



RESPONDING TO THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF GIRLS IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Every day, young girls enter a juvenile justice system that was not designed with their needs in mind. Unfortunately, the number of programs and interventions designed to respond to their unique circumstances and needs has lagged behind. National data over the last 20 years indicate that girls make up approximately 25% of youth adjudicated and placed on probation and about 13% of youth committed to state facilities. Data from [Nevada](#) (2020) indicate girls make up 20% of youth on formal probation, 18% of youth confined at the state, and 12% of youth placed in county camps. A 2020 survey of 200 juvenile justice practitioners and members of the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) found that 97% agreed that girls have unique needs, while 94% thought they needed gender-responsive programming. However, other studies have shown a lack of understanding and definitions in gender-based or gender-responsive services.

Figure 1. Probation and Committed Youth by Gender

Year	National			
	Probation		Committed	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
2006	76%	25%	87%	14%
2010	74%	26%	88%	12%
2013	75%	25%	87%	13%
2017	75%	25%	87%	13%
2019	75%	25%	86%	14%
AVG	75%	25%	87%	13%

What is Gender-Responsive Programming?

Gender-responsive policies, practices, and programs recognize girls have distinct histories, pathways to offending, and experiences in the juvenile justice system. Girls who enter the juvenile justice system have often experienced sexual, emotional, and/or physical abuse during childhood. Gender-specific approaches in juvenile justice seek to address these issues when responding to girls who come into conflict with the law.



The Need for Gender-Responsive Programming

Currently, boys maintain most of the focus in research regarding the juvenile justice system. This is not surprising, considering in the most recent Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement in 2019, boys made up 85.2% of all placed youth and tend to have longer sentences than their female peers.

Of system-involved youth, girls report trauma and adverse childhood experiences more frequently than boys. These traumatic instances are also more predictive of future adult arrests as these girls become adult women. The trauma that girls enter the system with varies, but includes higher rates of sexual abuse, physical abuse, and victims of family violence than their male counterparts. Research indicates that girls have rates of PTSD three times that of boys, and display more severe symptoms.

Girls often become system-involved due to a wide range of low-level offenses dissimilar to young boys and often involve drug use. Girls are sentenced to secure facilities for status offenses, unlike their male peers.

Selected Programs for Girls in Juvenile Justice

Do you currently operate or use interventions that are designed for girls? Share them at ncjji@ncjfcj.org

[Gender-Responsive Intervention for Female Juvenile Offenders](#), which created individualized treatment plans for girls between the ages of 12 and 18. Their treatment also included many specific sub-programs, including cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), the Thinking for a Change (T4C) behavior curriculum, and Girls Moving On (GMO) gender-responsive programming. What resulted was a statistically significant decrease in recidivism for these girls in the two years following the program compared to usual services like probation.

[Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care](#) or MTFC has been shown, in a follow-up study to a clinical trial, to reduce delinquency. Though limited by a small sample size, the study showed that a supervised community-based foster home could effectively help young girls turn away from delinquency.

[Juvenile Justice Anger Management \(JJAM\) Treatment for Girls](#) yielded promising results. Through the application of cognitive-behavioral anger-management therapies, young girls in detention achieved statistically significant decreases in anger, physical aggression, and relational aggression.

Gender Responsive Program Characteristics

- Culturally Responsive
- Build from Relational Theory
- Address Safety
- Use Skill-based and Strength-based Approaches
- Serve Girls Holistically

Gender responsive programs should also use individualized assessments and engage families

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[Explore the Model Programs Guide](#)

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