Miller, is to build a sense of connection with others.

Girls group has helped us build better relationships and realize that there are people around us that care, who are not going to leave once they have helped us.

--Focus Group

As seen in the model above, individual identities are formed in relation to factors in their community and cultural markers of difference such as class, ability and race. As individuals move from childhood to adolescence, the multi-layered factors in their lives shift and change, along with their priorities, identities and sense of self in relation to the world around them. For example, as a girl moves from being a child to an adolescent, she may not necessarily want to ‘separate’ from her parents, but rather to change the form and content of the relationship in a way that affirms her own developmental changes and allows new relationships to develop and take priority.

The power of this theory can be seen as we move from viewing identity as static and individually-based, to emerging and changing in the context of relationships with others.

Who am I? becomes…
« Who am I when I’m with my friends?
« Who am I when I’m with my family?
« Who am I when I am in class?
« Who am I when I’m with White girls? Black girls?
« Who am I when I am alone? And so on…

(Johnson, Norine G. and Roberts, Michael C., 1999)

As we use the Self-In-Relation Theory in our work with girls, it is important to take in to account the various contexts in which they are developing their sense of self. Within these contexts we can find their sources of both strength and challenge. Here are some examples of how these contexts impact on girls’ sense of identity, through posing challenges and developing strengths.

Context of self: consider the impact of such things as the impact of age and stage, class, gender, race, sexuality and physical body.
• research conducted on gender differences between boys and girls over the last fifteen years has consistently identified that girls are at greater risk for eating disorders and
suicide attempts than boys (McCreary 2003, Minnesota Adolescent Health Survey 1986 - 1987, Ann Peterson, 1988

- 38% of 13yr old girls and 48% of 15yr old girls believe they are overweight (King, Wold, Tudor-Smith & Harel, 1996)

- Body-based harassment is the most salient factor in developing body image disturbances. This includes, uninvited “positive” and negative comments. More than half of girls (53%) reported verbal sexual harassment at school (McCreary 2004)

- 61% of girls with eating disorders have reported sexual abuse; 85% have reported physical abuse (Miller 1986)

- Girls with a health condition, disability or who look older than their age are at higher risk

**Context of Peers:**

Who are the important people in their life? Given the central role of relationships in development, it is important to ask questions about their friendships and connections to peers.

- Canadian youth state that friends, siblings, and media are the primary sources of sexual health information (2000)

- The most common reason youth state for engaging in sexual intercourse is peer pressure

**Context of Families:**

- Research has consistently found that families although being a key source of risk (child abuse, neglect) are also the primary source of protective variables to adolescent health and that youth who feel connected and safe at home have better health, take fewer risks and have higher educational aspirations. (McCreary 2003, 2004)

- Strong relationships with mothers and “other-mothers” is linked with good outcomes for girls (Debold et al.)

**Context of School and Community:**

Family and School connection is a key area of social influence and challenges

- More than half of girls (53%) reported verbal sexual harassment at school (McCreary 2004)

**Context of Ethnicity, Culture and Race:**

Ethnic and cultural identity contribute to higher self-esteem & can assist the adolescent in buffering the negative impact of racism

*Girls group has helped us become involved in our community because we have learned to become more responsible and how to manage our time better.*

—Focus Group

**The Relational/Cultural Model: Foundation for Girls Group Models**

The work of Jean Baker Miller and her colleagues at the Stone Center and Wellesley College, expand upon their Self-In-Relation Theory through the development of the Relational/Cultural Model. This model further emphasizes the central importance of
relationship to healthy development and names the key elements of relationship which are the acts of connection and disconnection. According to the Relational/Cultural model, women develop a sense of self and self-worth when their actions arise out of, and lead back into, connections with others. Therefore, connection, not separation, is the guiding principle of growth for women. This is an important concept when dealing with at risk adolescent girls. Our focus groups and girls groups have informed us about the various and many ways that adolescent girls become disconnected from their sense of self and their worth and can “go underground” (Brown and Gilligan, 1992) with their emotions and “voice” in an attempt to conform to social stereotypes and values in peer culture at the expense of “self”.

The Relational/Cultural model defines connection as “an interaction that engenders a sense of being in tune with self and others and of being understood and valued” (Bylington 1997). According to this model, such connections are so crucial that many of women’s psychological problems can indeed be traced to disconnections or violations within their family, personal, or societal relationships.

Key in the girls group model presented in this manual is the utilization of this model, whereby the girl is decentralized as the problem and instead the problem becomes the societal context within which the girls lives. Traumas emerge in forms such as racism, poverty and violence, leading to the development of girls coping mechanisms as a form of resistance for survival in a society where these experiences are not listened to nor valued. Within this model, participation in healthy relationships provide girls with a greater sense of energy or zest, knowledge of self and other, capacity to act, sense of self-worth, and desire for further connection (Miller, 1986). Conversely, the absence of healthy relationships results in lowered self-esteem, inability to act, and ultimately disconnection from self and others. Symptoms of this disconnection manifest in depression, anxiety, suicidality and self-harming, disordered eating, substance abuse and other coping mechanisms. Leading theorists in the Relational/Cultural Model have found that gender-specific groups have four key healing components: validation of one’s experience, empowerment to act in relationships, development of self-empathy, and mutuality (Fedele and Harrington, 1990).

The girls group model presented in this manual builds on this theory, and provides a safe space to connect girls and women to share voice and experiences, providing links to each other and to community supports. In addition, girls groups provide a venue to develop relationships with marginalized girls and to hear their stories. Specifically, girls groups seek to include the voices of girls who are the most marginalized in society, including sexually exploited girls, who predominantly are aboriginal, homeless, isolated, and at risk for experiences of violence and serious health concerns.

Service providers need to focus on young women’s strengths and protective factors as well as recognizing that a woman cannot be treated successfully in isolation from her social support network (e.g., relationships with her partner, family, children, and friends). Coordinating systems that connect a broad range of services will promote a continuity-of-care model, (comprehensive approach provides a sustained continuity of treatment, recovery, and support services). This is why group treatment and mentoring approaches following the Relational/Cultural Model discussed in this manual can assist so well in
addressing the disconnection that is so prevalent in the lives of these young women and indeed of women in our society at large. (Covington, 1999.)

Evidence of this model’s importance are found in comments from the girls such as “we need a place just like this - a big group session, listening to each others ideas and opinions and finding ways to get through it”. Key in this statement was the need identified by the girls for the process to continue. With comments such as “I think we should do this more often because you get more comfortable,” girls highlighted the meaning of the group in their life and in providing a space to share their knowledge and their experiences.

The group processes and activities presented here help young women on three levels:

1. On the affective level, girls learn to express their feelings appropriately and to contain them in healthy ways by using self-soothing techniques. Because girls and women often become dependent on drugs in an effort to seek relief from painful emotional states, they need a safe environment in which to learn how to understand their feelings and how to work through their emotions.

2. On the cognitive level, education helps to correct girl's misperceptions and distorted thinking. Participants learn a process of critical thinking in which they first consider their thoughts and feelings and then make decisions.

3. On the behavioral level, girls make changes or positive choices in their drinking and drug-using behavior and in their relational behaviour (Brown, 1995).

Relational Competence

The Relational/Cultural Model helps girls and the group facilitators to develop “Relational Competence”. Relational Competence occurs within a context of wishing to empower others and appreciating nature of community building, creating strength with others rather than in isolation (Judith Jordan, 1994). Markers of Relational Competence are as follows:

1. Movement toward mutuality and mutual empathy (caring and learning flows both ways), where empathy expands for both self and other;
2. The development of anticipator empathy, noticing and caring about our impact on others;
3. Being open to being influenced;
4. Enjoying relational curiosity;
5. Experiencing vulnerability as inevitable and a place of potential growth rather than danger; and
6. Creating good connection rather than exercising power over others as the path of growth.

We believe that the values and beliefs associated with the models listed above are vital in building any programming dealing with adolescent girls. The focus and structure of all group activities and planning strategies within this manual are built on the tenets of these models.
Gender: Taking a central role

The stereotypical adolescent girl is often portrayed by the media, at best, as uncertain and overly concerned with her appearance and, at worst, as a victim of eating disorders, declining self-esteem, and risky sexual behavior. These stereotypes fail to capture the richness and diversity of adolescent girls’ experiences. (Johnson, Norine G. and Roberts, Michael C., 1999).

The most centrally meaningful principle on our culture’s mattering map is gender, which intersects with other culturally and personally meaningful categories outlined above. Within all of these categories, people attribute different meanings what it means to be female or male (Kaschak, 1992).

Understanding the distinction between sex differences and gender differences is vital. While sex differences are biologically determined, gender differences are socially constructed—they are assigned by society and relate to expected social roles. Gender roles are neither innate nor unchangeable, and they vary between cultures and time periods in relation to socio-political circumstances.

Gender stereotypes influence both our beliefs about the appropriate roles for women and men in our society and our behaviors toward women and men. Stereotypes also influence how we perceive people who violate the law, and stereotypes often have a differential impact on women. For example, a convicted female offender may automatically be labeled a bad mother, while a male offender may not necessarily be labeled a bad father.

Various theories explain human psychological growth and development, but the Relational Theory used here is useful in providing an increased understanding of gender differences, specifically the different ways in which females and males develop psychologically. By understanding Relational/Cultural Theory, we can develop more effective services by “taking the context of women’s lives into account” (Abbott and Kerr, 1995) and avoiding the re-creation of the same kinds of growth-hindering and/or violating relationships that women experience in society at large.

Implications for Trauma and Treatment

Disconnection and violation rather than growth-fostering relationships characterize the childhood experiences of most women in mental health settings and in correctional institutions. These young women, like others, have often been marginalized not only because of race, class, and culture, but also by political decisions that criminalize their behavior (e.g., the war on drugs). “Females are far more likely than males to be motivated by relational concerns... Situational pressures such as threatened loss of valued relationships play a greater role in female offending” (Steffensmeier and Allen 1998).

Gender differences exist in the behavioral manifestations of mental illness. For example, men generally turn anger outward and women turn it inward. Men tend to be more physically and sexually threatening and assaultive, while women tend to be more depressed,
self-abusive, and suicidal. Women engage more often in self-mutilating behaviors, such as cutting, as well as in verbally abusive and disruptive behaviors.

A history of abuse drastically increases the likelihood that a young woman will also abuse alcohol and/or other drugs. In one of the earliest comparison studies of addicted and non-addicted women (Covington and Kohen, 1984), 74 percent of the addicts reported sexual abuse (vs. 50 percent of the nonaddicts); 52 percent (vs. 34 percent) reported physical abuse; and 72 percent (vs. 44 percent) reported emotional abuse. The connection between addiction and trauma for women is complex and often includes the following dynamics: (1) substance-abusing men are often violent toward women and children; (2) substance-abusing women are vulnerable targets for violence; and (3) both childhood abuse and current abuse increase a woman's risk for substance abuse (Miller 1991).

The traumatization of young women is not limited to interpersonal violence, however. It also includes witnessing violence, as well as the societal factors outlined in the Relational/Cultural Model such as stigmatization stemming from gender, race, poverty, incarceration, and/or sexual orientation (Covington 2002).

Treatment Implications of Gender: Wraparound Models

Stephanie Covington has written extensively about the need for more integrated forms of treatment for girls and young women. She refers specifically to wraparound models and other integrated and holistic approaches can be very effective because they address multiple goals and needs in a coordinated way and facilitate access to services (Reed and Leavitt, 2000). Wraparound models stem from the idea of “wrapping necessary resources into an individualized support plan” (Malysia, 1997, p12) and stress both client-level and system-level linkages.

Community-based wraparound services can be particularly useful in working with girls for two primary reasons:

1. Girls have been socialized to value relationships and connectedness and to approach life within interpersonal contexts (Covington 1998). Service-delivery approaches that are based on ongoing relationships, that make connections among different life areas, and that work within women’s existing support systems are especially congruent with female characteristics and needs.

2. Most of the female clients we work with are, or will be, the primary caregivers of young children. Many adolescent women get pregnant in an attempt to feel a sense of connection that has been missing from their lives. These adolescents and children have needs of their own and require other caregivers if their mothers are not able to care for them initially or are perhaps incarcerated. Support for parenting, safe housing, and an appropriate family wage level are crucial when the welfare of children is at stake.
Challenges: Assisting Girls with Addictions, Self-harming and Trauma

This is meant as a guide for experienced counselors and youth workers who have training in areas of trauma, abuse and its effects. For facilitators who are not trained in these areas, it is imperative that you receive training on possible signs of trauma and understand the importance of safety and containment when working with girls. Remember to always refer your clients to trauma therapists when possible. Facilitators also need to be familiar with reporting guidelines with respect to children and youth and inform girls of your responsibility to report a disclosure so that a girl is empowered to choose whether or not to disclose her abuse. In addition, if a girl begins to disclose abuse during a group session, it's important to interrupt her and even stop her disclosure in order to remind her of limits of confidentiality and to encourage her to choose to disclose in privacy. It is always imperative to report all disclosures of child sexual abuse, and to tell the truth to girls about all possible outcomes and consequences. Given the widespread silencing of abuse and the challenge to voice and expression during adolescence for girls, this is an important area for facilitators to be skilled and trained in. Seek consultation if in doubt!

As noted in the research section of this manual, abuse and trauma are statistically within the daily lived experience for many of the girls we work with. As much of this abuse and trauma remains undisclosed and untreated, girls often speak to us through their symptoms and their coping mechanisms. The goal in our work with girls is not to heal from trauma or abuse, but to provide safety and containment for the girls in discussing these issues, as well as strategies for dealing with the reality of trauma in their lives. Facilitators need to be skilled in recognizing possible symptoms of trauma, and in providing harm reduction strategies to support a girl in moving from harmful coping mechanisms, such as addictions and self-harming, towards coping strategies that build on her strengths and assists her in dealing with the reality of trauma and its impact in her life.

Trauma

In working with young women in groups, it is important to educate them about trauma. As well it is important to hear about the things girls witness, hear about, and experience, and to assist them in placing trauma along a continuum, and within the intersections of their multiple identities. If facilitators are not trained in abuse or trauma, inviting therapists from
local agencies not only educates girls about these issues but also assists in building relationships between girls and trained sexual abuse trauma counselors.

“Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection and meaning” (Herman, 1992). Given the daily experiences of trauma in the lives of the girls we work with, we need to consider how girls groups can provide support to girls in three main areas.

- **Control:** Trauma survivors have a strong need for control given that abuse takes this from them, and yet at the same time they often experience strong feelings of helplessness. This has huge implications for program design and structure, including the elements of attendance, and participation. Given that trauma survivors often stop and start programs, its important that group is designed with flexibility to allow the girl to control her choice to attend or not attend.

- **Connection:** Trauma leaves girls with a profound sense of disconnection and alienation from themselves and others, therefore, a key goal of our work with girls is to support them in moving back into connection with themselves and others. In particular, the belief that they can be themselves and be in relationship with others.

- **Meaning:** Girls group can be a space to assist girls in making meaning of their lives and choices, in particular through strategies of naming, educating and sociopolitical actions and critique. Working with girls on dealing versus healing. Lewis notes that its important to move from the concept of healing to dealing, as for many girls trauma and its impacts are a daily reality. She suggests supporting girls to see that “my familiarity with violence (trauma) contributes to my knowledge, my sense of strength, and my capacity for empathy, rather than as something tainted with pathology that must be overcome”

**Psychobiology, Triggers and Relational Aggression and Disconnection**

Educating girls about the psychobiology of trauma, and helping them identify their triggers and how trauma impacts their body uniquely and providing them with the tools to deal with these triggers is key. Another key area to intervene and support girls is to assist them in moving from relational aggression towards one another, that is the process whereby girls attack another girls reputation or isolate her, towards directly expressing anger and frustration.

The use and the ability to build familiarity with guided imagery and body centering exercises (in the group manual curriculum) is encouraged to address a variety of issues that can come up in the group process. Girls who have experienced trauma in various levels of intensity, may begin to raise both their internal and external awareness and therefore may begin to have physiological responses that can surface during group.

In experiencing trauma, particularly longer term (type 2 trauma) ongoing physical and or sexual abuse, neglect and witnessing violence and abuse (one of the most under rated
The adolescent girl experiences the most extreme and toxic form of relational disconnection. The girl/child has to withdraw, isolate and disconnect from the harmful, non growth-fostering relationship in order to survive. This act comes at great expense to the girl on all levels of mind, body and spirit. It is therefore necessary to address all levels of being to externalize and deal with the trauma experience and attachment issues.

These children and adolescents suffer from chronic stress at a psychological and biological level. Establishing a safe connection may therefore be blocked by neurobiological reactions that create anxiety, shame and guilt and inhibit connection with healthy others. They often experience what the Relational/Cultural model calls the “Relational Paradox”:

When a person’s yearnings for connection are met with sustained and chronic rejections, humiliations and other violations, then the yearnings become even more intensified. At the same time these yearnings are experiences as dangerous. The person then tries to connect in the only relationship available but does so by keeping more and more of herself out of relationship. She tries to protect against further wounding and rejections by not representing herself authentically; rather, she alters herself to fit with what she believes are the wishes and expectations of others. These inauthentic expressions become ways of distancing from others, hiding her vulnerabilities and deep longings for connections (Stiver, I.A, 1992).

The good news is that there is so much new research in this area of neurobiology and attachment that can be utilized in treatment. (See references to Daniel J. Siegal, M.D. and Bessel van der Kolk). Van der Kolk and van der Hart (1991) discuss the fact that the combination of the arousal and autonomic nervous response, the secretion of neurotransmitters with resultant nerve stimulation and the patterns and pathways of the nervous system play a vital role in the mechanism of memory retrieval. This mechanism in children and adolescents is much more complex and less understood. This may stem from the fact that in infants and young children important parts of the nervous system related to memory are not yet myelinized. This constitutes the covering of the nerves with a specialized myelin sheath that protects the nerves, preventing disruption of impulses traveling within them. It is hypothesized that without this sheath, important parts of the brain associated with memory storage and retrieval are vulnerable to disruption.

Van der Kolk states that “actual experiences can be so overwhelming that they cannot be integrated into existing mental frameworks, and instead are dissociated, later to return intrusively as fragmented sensory or motoric experiences” (1991, p 447). [See Traumatic Responses in Children and Adolescents in Appendix C(j)]. This further emphasizes the importance of providing a safe, flexible environment (such as the group experience) to explore these mental frameworks and to offer alternate healthy ways of expressing these often overwhelming experiences. It is therefore imperative that group facilitators refer any such symptomology to an experienced trauma counselor or therapist.
A Story told on the Body: 
Eating Disorders and self-harming coping mechanisms

I have come to regard these behaviours as…forms of self-help because they provide rapid but temporary relief from distressing symptoms such as mounting anxiety, depersonalization, racing thoughts, and rapidly fluctuating emotion. 
(Favazza, in A Bright Red Scream)

Research into eating disorders and cutting have found that these coping mechanisms are often linked to past histories of child sexual abuse and/or trauma. For example, in a review of the literature on cutting, it was found that all studies identified a range between 50-90% of those who cut had a history of trauma (Strong, 1998). In addition, girls who have histories of trauma often engage in more than one high risk coping mechanisms, with cutting, eating disorders and substance abuse often occurring together. These coping mechanisms are more common in girls, and are most often triggered in adolescence by loss, isolation and conflict (ibid). In addition, these coping mechanisms are challenging to work with in that they are extremely effective in dealing with the effects of trauma on the psychobiology, for example research has found that “cutting is far and away the best mechanism, and patients discover that” (ibid).

Dissociation, self-destructiveness, and impulsive behaviour may all prove to be hormonally mediated responses that are triggered by reminders of earlier trauma and abandonment. 
(van der Kolk)

It is important that facilitators understand the difference between self-harming and suicidality. Often self-injury is seen and treated as suicidality, but it is not. Although at times people who self-harm may be suicidal this is a different issue. As one young woman in the book A Bright Red Scream notes, “there is no hazy line. When I am suicidal I want to die. I have lost all hope. When I’m self-injuring I want to relieve emotional pain and keep on living. Suicide is a permanent exit. Self-injury helps me get through this moment” (Lindsay, age 15).

Mental health professionals have not done a great job of listening to the body, what they try to do is medicate the syndrome, call it a disease, cure it, get it under control,…anything but respect the symptom and realize there’s a damn good reason that the person feels and acts this way

(Psychologist Mark Schwartz, in A Bright Red Scream, Strong, 1998.)

“Don’t freak out.”
(Roxanne, girls group alumni in response to a question about what adults can do to help girls who are cutting)
Strategies for Facilitators

These are some concrete tools that you can use in your girls groups when dealing with challenging issues such as trauma, relational aggression, self-harming, and eating disorders.

1. **Develop a Safe and Trusting Relationship**
   Given the challenge of forming and maintaining relationships, this becomes the key area for us to support and act. Adolescence and trauma combine to silence girls and leave them feeling they can not be authentic in their relationships with others. We can assist girls in choosing safe relationships with others, through modeling this in our relationship with them. In particular, the ability to work through conflict and express feelings of anger directly and appropriately. If we can support girls through our connection to them and reconnection after disconnection, we can teach them valuable lessons about forming safe relationships with others.

2. **Listen to the story told on the body or in the disconnection from others: what is she telling you through her actions or lack of action?**

3. **Respect the symptom and honor the creative act of self-healing**
   It is very important to name both the strength and the resistance present in the coping mechanism, as well as to honor the relationship to it and its role in her life. This does not minimize the risks associated -- in fact, a key step is assisting the girl to identify others’ worry for her and her own worries for herself in relation to her behavior. Naming the coping as a normal response to trauma and challenges of development assists the girls in developing new coping strategies and skills that do not hurt themselves or others.

4. **Don’t focus on stopping the behaviour**
   Girls need to choose to stop their behaviours and need to have developed new and healthier strategies to replace old ones with. Without these changes, stopping a coping mechanism could trigger suicidality and other more extreme symptoms. Ask yourself “who am I to presume they can manage without this behaviour”.

5. **Provide creative alternatives for expression (dance, art, writing)**

6. **Provide an emotional language to talk about feelings – create a vocabulary “because once you can say it, you can handle it”**

7. **Harm Reduction: Ask the girl “What can you do in this moment that would be less destructive?”**

8. **Refer to Counseling**
   Referrals to counseling and other supports are important to allow the girl to further explore the meaning of the coping in her life, and assist her in development of new and healthier tools.
Questions for Facilitators to Consider

When working with girls, ask yourself these questions about their coping mechanisms, strategies for survival and “risk-taking” behaviors.

? What meaning might there be for the young woman in her coping? What role might this play in assisting her with the feelings she is experiencing or the reality of her current living situation?

We can support girls to look at the short-term gains and long-term consequences (resistance for survival) associated with her behaviour, as this insight is important in supporting girls in making changes.

? What are the key areas to support, name and build strength?

It is important that we begin with building strengths and resources, as should a girl choose to stop a negative coping mechanism, she will need to have new resources to draw on to assist her in dealing with past and current trauma, emotionality and challenges of daily life.

? What are the daily lived traumas and triggers this young woman is dealing with?

It is important to understand that abuse is not something that lives only in the past, but due to the reality of sexism, racism and other abuses, many girls are constantly triggered by emotions throughout the day. Helping girls to deal with the continuum of trauma in their daily lives, and providing tools to deal with issues such as racist comments, sexual harassment at school, or living with an alcoholic parent are key in our work with girls.

? What areas of support will I need? Supervision? Consultation? Training?

Facilitators of girls groups need the space and time to debrief with each other, as well as access to agency and external supports for dealing with the complex range of issues girls present. If in doubt, consult. In addition, becoming aware of vicarious traumatization, and developing a practice of self-care are essential for women working with girls around these issues.

Questions For Girls to Consider

These are questions that will assist you in your work with girls around these issues (adapted from Passage on the Wild River of Adolescence: Arriving Safely by Norine G. Johnston and Michael C. Roberts 1999 in Beyond Appearance: A New Look at Adolescent Girls edited by Johnson, Roberts and Worell. Ask the girls to consider the following:

- Who am I? When I am alone? With friends? Family? In society? How safe do I feel in each of these relationships? What coping is associated with each of these relationships?

This helps girls understand their multiple identities, and the role of safety and containment strategies.

We come because we can relax, have fun and get to know each other better. We don’t get forced to do things that we don’t feel comfortable doing.

—Focus Group
within each of these relationships. For example, a girl might identify that she only cuts at school in order to deal with peer relationships and feeling unsafe.

• What tools have helped me survive? Thrive? What hurts me? Helps me? Worries I have about my current coping?

This will assist girls in identifying resources and challenges in their current coping toolkit, and the costs associated with each of these. Do they have long-term consequences or risks associated with them? In addition, girls are often aware of others’ worries for them about their coping behaviors, but have not taken the time to connect with their own worries for themselves.

• What role did relationships play in supporting me through hard things I have coped with? Have I had a disconnection from a support in my life?

Many girls who have experienced trauma, have histories of disconnection and disruption in their intimate relationships. Working with girls to identify the past and current supportive and safe people, and working with them to expand this, will help girls with coping outside of group and during the rest of their week.

• What are my strengths? Things I could do more of?

Girls are often not aware of, nor comfortable with, identifying their own strengths. Yet it is these very resources they will need to draw on as they meet the challenges of dealing with the issues in their lives.
Girls Group: Setting Up for Success

The process is key in the development of a girls group, from the invitation you extend to girls to attend the group, to the physical location, and through to the planning and delivery of the group. Given the importance of relationships as identified in this manual, relationship issues needed to be centralized throughout this process. In this section we will walk you through some of the important steps of developing your group: Pre-Relationship, Relationship Development, and Post-Relationship.

1. Pre-Relationship Issues

Choosing Facilitators: Gender, Culture and Truth-Tellers

Choosing the facilitators is an important step to consider. Given the power held by adults in helping relationships with girls who are marginalized or at risk, it is important that the facilitators of the group are connected to the daily lived experiences of marginalized girls. “Because experiences of sexuality, relationships, and work are all deeply imbued with cultural meaning and are affected by race, class, and sexual orientation, girls tend to name women who are similar to them in these respects as important in their lives” (Gilligan, 1995). Specifically, as indicated by Carol Gilligan, girls identify that women who “tell the truth” and are similar to the girls in background are key to supportive relationships. Gilligan states that “Women who share girls’ cultural or class background may also be best qualified to pass on effective survival strategies or to point out strategies that may not be serving girls well” (1995). Female facilitators need to be prepared to deal with direct and at times challenging questions from the girls about their own life and choices in life. In addition, a counselor is an important part of this model – as the girls are then able to follow-up with key discussions from group which may have been triggering, and/or seek individual help for issues such as suicidality or self-harming.

From the field…

- Consider Location – go where the girls are.
- Invite all girls – don’t target “at risk” girls or “problem” girls as girls are suspicious of these groups and often don’t attend
- Provide snacks – food is key; involve girls in choosing foods
- Ground in Your Own Experience – (see Appendix C) – are you and your co-facilitator prepared to deal with the issues you will encounter?
- Be knowledgeable and experienced in dealing with adolescent female issues
It is also important that the girls are given the space and power to name the group, impact its format, including space, day and time as well brainstorm and develop the activities and issues that will be discussed. Allow this to emerge from the girls themselves with a focus on accessing their voice and wisdom.

Self-disclosure is an important part of girls group as it allows them to connect with the facilitators, share in the story telling process and build a sense of trust. However, the goal is always to further and deepen the girls own sharing and exploration of their own issues. For example, when a facilitator shares about her own difficult experiences in dealing with parents over the holidays and some tools that helped her with this, the girls are able to open up about their own experiences and fears, as well as learn some practical skills to apply in their own situations. Self-disclosure is not appropriate where the issue has not been dealt with by the facilitator and where the focus shifts from the girls as a group to an individual.

2. Relationship Development: Skills of Connection and Disconnection

Relationship development includes the process of initiating connections with the girls, the development of trust and the maintaining of relationships with the girls and with the community.

At the first meeting it is important that girls are invited to take ownership of the group, from the naming of the group, to the time it will be offered, and the day of the week (where possible). In addition, a key process throughout the groups life, will be the development of the topics the girls wish to discuss (generally issue based) and the list of activities. It is important that girls are aware if there is a limited budget, however, it is also important to not shut down the process and girls may wish to fundraise or work towards a more expensive activity. For example, the girls wanted to go on a trip to Whistler with the girls group, therefore we applied for funding to complete this activity – calling it the “girls up all night” event. It was very successful and was a great motivation to not only attend group but facilitated deeper relational impact for the girls with each other and with the facilitators.

Once the date, time and name for the group are selected, invite the girls to create posters (although the power of word of mouth is actually key in the success of a girls group). In addition, given the fear of attending a group on their own, invite girls to bring a friend.

The process of the group’s development is also important for the girls to own and understand. Key here are establishing safety through rules and consequences, guidelines and limitations of confidentiality (including reporting), and the schedule of the topics each week. Schedules should be posted for the girls to see so that they can decide whether or not to attend. For example, a girl can choose not to come the week that a particular topic is being discussed.

From the field...

When setting up the girls group in Burnaby, I first considered location. Where were the girls? Where did they hang out? I then approached the youth worker at the local youth centre and discussed offering a girls group at their centre. She identified a need for this as the centre was often over represented by the young men, with girls feeling reticent to play pool and to take up space in the centre. In order to engage girls in the development from the beginning we invited any girls who attended the centre to come meet with us, eat pizza, and begin to develop the girls group. Inclusivity is key as girls are suspicious of groups which identify who should attend.
discussed if it might be triggering for her or if she is not prepared to deal with this issue at this time.

Some of the tools which aid in establishing relationships between girls and with the facilitators include beginning each group with a check-in during which each girl is invited to speak about whatever issue is on her mind. Girls are not required to share anything, but do have to verbalize that they wish to refrain from sharing this week. In this way every girl has had an experience of speaking and being heard in the context of the group. In addition, the activities are key in building relationships through completing art together, laughing at a movie, sharing in a physical activity, and of course eating food together. All of these activities build relationships.

In establishing a connection with a girl, in particular a new girl to group, the facilitators should always ensure they meet with the girl prior to the group in order to introduce her to the process, tell her what she can expect, and invite her to bring a friend or youth worker to the first meeting. In addition, forming connections with new girls is often done through building on previously established relationships with youth. The facilitators can build healthy relationships with the youth through remembering key events in their lives such as birthdays, breakups, asking for current updates in their lives, and noticing changes in appearance such as hair cuts and new piercings.

Another factor which will assist in forming and maintaining the relationship with the girls is their witnessing evidence of other girls trusting the facilitators, especially in times of crisis and intervening in critical incidents and abuse. Key moments are incidents of racism, sexism or other abuses which need to be interrupted immediately in the group. While it is important to maintain relationships with all of the girls involved, it is equally important to make the consequences clear and facilitate reconnection between group members.

One of the key principles in the relational model is the process of connection following disconnection. This is an important concept for facilitators to not only understand but to facilitate for the girls. For example, if there is a fight between two girls who attend group, the facilitators can support the girls in communicating appropriately and directly with one another in order to reconnect. In addition, where a disconnection happens between a girl and a facilitator, this reconnection is key. An important relational rule is that if a girl leaves...
Facilitating the Process

The issue of establishing safety warrants further discussion of girls who daily experience the negative impacts of racism, trauma and violence. For these girls, trust and safety are not easily established and yet are paramount in preventing further exploitation. As noted earlier, ideally the two facilitators will include a counselor specializing in issues of abuse and exploitation and an experienced youth worker. Ideally this duo would be racially and/or culturally diverse to make a range of girls feel included. The importance of the girls group being co-facilitated by a counselor cannot be overstated as this provides the skill to facilitate the process safely, to elicit wisdom and knowledge, and to provide counseling or debriefing for youth who need this. Within our previous girls groups, several youth disclosed sexual abuse experiences and the counselor provided safety and containment for the discussion, as well as following up with community supports including driving the girl to the safe house. A counselor is also able to address any issues that may arise during the course of the girls group including street dynamics and relationship conflict which exists between girls outside of the group.

Another key component in the girls group development and individual relationships with youth is the process of **Witnessing and Receiving Stories**. Checking-in is a key step in this model, with every group beginning and/or ending with a group check-in. The facilitators job is to ensure safety, role model and facilitate sharing through appropriate self-disclosure, and ask questions. It is important to deal with disclosure issues created by the sense of safety among girls. Girls need to choose to disclose and understand the consequences of this disclosure. If a girl appears to be about to disclose abuse, she should be reminded of the facilitators’ duty to report and should be encouraged to continue the disclosure in the privacy of an office with one of the facilitators.

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**From the field…**

In my experience, engaging in an activity with a girl where they are able to be the expert is key in building relationships. With one young woman who had been referred to counseling multiple times and had not followed through with any appointments due to her severe trauma history and trust issues, after several months of attending group, she was helping me with an art activity which I was particularly bad at and she was skilled in, and she said to me “so you are a counselor huh. Maybe we could have coffee sometime”. She proceeded to enter therapy and work on her childhood sexual abuse issues for several years, including taking one of her offenders to court. It was a huge step for her and a huge success for the group model.
Making visible their strengths
As noted earlier, a problem-focused approach tends to dominate discussions of girls and
girls groups. This can be seen in the focus on resistance strategies which manifest in eating
disorders and other self-harming activities. Therefore, in order to shift and counter this, the
central role of the girls group activities and relationship development should be make the
girls strengths visible. This can be done through displaying art, encouraging publishing of
writing, and creating opportunities to contribute to community projects. For example, during
Natalie’s girls group, the participants painted bird houses to raise funds for a local
neighbourhood house.

Encouraging Resistance for Liberation
Another core concept which guides all activities
is the link between individual problems, coping
mechanisms and society. Girls are encouraged to
name and centralize the location of the problem
outside of themselves, as based in the
Relational/Cultural Model. For example, with
respect to eating disorders, girls are encouraged
through collage to explore the messages they are
given from the media about what they should
look like and act like. They are then encouraged
to resist these images through creating a collage
of images and words which represent what girls
really look like and feel, including representing
the diversity of girls in our group (girls with
glasses, girls who are size 16, girls of colour, bi-
racial girls et cetera).

3. Post-Relationship:
What Happens after Group is Over? (today
and forever)
After the group is done for the day, it is
important to keep in mind how the activities you have facilitated may affect the girls in
attendance. Facilitators will need to ensure action and follow-up with important issues such
as school, housing and shelter, and counseling. Facilitators may also wish to motivate the
girls to attend community activities which sustain and nurture their strengths. Additionally,
as mentioned above, if there has been a disconnection or fight between two of the girls in
the group, be sure to follow up with the individuals involved after the group is over. It is
important that no girl leaves feeling that she is not welcome the following week. Once a girl
becomes too old to attend the group, moves away, or has to stop coming for some other
reason, it is important to provide a sense of closure and continuity. The girls will take with
them all of the skills and self-awareness developed through the course of the girls group.
They should also take with them the sense that they have contributed to the creation of this
group and that this connection will be long-lasting.

From the field…
A number of girls had identified date
rape issues impacting the youth
centre, however none of these girls
wished to report these issues. I
worked with them to shift the blame
from themselves as well as
supporting them in moving from
“survival” resistance strategies such
as dropping out of school to avoid
seeing the boys, to naming the
issues and demanding change. The
girls created a poster which said
“Hey do you want to get laid? And it
then went on to identify the
conditions under which rape occurs
including the date rape experiences
these girls had experienced. This
poster was then placed in a central
place within the youth centre where
these boys attended, and was left
there, unmarked for a number of
years.
You can discuss with the girl her future plans and needs that may emerge as she exits from this circle of relationships. Some ideas include following-up with a phone call to check up on her after a few weeks, connecting her with other local supports, fundraising, soliciting adult mentors to attend group and building connections between girls and the external community.

Providing a proper ending is an important step in that the group model allows girls to attend group from the ages of 12-19, and includes the ability to mentor and teach younger girls as they age and mature through the group process. Girls can be encouraged to volunteer to facilitate group sessions once they are no longer attending group weekly or to contribute to the group in some other way.

Skills for Facilitators
The following is a summary of the skills to keep in mind in your role as a girls group facilitator.

Truth-telling is a strategy of directly naming and challenging negative cultural messages, for example, messages about gender. Sharing strategies of coping with life challenges is key here. Self-disclosure and the telling of stories all aid girls in understanding and coping with the challenges they experience daily. Self-awareness is important in your role as a facilitator, as you will be challenges to share your own lives and struggles. Too often as adults we have been socialized to be silent about these issues or they may be painful and unresolved for us. Its imperative that facilitators do their own work in order to better support the work they do with young women.

2. Focus on safety and containment
“Given the intersection of trust with power relations and the vulnerability involved in trusting another, the person who stands in a position of power bears more of the burden for establishing trustworthiness and cultivating trusting relations” (Horsman, 2000).

Applying strategies within the group and within individual relationships which address issues of safety and containment are key in allowing girls the opportunity to learn and grow. In addition, safety and containment will provide a context for dealing with issues of trauma, abuse and the challenges related to identity and development. Key skills here include continually reminding girls of the limits of confidentiality, encouraging and supporting the act of choosing to speak and share their truth, and other tools which aid in containing the impact of strong emotions.
3. Naming and Noting
Naming and noting includes identifying the strengths within girls, their choices and their stories is key in assisting their healthy development. In addition, it is important to support girls to develop the “island of competence”, that one thing they feel they are good at. With one girl who attended girls group, facilitators encouraged her creative and artistic spirit through finding jobs where she could paint her graffiti art, as well as supplying her with tools to aid in her sewing (such as fabric et cetera). Another key skill here is the power of observation, noting the unique ways each girls expresses who she is, and truly listening to the myriad ways of telling. For example, changes in hair and appearance are often key points of expression for girls and noticing these changes affirms her uniqueness.

4. Fostering Healthy Resistance: Normalizing and Theorizing
A key skill in the development of relationships with girls is the ability to normalize their experience and their coping, and then to assist them in theorizing and locating the source of the issue outside of themselves, in society. Utilizing the models identified earlier, assist girls to identify the survival strategy currently present in their coping, the short-term gain and long-term consequence. For example, by dropping out of school they are avoiding dealing with a teacher who reminds them of a past abuser, but they are creating long-term consequences for themselves. Girls need to be assisted in developing resistance for liberation, which names the source of the problem and demands change in the system or source that is oppressing them. A girl might be encouraged to call a meeting, or write a letter, where they identify the larger social issue at play. The central goal is to move the emphasis from individual solutions to structural problems and to provide girls with a “caring that gives girls the opportunity for self-development through effective socio-cultural critique” (Debold et al, 1999). Some of the important sources of resistance to negative cultural messages include a strong ethnic identity and speaking one’s mind, in addition to strong female role models, feminist beliefs and attitudes which are non-traditional (Basow and Rubin, 1999).

Key Components of Gender Specific Programming
- Take into account developmental needs of girls at adolescence – a critical safety measure for gender identity formation.
- Nurture and reinforce “femaleness” as a positive identity with inherent strengths.
- Provide girls with decision-making and life skills that will assist their development to adulthood.
- Teaching positive relationship-building skills
- Empowering girls to use their “voice”, speak for themselves and see that they have choices.

5. Relationships and Supports
When we develop a strong relationship with a girl, it is important that we support her in building on this relationship and the development of a larger support network. In my work with girls, I often complete an inventory of their supports, or people they feel safe with, and a key goal is to increase the number of people and places in this inventory.
6. Connecting within Sameness and Across Difference
“Too often we pour the energy needed for recognizing and exploring difference into pretending those differences are insurmountable barriers, or that they do not exist at all. This results in a voluntary isolation, or false and treacherous connections. Either way we do not develop tools for using human difference as a springboard for creative changes within our lives” (Audre Lorde, 1984).

This requires facilitators to work within the connections of sameness they have with girls and girls have with each other, including experiences of immigration, racism, sexism, and gender. In addition, it is key to name, explore and support the development of connections across differences that exist between girls in the group and between girls and the facilitators.

7. Celebrate small wins
We need to name and celebrate all steps that girls take towards change. If they have been unable to attend school, celebrate the one day they attend in the week. Build on these small changes.

Developing Collaborative Relationships with Girls
Sonia Manhas, with whom Natalie co-facilitated the John Oliver Girls Group, developed five purposeful actions that assisted in our development of collaborative relationships with the girls.

1. Conscious Intent
Key here is stepping out of the expert role, and depending on location and setting, not stepping into a role such as teacher, or counselor. The development of mutual empathy as key here. In addition, the role of conscious intent is important in self-disclosure with the goal facilitating the girls own process, including strategies for coping with certain challenging issues. This is often key during the holiday season, where the facilitators could share their strategies for dealing with family members and provide tools to the girls based on experience.

2. Practical application of power sharing
The importance of sharing power with the girls is very important. Even if girls are mandated to attend the group, it is important that the facilitator find and create spaces for the girls to share and express their power in the group, including group rules and topics discussed.

3. Open perspective
The importance of really listening to girls and letting go of preconceptions about who they are and how the process will unfold is key. Manhas notes, “I found that by letting go of
preconceived notions and resisting judgments of girls or their cultures, I could tune into the intricacies of individual experiences and expand the potential of the relationship”

4. Honesty
As Gilligan, Taylor ans Sullivan (1995) identify in their research, girls clearly identify the positive impact of women who are the “truth tellers’ in their lives. Specifically, women who speak about power, privilege and issues that are difficult to discus invite the girls to engage with them and to develop a critical understanding of their world.

5. Self-reflection: Connections within sameness and across difference
This step is key, and underlies the importance of a co-facilitated group as the ability to debrief and reflect on one’s own experience of the group is key to deepening the relationship with girls. Challenging our own values, judgments and triggers with respect to life experience and self-disclosure are central in allowing the true relationship with each girl to emerge. In addition, our ability to reflect on our own relationship to power and privilege, and educate oneself about cultures and experiences different from one’s own allows us to truly listen to girls stories and become an ally to girls in their growth and development.
Session Outlines for Girls Groups

The following session outlines are intended to provide you with guides for your own group. They are not to be used in any particular order, nor are they scripted to be used exactly as stated. Please use them as inspiration and guidance in your own work – adapt them, make them your own. Additionally, with all of these sessions it is important to follow the pace and comfort level of the group. Sessions can be continued or stopped at any time that is appropriate to just “go with the flow” of the girls’ discussions as relevant to giving voice to their current experience. For additional ideas for group activities, see the last pages of this section, titled “Relational Tools & Exercises”.

Relational Model

The following sessions are arranged along a continuum of relationship development, as outlined by the Relational/Cultural Model. They include:
1. Relationship to self and self care
2. Relationship to peers
3. Relationship to family and community
4. Relationship to society

Guiding questions

When developing group activities for adolescent girls it is important to keep in mind some of the following issues/questions:

- What meaning might there be for the young woman in her coping?
- What are the key areas to support, name and build strength?
- What are the daily lived traumas this young woman is dealing with?
- What areas of support will I need (connecting across difference, within sameness?)

[For more information, see Appendix C(d)]

Group Facilitators Please Note:
Facilitators need to be very careful not to go into more complex and severe trauma material that may begin to surface in the group process. When there is an environment of safety and trust as happens over time when girls have the opportunity to be authentic and voice their vulnerabilities in this new context, material that may have been on an unconscious level may surface.

Unless the group is being facilitated by a counsellor or therapist who has been specifically trained in working with trauma, and the group is conducted in a clinical setting, group facilitators should not utilize this material to address deeper personal trauma. We would recommend that any group member who experiences being triggered by material in the
group, which could include anxiety, panic attacks, flashbacks, depression, sleep disturbance, triggering of old coping skills, suicidality, all of which are natural responses when unconscious material is accessed, stirred up and the client feels that she is in a safe environment and perhaps may be ready to deal on a deeper level with previously existing trauma material.

We recommend that you always have immediate referral sources at hand to deal with these situations, as it is an opportunity for the client/girl to continue to seek connection and health instead of disconnection, fear and continued emotional pain.

The following sessions are meant as a place to create space for girls’ voices and to have an opportunity to talk about the impact and reality of how this material interferes with relationships and normal developmental experience and to increase awareness of issues and stages in girls’ lives where trauma intersects and may never have been previously validated.

A. Relationship To Self

SESSION 1: CREATING SAFETY

Session Goals

• To make the group as non-threatening as possible.
• Elicit information from group participants on what makes for a safe environment.

Clinical Rationale

Creating an atmosphere and environment that feels respectful and as safe as is possible for all participants is the first and most important consideration in group therapy. Our goal is to make this a place where adolescent girls can break their isolation and begin to give “voice” to their feelings honestly.

Facilitator's Guide

Facilitators Introduce Themselves and the Program: (name, length of time of association with agency/working in the field, experience with groups, etc.). Talk about why the facilitator is interested in doing this work.

Participant Introductions: Why are you here? What do you expect from this experience? What do you want to gain from this experience? What was difficult about coming here today?

Develop Group Rules: Discuss girls’ needs in order to feel as safe and as comfortable as is possible. Ask each member what they need from the others to feel as much comfort and safety as is possible in this group experience.

Brainstorm guidelines for group rules. List the rules developed on chart paper and have them typed for handout at Session # 2.

BREAK

Check In: after break to reinforce group cohesion. How are you feeling now as compared to when you first walked in?

Anxiety Management Strategies – [see Appendix B(a) and B(b)]

After checking in with members again after the break, the facilitator can begin to link feelings of anxiety with the practice of safety procedures explained in appendix B(b). This can begin the process of acknowledging the feelings that are often overwhelming as a result of dealing with disconnection experienced in important relationships and hearing others' stories of disconnection and the subject content in general. Therefore the feeling of being able to do something about these feelings is seeded.
Symbol of Safety: Introduce this concept and ask participants to begin to think about a personally significant symbol, place or thing etc. that represents safety or the absence of danger, fear and anxiety.

Tools to Practice: Think of something that signifies safety and/or comfort for you. It may be helpful to think of a pleasant memory, experience or perhaps you have a pet or a favourite place or activity that gives you comfort and safety.

Identify a symbol or souvenir of safety and draw it.

Check out: End the session with grounding exercise - allowing each participant to draw their own meaning or relevant interpretations for themselves. (See Appendix B).

Each girl is offered the opportunity to comment on her experience of the session or make any comment needed to finish the discussion for them.

* Discuss format of the group again, i.e. It is now time for checking out as we did at the beginning with check in.
SESSION 2: CREATING MORE SAFETY

Session Goals

- Each adolescent will; (a) create a symbol of safety and/or comfort and make a concrete representation of it from clay and, (b) begin to identify and understand maladaptive coping skills.

Clinical Rationale

Working with modelling clay (Sculpie or Femo) the girls creates a concrete representation of their symbol for safety and/or comfort. This allows them to develop and reinforce for themselves the possibility of safety and/or comfort and provides something to help transport them to that state when negative feelings are in danger of taking over. Identifying coping skills, allows for choices in responding to feelings such as panic, overwhelming anger or fear. The pace of this session respects the time it takes to create a feeling of safety and the need to practise comforting thoughts, visions and objects.

Facilitator's Guide

Check In: This is an opportunity for participants to briefly comment on how they are feeling about any significant events over the past week and any questions or comments from the previous session.

Review of week and “new tools” practiced and Discussion

Task

- Each participant is asked to form a representation of the symbol of safety they have chosen for themselves using various colours of modelling clay presented.
- Participants "show and tell" (if they choose) explaining symbol's significance.
- This task is a good group building activity and helps to keep adolescents more comfortably in the present and in their bodies and builds skills to self soothe in a healthy manner.

BREAK

(timing of the break is at the facilitator's discretion, depending on how long it takes to complete the exercise)

Relationship Between Experience and Body Sensation: Enter into a discussion of how to use this symbol. While holding the symbol each participant is asked to recall a minor experience of frustration or fear i.e. losing something valuable, visiting the dentist, etc. The facilitator then leads them through a guided experience/visualization similar to the one in Appendix B(b). With the goal being to help them increase their awareness of the relationship between experience and body sensation.
**Review of Safety/Relaxation Techniques** [see Appendix B(b)]: Debrief the exercise by asking participants to discuss this experience. Facilitator can remind them that their symbol and the safety and relaxation techniques can be utilized to help alleviate unpleasant feelings, emotions and body sensations.

**End with guided relaxation** [see Appendix B(b)]: during which the participants can utilize some of the above-mentioned safety and relaxation techniques.

**Tools for the Week**: During the next week, choose a time and a way in which you can use your representation/symbol to create a feeling of increased safety and comfort. Practice relaxation response with safety symbol to build self-soothing skills.

**Check out**

**Note**: Some facilitators may want to extend this session into an extra session in order to process in a more in-depth and experiential manner these new tools and techniques. Thus the 1st session would focus on the creation of the symbol of safety and/or comfort and the experience of that creation. The second session would focus on practising the use of the symbol in specific situations, allowing participants to familiarize and practice these techniques.

If using two sessions for this topic, a sample homework assignment for this extra session could be:  **During the next week, focus on one or two ways to nurture or soothe yourself during times of discomfort or stress.**
SESSION 3: GROUNDING IN OUR OWN EXPERIENCE

Understanding The Effects of Disconnection and Respecting Adaptive and Maladaptive Coping Skills

Session Goals

- Participants will have the opportunity to; (a) understand the emotional, behavioural and physical effects of their experience, (b) begin to identify their own coping skills and, (c) begin to be able to talk about the effects and the coping skills.

Clinical Rationale

Identifying the impact of disconnection in relationships at all levels as a significant factor in the development of negative outcomes for adolescent girls including the development of depression, eating disorders, self-harming behaviors and suicidality.

Reviewing the impact and resulting affects externalizes the problem, which can decrease the sense of isolation and the feeling of “what's wrong with me?” Identifying coping skills allows for choices in responding to feelings such as panic, overwhelming anger or fear.

Facilitator's Guide

Check In

Tools for the Week and Discussion

Brainstorm Exercise: Using flipchart, list what girls see, feel and think were the physical, emotional and behavioural affects of an experience of disconnection.

Discussion includes:
- How did these affects impact your life?
- Who if anyone knew about the affects?
- How did this experience affect your sense of self, (mind body spirit)
- What is it like to voice your experience and the impact or affects?

Facilitator can seed a future session discussion regarding Outcomes of Connections and Disconnections. (See Session 4)

BREAK
Discussion

Part I
Discuss common themes that emerged during the previous discussion.
• Ask how participants dealt with those affects.
• Have you been aware of coping skills used?
• How did those coping skills help you deal with your experience?
• How did those coping skills affect your relationships with others?

This discussion focuses on how these coping skills have or have not changed over time.

Part II
Begin to discuss current coping skills such as dissociation, numbing, rationalization, self-mutilation, minimizing, selective memory, and amnesia so the survivor can begin to delineate the past from the present effects of the abuse. This helps link the past with the present. For example, Suzy may now be seeking support in response to her earlier maladaptive coping skill of using alcohol or food to self-medicate and or numb her painful experience. Facilitator needs to be sensitive to the fact that girls may be still utilizing some of these coping skills - the purpose of this discussion therefore is to acknowledge the existence of these coping skills.

Relaxation Exercise [see Appendix B(b)]: To get participants to practice using techniques to manage anxiety raised by discussion. Repetition of this and other safety techniques is critical to internalizing the ability to calm oneself.

Tools for the Week: choose one coping skill. Write about how and when you developed it, how it helped you feel safe (rather than powerless). When might you still need the feeling of protection or safety it created.

During the next week, choose a time and a way in which you can use your representation/symbol to create a feeling of increased safety and comfort.

Check out
SESSION 4: SELF/BODY IMAGE

Session Goals
To develop an awareness of how adolescent girls experience themselves in relation to self and others and her community.

Clinical Rationale
In Reviving Ophelia, Mary Pipher says - “the culture is what causes girls to abandon their true selves and take up false selves”. Therefore it is vital for adolescent girls to explore feelings such as shame, self-doubt in the context of their culture, race, gender, and to begin to develop a healthy discourse and social analysis of this critical issue.

Facilitators Guide
Check In

Tools for the Week and Discussion

Brainstorm Exercise: On flip chart paper, ask girls the following question:
- What affects our image of ourselves (including media, books, family, fashion)?

Discuss the objectification of women through media, societal expectations of what a desirable woman is. How has this affected you?

Discuss how adolescent girls treat their bodies.

Other suggestions for discussion:
- Acknowledge the body exists i.e. these are my hands, this is my face
- Body in relation to food
- Hygiene, self-care
- Exercise
- Self-mutilation
- What does it mean to be female?
- How girls feel about various parts of their anatomy, e.g. breasts, vagina

Discuss how the popular culture and media has affected the girls’ image of her body, herself and her sexuality.

- Violence, abuse and neglect interrupt and complicate normal development, particularly the child/adolescent’s curiosity and pleasure with the body and its abilities. Some ways girls deal with these issues include numbing out via substance use, and self-mutilation
**Group Exercise:** Create a collage of images from popular culture coming out of the above discussions. Share with the group if the group is in agreement and discuss the implications of these images.

**Check-out:** Remind girls to ground and center themselves using symbol of safety and relaxation techniques.
B: Relationship To Peers

SESSION 5: UNDERSTANDING AND TRANSFORMING DISCONNECTIONS

Session Goals

- Girls can understand, acknowledge and give voice to the feelings associated with experiences of disconnection and to begin to develop awareness and skills to move toward re-connection following a disconnection.

Clinical Rationale

A “disconnection” can be defined as an interaction where one person does not feel heard, understood, or responded to by another person. (Relational Practice in Action Manual, Stone Center p35). Some disconnections are relatively minor and can be easily turned into a stronger connection. Some disconnections are more serious (as in the case of abuse, neglect, violence). In these cases learning how to disconnect from an unhealthy connection is the desired outcome. It is very important in the latter case to find other healthier connections for support while in difficult situations of disconnecting from un-healthy relationships.

Facilitator’s Guide

Check In

Tools for the Week Review and Discussion: Facilitator can discuss the two handouts: “Cycles of Disconnection” and “Outcomes of Connection and Disconnection” [see Appendix B(f) and B(h)].

Brainstorm: Think about ways that you disconnect (how do you do disconnection? (e.g., get quiet, become critical, angry..) Think of a time when you used one of those strategies.

- What happened?
- Were you aware of what you were doing at the time?
- What could you do differently next time?
- Are you aware of where you feel the impact of that in your body?
- Were you aware of the other person’s strategies of disconnection?
- What are some ways of moving back onto connection?

BREAK
Debriefing and Closing Connection: Facilitator discusses the handout “Connect” [see Appendix B(e)]. Then, the facilitator goes around the room and invites girls to share their thoughts and/or feelings. The purpose of this is not to have a major discussion or debate about this information, but to provide a space for each girl’s voice to be heard, and to talk about what this session was like for them, and to be more aware of what creates growth in relationships.

Tools for the Week: During the next week try to be aware of your interactions with others and identify your own patterns of connection and disconnection.

Wrap-up: Remind girls to ground and center themselves using symbol of safety and relaxation techniques.
SESSION 6: UNDERSTANDING “SELF” IN THE CONTEXT OF PEER RELATIONSHIPS

Session Goals

• To better understand the concept of “self in relation to others”. To identify the adolescent girl's self concept and how others may view/experience her differently in contrast to her own individual experience.

Clinical Rationale

One of the key concepts in The Relational Cultural Model is that of authenticity. “The honest expression of one’s needs and feelings, with attention to possible impact on the other person and on the relationship.” (Relational Practice in Action manual pg.17) In order to achieve this it is important for adolescent girls to have an honest, authentic understanding of their own experience of self and how that may affect how others experience them in any relationship context – self, peer, family, and community.

Facilitator’s Guide

Check In

Tools for the Week and Discussion

Task: (Facilitator introduces tasks by explaining use of art). Each participant is asked to make a mask or picture that represents some aspect of the self, including their most threatening feelings (rage, pain, sorrow, fear of going crazy, etc.) using the materials presented. Introduce task by reading the Mask Induction (see Appendix B(d))

Exercise Instructions: Using the materials provided, create a mask that represents the way you relate to yourself - those thoughts, self/body image, any relevant images, symbols, or anything that seems significant that may have come up during the guided imagery as compared to how you think others may view you.

Debriefing and Discussion:

• Participants “show and tell” (if they choose) explaining mask’s significance.
• Facilitator needs on hand materials such as construction paper, markers, glue, scissors, yarn, glitter, feathers, etc.

Tools for the Week: Once you are more aware and no longer as threatened by, or fearful of, the feelings that your mask represents, how will the mask be different. Reflect on and/or make another mask or a drawing (or write about) something representing that change.

Wrap Up: Review what to do to keep safe, grounded and centred.
C: Relationship to Family and Community

SESSION 7: COLLABORATIVE ACTION AND CHANGE

Session Goals
• To identify how society defines being female and how women are “supposed to act”.

Clinical Rationale
The Relational Cultural Model emphasizes and embraces the transformation and building of community. This model focuses on the concept that as people engage in growth fostering relationships they seek to reach out to and to better understand others. This model stresses the importance of not only personal, individual change, but also the need for collective change. In order to move toward change, we each need to understand ourselves in relation to the societal and cultural influences we experience. The “Act Like a Lady Flower” exercise (adapted from Helping Teens Stop Violence p.92) is an excellent way to assist adolescent girls to “resist” the dominant culture and to analyse their social/cultural context.

Facilitators Guide
Check In

Tools for the Week and Discussion

Exercise: Act Like a Lady Flower
Brainstorm on flip chart paper:
1. Name one thing that men or boys say to you – something that hurts you or that you don’t like, something you don’t want to hear again. (Write the comments off to one side of the chart paper.)
2. What is this list of things telling you about how you are supposed to act as a girl/women? What have you learned about in your own family about how you are supposed to act as a good girl? Draw a flower around this list and label it “Act Like A Lady”. Explain: Women who are outside of this flower get called names to influence them to stay in the flower (stereotypic role)
3. What are some names women/girls get called when they step out of the flower? List such as bitch, tramp, slut, dyke, lesbo, etc. What are some of the physical things that are done to women/girls if they step out of the flower? (rape, abuse, catcalls. List these things to the left of the flower.

EXAMPLE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Act Like A Lady</th>
<th>Verbal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>rape</td>
<td>sweet</td>
<td>whore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hitting</td>
<td>good girl</td>
<td>bitch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bad reputation</td>
<td>smart but not too smart</td>
<td>dyke</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Facilitator can continue to illicit the experiences of the group and help them give voice to their experience while putting it in societal context.

**BREAK**

**Debriefing and Discussion:**
Ask the group the following questions:
- What are some ways we can “resist” buying into these gender-stereotypes?
- How do they limit our experience?
- Who in your circle of relationships (including adults, mentors etc) could you enlist help from to resist this limiting stereotype?
- What are some things you and your peers can do to help your community become more aware of and deal with these issues?

**Tool for the Week:** Talk to your peers and members of your community about ways of resisting these roles and damaging stereotypes.

**Check out:** Remind girls to ground and center themselves using symbol of safety and relaxation techniques.
SESSION 8: CELEBRATING DIFFERENCE

Session Goals

- To better understand the cultural lifestyles, values and differences we bring to any interaction and why these are important for our own identity development and the way we think about others and ourselves.

Clinical Rationale

Ethnic and cultural identity contribute to higher self-esteem & can assist the adolescent in buffering the negative impact of racism. The Relational Cultural Model, emphasizes how individual differences often determine how we think about ourselves and how we make connection with others based on things we have in common. Honoring diversity involves being flexible and open to difference. (see Appendices B and C for additional resources and exercises).

Facilitators Guide

Check In

Tools for the Week and Discussion

Discussion: Think of a time when you felt different, (doesn’t have to be a big issue).
- What was that like for you?
- How does difference become a source of disconnection instead of a place of connection?
- How do the “isms” hurt people?
- Who gets to define what is normal?
- Are there times when you felt disconnected and different from your own family?

BREAK

Exercise: Using magazines and any other relevant art, images, or media material, create a group collage that represents the issues and reflections from the discussion. There is no right or wrong way to do this – it should flow from the individual group session interaction and discussion.

Tool for the Week: During the next week try and be aware of issues of diversity and some ways that you and your peers might be able to create some more awareness in your school and community.
See appendix for other activities, examples and ideas that youth can participate in and initiate to create more awareness and take a stand on issues of race, religion, gender, class, sexual orientation, privilege.

Check-out
D: Relationship to Society

SESSION 9: HEALING THE PLANET, ENCOURAGING HEALTHY RESISTANCE

Session Goals

• To experience self in connection with others as change agents
• To explore new ways of resisting limiting societal values and stereotypes.

Clinical Rationale

Encouraging Resistance for Liberation — Another core concept which guides all activities is the link between individual problems and coping mechanisms and society. Girls are encouraged to name and centralize the location of the problem outside of themselves and to focus on activities that can take small steps toward creating change. It is important to begin to seed hope for change in the future in order for adolescents not to be overwhelmed by all that is wrong in our society.

Facilitators Guide

Check In

Tools for the Week and Discussion

Exercise: Girls are invited to make a circle with their index finger and thumb, or alternatively is given a marble to hold. She is asked to imagine that this represents her own private planet and is in complete control all aspects of it including weather, climate, flora and fauna, and who is or isn’t allowed to come on to the planet. For example, the following questions as well as additional ones can be asked to make the experience more meaningful and vivid for the girls.

Since this is your own private planet, you get to determine everything about your world.
• What would be different on your planet?
• Who would be on your planet?
• What is the light like?
• How many days per week are there on your planet?
• What kind of food, drink is consumed on your planet?
• What are the customs on your planet?
• Who is allowed to visit your planet?
• What is the most exciting thing about your planet?

(This exercise was adapted from Charles Johnson, M.S.W. at The Solution Group, in Denver, Colorado)
Once the teen has developed a vivid, satisfying and comforting mental experience of his or her planet, she is invited to imagine going to the planet when in need of comfort and mental replenishment and to think about ways that each girl can bring some of the elements of her ideal planet into the present real world she lives in.

**Tools for the Week:** During the next week check with your peers to see if there are “small acts of anarchy or resistance” that can be employed to seed positive change. This could be as simple as not responding to a derogatory joke, or becoming a peer tutor, or fundraising for some cause that is relevant to her life.

**Check-out**
SESSION 10: CELEBRATING OUR RELATIONSHIPS

Session Goals
To celebrate all the learning that has taken place and the courage of the girls to face all of these issues and to take stock of the nurturing and growth of the Five Good Things.

Clinical Rationale
To reinforce all of the activities in the sessions and the introduction of the Relational Cultural Model in the context of “The Five Good Things” that occur in a growth fostering relationship (see Appendix B(g)). The five good things are;
1. Each person feels a greater sense of Zest (energy, vitality)
2. Each person feels more able to act and does act.
3. Each person has a more accurate picture of herself, the other person and the relationship.
4. Each person feels a greater sense of self worth.
5. Each person feels more connected to the other person and has a greater motivation for connections with others beyond those in a specific relationship.

Facilitators Guide

Check In

Tools for the Week and Discussion
Girls are asked the previous week to brainstorm a celebration. Can be potluck, or any fun group activity – going to the beach, going for a picnic, or whatever fits the individual group dynamics.

This is always a fun time with lots of laughter and celebration.

Discussion is left open and all are encouraged to think about how they embody “the five good things”.

Exercise: The facilitator reads the The Five Good Things: Imagery for Connection [see Appendix B(m)] and girls are encouraged to visualize a positive, healthy future for themselves and their families and communities.

Check-out
Relational Tools For Connection

In addition to the sample group sessions in this manual, the following are some additional ways the girls group activities might encourage and/or foster expression and awareness. Again, the activities are designed to foster the girls’ sense of self in relation to self, peers, family and community, and society.

Have them create a collage
• These activities can be utilized in the relationship to self and society context
  « An identity collage expressing who they are/ how they see themselves
  « A collage of their current struggles/challenges
  « A collage of their strengths and skills
  « A resistance collage

Encourage journal writing (always remember to respect boundaries and privacy)
• These activities can be utilized in all 4 contexts
  « Poetry
  « Short stories/plays
  « Songs

Always show interest in their written words
• This is applicable to all 4 categories
  « Creative writing
  « School assignments

Always provide the materials and opportunities for artistic expression
• This is applicable to all 4 categories
  « Drawing, painting, clay

Encourage physical movement, connection and strength
• This can be used in relationship to self and relationship to peers
  « Take the group to kickboxing, ice skating, yoga or other classes
  « Basketball, baseball and other group sports
  « Have a dance party

Be open to listening to their music
• This is applicable to all 4 categories
  « Explore their connection to it, meaning they find in it
  « Create a tape of empowering music with them
  « Create a music about abuse/survival
Ask about their dreams
• This is applicable to all 4 categories
  « Night dreams/day dreams
  « Fantasies, fears, aspirations etc.

Become aware of and provide exposure to empowering alternative images of girls in the various forms of media
• These activities can be utilized in the Relationship to self and society context
  « Magazines for girls girls
  « Video games for girls
  « Movies and theatre
  « Body movement/role play/dance
  « Computer web sites and video games
  « Go to see The Vagina Monologues

Encourage connections to, or the creation of, youth group organizations
• These activities can be utilized in the Relationship to Family and Community

Support the creation of girls only space and support groups
• Relationship to Self and in Relationship to Peers
  « Drop-in centres (girls groups)]
  « Schools/community recreation centres (ie. Girls open gym)

Encourage education and awareness building through connecting them to relevant organizations in their community
• Relationship to Community and Society
  « Guest speakers from PEERS or PACE to talk about sexual exploitation
  « Guest speakers from community services, such as the public health nurse
  « Educate them on their rights – invite an RCMP, Crown Counsel or Justice For Girls to speak

Create connections between adults who support adolescent girls
• These activities can be utilized in the Relationship to Peers and Community context
  « Woman-girl mentoring relationships
  « Creating allies networks

Note: based on a handout created by N. Clark & L. Redenbach
References


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Appendix A: Resources

More Information On Girls Groups


A program to help girls safely navigate the rocky road through adolescence and avoid pitfalls such as eating disorders and preoccupation with food and weight

Girls Circle Association (www.girlscircle.com)
Based in the United States, The Girls Circle Association seeks to promote girls' resiliency and connection by equipping group facilitators with skills and resources to hold Girls Circles in their communities. Emphasis is placed on offering programs that promote understanding, diversity and equal access to programming for girls. Their website offers information on their training materials, workshops and research on the significance of girls groups.

The North Star Girls Group Curriculum (Heidi Arizala, 2005) is a group curriculum designed to help girls gain a sense of competency and empowerment through education, support & connecting with others. The goal for the North Star Girls Group curriculum is to provide a safe and supportive environment in which group members gain support and specific knowledge from both their peers and group facilitators. The first North Star Girls Groups were piloted at a middle school in Bellevue, Washington in 1997. Since this time, North Star Girls Groups continue at elementary, middle and high schools, community mental health agencies, community centers, and summer recreational camps. (http://books.lulu.com/content/168732)

Resources For Facilitators


Commercial Sexual Exploitation: Innovative Ideas for Working with Children and Youth (March 2002). Justice Institute of BC.

Eating Disorders: Stories of Strength and Struggle. Collected works by members of the British Columbia Eating Disorders Association, Victoria B.C.


Raising a Daughter: Parents and the Awakening of a Healthy Woman. Jeanne Elium and Don Elium.


Resources For Youth


New Moon: The Magazine for Girls and Their Dreams. To order: p.o. box 3587 Duluth MN, 55803-3587, USA.


Redwire Aboriginal Youth Magazine. Found online at www.redwiremag.com

Reluctant Hero: Written for Girls by Girls - alternative teen mag - to order: 189 Lonsmount Drive, Toronto, Ontario - Canada M5P 2Y6


Girl-Positive Music

Kinnie Starr – tune-up
M.I.A.
Tegan and Sara
Lauryn Hill - The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill
Me'Shell Ndegeocello - Peace Beyond Passion
Salt - n- Pepa - A Salt with a Deadly Pepa
Madonna - The Immaculate Collection

Queen Latifah
Jewel - Pieces of You
Tori Amos - Little Earthquakes
Ain't Nuthin But A She Thing - various artists
Lit From Within - various artists
Veruca Salt
Women and Songs compilations
…and many more…
Appendix B: Worksheets and Activities

The following worksheets are intended to provide you with the building blocks for creating activities for your girls groups. Feel free to adapt these worksheets to suit the activities and needs of your own group.
APPENDIX B(a)

Safety Procedure - Anxiety Management Strategies

We have found it very useful in our groups to practice certain methods of remaining present and grounded while discussing some of the more difficult topics related girls’ experience.

This offers the Adolescent an opportunity to learn some new practical skills and tools for managing previously overwhelming responses. The following is a short exercise that is used both at the beginning of difficult topics and is also repeated throughout such exercises as guided writings and imagery that reconnect the adult survivor with the child at the time of the abuse.

The goal of this exercise is to create automatic responses of comfort and healthy self-soothing when certain phrases such as “remember your breathing and safety procedures?” are mentioned in the group. The adolescents will eventually be able to generalize this response as a result of frequent repetition to other surroundings and experiences in everyday life situations.

Safety Procedure

1. Sit in a comfortable position.
2. Try to uncross your legs, arms and hands.
3. Take some nice easy breaths as deeply and comfortably as you can.
4. Look at and/or feel your symbol/object of safety.
5. Continue to be aware of your breathing and where you are. You might want to feel your back resting against the chair and your feet firmly planted on the floor.
6. Look around you and realize that you are not alone and that others do believe you and can help support you in your experience.

Facilitator - this is helpful to do at the end of guided writing and visualization exercises.

Steps 1 - 4 - can be repeated throughout the guided imageries or writings or whenever the facilitator notices some particularly difficult reactions in survivors during group.
APPENDIX B(b)

Relaxation Exercise

Instructions given by facilitator

- Sit in a comfortable position
- Uncross legs, arms, hands
- Take some nice, easy breaths as deeply as possible or in any way you can comfortably breathe. And just allow yourself to adjust whenever you need to in any way that seems right.

There is really no right or wrong way to relax - just do whatever feels right for you. Some of you may want to keep your eyes open and look at something in the room, while others may feel their eyes becoming heavy and they may close all by themselves.

Just let yourself drift while listening to the sound of my voice outside, or while listening to the sound of your own breathing - inside. It is important to remember that you can centre yourself and give yourself comfort by being in touch with the rhythm of your own breath.

And you might want to let yourself wander to a place where you can feel some comfort and tranquillity and let yourself be reminded of all of the sights, colours, shapes and textures in that place. And what is the temperature there, and are there any sounds there that you can enjoy? The sounds of nature, or of a favourite piece of music? Perhaps you can sense the closeness of a beloved pet snuggling next to you - just allow yourself to be where ever you are, with a different sense of comfort - simply drifting for a moment or two of clock time all the time you need to feel some comfort and connection to self.

Facilitator Tips

- Read out the relaxation metaphor slowly, in a calm, soft, but audible, voice. Don't worry if some members seem to fidget or look around. It often takes several practice sessions for clients to feel ok doing this.
- Let group members know there is no right or wrong way to participate. If they are uncomfortable with the idea - just ask them to do whatever they need to do. In our experience, just being present while others participate is soothing and centering.
- This is a helpful exercise for use at the end of any session, particularly sessions in which some difficult material is discussed and experienced.
APPENDIX B(c)

Sample of Effects of Abuse, Neglect, Violence

- Nightmares - sleeplessness
- Fear of sleeping in own bed
- Temper-anger outbursts
- Loss of "self"
- Sleeping with someone else
- Isolation
- Learned helplessness
- Phobias
- Self abuse - mutilation
- Sadness
- Crying
- Inability to feel anger
- Paranoid
- No trust
- Self doubt
- Feeling out of control
- Loss of feeling for others
- Don't trust self
- Hide behind clothes - weight
APPENDIX B(d)

Mask Induction

As you are sitting there listening to the sound of my voice outside, wouldn't it be interesting to just allow your mind to wander as you are aware of the support against your back and under your feet, it's so nice to feel supported and comfortable as you sit there. Feeling free to make any adjustments that seem right for you at any time you are ready. And keeping your eyes open or closed, whatever you feel most comfortably doing, and you can focus on something in the room if you like or you can focus on the sound of my voice, knowing that you are not alone and that you can come back to the room whenever you need to. That's right. And you can listen to the sound of your own breath as it enters your body comfortably and slowly. That deep satisfying breath that nurtures you with each inhale and lets go of whatever you would like to let go of on every exhale, that's right, finding your own unique rhythm and pace. Accessing all of those strengths and resources that you have on an unconscious level that you may not have realized were there (pause).

Just allowing your mind to wander and wonder at all of that knowledge that you have within. All of those experiences that you can safely and comfortably access. Remembering only what you need to remember and letting go of the rest... (pause). I am reminded of a recent art exhibition I visited called "The Voice of the Mask", as I wandered through the gallery I was entranced by the beautifully constructed masks, noticing their texture and shape. Wondering at all of the brilliant colours, bright red, green, yellow, orange and the expressions on their faces, sadness, surprise, fear, shock, wisdom and timelessness. These masks were symbols of the individuals who had worn them, a culmination of their experience and unique persona. What a strange sensation to wear a mask. Once, at Halloween, I can remember wearing the mask of a cat and feeling quite detached from my usual self. There, and not there, seeing through my eyes and yet feeling as though I was someone else (pause). Visible but invisible (pause) present but not present (pause).

As you are sitting there hearing my voice outside and I'm wondering what it would be like for you to think about that face you present to the world on the outside, what does her persona look like as she presents herself to the outside world, what kind of expression does she have? (pause), how old is she? (pause) how does she look and seem to others? (pause). Remembering to breathe. I don't know when you might begin to notice something about that face that others see? And what about underneath the mask? How does she really feel? (pause). How old does she feel (pause) how does she sound to herself? (pause). And how does she feel underneath that mask she presents to the outside world? And what expression does she have on her face, what emotions? (pause 30 seconds). Remembering to breathe deeply and
only going as deep as you can comfortably go, that's right. Keeping your eyes open or closed and listening to my voice knowing you are not alone. Just allowing any images, or feelings or thoughts to float and drift through your mind. Just seeing, experiencing, feeling or hearing what ever is important right now and back then, that's right (pause). And as I was walking through that exhibition, I was struck by all those images and impressions triggered by those masks and I was struck by all the symbols those masks represented - symbols of transformation and change.... and you can take a moment of clock time, all the time you need and integrate whatever is important for you from this experience, bringing back some important information or letting go of anything you need to let go of... safely and comfortably... that's right. (pause) And when you are ready, gradually reorienting back to the room, breathing comfortably, feeling your feet on the floor, stretching and looking around you, noticing something or someone that catches your eye. Remembering to breathe at your own pace, easily that's right.
APPENDIX B(e)

“Connect”

C  Connection must be affirmed as a priority

O  Offer positive memories from the relationship’s past and new hopes for the future of the relationship

N  Name the disconnection

N  Need to apologize if you have hurt the other person

E  Embrace the differences

C  Call for a relational “time out” when needed

T  Talk to a third person together to get help

From Relational Practice In Action Manual, P. 39
APPENDIX B(f)

Outcomes of Connection and Disconnection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connection</th>
<th>Disconnection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased energy, zest</td>
<td>Decrease in energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity about self and others</td>
<td>Confusion regarding self and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More able to act and does act</td>
<td>Unable to act, immobilized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater sense of worth</td>
<td>Decrease in self worth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire for continued and more</td>
<td>Turning away from connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>connection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*From Relational Practice In Action Manual, Stone Centre.*
Five Good Things

Characteristics of growth fostering interactions:

Zest
Each person feels a greater sense of “zest” (vitality, energy)

Empowered Action
Each person feels more able to act and does act

Increased Self-Esteem
Each person has a more accurate picture of her/himself and the other person(s)

New Knowledge
Each person has a greater sense of worth

A Desire For More Connection
Each person feels more connected to the other person(s) and a greater motivation for connections with other people beyond those in the specific relationship

From Jean Baker Miller; Irene Stiver (1997)
APPENDIX B(h)

Cycles of Disconnection

Socio-cultural Context

Relational disconnections → Negative Social Esteem

Negative self image → Shame → Turn away from → Isolation

Inauthentic Interactions → Depressed and Angry Feelings

Drop in energy → Depressive spiral

Further disconnection

Feeling “there is no way out”

Condemned isolation

“I am the problem”

Eating Disorders ← Poor Self-Care

Burn Out and Workaholism

Drug and Alcohol Abuse

*From Relational Practice in Action Manual, Stone Centre.*
10 Things I Love About Me!

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.
APPENDIX B(j)

Let Me Introduce Myself....

1. The music that I like the best is:
2. The way that I dress could be described as:
3. I like to spend my free time:
4. My favorite food is:
5. The languages I speak are:
6. I am really good at:
7. My family is made up of:
8. The things I like about my culture/gender are:
9. The things I don’t like about my culture/gender are?
10. I have lived in Canada for:
11. I worry about:
12. Is there an adult in your life who you feel is your ally (ie. supports you)? If yes, how?
13. I feel most powerful when:
14. I feel safe to tell my secrets to ______ because:
15. A person I admire is ______________ because:
16. When I see myself, I see....................
17. The thing I like the best about myself is:
18. The thing I most want to change about myself is:
19. The thing I want most for myself:
20. I dream that one day, I will:

Girls Group Handout Adapted from Helping Teens Stop Violence, Creighton et al. Adapted by S. Manhas and N. Clark
APPENDIX B(k)

Grounding In Our Own Experiences (Part 1)

I REMEMBER WHEN I WAS A TEENAGER

This activity can be done by the facilitators and shared with the girls group, especially in conjunction with the “Let Me Introduce Myself” exercise.

1. The music that I liked best was:
2. The way that I dressed could be described as:
3. My experience of school could be described as:
4. My experience of friendships were:
5. The thing I remember best about being a teen was:
6. One of the worst things about being a teen was:
7. Being a teen in my family/culture meant:
8. I felt ____________ about my gender, because:
9. I would describe my relationships with the opposite sex as:
10. I would describe my relationships with the same sex as:
11. My experience of my sexuality was:
12. I felt safe to tell my secrets to _______________ because:
13. Was there an adult in your life who you felt was your ally (ie. supported you?)
14. If so, how did you know this person was your ally?
15. How would you describe your coping style as an adolescent?
16. Were there any particular tools that helped you (ie. Writing)?
17. The thing I liked best about myself was:
18. The thing I most wanted to change about myself was:
19. My most powerful moment as a teen was:
20. When I reflect back on my adolescence, I feel:
APPENDIX B(I)

Grounding In Our Own Experiences (Part 2)

This reflection can be done on your own or with your co-facilitators after completing the above questionnaire.

What was that experience like for you?

Remembering our teenage self often triggers emotions in us, given this, what are some of the ways that you could/do take care of yourself?

Why is it important to ground in our own experience?

How does your experience impact on your work today with parents?

What are the strengths you bring to your work because of your experiences?

What are the challenges?
APPENDIX B(m)

The Five Good Things: Imagery for Connection

...And you can take some nice easy breaths, making yourself as comfortable as possible. Listening to the sound of your own breath inside, and being in touch with your own natural rhythm. Nothing that you have to do or think about, just allowing yourself to simply be, comfortable, tranquil, feeling free to adjust at any time for more comfort.

It might be interesting to imagine yourself experiencing a different kind of connection. A sense of connection in which you feel in power with, and joined by others, and to yourself. Connected to your experience, senses, zest, and energy. A new sense of vitality in relation to yourself and to others. Outside, inside, out of isolation and into connection. Out of conflict and into connection.

Authentic on so many different levels, in so many ways. Hearing, feeling, seeing, sensing, experiencing in the moment, moving forward, toward growth. Affecting others, affecting self. Less hesitation, more courage, less shame, more self-respect, honour and spontaneity. Less fear and more self-worth. With a deep sense of self-appreciation for all that you are, do, and mean to others and to yourself.

It is nice to know that you can experience yourself in a different way, with a different perspective and with more empathy and compassion. You can be more empowered to act in the moment. To make changes that are right for you, with more confidence and clarity. Experiencing yourself and others in a different way. Comfortable in your own skin. Understanding and knowing yourself in a different way. Recognizing change and clarity.

Sharing ideas, experience and dreams. Expanding individual knowledge into collective experience, synergy of ideals, energy and vitality to create.

Validating your experience in relation to others, and in relation to yourself. Worthy, strong, and unique, less loneliness, less fearful, and less constrained. Interdependent, interconnected in community with, and connected to the collective unconscious. Connected to the healing energy of the earth. Grounded, rooted in your own experience, knowledge and resources, able to tap into the power and knowledge within and without.

Authentically you. Hopeful, and motivated toward authenticity and creative actions to change self and other in a mutually beneficial way. Even more creatively, even more powerfully and uniquely you.
And you can take a moment (all the time you need) to ponder, wander and wonder. To allow your mind to connect to any images, resources or symbols that are relevant to you now. Allowing anything to surface that is important to you and your present experience. Bringing back any information or realizations that can help you now and in the days, weeks, and months to come … and letting go of anything you would like to let go of. Coming back to the present with a deep breath and a deep sense of self-appreciation for all that you are and all that you do for yourself and others.
For one minute, close your eyes, listen to your self-talk, and write down what you hear. Use the key words below to guide you. Nothing is off limits or too weird!

MONEY:

DRUGS:

SEX:

THE FUTURE:

FRIENDS:

PARENTS:

Positive Self-Talk: Create a positive statement to answer any negative messages you wrote above. You can do this on the attached sheet. It may not sound real or believable at first, but if you practice giving yourself positive messages, you can change how you feel and react to uncomfortable situations and people. You can make great things happen for yourself.
APPENDIX B(o)

Elevator Music in Your Head (Part 2)

MONEY:

DRUGS:

SEX:

THE FUTURE:

FRIENDS:

PARENTS:

Positive Self-Talk: Create a positive statement to answer any negative messages you wrote above. You can do this on the attached sheet. It may not sound real or believable at first, but if you practice giving yourself positive messages, you can change how you feel and react to uncomfortable situations and people. You can make great things happen for yourself.

Adapted from Earl Hip 1992
Healthy Relationships

What exactly is a healthy relationship?

How can we create one?

How would you like to be treated in a relationship?

What skills/qualities do you think someone brings into a healthy relationship?

What about jealousy?

How do you know if you respect someone?

How do you know if someone respects you?
Girls with Girlpower...

- Can ask for what they want
- Are able to say NO
- Have a wide range of feelings
- Can express their feelings and opinions
- Constructively
- Have self-esteem in many areas, not just about how they look
- Have connections with others that are based upon honesty and being themselves

Adapted from Sandy Friedman
Appendix C: Skill Building for Facilitators

These information sheets are intended to provide facilitators with a deeper knowledge of the issues and tools they will need for running a girls group. They cover a range of issues and skills that we have developed over the years and hope to share with you and the girls you work with.
APPENDIX C(a)

Adult Allies

In our girls group discussions, we brainstormed what characteristics make an adult helpful or supportive.

We think a helpful adult would:

1. Be knowledgeable, with more experiences in life that they can share.
2. Share about the choices they have made in life and what happened
3. Be flexible
4. Be both a child and an adult, be both playful and serious
5. Have a good relationship with children and youth
6. Have good relationship building skills
7. Not criticize
8. Be a good listener
9. Be gentle and not lose their temper
10. Not treat us like children, but instead respect us.
11. Be open-minded
12. Give us ideas and speak their mind
13. Not be biased or show favoritism towards their own cultural group
14. Know how to have fun
15. Be fair and equal

*John Oliver Girls' Group, Facilitated by N. Clark and S. Manhas, May 2000.*
APPENDIX C(b)

Steps to Support Clients in Moving from Survival to Liberation

1. Name – barriers
   - Power/non-power
   - Negative distortions in media etc.

2. Discuss – who is served by these barriers, powers, etc.
   - Impact on their lives
   - How it functions to keep them silent/isolated

3. Create a Relationship which provided the space for alternative stories
   - Look for and embrace affirming positive images and behaviour

BE AN ALLIE!

1. Be aware of how power and oppression have impacted us in our lives.

2. Become aware of how power and oppression have impacted for our client.

3. Be willing to name and discuss power differences and to create connections across these differences.

4. Be willing to name and discuss connections in any experience of oppression.

5. Tell the truth about power and abuse of power in our society.

6. Provide the space for your clients to tell you their experiences and their knowing.

7. Listen and don’t push – honour each client’s pace.

8. Be willing to share power where you can.


10. Celebrate and name their successes, positive choices and positive resistance.
Group Work with Culturally Diverse Girls

Strategies for the Group Leader

Group leaders can address issues of race, colour, ethnicity and class as a way of facilitating the group process and enhancing bicultural development of the group members.

1. Confront the issue. It is very important to name and discuss issues related to race, colour, ethnicity, class, gender or other variables of oppression when group dynamics threaten to replicate day to day experiences of oppression.

2. Go back to the group rules. It is important to explore the nature of the specific issues (example – racial slur). Exploration is necessary in order to break down the walls created by racial subgroup isolation and ethnic division.

3. Discuss stereotypes at all levels, including personal, familial, community, culture and society. It is important to point out how specific comments can become generalizations about an entire population (example – stereotyping the machismo of men). The group can explore how such messages are learned, particularly examining media images.

4. Point out commonalities. It is useful to explore the shared experience of adolescence as well as the shared necessity in being bicultural. The group can share their experiences in grappling with two sets of values.

5. Explore the meaning of words and language. The group can explore the meanings linked to statements. For example, exploring and naming which groups are linked with “being on welfare” or “aggressive”.

6. Recognize and acknowledge your own discomforts about race, colour, ethnicity and class issues. As group leaders, there are many traps that we can fall into. For example, emotional identification with one group may lead to overcompensation for another. An on-going commitment to self-reflection and analysis is critical.

Adolescent girls need sensitive and self-aware group leaders who can relate in a warm and genuine way. The leader can act as a sounding board, information giver, educator, mediator, safety net, and role model. The challenge is to create an environment that is safe and accepting and helps adolescents to acquire enough confidence and understanding to be capable to move within/between among the cultures they choose.

APPENDIX C(d)

Key questions to keep in mind in our relationship with girls

- What is her relationship with her self like? Self-esteem? Her body?
- Who are the important people in her life?
- What are her ways of expressing herself? Dealing with stress? Protective factors? Risk factors here?
- How much empathy does she have for her self? for others?
- How authentic does she feel in relationship with you? With others?
- How able is she to engage in constructive conflict?
- How resilient is she? How does she respond to stress? Adversity?
- If a disconnection happens in a relationship can she move back into relationship and work on this?
- Support systems? Who does she turn to? Tell things to?
- Resources of spirituality? Culture? Sense of belonging to something larger?

Adapted from Stone Centre Conference notes.
APPENDIX C(e)

Reframing Resistance

The response to the crisis of adolescence for many girls often involves one of two solutions:

- **Psychological Dissociation** - respond by devaluing self and feelings, silencing of the self!
  
  OR
  
- **Resistance For Survival** - break free of the institutions/relationships that are devaluing them

*Both are costly solutions to the girl.*

For a girl to speak about her life and have it heard in the context of a society which requires her to silence her authentic feelings and thoughts is an act of resistance for both the speaker and the listener.

Resistance is “a process in which girls consciously or unconsciously resist psychological and relational disconnection that can impede development and threaten their psychological health” (Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995, pg. 18)

When we listen to girls we need to listen with ears attuned to the ways they have resisted barriers and oppressions. It is useful to conceptualize resistance as having two forms:

**Resistance for Survival:**

- Meets the teens needs on a short-term basis
- Attempts to survive in an environment/society that oppresses them
- Quick fixes (ie. Drop out of school)
- Short-term gains but long-term consequences
- Doesn’t challenge the source of the problem (ie. Power imbalances etc.)
- A form of dissociation which involves “loss to the conscious self of knowledge or feelings that have become dangerous to know and feel” (Taylor et al. Pg. 26)
Resistance for Liberation:

- “Resistance in which girls… are encouraged to acknowledge the problems of, and to demand change in, an environment that oppresses them” (Gilligan et al.)
- Empowering
- Long-term gains which address the source of the girls oppression

Supporting The Move To Resistance For Liberation:

1. Name the quick fix “resistance for survival” and the meaning behind it
2. Learn to identify and name negative distortions that created it (ie. Power imbalances, oppression etc.)
3. Understand where they come from and who they benefit
4. Look for and embrace positive and affirming images

*Created by N. Clark & L. Redenbach*
APPENDIX C(f)

On Speaking

*Girls speak to us:*

- Through their words
  - Direct
  - Indirect

- Through their actions/behaviours
  - Peer relationships
  - Suicidality
  - Self-harm
  - Rejection of adults
  - Consideration of others
  - Shoplifting

- Through their music/writing/art
  - Journals
  - Poetry
  - Favourite music
  - Collage

- Through their bodies
  - Dress
  - Eating disorders/dieting
  - Body-image
  - Dance

- In their silence

*Handout created by N. Clark & L. Redenbach*
APPENDIX C(g)

On Listening

Young women are often wanting to talk, but they require our patience in allowing a relationship built on trust, respect, and honesty to develop… if there is a history of abuse and the profound silencing that goes with it, this process will take longer… trust takes time!

As listeners we can foster healthy resistance by:

- Using our senses
  - Sight
  - Hearing
  - Intuition
- Listening to their words / their language that they speak in
- Listening to their silences
  - What they start to say but didn’t, to what they implied or to their unspoken words
- Be open to listening to their music, writing, are and what they are expressing through it
- Viewing their actions and behaviours as communication
- Listening to what their bodies are telling us
- Listening to what they say about their relationships at all levels
  - Friends
  - Family
  - Society
  - Self

Handout created by N. Clark & L. Redenbach
APPENDIX C(i)

Key Principles of Practice

1. **Youth Participation:** Recognizing and nurturing the strengths, interests and abilities of young people through providing opportunities for youth to become involved in decisions that affect them at individual and systemic levels.
   
   Examples:
   - Youth-driven programming
   - Activities determined by the youth participants
   - Youth mentorship and leadership opportunities

2. **Collective Responsibility:** Action to resolve the problems facing youth are the responsibility of all members of society. We must work with one another, through partnerships and mutual support, in addressing issues such as sexual exploitation, violence, sexism, racism and so on.
   
   Examples:
   - Social justice approach
   - Working in alliance with diverse youth programs
   - Removal of barriers to full participation in society faced by youth

3. **Equity of access to services:** Efforts to maximize the accessibility of services and assure their relevance to all young people. Additionally, services that address barriers that hinder or prevent certain children or youth from accessing help.
   
   Examples:
   - Outreach programs that serve youth in their own environments
   - Anti-harassment, anti-discrimination policies and training
   - Flexible services that change with the needs of youth

4. **Culturally Specific programming:** Programs that recognize the impact of marginalization and discrimination, and builds in a positive manner on the diversity found among young people and their families.
   
   Examples:
   - Gender-specific programs and spaces
   - Activities that reflect youth subculture

5. **Focus on building relationships:** An emphasis in services that aims to build relationships between youth and their peers, counselors and other support people in order to create change in their lives.
   
   Examples:
   - Space for youth to create community among themselves
   - Opportunity to develop long-term relationships

*Adapted from Commercial Sexual Exploitation: Innovative Ideas for Working with Children and Youth (March 2002). Justice Institute of BC*
APPENDIX C(j)

Traumatic Responses in Children and Adolescents

Notes

Normative Dissociation

- Dissociative experience and behaviours occur along a continuum. It is therefore, sometimes difficult to tell if an adolescent or child has crossed the line into pathology.
- Some dissociative behaviours in children/adolescents would be considered pathological in adults (i.e., make believe friend ok for a child strange for an adult)
- In assessing, we must take level of development into account. There is usually some level of arrested development – can ask yourself “How old is the individual emotionally?” “How old was individual at time of trauma, assault, abuse?”
- Trance like states, assuming other identities – is normal in childhood and adolescence, it is part of the process of developing a sense of self and perspective – creation and integration of different aspects of self is part of a normal developmental process

Pathological Dissociation

- Complex psychophysiological process including:
  - Memory impairment
  - Identity disturbance (DID)
  - Dissociative process symptoms including hallucinations,
- Amnesia and state dependent memory in children/adolescents includes:
  - Forgetfulness
  - Erratic variation of skills, knowledge, habits and preferences
  - Severe black-outs, coming to in the middle of something
- DID as exhibited by alter personalities may be named and/or patterned after superheroes, or animals or cartoon or fictional characters.

Psychobiology and Traumatic Responses in Children
Intense moment to moment perceptual, kinesthetic and somatic experiences are the hallmark of traumatic responses
- Child/adolescent tries to appraise external and internal threats
- Child/adolescent is challenged by the intensity and duration of the physiological arousal, affective responses and psychodynamic Threats
- When appraising external threat, infants and young toddlers rely on social referencing to attachment figures to respond to situations of uncertainty, safety and risk
- Adolescents rely more on their own appraisals of threat and motivation
- Because of the nature and intensity of children’s affiliative needs and desires, they are particularly Vulnerable to PTSD from witnessing threat or harm to a parent or family member
- The younger the child, the more recollection is confined to a single image, sound or smell usually representing the action most associated by the child with immediate threat or injury
- Adolescents have more occurrence of full flashbacks than younger children
- Recently developed achievements and milestones are particularly vulnerable to disruption
- Impairment in attention or learning may be more Profound for a child who is just learning to read
- A child/adolescent’s interpretation of his/her own behaviour during and after a trauma may profoundly transform perceptions of self-efficacy and self-concept
- Concept of child/adolescent as “bad” may interfere with normal moral development
- Adolescents may experience disruption of integrating past, present and future expectations into a positive sense of identity
- Fear in primary relationships in infants and toddlers can lead to disorganized attachment
- PTSD may deter mid-adolescents from seeking council of parents at critical junctures of decision making and risk taking
- Adolescents may experience an abrupt shift in interpersonal attachments. This may lead to heightened attachment in existing relationships (phobic reactions) or Increased identification with peer group as a protective shield or Extreme isolation or ostracism and may move toward dangerous, risky relationships and behaviours without intervention.
Appendix D: Case Study – Sample Girls Group

SAMPLE GIRLS GROUP

It’s A Girl Thang: An Innovative Group for Girls

The following material was developed by Natalie Clark and her co-facilitators during the years that they ran It’s a Girl Thang, a girls group at the Edmonds Youth Resource Centre. This information is intended to give you an idea of the scope of issues and activities that can be covered in a girls group, and some of the challenges you might encounter.

Rationale/Purpose:
The girls group, “It’s a Girl Thang”, which operated out of the Edmonds Youth Resource Centre is an innovative programming model developed by Natalie Clark, which provides marginalized and at-risk adolescent females with a space to explore a wide range of issues that impact their daily lives. The group provides adolescent girls with the opportunity to explore their experiences of abuse, sexual exploitation, body image, and other violence and the issues related to it that they are struggling with on a daily basis, in a safe and non-threatening environment. Most importantly, the group provides adolescent girls who are in need of services and yet often experience the most barriers to accessing community services (ie. poverty, homelessness, oppression, non-school attendance).

History/Funding:
The group was first funded as a pilot project through the Vancouver Sun Children’s Fund, and has since operated for 10 years without sustained core funding.

Staffing:
The group is co-facilitated by two women, a Trauma Counselor and the Youth Worker provided through the Edmonds Youth Resource Centre. There has been significant turnover in the youth worker position, but the counselor has remained the same since the groups’ inception, helping with formation of long-term relationships. Given the nature of staffing issues and turn over in youth worker positions, it is important that the group is prepared to address issues of endings and transition to new co-facilitators. In addition, adult women volunteers, students, and mentors from the community are involved and key in the programming success.
Development of the Group:
Go to the Girls. From the beginning ownership of the group and its development was by the girls for the girls. The designed the format, the title, posters, brochures, and generate the topics for each year. Host a focus group or pizza meeting to discuss their needs and ways to meet these group needs. Share power wherever possible.

Number of Girls who Attend:
Patience… go slowly. Initially the group had a few core girls who been part of the planning/implementation group. However, as times there would be only 1 girl at the group and two or three adult facilitators. Over time the group expanded and the number of girls attending increased at peak times to include 25-30 girls for some activities, and 10-15 core girls.

Structure:
Drop-in group, weekly, from 5-6:30 (with time built in after for individual support and counseling after each group). The group is an open group which is key given the desire to engage marginalized girls who often have experienced trauma. This allows girls the ability to assess their own triggers and practice self-care through engaging and disengaging in the group process. Girls are required to remain present and in circle during check-in, but once complete they can come and go as they wish. Its important to alternate fun relationship building activities with issue based sessions.

Role of the Facilitators:
Establish and maintain safety and containment for the group through establishment of confidentiality and group rules. Facilitators act as resources to the girls, who create the agenda, and the adults assist with finding speakers, and providing supplies for activities, in addition to food. Appropriate use of self-disclosure and modeling is inherent in the model with the goal of further facilitating the process of self exploration and establishing relationships with others.

Challenges:
Some of the challenges included dealing with the issue of boys wanting to interrupt the group and/or the relationship issues between girls and their boyfriends who often felt threatened by the group. In addition, the challenge between being in relationship with the girls and engaging in “truth telling”, while setting boundaries regarding self-disclosure in response to the never-ending quest by the girls to know more. Another key challenge is given the impact of trauma on the psychobiology of many of the girls, this often manifested in high energy, emotional outbursts at times and relational disconnections between girls. Important here to support the girls in identifying underlying feelings and communicating directly with each other. Finally, the importance for the adult facilitators to release expectations of what group will look like, including check-in, and instead follow the girls lead and needs.
SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR GIRLS

A Guide for girls:

Important Questions when starting your own girls group

• Why? Is there a need?
• Who should participate?
• What do you need?
• Who can help you? (adult allies)
• Where and when can this happen?
• How do you get started?
• What do you want it to look like (how long, title of group, open or closed?)
• What kinds of things do you want to talk about?
• What kinds of things do you want to do?
SAMPLE SCHEDULES

Girls Group Schedule: June 1999

- June 1<sup>st</sup>  CHECK IN/PLANNING FOR SUMMER
- June 8<sup>th</sup>  MOVIE
- June 15<sup>th</sup>  RAIN’S VISIT/CHECK-IN/SLURPEE WALK
- June 22<sup>nd</sup>  WHAT MAKES BOY’S TICK (US OFF) ?
- June 30<sup>th</sup>  WIND UP PARTY

JULY - special outing…
AUGUST - Girl's Up All Night…

Girls Group Schedule: Spring/Summer 2001

- April 3<sup>rd</sup>  Spring Fling
- April 10<sup>th</sup>  Pace guest speaker/ sexual exploitation
- April 17<sup>th</sup>  Centre closed (Easter)
- April 24<sup>th</sup>  Dealing with Stress & Anxiety – guest – Cheryl - visualizations
- May 1<sup>st</sup>  Clothing exchange
- May 8<sup>th</sup>  Self-Defense moves – guest Laurie
- May 15<sup>th</sup>  Feeling Good About Self / Affirmations
- May 22<sup>nd</sup>  Centre Closed
- May 29<sup>th</sup>  Write your Heart Out
- June 5<sup>th</sup>  Out trip (surprise weather permitting)
- June 12<sup>th</sup>  Gym - basketball
- June 19<sup>th</sup>  Last girls group – self-defense for the summer
- July 31<sup>st</sup>  Summer outing
- August  no group – Girls groups starts again September 11<sup>th</sup>


- January 8<sup>th</sup>  Check-in/planning
- January 15<sup>th</sup>  Movie
- January 22<sup>nd</sup>  Depression
- January 29<sup>th</sup>  Mosaic Art with Donna
- February 5<sup>th</sup>  Loving Self
- February 12<sup>th</sup>  Candlemaking
• February 19th  Chillout Session
• February 26th  Skating
• March 5th  Art Therapy – clay
• March 12th  Writing, Spoken word
• March 19th  Spring Equinox – planting/growth
• March 26th  Swimming
• April 2nd  no group
• April 9th  Odyssey
• Natalie away rest of April
• April 16th  Sex and the City
• April 23rd  Art with Donna
• April 30th
• May 7th
• May 14th
• May 21st  no group holiday
• May 28th
• June 4th
• June 11th
• June 18th  Last Girls Group
• Girls group will start again on September 10th!!!!
SAMPLE PLANNING NOTES AND BRIEF SESSION OUTLINES

Bi-Racial Girls Group Planning, 2000

1. Beginning of March - Promotions
   « Posters in hallways
   « Give handout packages to counselors

2. March 27th - Information Drop-in Session
   « Food / snacks
   « Handout group information and consent forms
   « Sign up sheet

3. April 3rd - Session #1 - Introductions
   « What is a girls group?
   « Who are we?
   « Why are we doing this? / Context
   « Circle introductions
   « Establish safety and confidentiality / self disclosure
   « Feedback mechanisms
   « Draw on girls’ ideas for the group / share our ideas
   « Ask them to bring something to share for next time / music
   « Concept of check ins / outs

4. April 10th - Session #2 - Self Identity
   « Starting with You
   « Work on questionnaires individually; share ideas in pairs; share with larger group
   « Ask if we can collect the questionnaires
   « Share what they have brought / ask them to bring in music
   « Collage building; ask to present the multiple views of themselves (ex. self, family, school, friends, media, etc.); share with larger group (permission to photograph the collages)
   « On-going resource table (books, articles, etc.); encourage girls to bring in resources as well

5. April 17th - Session #3 - Culture / Race
   « Concept of “being caught between worlds”
   « Explore concepts of “conflict” and “harmony” using a variety of tools, including role plays, journal writing, flipchart (pros / cons of being bicultural)
   « Introduce media literacy - ask girls to collect media information
6. May 1st - Session #4 - Media Literacy
   « Bring in our resources - magazines, music, etc.
   « Begin with circle, share spring break experiences and what they chose to collect
     from the media
   « Dialogue about media; biases, whose faces are missing, etc.

7. May 8th - Session #5 - Allies
   « Dialogue about past and present supports - what has worked, what has not
   « Brainstorm for future - what are important characteristics of an adult helper?

8. May 15th - Session #6 - Celebration
   « Reflect on what we have been doing: Is a group a useful support to bicultural
     girls?
   « Looking forward to what can happen next: workshop, recommendations to the
     school, conference, FREDA’s Girl Child Project, continued group
   « Celebrate with yummy snacks, good music and conversation
SAMPLE GOALS, OUTCOMES AND EVALUATIVE TOOLS

When your group is applying for funding, you will need to set out clear goals, intended outcomes and measurements of evaluation for potential funders. Here is a sample of the goals set out by the *It's a Girl Thang* group. Please feel free to use these as a model in your own funding applications and evaluations.

1. To provide a safe place for young women to explore adolescent female issues including strengths and skills, as well as a place to name and externalize their issues of victimization, risk of street involvement and sexual exploitation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Weekly group sessions will begin with a “check in” (ie., thoughts, feelings, issues)</td>
<td>- Improving self esteem of participants</td>
<td>- # of participants demonstrating self esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sessions will encourage creative expression (ie., art, poetry, etc.)</td>
<td>- Increased knowledge regarding issues affecting young women</td>
<td>- # of participants showing increased knowledge regarding issues affecting young women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Presentations and activities led by guest speakers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. To provide participants with increased coping skills regarding the issues they face as young women and a shift from harm to self and other towards resistance for liberation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Sessions will encourage creative expression (ie., art, poetry, etc.)</td>
<td>- Time: 12 weekly sessions with participants at 1.5 hours per session</td>
<td>- # of participants demonstrating improved coping skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sessions will focus on issues affecting young women, especially those identified by the group.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Presentations and activities led by guest speakers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
3. To encourage participants to develop healthy relationships with self, peers, family and their community

- Sessions will facilitate connections with outside resources
- Sessions will encourage the development of relationships with participants and their peer group, family, & women in their community who are role models
- Presentations and activities led by guest speakers

- # of participants demonstrating improved perceptions of self
- # of participants demonstrating improved relationships with their peers
- # of participants indicating improved relationships with family
- # of participants who establish relationships with community (eg., volunteering their time in the community)
ASSESSMENT TOOL

A snapshot of me now:

1. I would describe myself as:
   « I would describe my self-esteem as ________________________ because:

2. I feel __________________________ about being female because:

3. Rate your relationships on a scale of 1-10 (1 being not very connected/unhealthy communication and 10 being very healthy and connected).
   « Relationship with yourself
   « Relationship with family
   « Relationship with friends
   « Relationship with community (school, et cetera):
   « Dating relationships:

4. The things that I worry about:

5. Rate your daily stress (1 very little stress – 10 very stressed)

6. Coping mechanisms – things I currently do when I am stressed.
   « Things that help me or others:
   « Things that hurt me or others:

7. 1 hope I have for this group:
We invite you to participate in a GIRLS’ GROUP
For ethnically diverse girls
At John Oliver.

What is a girls’ group?
Space and time to talk about issues that are important to you.

When: Mondays, March 27th to May 8th
Time: After school, 3:15 to 5:15
Where: Room 210

The girls’ group will be facilitated by Sonia Manhas and Natalie Clark

See you there!

For more information please call Sonia at xxx or contact the Counseling Centre at John Oliver.
Sample Poster #2

Eating disorders...Mask Making...Clay Design...Sexuality...
Safer Sex...Question & Answer...Movies

‘GIRL THANG’
On Tuesdays
from 5:00 to 6:30
At the Edmonds Youth
Resource Centre
Come learn about topics
of interest to you
Or just come join
everyone and hang out!

Birth Control...Safe Hang Out...Artwork...Career Nights...
AIDS...Self-Defense...Guest Speakers...
Email from a Girl – The relationship grows

hey natalie!

I was just reading the book you lent me real girl real world and I found this poem and I think it's really good.

You might have read it before.

unplugged

the scalding look into her eyes
“you should wear feminine shoes, you look like a truck driver”
“let boys win or they wont like you”
“suck in your tummy” made part of me die
pushed a tough straw into my throat

that cut in her voice
“why don't you spend more time on your hair”
“don't eat too much on a date”
goes in deep. I'm not included
in her world, not quite a real girl
the clog in my throat grows more dense
its hard to speak

for a time I manage to take my turn
waiting for boys to call, pretending to lose
to their skills, having all the questions -
“what do you think” “what do you like”
but no answers

a moment comes I don't recognize
myself in the mirror
I wonder again and again “what's wrong with me?”

until I finally meet others
who look beyond the mask and ask what I think
I pull a bamboo branch out of my stomach
through my throat that's been clogging me up

I say I am real, I'm not just a part
those shoes she urged make me wobble
and no one can know me
the words pour out and pull people i love around
make me strong and whole.

talk to you later

take care
APPENDIX E – FREDA Statistics

The FREDA Centre
for Research on Violence
against Women and Children

VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS:
STATISTICAL HIGHLIGHTS

• 54% of girls under age 16 have experienced some form of unwanted sexual attention; 24% have experienced rape or coercive sex; 17% have experienced incest (Holmes & Silverman 1992; Russell 1996)

• Girls are two to three times more likely to experience sexual abuse than boys (Johnston & Saenz 1997)

• Canadian statistics on child sexual abuse reveal that 64% of all reported sexual assaults are against children; 33% of those assaults occur at the hands of family members, half of whom are parents, with 97% of the perpetrators being male (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics 1994)

• In a survey of 3 major Canadian hospitals: 75% of children admitted for sexual assault were female, as were 48% of children admitted for physical abuse (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics 1994)

• The rate of sexual abuse for girls with disabilities is quadruple that of the national average (Razack 1994)

• A Toronto study of runaways found that 86% of the girls and 50% of the boys had experienced sexual abuse (Welsh et al. 1995)

• Canadian girls are victims in 84% of reported cases of sexual abuse, in 60% of reported cases of physical abuse, and in 52% of reported cases of neglect (Thomlinson, Stephens, Cunes, and Grinnel 1991)

• 35% to 50% of young adults are involved in some level of physical abuse of their partners (Danielson et al. 1998)

• Research indicates that physically abused girls are more likely to develop eating disorders (Hernandez 1995)

• 61% of girls with eating disorders have reported sexual abuse; 85% have reported physical abuse (Miller 1996)

• 53% of women with disabilities from birth have been raped, abused, or assaulted (Lynn & O’Neill 1995:278)
• The Ontario Native Women's study on violence against women in Aboriginal communities reports that 80% of women and 40% of children are abused and assaulted (Lynn & O'Neill 1995)
• Adolescent wives (aged 15 to 19) are murdered three times more frequently than adult wives (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics 1994)
• Dating violence and sexual assault have been linked to low self-esteem and eating disorders in young women (National Forum on Health 1997)
• 38% of 13-year-old girls and 48% of 15-year-old girls believe they are overweight (King, Wold, Tudor-Smith & Harel 1996)
• Although boys are more likely to commit suicide, girls attempt suicide 4 to 5 times more frequently; Aboriginal girls are 8 times more likely to commit suicide (Debold 1995)
• The suicide rate for adolescent Aboriginal girls is 8 times the national average of non-Aboriginal adolescent girls (National Forum on Health 1997)
• The mortality rate in Canada for girls and women in prostitution is 40 times the national average (Davis 1994)

The FREDA Centre for Research on Violence against Women and Children can be found on the Internet at www.harbour.sfu.ca/freda