

*Training Curriculum – Part 2*

# The Voices Program for Girls: Theoretical Foundations and Program Overview

by Stephanie S. Covington\*

**Editor's Note:** *Voices: A Program of Self-Discovery and Empowerment* is a new training curriculum for girls. In this issue of *WG&CJ*, we publish the second of a two-part excerpt from this important new volume. In this part, California psychologist Stephanie S. Covington, along with co-authors Kate Cahoon and Kary Young, describe the program's psychological/ theoretical foundations and offer a practical overview of the program, focusing on the role of facilitators. *Voices* consists of a 223-page, three-ring binder *Facilitator Guide* (\$80), plus an 80-page *Participant Journal* (\$9.15 each). The full cost of these volumes includes a 10% shipping and handling fee (plus a 7.75% California sales tax where appropriate); these volumes can be purchased from the Center for Gender and Justice Institute for Relational Development, 7946 Ivanhoe Ave., Ste. 201B, La Jolla, CA 92037, (858) 454-8528, (website) [www.centerforgenderandjustice.org](http://www.centerforgenderandjustice.org). In this excerpt, some language has been altered slightly from the original and specific references have been deleted (all of these are available in the full document).

## Theoretical Foundation

The framework for the *Voices* program is based on the following theories: psychological development, attachment, resilience, addiction, and trauma. The various treatment strategies used in the program apply these theories to create the therapeutic process.

**Psychological Development.** Designing effective programs for girls requires a clear understanding of girls' psychological development. Traditional theories of psychology describe "development" as a climb from childlike dependence to mature independence, where the goal is to become a self-sufficient, clearly differentiated, autonomous self. In contrast, Jean Baker Miller, in her 1976 book, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, found that a girl or woman develops a sense of self and self-worth when her actions arise out of, and

lead back into, connections with others. Because of their desire for connection, girls tend to give up their sense of self and their own voices to be in relationship with and acceptable to others, primarily boys. This desire for connection reaches a high point in adolescence, and girls will enter into unhealthy connections when healthy connections are not available, in order to avoid isolation.

A gender-responsive program based on relational theory creates an empowerment model that can reproduce five critical out-

comes: increased zest and vitality, empowerment to act, knowledge of self and others, a sense of self-worth, and a desire for more connection. As Jan Surrey states, "rather than viewing relationships as signs of weakness or dependence or even just as a source of support, we may view them as signs of relational strengths, competence and empowerment."

According to Ainsworth, there are different types of attachment:

---

*"Rather than viewing relationships as signs of weakness or dependence or even just as a source of support, we may view them as signs of relational strengths, competence and empowerment."*

---

comes: increased zest and vitality, empowerment to act, knowledge of self and others, a sense of self-worth, and a desire for more connection. As Jan Surrey states, "rather than viewing relationships as signs of weakness or dependence or even just as a source of support, we may view them as signs of relational strengths, competence and empowerment."

**Attachment.** Attachment theory is based on the early work of Harlow and Bowlby and has been expanded on by Ainsworth, Stern, and Winnicott. Bowlby believed that a child's proximity to, affection for, and interaction with a parent is the foundation that creates a secure attachment. Attachment behavior is biologically based. "The emotional communication occurring within attachment relationships is the primary experience that organizes and regulates the brain circuits which mediate self monitoring, self regulation, and social relatedness."

Attachment is formed between the primary caregiver and the child, through day-to-day activities, such as providing food and comfort. This first relationship, often with the mother, becomes the founda-

- Secure attachment, in which the child is confident that the primary attachment figure (s) will be available, responsive, and helpful—especially in adverse situations. These children feel safe and are clear about self/other boundaries;
- Avoidant attachment, in which the child is unsure that the primary attachment figure(s) will be available or helpful when needed. These children experience separation anxiety; and
- Ambivalent attachment or anxious-avoidant attachment, in which the child has no confidence that his or her needs will be met or responded to. Such children often feel rejected and criticized.

**Resilience.** The term fostering resilience often is used in discussions of issues of youth. The definition of resilience is related to the question: Why is it that some people make it through the stresses and difficult situations in their lives, while others get weighed down and stuck in life's struggles? Those who have studied resilience argue that there are cer-

*See VOICES, next page*

\*Stephanie S. Covington, Ph.D., LCSW, is co-director of the Center for Gender & Justice, located at 7946 Ivanhoe Ave., La Jolla, CA 92037, (858) 454-8528, (e-mail) [sscird@aol.com](mailto:sscird@aol.com).

*VOICES, from page 3*

tain skills that are learned at a young age that can make a person more resilient and, therefore, apt to have fewer difficulties in coping with life's stressors. There are "protective factors" that help some individuals—even those who face a great deal of adversity in their lives—to overcome life's difficulties. Protective factors are not just personal characteristics; they are the result of a person's experiences in his or her immediate environment, including family, school, and community.

There are tools that may be helpful in measuring levels of resilience. For example, the Adolescent Resiliency Attitudes Scale (A.R.A.S) is based on the work of Steven Wolin and Sybil Wolin. The A.R.A.S uses the following seven indicators of resilience to determine an individual's level of resilience: insight, independence, relationships, initiative, creativity, humor, and morality.

A quote often used is that a resilient child is one who, "works well, plays well and loves well." This implies that the resilient child has learned to cope with adversity in a way that allows her or him to move on from stressful situations and to participate in the enjoyment of life. Resilient children have confidence that, although they may be experiencing difficulties at this particular time, things will change for the better in the future.

According to Greene, Peters, and Associates, a girl who is resilient tends to have:

- A close relationship with at least one adult that she trusts and who cares for her;
- Significant adults in her life (e.g., parents, teachers, counselors, community leaders; elders) who have high expectations of her; and
- The opportunity to meet positive role models and mentors through community involvement.

**Addiction.** Health professionals in many disciplines have revised their concepts of disease. A more holistic view of health acknowledges not only the physical aspects of disease but also the emotional, psychological, and spiritual aspects. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) was one of the first proponents of a holistic health model of addiction; the concept of addiction as a disease has now gained wide acceptance. Because so many young people begin to abuse alcohol and other

drugs at an early age, addiction is being called a "pediatric-acquired disease."

The theoretical model of addiction used in *Voices* expands this holistic perspective. It addresses the complexity of issues in the lives of young women who have substance-use disorders, including genetic predispositions toward addiction, histories of abuse, health consequences, shame, isolation, or any combination of these. For example, although some young women may have genetic predispositions to addiction, it is important in this program to acknowledge that many of them have grown up in environments in which drug dealing and addiction are ways of life. When addiction has been a core part of a girl's life, the treatment process requires a holistic, multidimensional approach.

and they may live with adversity stemming from oppressive policies and laws that obstruct their ability to move forward. These examples emphasize that it is important to think about the *whole* person when considering drug and alcohol abuse.

**Trauma.** Many young women have experienced abuse or other traumatic events in their lives. The diagnostic manual used by mental-health providers (DSM IV-TR) defines trauma as, "involving direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity; or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other

---

*Why is it that some people make it through the stresses and difficult situations in their lives, while others get weighed down and stuck in life's struggles?*

---

It is important to understand that substance abuse is different for girls than it is for boys. Young women often are in relationships with young men who "use" and give them drugs. In other words, they often use drugs with the young men they are involved with. (Covington, 2002). Research suggests that girls are more likely to become dependent on alcohol and other drugs than boys are and that the earlier girls start to "use," the more severe their problem use becomes. Often, girls who have substance-abuse problems also have problems with their parents, have been physically and/or sexually abused, and suffer from mental-health problems.

Young women cannot be separated from the influences that surround them. In considering girls' likelihood of using alcohol and other drugs, it is important to think about their environments. They may be genetically susceptible to drug and alcohol use because of generations of addiction, they may have experienced trauma in their lives that compels them to use drugs or alcohol to numb the pain, they may face social and economic oppression that is difficult to cope with, they may feel spiritually depleted and unconnected to the world around them,

close associate. The person's response to the event must involve intense fear, helplessness, or horror (or in children, the response must involve disorganized or agitated behavior)." The word trauma is used to describe both the event and the reaction or response to the event.

Trauma begins with an experience that overwhelms a person's normal coping mechanisms. There are both physiological and psychological reactions in response to the event: hyper-arousal, altered consciousness, numbing, etc. These are normal reactions to an abnormal or extreme situation. A young woman's nervous system then becomes sensitized and is vulnerable to any future stressors in her life. She may be triggered in her current life by reminders of the traumatic event that happened in the past. There may be nightmares and flashbacks to the earlier experience. This creates a painful emotional state and affects subsequent behavior.

Girls and boys both are at risk of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse when they are young. Although sexual abuse in childhood is significantly higher for girls than for boys, girls are - proportionally - a higher percentage of victims

*VOICES, from page 4*

of violence - including rape - than boys. Females in general are more likely to be exposed to physical abuse, rape, sexual molestation, childhood parental neglect, and childhood physical abuse.

In adolescence, girls are more likely than boys to continue to be abused or assaulted, more often in private and by someone close to them, such as a date or a relative. Boys are less likely to be abused in close relationships. Their risk comes from peers or rivals (as in gangs). When males are assaulted or abused, it is more likely to be done in public and by strangers. This pattern carries on into adulthood. Women are most at risk from people they know, and men are primarily at risk from crime or war.

Having an understanding of the impact of abuse and trauma on the girls in the *Voices* group is essential.

**Environment.** One of the fundamental elements in trauma treatment and theory is providing a safe environment. The importance of environment is stressed in the field of child psychology, which emphasizes that the optimum context for childhood development consists of a safe, nurturing, consistent environment in which the child experiences warmth and a sense of being cared for and understood. These are the same environmental qualities that need to be developed in girls' programs.

A "therapeutic milieu" is a carefully arranged environment or culture that contains the following five elements, all of which are fundamental in both community and institutional settings:

- Attachment: A culture of belonging;
- Containment: A culture of safety;
- Communication: A culture of openness;
- Involvement: A culture of participation and citizenship; and
- Agency: A culture of empowerment.

The environment in many juvenile-justice settings is particularly challenging for young women with histories of trauma. Any therapeutic process will be unsuccessful if the environment mimics the behaviors of the dysfunctional systems the girls have already experienced. Rather, the design of program and treatment strategies should be aimed at undoing some of the prior damage. A therapeutic environment's norms are

consciously designed to be different: safety with oneself and with others is paramount, and the entire environment is designed to create living and learning opportunities for everyone involved, staff and clients alike.

**Safety.** Safety is a critical and primary element when working with girls. It is fundamental in all trauma-treatment models. Judith Herman developed a three-stage model of recovery from trauma; stage one focuses on self-care and safety in the present. Herman also emphasizes that a trauma survivor who is working on safety issues needs to be in a homogeneous group. This means that

ing yourself on purpose." Self-harming behaviors often are used by girls to deal with the pain of abuse. Cutting and burning are among the most common forms of self-harm. Successful treatment of self-inflicted violence (SIV) includes teaching young women new ways of coping with stressors so that underlying painful feelings can be dealt with. One of the challenges is abstinence from mood-altering drugs, as these have a tendency to increase self-harming behavior.

If you find that any of the girls in the group are hurting themselves, you will want to watch for other girls in the group who might be beginning this behavior.

---

***Many abused girls use alcohol and/or other drugs to medicate their depression or anxiety because they know no better ways to comfort themselves.***

---

it is important that the group be composed solely of girls and that the facilitator be female.

Facilitators can help young women in the group to feel safe by trying to keep the program free of physical, emotional, and sexual harassment and by assessing any risk of violence in the girl's home, school, and relationships. Facilitators also can help the young women to feel safe internally by teaching them grounding and self-soothing techniques. Many abused girls use alcohol and/or other drugs to medicate their depression or anxiety because they know no better ways to comfort themselves.

**Self-Harm.** "The term *self-inflicted violence* is best defined as the intentional harm to one's own body without conscious suicidal intent. In simpler terms, the act of self-inflicted violence is hurt-

Clinicians have found that, in juvenile-justice and other residential settings, when one girl is cutting, carving, or burning herself, others are more likely to begin to do the same.

### **Program Overview**

The *Voices* curriculum is contained in a Facilitator's Guide and an accompanying participant's journal. It was created to serve girls and young women between the ages of twelve and eighteen. A recent Girls Scouts of the USA report determined that there are three distinct age groups in which girls have common interests. It may be helpful to think about these groups and their specific needs in relating to the age group that you are working with:

- Girls between 11 and 12 are anticipating the transition to middle school, want to be liked, worry about fitting in, are community oriented, and are full of hope and wonder;
- Girls between 13 and 15 are highly vulnerable to peer pressure, focused on "me," focused on boys, want to be popular, and are conscious of body image; and
- Girls between 16 and 17 are feeling more independent, feeling more pressure to succeed in school and make something of themselves, looking for activities that improve skills, and feeling adult pressures.

*See VOICES, next page*

### **We Want to Hear From You**

*Women, Girls & Criminal Justice*  
welcomes articles, commentaries  
and letters to the editor.

Submissions can be sent to:  
Russ Immarigeon at (518) 325-5925  
or russimmarigeon@taconic.net.

*VOICES, from page 7*

Throughout this curriculum you will notice that the terms "girl" and "young woman" are used interchangeably. When you consider the language that you will use as the facilitator, think about the age range of the group members. Some feel that using "young women" for group members in early adolescence is "adultifying" and does the girls a disservice. However, it is respectful to use "young women" for older group members.

This program is designed for facilitation in a group setting but can be adapted for one-on-one use. The suggested number of participants per group is between six and ten. Ideally, the groups would be "closed," that is, the same girls would begin and end the program together. The curriculum can be adapted for larger groups and open groups, if either is essential to the program setting.

*Voices* addresses core themes of self, connection with others, healthy living, and the journey ahead. Given the pervasive impact of substance use in many girls' lives, this theme is woven throughout the sessions. In addition, skill building in the areas of communication, refusal skills, anger management, stress management, and decision making is integrated across program topics.

The curriculum promotes a strength-based approach that seeks to empower the girls and increase their sense of self. In using this kind of model, the facilitator helps the girls in the group to see the strengths and skills they already have that will aid in their growth and development. The curriculum also focuses on emotional development; dealing with expression and containment of feelings are critical parts of adolescent growth.

### **The *Voices Journal***

Each group member is provided a *Voices Journal*. This journal serves as her personalized tool for exploring and recording her experiences, thoughts, and feelings as she progresses through the program.

The process and impact of journaling has been studied widely across many fields, including psychology, psychiatry, literature, art, and education. Research has generally revealed that journaling can be a valuable tool in self-exploration, healing, health improvement, problem solving, and coping with stress. Evidence

suggests that journaling in general, and structured journaling specifically, is a powerful tool for personal growth and change.

The *Voices Journal* utilizes a process called *Interactive Journaling*®. *Interactive Journaling*® is an experiential writing process that guides and motivates people toward positive lifestyle changes. This process was created with the assistance of over 250 professionals in the health and human services field.

In the context of girls' lives, structured journaling provides an outlet for creativity, personal expression, exploration, and application of new concepts and

of the first activities in this program. This is an important discussion that sets the groundwork for the girls' senses of safety, trust, and respect within the group.

It is recommended that the girls be allowed to take their journals home between sessions and at the conclusion of the program. However, be aware that some girls may not feel comfortable or safe carrying their journals to school or home. Because of this, it is recommended that you give all group members the option of storing their journals in a designated, secure place onsite. Be sure to identify such a place.

---

## *The curriculum promotes a strength-based approach that seeks to empower the girls and increase their sense of self.*

---

skills. In the face of pressure to suppress girls' true selves, expression of feelings and ideas in the form of writing and drawing can be especially empowering and clarifying for group members. The *Voices Journal* becomes a personalized tool for exploration and growth.

It is important to convey to group members that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions posed in the *Voices Journal*. Penmanship and grammar are of no importance. The purpose of the journal is to provide group members a safe and structured place in which to explore their experiences, thoughts, and feelings.

### **Confidentiality**

It is imperative that the confidentiality of the girls' responses in their journals be respected. In order to build the trust necessary for the girls to share and learn from one another's experiences, an atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance must be established.

Some girls will hesitate to share their thoughts and feelings (both in the journal and in group), for fear that their contributions will be judged or considered "wrong." As a facilitator, you can help to minimize this hesitation by respecting the participants' privacy in regard to their journal responses and by validating all contributions made in the group.

Establishing group agreements is one

### **The Facilitator's Guide**

The first part of the *Facilitator's Guide* gives the facilitator some background information about girls and about the formation of the *Voices* program.

The second part includes four modules (or themes) with a total of eighteen 90-minute sessions. The sessions may be arranged in a variety of ways. However, the curriculum is laid out in the suggested sequence. The four modules are:

- Self (with sessions on Who Am I?, My Life Story, Breaking the Silence, the World Girls Live In, and Support and Inspiration);
- Connecting with Others (with sessions on Communication, My Family, Mothers and Daughters, Friendship, Dating and Sexuality, Supportive Relationships, and Abusive Relationships);
- Healthy Living (with sessions on Our Bodies, Emotional Wellness, Alcohol and Other Drugs, and Spirituality); and
- The Journey Ahead (with sessions on Crossroads and Packing for My Journey).

Each session is organized the following way:

- The objectives, general topics to be covered, and materials needed are listed at the beginning of each session;

• See *VOICES*, next page

*VOICES, from page 8*

- There is a check-in with the girls in the group at the beginning of each session;
- Each session contains a teaching component—a segment in which the key topic(s) for the session are presented, to enhance the girls' understanding of the topic(s);
- Each session contains an interactive component in which the girls discuss the issues, ask questions for clarification, and process the new information;
- Each session contains an experiential component in which the girls do exercises to try out new skills, based on the information just presented, in a safe, supportive environment; and
- Closure includes questions for the girls to think about until the next session.

The third part of the Facilitators guide contains the script for the family sculpture, references, and a feed back form.

**Facilitating Voices**

The facilitator is to maintain the structure of the group, move the group through each session, lead by example by having appropriate boundaries and by expressing or containing your feelings, and allow the girls to have their own experiences of the group.

You are encouraged to enhance the learning experience by tailoring the information and exercises to the conditions and needs of the participants. This may include an assessment of their cultural issues, educational and literacy levels, and unique concerns. In juvenile justice settings, there may be additional considerations.

**What Makes a Good Facilitator?**

The following qualities in a facilitator will help to ensure a positive group experience:

- Trustworthiness;
- Reliability and consistency;
- Warmth and compassion;
- Emotional maturity;
- Healthy boundaries, respect for confidentiality;
- Commitment to and interest in the girls' issues;
- Multi-cultural sensitivity and responsiveness;

- Appropriate gender (a female should facilitate all-female groups);
- Content expertise, if possible; and
- Facilitation skills.

**Facilitating in a Juvenile Justice Setting.** There are many unique challenges to being a facilitator in a juvenile justice setting, including issues of confidentiality, support, group space, comfort, and security. It is particularly important in this setting for the facilitator to provide confidentiality and emotional safety, as well as to be an advocate for the girls and the group. Often there is a "culture clash" in juvenile justice settings. Historically, the criminal justice system has been based

your group. This is not only respectful; it will help your facilitation. Find out who they are, what they want to know and learn, their levels of experience, their current emotional states, their levels of functioning, and any particular group dynamics. You may wish to develop a questionnaire to help gather this information before the first session. Learn as much as you can ahead of time about the issues, concerns, and demographic profiles of the girls in the group. These could include issues of race, class, and culture.

Girls need adequate cognitive functioning to participate in the exercises and discussions. Girls who have certain men-

---

*Girls need adequate cognitive functioning  
to participate in the exercises  
and discussions.*

---

on a control model; the therapeutic treatment field is based on a change model. Some treatment providers struggle to work in a setting that feels unsupportive.

**Prior to the Session.** Before you begin the group, it is suggested that you allow six-to-eight hours in which to read and comprehend the curriculum materials. It is also useful to review the materials for each session again before beginning that session. This is necessary in order to feel comfortable with and absorb the information. You will want to be able to present the materials by just referring to your notes, rather than "reading" them.

Consider finding a support person (a friend or mental health provider) who can be available to the girls between sessions. This may be another challenge in a juvenile justice setting, where support may not be readily available.

Be sure that all equipment (e.g., flipchart and CD player) is available and in the session room at the time it is needed.

Be sure that the "logistics" (e.g., special needs, transportation, room setup, chairs, nametags, doors unlocked) are taken care of before each session. For example, you might need to find a secure place for the girls' journals if you work in a correctional setting.

**Knowing the Girls in the Group.** Know something about the young women in

tal illnesses or disabilities that may prevent them from participating need to have a group modified especially for them.

Girls may either volunteer for or be referred to the program. It is important to clarify this when starting a group. Sometimes, a girl who has been referred may feel resentful about attending. It may help to assess the motivation of the individual group members. Acknowledging that there will be benefits to each girl in the group for attending, as well as expressing in a personal way that you are pleased that they are going to be part of the group, may be helpful.

**Tips on Running a Group**

**Reliability.** You (and any other facilitators) need to commit to attending each session, in order to:

1. Build trust;
2. Show that you are committed to the group; and
3. Maintain a sense of consistency or continuity that helps to create psychological safety.

It also is important that a facilitator be emotionally constant for the girls in the group and that each session start on time and end on time.

**Style.** Be non-judgmental and give support to the participants. For example,

*See VOICES, next page*

*VOICES, from page 9*

you might say, "That's a good question. I'm glad you asked that."

Be conscious of group trust and confidentiality. The facilitator needs to watch for interactions and indications that have the potential to impact the cohesiveness of the group. This might include competition among members, absenteeism, silence, non-participation, sub-grouping, or a breach of confidentiality. Verbally check in with the group regarding these issues (e.g., "What does this silence mean?").

It is important to be culturally sensitive and to use culturally relevant examples throughout the curriculum. Race, class, religious differences, sexual orientation, disability, culture, and ethnicity can influence the girls' levels of comfort with the issues discussed in the program.

Set standards for an acceptable way of relating with others (e.g., no physical or verbal abuse, no interrupting, no name calling).

**Group Interaction.** Encourage the girls to speak about their personal experience, not in generalizations or abstractions, while keeping the pace moving along. At the same time, allow the girls to set their own limits with respect to self-disclosure. This helps to create safety. Sharing personal experiences increases connection and closeness with others. It also enables the girls to learn from one another's experiences.

Be aware that too much disclosure on the facilitator's part may be inappropriate and can derail the group process. It is also detrimental to use the group as a sounding board for your personal concerns. If you are considering self-disclosure, always ask yourself, "What would be most helpful for the young women in the group?" Remember, in a support group, the important discoveries will come from the group members. Your self-disclosure should be kept at a minimum.

Confidentiality is a value that must be adhered to by the facilitator as well as the group members. There are two exceptions:

- You may communicate with treatment-team members as part of a participant's ongoing care; and
- You may break confidentiality when someone's personal safety or the safety of others is at stake.

**Cultural Awareness.** Remember that race, ethnicity, and gender are not mutually exclusive. Together, they are part of the complex lens through which many girls see and experience the world. To simply discuss issues related to girls, generically, does not recognize the importance of the racial and/or ethnic identities of the young women in the group.

**Special Considerations for Juvenile Justice Settings.** As was previously mentioned, conducting a group program in a juvenile justice setting has its own unique challenges. You need to think through the following issues before the sessions begin.

- Space, setting: Can chairs be arranged in a circle? Is music allowed? Is priva-

- Standard Operating Practices: Procedures such as searches, restraints, and isolation may traumatize and/or re-traumatize young women.

### Elements of the Group Process

**Group Membership.** Ideally, the group should be closed to new members after the first session, so that the entire group begins and ends together. This helps to establish connection and safety among the group members. The curriculum can also run as an open group if the setting requires an open group process.

**Timing of Sessions.** Each session takes about ninety minutes (one and one-half hours) to complete.

**Safety.** Many of the young women in a *Voices* group have never felt safe, be-

---

*Sharing personal experiences increases connection and closeness with others. It also enables the girls to learn from one another's experiences.*

---

cy allowed or must correctional staff members be present? Are there other security issues that affect the setting and environment you are trying to create? Is the facility co-ed?

- Confidentiality: Is confidentiality more difficult to ensure in a setting in which security is prioritized and trust is not the norm?
- Interruptions: Will there be interruptions such as doing the "count," observations by correctional officers, and inflexible times for medication?
- Attitudes of group members: Are some participants required to be there? Are the girls resistant to being there?
- Materials and Journals: Can the girl's journals be kept in a safe and confidential place? Do the girls have the time and permission to do the activities in their journals?
- Support for the Facilitator: The correctional environment can be harsh for the facilitator as well as for the girls. Getting support from someone within the institution or correctional setting can help you to navigate the system more easily as well as provide an emotional sounding board for your concerns.

cause others have betrayed their trust. These young women spend a great deal of energy trying to keep themselves safe or feeling anxious about their safety. The group is externally safe for the participants when it is free from physical threat and discomfort. It is internally safe when it is free from emotional threat. Some emotional discomfort may arise as a result of the exercises, but a supportive, caring environment can help the girls to work through the emotional issues. Setting limits, ground rules, and boundaries can help the participants to feel safe in the group.

**Group Agreements and Ground Rules.** Basic guidelines for group participation and confidentiality need to be presented and discussed in the first session, with all the girls in the group. Creating group agreements about behavior right at the start helps to create a safe group culture. This encourages the girls to feel comfortable sharing their feelings, asking questions, and fully engaging with one another and with the materials.

Group agreements should be clear, short, simple, and direct. Confidentiality, nonviolence, and not coming to group under the influence of alcohol or other drugs are three agreements that are non-

*See VOICES, next page*

## VOICES, from page 10

negotiable. Have the group members suggest other rules, and do your best to get consensus. The following are a sample of these types of agreements.

- Group members are to honor one another's confidentiality. What is said in this room stays in this room; it is not shared with anyone outside the group. (You might want to ask the group members, "What does confidentiality mean to you? What happens when it is violated? How does that feel? What do you want to do, as a group, to maintain confidentiality?")
- Violence and aggressive behavior is not permitted. No physical, emotional, or verbal abuse will be allowed in the group.
- Sessions will start on time and end on time.
- Regular attendance and participation is important for everyone in the group. Group members should contact the facilitator if they are unable to attend a session.
- Contact with other group members outside the regular group session is encouraged.
- Share the floor time with others; everyone in the group should have the time to talk and share what is on her mind.
- There will be no smoking or eating in the group sessions
- Do not come to the group session under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Having feelings is okay. Crying in the group is okay. Laughing is okay. Getting angry is okay. Being abusive to another group member or the facilitator is not okay.
- Every group member is free to "pass" when asked a question or when invited to participate in an exercise during a group session. (It is important to take time at the end of the group to privately ask a girl who passed why she chose to do so. Often, those who do not speak have a great deal to say but may not feel comfortable sharing in a group setting. Find out how you may be able to assist her in feeling safe enough to share.)

**Opening and Closing the Session.** Opening and closing activities help the

***Having feelings is okay.  
Getting angry is okay.  
Being abusive to  
another group member  
or the facilitator  
is not okay.***

group members feel grounded and present. Begin each group session with some quiet time and a brief check-in. Remind the girls of the confidentiality agreement and other ground rules. When closing a session, allow the girls time to reflect on what has been covered.

**Empowerment.** Empower the girls in the group. Point out and emphasize the girls' strengths. Encourage them to make conscious decisions. Help them to take ownership of their feelings and to act out their feelings in appropriate ways, rather than suppressing them or being

consumed by them. Encourage social action as part of the healing process.

**Guided Imagery.** The curriculum uses guided imagery, or visualization, in several sessions. If you are not familiar and comfortable with this method, practice the guided imagery script, or directions, before the session so that your voice is relaxed and smooth when you are explaining the visualization. This is important in helping to make the group members feel relaxed.

It is important to start a visualization exercise slowly, to bring the girls out of the here-and-now and into the exercise. It is also important to end slowly, to help the girls come out of the experience and into the here-and-now. Once you have finished the visualization, and the girls have opened their eyes, it is important to serenely welcome the girls back into the group process.

For some trauma survivors, closing their eyes for an exercise can be very difficult. They may need to keep their eyes open until there is a deeper sense of safety and trust. ■

## Announcing!

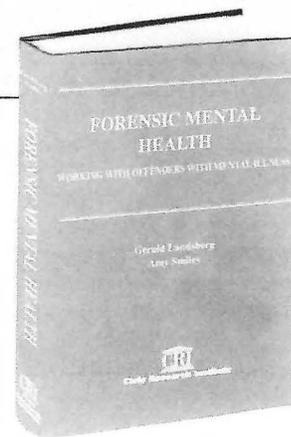
## Forensic Mental Health: Working With Offenders With Mental Illness

Edited by Gerald Landsberg, DSW, MPA, and Amy Smiley, Ph. D.

You'll get hands-on guidance on:

- Diversion programs for adults with emotional issues involved in the criminal justice system
- Inpatient and outpatient programming approaches
- New approaches to working with juveniles with mental illness who are in the criminal justice system
- Emerging legal and law enforcement issues
- Training correctional and mental health staff who work with forensic-unit inmates
- Assisting the victims of mentally ill offenders

**To order, see coupon on page 16.**



#### SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

© 2001 by Civic Research Institute, Inc. Casebound, one volume, approximately 656 pp.

The volume will be kept current and expanded through additional volumes sent to purchasers automatically on approval.