

Healthy Transitions for Girls

A Strength-Based Curriculum to Promote
POSITIVE BODY IMAGE
~ For Girls ages 8 to 14 ~



The **ESSENTIAL** Prevention Tool
for Parents, Mentors & Professionals

Facilitator's Guide

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Introduction

This Book Is Written for the Girls You Love

As a parent, a mentor, a teacher, a counselor, or clergy, you are aware that something alarming happens as girls begin to experience the changes of puberty. Girls who seem comfortable with their identity in grade school experience a crisis of confidence as they enter the middle school grades that too often manifests as heavy make-up, revealing fashions, obsession about appearance and weight, and a decreasing sense of well-being that signals more trouble ahead.

As a parent, you may wonder, “What’s happening to my little girl? All of a sudden, she...

Worries more about what her friends think
 Puts herself down
 Wants to wear revealing or tight clothing
 Obsesses about her appearance
 Worries about having a boyfriend
 Is embattled in girl drama (usually over boys)
 ... and Argues with family rules.”

As a professional or lay-professional, you see increased social and emotional distress in girls, even at younger ages. For example, the Oregon Healthy Teens Survey (2009) of 8th grade girls revealed the following:

- 36.9% of girls viewed themselves as overweight.
- 23% seriously considered suicide in the last 12 months.
- 16.1% had been harassed about weight, physical appearance, acne, and/or clothes.

The statistics related to negative body image in Oregon are actually favorable compared to other studies. Various studies show that between 40 and 80 percent of girls between 4th and 8th grades have a negative view of their bodies (Kotanski & Gullone, 1998).

The *Healthy Transitions for Girls* curriculum not only explains why these changes happen, but it also offers solutions. After viewing a *Healthy Transitions for Girls* presentation, one school superintendent remarked, “I always wondered why 6th grade girls who were so lovely and talented would say such critical things about themselves; now, I know why.”

Positive Body Image Creates Resilience to Other Teen Problems

If there was one single approach that could help girls resist the many frightening pitfalls of adolescence, such as substance abuse, eating disorders, depression, unhealthy dating relationships, risky sexual behavior, and low self-esteem, what would it be? If all the money currently spent on prevention could be streamlined into one powerful effort, where would we focus? The answer is: POSITIVE BODY IMAGE.

Helping girls develop positive body image is an “umbrella” solution to the many problems facing girls today. Appearance plays a critical role in the developmental process, and individuals with negative physical self-esteem are at high risk for developing social and emotional problems (Seidah & Bouffard, 2007). Choate (2007) states, “BID (body image dissatisfaction) is associated with emotional distress, obsessive thinking about appearance, unnecessary elective cosmetic surgery, depression, poor self-esteem, smoking onset, and maladaptive eating practices” (p. 318). Girls who have a healthy self-concept based upon positive views of their bodies resist the nagging sense of inadequacy that leads to maladaptive coping behaviors.

While traditional health curriculums address the biological changes that occur in adolescence and the risky behaviors that challenge kids, these programs do not address the self-schema, or beliefs about self, that are formed about the body during this transitional stage. Ferron (1997) explained that as girls experience changes to their physical body, their mental constructs of self need to develop as well, and that “adaptation to the bodily changes of puberty exerts a strong influence on adolescents’ social adjustment, psychological well-being, and health behaviors” (p. 736).

In short, as girls’ bodies develop, girls must also develop positive beliefs about these changes to form healthy identities as young women. Simply addressing high risk behaviors (disordered eating, self-harm, substance abuse, and early sexual experimentation), without addressing the core beliefs that motivate these behaviors, misses the *heart* of the matter. We can no longer assume that girls are going to negotiate the bumps of puberty without intervention. To promote global, healthy functioning in girls, the causes of negative body image need to be mediated (Seidah & Bouffard, 2007).

A Working Definition of Body Image

Muth and Cash (1997) define body image as how individuals “think, feel, and behave with regard to their own physical attributes” (p. 1438). Body image is not just whether a girl likes her body or not; it is a multi-dimensional concept. Positive body image is a resilience or protective factor that is developed through attention to the social, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and physical aspects of the individual girl. In

addition to these factors, the broader influences on a girl's development must be considered, such as family, peer, and community influences.

For example, Nilsson, Abrahamsson, Torbiornsson, & Hagglof (2007) found that girls suffering from anorexia shared common global factors, such as perfectionistic and unrealistic demands upon self; developmental crisis that yielded a poor view of self and body; family difficulties (stress, unrealistic expectations and criticism, and/or conflict); peer bullying or fear of ridicule; and the demands of sports. Building strengths in "multiple life dimensions" teaches girls to "view their identities as extending beyond physical appearance" (Choate, 2008, p. 46-7). Attention to global factors helps girls to challenge negative cultural messages, especially the harmful messages perpetuated through mass media. Verkuyten (1990, as cited by Wood, Becker, and Thompson, 1996) define body image as "the greatest single predictor of self-esteem for adolescents of different ethnicities" (p. 86). Yes, body image is a BIG deal!

"When Should I Start to Address Body Image?"

One very aware mother asked, "My daughter is only seven years old; is it too early to start?" My emphatic response is, "Absolutely not!" Incredulously, one early study (Collins, 1991) found that 42 percent of 1st – 3rd grade girls wanted to be thinner. One merely needs to peruse the fashion section of a favorite department store to know that girls are being pounded with the "dos" and "don'ts of being cool" at younger and younger ages. The best time to address body image is BEFORE girls experience puberty. They want and need to talk about these changes. My heart tugs each time a girl admits her private fears about growing up. Whether you are a professional or a parent, address this developmental milestone early.

How Is *Healthy Transitions for Girls* Different from Other Programs?

Healthy Transitions for Girls Includes ALL Essential Factors

Healthy Transitions for Girls supports the WHOLE girl! The *Healthy Transitions for Girls* curriculum addresses all factors shown by research (Choate, 2008) to promote positive body image. This curriculum

- Reframes negative belief systems and creates positive belief systems.
- Supports holistic wellness.
- Supports strong parent and peer relationships.
- Teaches media literacy and critical thinking.
- Encourages healthy gender role concepts and challenges gender stereotypes.
- Supports global and physical self-esteem.
- Teaches coping skills.

All these factors are essential for success, and efforts to develop positive body image are less effective if any of these interrelated factors are excluded. Each chapter in the book covers one of these concept areas. Because the concepts are interrelated, a concept may appear in one chapter and reappear when it correlates to a concept in another chapter. This kind of reinforcement enhances real learning and real change.

Healthy Transitions for Girls Utilizes a Strength-Based, Wellness Approach

A wellness approach looks at the bigger picture of girls' health behaviors. "Counseling for wellness," rather than focusing on pathology, helps a girl to "improve her overall health, quality of life, and ability to cope effectively with life's demands" (Choate, 2008, p. 8). A wellness approach focuses on building positive strengths, known to contribute to overall happiness. As girls develop their intrinsic strengths, they develop resilience to the stressors in their lives.

Healthy Transitions seeks to put girls in the driver's seat; it develops an "internal locus of control," a belief that girls have control or responsibility for the outcomes in their lives. A high degree of wellness cannot be achieved without what Myers and Sweeney (2005) call a "deliberate, conscious choices, made on a daily basis" (p. 13). In *Healthy Transitions for Girls*, the objective of each activity is an "I can" statement, such as "I can develop a working definition of femininity that is non-sexualized," or "I can recognize my support systems and learn to ask for help." *Healthy Transitions for Girls* incorporates the essential strategies for building resiliency which have been identified by Rink & Tricker's (2003) research. These strategies include the following:

- Identify the youth's assets.
- Identify the family's assets.
- Role model positive behavior.
- Encourage learning and extracurricular participation.
- Encourage exploration of values and beliefs.
- Teach communication skills, problem-solving skills, and decision-making skills.
- Promote community involvement.
- Help youth identify clear goals and provide resources.
- Set clear expectations.
- Encourage a positive sense of self.

Healthy Transitions for Girls Encourages a Team Approach

A team approach between professionals, parents, schools, and community achieves the best results. Parents play a critical role in the development of body image, but they are too often excluded from school or community-based programs.

In *Healthy Transitions for Girls*, parents are initiated at a parent/daughter workshop and partner with their daughters in homework assignments.

Also available through www.healthytransitionsforgirls.com is an expanding resource center for parent workshops, professional workshops, school- and agency-based workshops, and community presentations. You are encouraged to use *Healthy Transitions for Girls* presentations with service organizations, churches, and other community partners. *Healthy Transitions for Girls* is a timely prevention tool. It takes ALL of us to fight this cultural war and help girls navigate the minefield of alluring messages that create lifelong dissatisfaction with their bodies.

Healthy Transitions for Girls Offers Real-time Coping Skills

Ideas and theories are great, but what about when a girl is having a meltdown? This curriculum helps prevent or reduce unhealthy behaviors as girls transition through adolescence, but it also gives real-time solutions that can be used by professionals and parents in a crisis. Chapter 8, Coping Skills and Problem-Solving Skills, provides relaxation skills and self-soothing skills, such as Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) and “mindfulness” that girls can use “in the heat of the moment” to cope with anxiety, grief, depressed mood, and conflict.

Healthy Transitions for Girls Uses a Values-Based Approach

When addressing puberty in schools and counseling arenas, the role of “values” is often avoided. Mary Pipher, PhD, author of *Reviving Ophelia* and an expert in girls’ issues, admonished counselors not to “check basic morality at the doors of [their] offices” (1998, p. 3). *Healthy Transitions for Girls* promotes values such as modesty in dress, sexual abstinence, and attention to spiritual needs. These concepts are discussed in the context of current research. In *Healthy Transitions for Girls*, girls are encouraged to develop feminine traits of nurturing, empathy, compassion, and connectedness, as well as to understand the beautiful nurturing potential of breastfeeding and giving life. Girls learn to differentiate between real femininity and “sex appeal” as promoted by the media. They are encouraged to develop friendships with boys, rather than engage in steady dating. They learn how to set physical/sexual boundaries that help boy-girl relationships develop into real friendships, an essential skill for secure marriages later on.¹ In essence, *Healthy Transitions for Girls* speaks to both the mind and the *heart* of girls.

¹ See *Reviving Ophelia Study Guide*. Available through the Media Education Foundation at http://www.mediaed.org/assets/products/303/studyguide_303.pdf.

How To Use This Book

This book is extremely versatile and can be used in multiple settings by parents, mentors, and professionals in school and agency settings. While the activities are written primarily for groups, most can be used one-on-one, such as a parent and daughter, or a counselor with an individual client. Look for special notes throughout the book which help adapt the activities to various settings, home, school, or agency.

The initial chapters of the book, Chapters 1-10, each cover a protective factor area necessary to develop positive body image. Chapters 11 and 12 provide specific plans for combining the activities in Chapters 1-10 into workshops that can be conducted in schools, churches, and agencies. Chapter 11 includes workshop plans for a 12-week workshop comprised of 60 minute sessions, as well as a 3-week summer workshop comprised of bi-weekly two hour sessions. Also included in Chapter 11 are basic instructions for structuring a first group session and suggestions for structuring a basic workshop plan. Chapter 12, “Using *Princess Academy* in *Healthy Transitions for Girls*,” instructs professionals, such as school counselors and prevention specialists, on how to organize a *Princess Academy Book Club* where girls integrate body image activities from Chapters 1-10 into their discussions of the delightful book *Princess Academy* by Shannon Hale. Parents too may benefit from Chapter 12 and learn how to support positive body image as they read *Princess Academy* aloud with their daughters.

For Parents: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Do I need special training to help my daughter build positive body image?

A: No one knows your daughters needs better than you. You do not need to be a professional “expert” to increase your ability to help your daughter transition through puberty. You do need to make a conscious effort to help your daughter increase her strengths to successfully navigate the pitfalls of puberty.

Q: How do I know what areas I should focus on?

A: Notice that each lesson in the book lists targeted strengths. As you peruse the book, make a mental note: “What strengths does my daughter already have?” “What areas need more support?” Trust your instincts. Choose activities that meet your daughter’s specific area of need.

Q: Where do I start?

A: I recommend that you start by introducing the concepts covered in Chapter 1. After you have introduced Chapter 1, it is not necessary to use the other chapters in

any particular order. Choose what you feel is most needed in the moment, as your daughter presents problems to you. For example, if she comes home and complains that she has “no friends,” look for help in Chapter 5, “Building Supportive Connections with Other Girls.” If she is upset and needs help calming her emotions, look for an activity such as the Butterfly Hug or Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) in Chapter 8, “Coping Skills and Problem-Solving Skills.” If you decide that your daughter needs help with better eating habits, Chapter 10, “Physical Self-Esteem” can assist you and your daughter in improving family health habits.

Q: What if I am worried about my relationship with my daughter?

A: I have dedicated an entire chapter to parent resources, Chapter 4, “Building Parent Connections.” When a child reaches adolescence, this is a new life stage for the *entire family*, not just your pre-teen or teen. It is inevitable that your relationship will experience many new dynamics that are normal, albeit challenging. This chapter contains many practical ideas to help you manage conflict, improve communication, understand teen behavior, and protect your daughter from harmful cultural messages. If you feel anxious about the cultural influences your daughter faces, you are wise, not paranoid. In my workshops, I tell parents that today’s culture is toxic because it pervasively reinforces norms that lead to pathology, rather than norms that lead to good mental and physical health. With new awareness and skills, you will be prepared to mediate the harmful effects of the culture and protect your daughter’s self concept.

Q: What if my daughter gets defensive whenever I bring up “puberty”?

A: A non-threatening way to initiate discussions between you and your daughter is to read together. That’s why Chapter 12 provides ideas for using *Healthy Transitions for Girls Activities* with the coming-of-age-book, *Princess Academy*. This Newbery Honor Book covers all the major factors or themes necessary to develop positive body image. Chapter 12 provides a chart which shows where each theme is addressed in the book, as well as a corresponding *Healthy Transitions for Girls* activity. Specific ideas as given for how to adapt the activities while discussing the *Princess Academy* characters and their dilemmas. As you read together, when you see one of these themes discussed, stop and talk with your daughter about how her own challenges are similar to the challenges faced by the characters in the book. When you discover a problem in a particular theme area, use the corresponding *Healthy Transitions for Girls* activities to build strength in that area. Do your best to make it fun! If you find that the discussions bring up some of your own worries and anxieties, use one of the coping skills listed in Chapter 8. These coping skills are not just for kids! It is almost inevitable that your daughter’s experiences will bring up some of your own issues since body image issues affect women of all ages. Both of you can grow together as you share the activities in this book.

For School Counselors and Prevention Specialists: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How do I introduce this curriculum to my school and community?

A: In my experience, most administrators and community leaders know the problems; they are already searching for the exact solutions offered in this book. Since funding is always a challenge, the fact that *Healthy Transitions for Girls* is a prevention approach to a *wide variety* of problems has great appeal. Monies designated for bullying, mental health concerns, violence prevention, and/or substance abuse prevention can be used to fund this curriculum.

If parent and community education is part of your assignment, Chapter 11 provides a *Parent Workshop Activity*, which is an excellent way to raise awareness of the issues currently facing girls. The parent workshop plan can be adapted for use with community groups as well. Of particular value in educating community groups is the *Media Detectives Activity* in Chapter 7, “Media Literacy and Critical Thinking.” As adults become acquainted with the terminology and information in this activity, they gain a profound awareness of the need for a team approach to the problems girls face. Check www.healthytransitionsforgirls.com for an expanding database of resources, such as templates for promotional flyers, parent study guides, workshop evaluations, instructional CDs, and PowerPoint presentations for professionals and parents.

Consider also, that the *Princess Academy Book Club* presented in Chapter 12 would be a great after-school program that could be offered through your local library, 4-H program, or women’s crisis center. Network with existing groups that already have funding and facilities to incorporate this valuable prevention approach.

Q: What if I need a curriculum plan that is shorter or longer than 12 weeks?

A: While Chapter 11, “Workshop and Curriculum Planning,” offers you two different workshop plans, you can easily customize your own prevention program. This curriculum is built upon an evidence-based model that requires certain protective factor areas to be covered as explained previously. As long as you design a workshop plan that covers each of these areas, you have built a foundation for achieving a measurable success with your girls. If you need a program that is shorter than 12 weeks, simply choose at least one or two activities from each chapter, Chapters 1-10. Choose activities that you feel are most needed, based upon your understanding of your clients. Be sure to include the parents as they are an important factor in long-term success.

If you need more than 12 weeks of activities, supplemental activity ideas are provided at the end of each workshop in Chapter 11. Chapter 12, “Using *Princess Academy* in *Healthy Transitions for Girls*,” also provides additional ideas for workshops using a

“bibliotherapy” approach. You can also supplement the *Healthy Transitions for Girls* curriculum with activities from other prevention programs. For example, when you address peer relationships in Chapter 5, “Building Supportive Connections with Other Girls,” you can add activities from a bullying prevention program. When you address Chapter 10, “Physical Self-Esteem,” you can integrate lessons on substance abuse prevention. Activities in Chapter 3, “Holistic Wellness” integrates well with values education. Chapter 8, “Coping Skills and Problem-Solving Skills,” and Chapter 9, “Gender Role,” have activities that would work well with a life skills group.

Q: What if I only have time for 60-minute workshops?

A: The 12 week workshop plan is designed for 55–60 minute sessions. The *Princess Academy* Book Club workshops (explained in Chapter 12) last 60 minutes and have been successfully conducted during the school lunch period. We obtained additional time after the lunch break since we were using a literacy-based approach and many grade and middle schools have sustained reading time or literacy programs after lunch.

For Counselors and Therapists: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What if I am required to use only evidence-based practices?

A: *Healthy Transitions for Girls* provides excellent tools to support evidence-based practices in group and individual counseling. Each activity has been designed with a theoretical framework in mind. The activities and handouts in Chapter 1 provide essential tools for cognitive reframing in a Cognitive Behavioral Approach. Chapter 4 provides activities which can be used in a family therapy setting to increase understanding of family life stage, active listening, and conflict management skills between parent and child. Both Chapter 4, “Building Parent Connections,” and Chapter 8, “Coping Skills and Problem-Solving Skills,” present skills that are effective for a Solution-Focused Model. Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) strategies are used in Chapter 1, “I Am A Palace of Possibilities: Build Positive Belief Systems,” Chapter 2, “The Mind-Body Connection,” and Chapter 8, “Coping Skills and Problem-Solving Skills”; using “mindfulness” and watching for “body signs” to promote emotional regulation are adapted to the needs of young girls. Chapter 5, “Building Supportive Connections with Other Girls,” utilizes DBT Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills to help girls set boundaries and make requests appropriately. Chapter 10, “Physical Self-Esteem,” utilizes a Gestalt Approach in the *I Am Thankful for All My Body Does for Me* Activity. Because *Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT)*, presented in Chapter 8, is a newer therapy in the field of energy psychology, I provide extensive links to research on this strategy on my website. Remember too, that the entire curriculum is based upon an evidence-based model as outlined by Choate (2008) and published by the American Counseling Association.

Q: The activities are designed for groups. Can they be used in individual counseling?

A: As a counselor who has worked in a busy agency, I know how much therapists in the trenches need resources to address specific client problems. We are constantly scrambling to find tools to meet the difficult challenges our clients bring in to our offices. Candidly, this book presents the tools I most needed to be a more effective therapist. Instead of going through multiple files and workbooks to find activities, I just pull out my *Healthy Transitions for Girls Facilitator's Guide*.

Many girls with low self-esteem or depression do not understand the effect of the larger media culture on their belief systems; Chapter 7, "Media Literacy and Critical Thinking," increases awareness of harmful media influences and gives them tools to combat these messages. Girls who need help with boundary setting and co-dependency in relationships will benefit from activities in Chapter 5, "Building Supportive Connections with Other Girls," and Chapter 6, "Building Healthy Boy-Girl Friendships." Chapter 3, "The Mind-Body Connection," and Chapter 8, "Coping Skills and Problem-Solving Skills," have activities which specifically address trauma and anxiety. Using activities from these chapters, clients learn self-help skills, self-soothing skills, and relaxation skills that they can use to mediate panic and anxiety. Whether you need activities for a group to develop positive body image, or a book with activities to enhance general counseling practice, this book has tools to address the common challenges you face with your adolescent clients.

Q: What if I need handouts to use with my individual clients?

A: You may purchase and download handouts for individual clients through the *Healthy Transitions for Girls* website. You can purchase the entire set of full-color handouts, or you can purchase specific sets of full-color handouts, depending upon your need. The handouts in this Facilitator's Guide (except Handout 2) should not be photocopied, not only because it violates the copyright and license agreement, but because you will enhance your program effectiveness by using full-color handouts.

Help the girls you love gain tools to navigate the minefield of negative media messages **NOW!**

The answer is:

**POSITIVE
BODY
IMAGE**

What **ONE** factor helps build strength to resist:

- *Eating disorders*
- *Substance abuse*
- *Depression and mood disorders*
- *Unhealthy dating behaviors*
- *Risky sexual behaviors*
- *Low self-esteem*



Healthy Transitions for Girls is a strength-based, wellness approach that addresses all factors shown by research to promote positive body image:

- Supports parent and peer relationships
- Supports global and physical self-esteem
- Encourages healthy concepts of femininity (gender role)
- Teaches coping skills and media literacy
- Creates awareness of negative belief systems

Healthy Transitions for Girls speaks to the minds and hearts of girls.

ACCLAIM FOR THE HEALTHY TRANSITIONS FOR GIRLS CURRICULUM

"This is an innovative approach to promoting girls' self-esteem and body image resilience. It is well written and informative for both parents and professionals. The activities are well described, easy to implement, and are engaging for participants as they explore their strengths and possibilities for the future."

- **Laura Choate, Ed.D., LPC, NCC**, Associate Professor of Counselor Education at Louisiana State University
Author, *Girls' and Women's Wellness: Contemporary Issues and Interventions* (Published by the American Counseling Association).

"Captivating...Well targeted...It could potentially heal so many individuals and societal ills. I connected with my own femininity in a pleasant way while reading it."

- **Angelyn Ray, LCSW**, Private Practice Counselor, Women's Crisis Center Clinician

"The skills learned from this program are not only important for an adolescent girl vulnerable to negative outside influences, but are also valuable tools she can carry with her into adulthood"

- **Ashlee Voges, MSW**, Child and Adolescent Prevention Specialist

PEGGY A. MCFARLAND, MS, NCC, has over 30 years experience working with girls and teens. As a mother, teacher, mentor, and counselor, she understands the challenges faced today by pre-adolescent and teen girls. *Healthy Transitions for Girls* was developed out of a passion to help other parents, mentors, and professionals have tools to combat the onslaught of media messages that cause girls to develop a devastating, life-long "disconnection" from their bodies. When girls disconnect from their bodies they lose a connection with their intuitive, feminine nature—it is a tragic loss of identity.

Peggy has a private counseling practice in the "outback" of Eastern Oregon. She has four daughters of her own and many "adopted" daughters.



www.healthytransitionsforgirls.com