

GIRLS CIRCLE: PROMOTING RESILIENCY IN GIRLS THROUGH GENDER RESPONSIVE GROUPS ¹

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Session Overview

This practice-focused two-hour workshop presents the research-based Girls Circle model, a female responsive, structured support groups for girls, ages 9–18, and provides participants with the foundational guidelines for implementing this successful approach in schools, community settings, and intervention programs. Because girls face unique gender-specific, social-cultural, developmental challenges through early adolescent and teen years, Girls Circle is an effective strategy for all girls at all levels of risk and protective factors. Many girls encounter gender-relevant trauma that increases their risk factors. The Girls Circle model recognizes trauma as a path to high risk behaviors. The Girls Circle model is rated a “promising approach” with the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention. It recognizes girls’ capacities for safe and healthy development when relationships with peers and adults are consistent, secure, available, and safe. Promising studies show significant decreases in girls’ alcohol use and self-harming behaviors and increases in school bonding² self-efficacy, perceived body image, and social connection^{3,4,5}. The model is being applied nationwide in all areas of prevention and intervention programs in education, community, and juvenile justice settings.

“After years of struggling to squeeze girls into programs designed for boys, some agencies that work with girls are seeking solutions that are gender-specific. This does not mean giving girls the same programs as boys. . . . Instead, the most effective programs are rooted in the experience of girls and incorporate an understanding of female development. Such programs foster positive gender identity development. Gender-specific programs recognize the risk factors most likely to impact the targeted gender group and the protective factors that can build resiliency and prevent delinquency “ (Source: http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/pubs/principles/ch2_6.html).

¹ A report on the research results of the national evaluation of Girls Circle is included as a bonus in the conference Proceedings. See *Girls Circle National Research Project: Evaluation Results: Year One*, by Jessica Roa, Angela Irvine, and Karina Cervantez of Ceres Policy Research.

² Irvine, A., & Roa, J., (2007). *Girls Circle National Research Project*. In press.

³ Steese, S., Dollette, M et al. (2006). Understanding Girls’ Circle as an intervention on perceived social support, body image, self-efficacy, locus of control, and self-esteem. *Adolescence*, 41(161), Spring 2006, pp. 57-74.

⁴ Rough, J., & Matthews, G. (2005). *Understanding the intervention of Girls Circle on friendship quality and self-efficacy: A replication and extension*. Unpublished manuscript, Dominican University of California, San Rafael.

⁵ Irvine, A., (2005). *Girls Circle: Summary of outcomes for girls in the juvenile justice system*.

Workshop objectives include presentation of the relational-cultural theory and resiliency practices, the six-step circle format, utilizing a strengths-based approach, recommendations for implementation, and current research findings. Workshop participants may represent elementary, middle, secondary and alternative school administrators, counselors, psychologists, and service providers in community organizations in school, after school, community, and juvenile justice settings.

Through lecture, group interaction, and discussion, participants will gain knowledge of the Girls Circle model, curricula, trainings, and implementation strategies to effectively impact girls' safety and well being.