

# Girl Connection

For those who serve adolescent females

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Iowa Task Force for Young Women



## Intergenerational Crime

Those who serve young women at risk often find themselves asking, "How can I get people to care about these young women?" The assumption being that if people care, they will put forth more effort toward making a difference in the lives of young women. So, in a time when resources are pushed to the limit and systems are stretched to the breaking point, this question takes on an ever-increasing sense of urgency.

It is normal to focus limited resources in areas that seem most pressing. In the justice system, with public safety a priority, this often means that young women's needs are placed on the back burner. Why? Because young female offenders are generally nonviolent and they are a much smaller portion of the juvenile justice system than males.

Unfortunately, the diminishing emphasis on young women, though perceived by some as a necessary evil, is shortsighted. Forget, for a moment, that the needs of female offenders are inherently as important as the needs of male offenders already and consider that the young women in the juvenile justice system today are the next generation of mothers who will have both sons and daughters in the justice system.

Though not a foregone conclusion for every young woman in the justice system, it is a reality that a family history of incarceration is a contributory factor in future criminal behavior. Children with a mother, father or older sibling who has been or is involved in the adult corrections or juvenile justice system are more likely to be involved in them as well.

Witnessing behavior, or social learning, leads to children mimicking that same behavior. In families where crime and incarceration exist, this means criminal behavior. The old adage, "Do as I say, not as I do" is truly erroneous and in this case, potentially life altering.

Young female offenders have an opportunity not only to change their own path but to break the cycle for future generations of their children and grandchildren. This argument may not hold much water for the adolescent offender herself, as teenagers are developmentally predisposed toward indifference about long-term consequences of their actions, but it can be an effective assertion when it comes to adults.

This is particularly true when an allocation of resources is involved. Those who decide what resources will go where may or may not care about the need of female offenders, but what they do care about is making the best decision possible about where those resources go. For those of us who advocate on behalf of adolescent female offenders, this means showing those decision makers that an investment in these young women can make a difference now and for generations to come.

### New Year Activity

Instead of a list of resolutions, try this!

1. Have them sit comfortably and close their eyes
2. Have them focus on each deep breath they take
3. Ask them to picture their best, happiest life as if it is already there
4. Ask them to feel how wonderful it is and not worry about the "how to" of getting there

They are silently sending the message out to the world that this is what they expect to receive and in the meantime, they get to experience all the positive feelings that go along with the imagining! They can repeat this activity themselves whenever they like on their own as a kind of relaxing

In its ongoing effort to facilitate a fundamental change in the juvenile justice system that enhances the understanding and utilization of innovative gender-responsive approaches in all programs and services, particularly those that serve the adolescent female population of Iowa's juvenile justice system, the Iowa Task Force for Young Women (ITFYW) presents its newest publication, "Female Responsive Protocol for Adolescent Offenders."

This guide can be used as both a tool to begin providing female responsive services as well as to examine existing female responsive services for strengths and weaknesses.

It can be found on the ITFYW website under "Task Force publications".  
[www.women.iowa.gov/girls](http://www.women.iowa.gov/girls)

As always, the Iowa Task Force for Young Women is available to provide training/technical assistance not only with program assessment but with any issue related to young women involved in or at risk for involvement in the juvenile justice system.

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## The Girl Connection

newsletter is provided as a service of the Iowa Task Force for Young Women.

For back issues of *The Girl Connection*, more information about the Iowa Task Force for Young Women, or if you are willing to receive future issues via e-mail to save mailing costs, please contact us:

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