

Executive Board Adoption Date: June 8, 1999

GENDER-SPECIFIC PROGRAMMING IN JUVENILE DETENTION AND CORRECTIONS FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS

STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE:

Historically, the relatively small number of girls in the juvenile justice system has resulted in that female population being overlooked or inappropriately served. Juvenile justice programs for females have generally attempted to replicate services available to their male counterparts in both design and method of service delivery. Additionally, sex-role stereotyping has impacted decision-making at all levels, from public policy to individual treatment. Although juvenile female arrests have increased at a proportionately higher rate, juvenile crime is still a predominantly male problem. However, researchers and practitioners now recognize that programs designed to address the needs of the majority male offender are ineffective and inadequate in meeting the unique needs of the female population.

NATURE OF THE ISSUES:

- Gender-specific programs should acknowledge the female perspective, provide positive female role models, empower girls and women to reach full potential.
- Gender-specific programs should promote philosophies and policies that work to change attitudes and stereotypes that limit young women from reaching their full potential.
- Programs for girls must offer equivalent, but not the same, opportunities as those offered to programs for male offenders.
- Gender-specific programs should provide physical space which is physically and emotionally safe from male influence, removed from those who depend on them, removed from the attention of adolescent males, and in which girls are free to develop a sense of self and self-esteem.
- Data indicates that most crimes committed by girls, even violent ones, are relationally-based.
- Girls need programs that potentiate relationships with other women.
- Successful programs for boys concentrate on rules and offer the means to advance within a structured environment while successful programs for girls concentrate on relationships and offer the means to flourish while keeping their relationships intact.
- Gender bias in the classroom and sexual harassment in schools have been well documented by research so gender sensitivity in educators is critical to an effective program for girls. The school curriculum must include experiences of women and girls, and boys must see women reflected in the materials they study.
- Girls in the juvenile justice system have experienced life traumas, physical, emotional and sexual abuse and victimization which impact their self-esteem and ability to trust.
- Girls have unique health and medical needs which need to be addressed through specialized services.
- Troubled girls are more likely to express emotions inwardly in self-destructive ways while troubled boys are more likely to act out through aggression towards other people or property.
- Gender-specific programs should provide opportunities for fitness and sports in a non-competitive, success-oriented environment.
- Programs for girls must consider racial, cultural and ethnic differences as well as gender differences.
- Programs for girls must consider issues of sexuality, pregnancy, and parenting.

POSITION STATEMENT:

The National Juvenile Detention Association (NJDA) advocates the development and implementation of programs for female offenders which embrace the elements necessary to meet the unique needs of girls in the juvenile justice system. Those programs should be designed to emphasize the importance of relationships to young women, a physical and emotionally safe environment and positive female role models. Staff working in juvenile facilities and programs should receive specialized training regarding the unique needs, issues and perspectives of the female population in order to enhance their ability to effectively address both male and female youth in their care. Juvenile justice programs for girls must be comprehensive, integrated and sustained over time.
