



MEETING THE NEEDS OF GIRLS

Girls of color share how to improve equity in Oakland schools

WHY WE CREATED THIS TOOLKIT

Girls are the largest growing juvenile justice population in the United States—often as a direct result of being disproportionately disciplined or suspended from school.

This problem is known as the school-to-prison pipeline. With support from the National Girls Initiative, funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), Alliance for Girls asked girls of color in Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) about their experiences in school, and solicited their ideas for putting an end to the school-to-prison pipeline.

In a series of focus groups, girls of color openly shared what makes them feel unsafe or as if they don't matter—and what they need to feel supported at school.

To help meet girls' expressed needs, Alliance for Girls members, partners and girl leaders worked together to create this toolkit to help you—OUSD frontline educators—shape a **girl-equity culture** that includes the supports girls of color so desperately need. The toolkit recommends policies, practices and programs, and includes a variety of helpful resources. We hope it supports you in doing the important work you do each day: **HELPING GIRLS THRIVE.**



Photo: TechBridge

Who we are

Alliance for Girls (AFG) is a membership-based association developing leadership in the service sector in the San Francisco Bay Area. Nationally, AFG is the largest regional alliance of girl-serving organizations. Its growing membership includes more than a hundred organizations that employ 2,400 people and engage more than 5,100 volunteers in serving more than 300,000 girls and young women across six Bay Area counties. This toolkit was created in partnership with:

- the AFG technical assistance team, including project lead consultant Iminah Laura Ahmad, Yejide Ankobia of Community Works West, Rebecca Peterson-Fisher of Equal Rights Advocates, Whitney Morris of Girls Inc. of Alameda County, Holly Joshi of MISSSEY, Celsa L. Sneed of The Mentoring Center and Courtney Macavinta of The Respect Institute.
- current and former OUSD girls, and boys, who live throughout Oakland.
- Oakland Unified School District stakeholders, including Nzingha Dugas, Director of the OUSD African American Girls and Young Women's Achievement Initiative.
- the AFG Girls Leadership Team.
- more than 100 Oakland community members.

WHAT GIRLS ARE SAYING

AFG completed two studies, including focus groups*, to learn more about the lived experiences of girls of color within OUSD and throughout Oakland. Girls and young women of color shared their overwhelming top concerns.

Girls are being **SEXUALLY HARASSED**

At one school, girls reported that boys had created “Slap-Ass Fridays,” which gave them “permission” to **spank and otherwise touch girls’ behinds**. Girls said teachers are aware of this tradition, but focus their responses on the girls’ reactions instead of addressing the boys’ behavior.

Girls need **MORE SAFE SPACES** and programs

“In our girls’ group, we dance, watch movies, talk about problems in our families, give each other advice and raise money for people who need it.”

Girls **DON’T FEEL VALUED** by all adults at school

Girls said some adults at school make disparaging comments such as: “Do you want to go to jail, or do you want to succeed?”

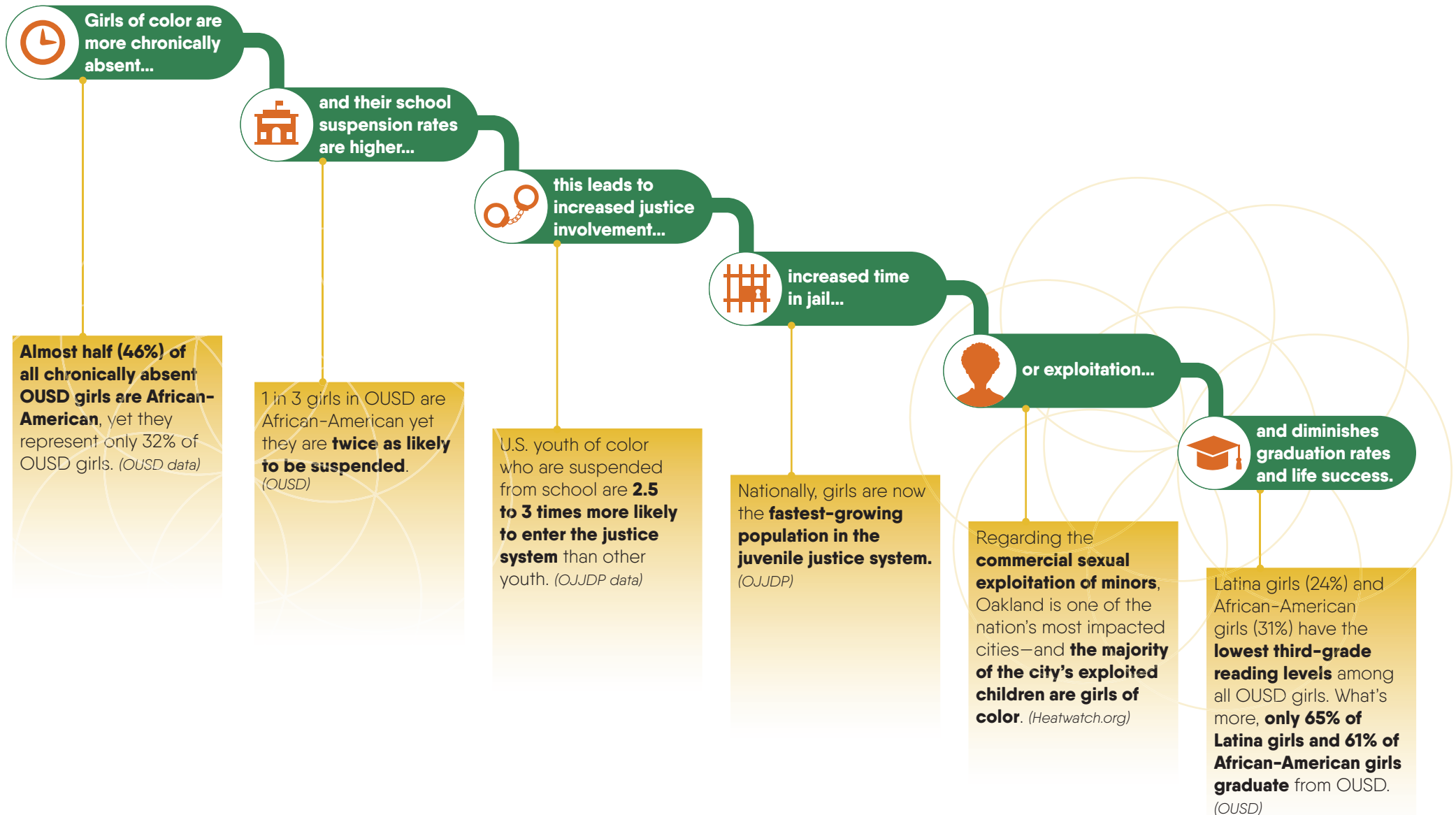
African-American girls face **MORE DISRESPECT AND PUNISHMENT**

“Teachers are more scared of Black girls.”

READ THE FULL REPORT

“Valuing Girls Voices: Lived Experiences of Girls of Color in Oakland Unified School District” alliance4girls.org/meetinggirlsneedstoolkit

WHY WE MUST LISTEN



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Whether you are a classroom teacher, classified staff, administrative leader, after-school program director, coach, volunteer or other caring adult, you are at the heart of keeping girls of color positively connected to school. To meet the needs of girls, you can uphold a framework of **policies, practices and programs** that ensure equity for girls. Here's how:

- #1 Explore your beliefs about girls
- #2 Take inventory of your approach to girls
- #3 Recognize bias
- #4 Stop sexual harassment
- #5 Create healthy relationships with girls
- #6 Bring girls' programs into your school



Photo: Girls Inc. of Alameda County

#1 EXPLORE YOUR BELIEFS ABOUT GIRLS

Our beliefs about girls become the foundation of how we treat them and what we envision is possible for them. During focus groups, girls said to “correct” them, adults at school routinely say things to them such as:

“Do you want to work at McDonald’s for the rest of your life?”

“If you keep going like this, you will be a teen mom.”

“Only ratchet girls let their books fall out of their bags.”

COMPLETE THESE SENTENCES:

- My reaction to the quotes above is...
- One example of a belief about girls that I now recognize is limiting or rooted in a stereotype is...

Girls of all races also report noticing that African-American girls in particular face disproportionate discipline:

“African-American girls are thought of as being loud, but that’s because no one wants to hear us. We have to speak up to be heard.”

REFLECT:

- What have you noticed about adults’ beliefs about African-American girls compared to other girls at your school?
- What do you commit to believing about all girls?

#2 TAKE INVENTORY OF YOUR APPROACH TO GIRLS

OUSD stakeholders who were interviewed for the AFG report agreed that trauma-informed approaches for all girls are needed, as are increased empathy, understanding, care and concern, especially for African-American girls. A wide body of research provides a framework—dubbed GCSTD—for how to create a girl-equity culture through your practices and relationships with girls.

“We are all hypersexualized by society in general. Every male that you have some type of relationship with will think he is entitled to you because society sexualizes you—you are here as a girl of color for that reason, to be sexual. That’s the worst stereotype.”

Approach	How	AFG member example	Learn more
Gender-responsive	CREATE an environment, including curriculum, that reflects an understanding of the realities of the lives of women and girls and that addresses and responds to their strengths and challenges. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention defines gender-responsive programs as those that are “designed to meet the unique needs of young, delinquent and at-risk females; that value the female perspective; that celebrate and honor the female experience; that respect and take into account female development; and that empower young women to reach their full potential.”	Girls Inc. of Alameda County provides a pro-girl environment that is physically, socially and emotionally safe. Its holistic programs focus on girls’ needs and provide access and exposure to new opportunities. Girls Inc. says: “We connect girls from underserved neighborhoods with access to the resources and opportunities they need to navigate gender, economic, and racial barriers, and realize their potential.”	Explore “A Guide for Gender Equality in Teacher Education Policy and Practices”—Module 6: Pedagogy and instructional materials produced by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002316/231646e.pdf
Culturally relevant	EMPOWER girls by incorporating relevant racial, ethnic and socio-economic issues—as defined by girls’ communities, family histories and structure—into classroom culture and curriculum.	Community Health for Asian Americans uses the GCSTD approach to serve Asian, South Asian and Pacific Islander (API) girls in Alameda County by “recognizing that individuals, families and communities have their own unique knowledge, experience, strengths and resources that deserve acknowledgment and respect.” The organization also provides training to teach schools and other partners how to better support API communities.	Find lesson plans to introduce girls to a more accurate, complex and engaging understanding of United States history than is found in traditional textbooks and curricula: zinnedproject.org

#2 TAKE INVENTORY OF YOUR APPROACH TO GIRLS

Approach	How	AFG member example	Learn more
Strength-based	IDENTIFY and draw upon the strengths of girls and their families and communities. Recognize and dispel negative labels and stereotypes. "Strength-based" is a way of viewing girls as resourceful and resilient in the face of adversity.	The Mentoring Center connects formerly incarcerated and at-risk youth to community-based mentors whom they can relate to. The center also provides a safe environment where young people are encouraged and supported to explore and develop their talents and skills at its West Oakland Youth Center.	Read <i>Mindset</i> , Dr. Carol Dweck's seminal book on growth mindset and how to foster it in youth: mindsetonline.com
Trauma-informed	REALIZE the widespread impact of trauma, recognize the signs and symptoms in girls and understand potential paths for recovery. Nurture "protective factors" that can help girls heal, including the ability to form relationships based on respect, trust, common interests, listening and safety.	MISSEY 's service model is trauma-informed, survivor-centered and youth-focused. MISSEY says: "We recognize the crucial voices of survivors in facilitating healing in victims of commercial sexual exploitation and the value of young people empowering other young people."	Review the definitions of trauma and how to respond effectively: samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions
Developmentally appropriate	NURTURE a girl's social-emotional, physical and cognitive development by basing practices and decisions on child development theories, individual strengths and the unique needs of each girl identified through authentic assessment.	The Respect Institute offers the Respect 360 Toolkit to nurture girls' self-respect. The kit includes group activities, games, journaling and a 1-1 coaching model, as well as a grade-specific roadmap to engage girls in grades 6 to 12 based on their ages.	Explore developmentally appropriate practices: childcareaware.org turnaroundusa.org/what-we-do/tools/

IN YOUR ROLE, WHAT ARE WAYS YOU CAN FORTIFY YOUR APPROACH TO GIRLS?

Approach	I will...
Gender-responsive	
Culturally relevant	
Strength-based	
Trauma-informed	
Developmentally appropriate	

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#3 RECOGNIZE BIAS

The OUSD Equity Policy currently states:

OSD will seek to end forms of social inequalities and oppression across multiple demographic groups, including race, gender, gender expression and identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, immigration status, involvement with the dependency or juvenile justice systems, and students with disabilities and learning differences.

In focus groups, OSD girls said they don't see boys being punished for using sexualizing or disparaging language with girls, which makes them feel unsafe. Girls also reported that some teachers and principals put pressure on girls to regulate their behavior because boys "can't control themselves." These examples point to a need to understand and uphold school-district policies and laws that support gender equity at school.

To support girls and address bias:

- **Review positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS).** For example, girls and AFG members suggest:
 - » Working with your school administration to review your tactics for each PBIS tier to ensure girls of color are getting adequate support vs. overly punitive measures.
 - » Reviewing your dress code to make sure it doesn't disproportionately target girls.

- » Co-creating school-wide Tier 1 norms with a student leadership team and holding skill-building workshops to help students and staff practice showing each other mutual respect on campus.
- » Institute Tier 2-3 strategies to reduce disproportionate office referrals or school suspensions for girls of color.

- **Expand your knowledge of trauma.** Review (and complete) the 10-question Adverse Childhood Experiences Survey acestoohigh.com. When a girl "misbehaves" or is "challenging," ask yourself: Is it really disrespect toward me? Or may she have unmet needs or be suffering in some way?

- **Question your own perspectives—and ask girls for perspectives, too.**

"It's important to recognize that we are products of our environment, a society that is not equitable, and we have internalized many of its messages," says Holly Joshi, AFG member and executive director of **MISSEY**. "Center the voices and perspectives of girls. Girls are the most impacted by our actions and systems and they are the true experts on their lives, experiences, and path forward." When working to address bias, partner with girls to solve the problem.

- **Test yourself.** Check out Harvard Implicit Association tests, which help you measure implicit bias. implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html

COMPLETE THESE SENTENCES:

- Ways I have seen bias against girls at my school include...
- One way I prevent or address bias is...

"I have one hole in my jeans at the knee and I get sent home, but the boys have their underwear showing and no one says anything."

#4 STOP SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Girls say they are being sexually harassed. Here's what you can do:

- **Know the law.** Title IX is a comprehensive federal law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any federally funded education program or activity. Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination prohibited by this law. The United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights defines sexual harassment as unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, which may include:

- unwelcome sexual advances
- requests for sexual favors
- other verbal, nonverbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature

If a school knows, or reasonably should know, about sexual harassment, it must take prompt and effective action to:

- eliminate the harassment
- prevent its recurrence
- address its effects

- **If you see it, stop it.** While sexual harassment affects students of all genders, it disproportionately affects girls and lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQQ) youth. Under California law, "if school personnel witness an act of discrimination, harassment, intimidation or bullying, they shall take immediate steps to intervene when safe

Girls at several schools said that boys regularly call them "bitches," "sluts" or "hos" in the presence of teachers and adults who take no action.

to do so." If you are not sure how to intervene, ask for professional development that will help you do your part to ensure your school is safe for everyone.

- **Know your district's policy.** Any OUSD student who believes they have been subjected to sexual harassment by another student, an employee or some other individual is strongly encouraged to tell a teacher, principal or other school employee about the harassment. Make sure you understand what you are required to do if a student discloses to you that they are being sexually harassed, or that they are a victim of sexual violence perpetrated by someone at school.

- **Check your biases.** We live in a society that has long blamed girls and women when they are subjected to sexual harassment and violence. When sexual harassment victims come forward and are met with a dismissive or victim-blaming response, it only makes the situation worse. Consider what beliefs you hold about sexual harassment and sexual violence, and how those beliefs might affect how you respond to students who disclose sexual harassment.

Girls also said gossip or "drama" was a major issue among girls and reported needing counseling and support for their social-emotional well-being as well as safe spaces, especially for those girls who are the target of gossip.



Photo: Techbridge

#4 STOP SEXUAL HARASSMENT

- **Prevent it.** OUSD schools can partner with AFG member **The Respect Institute** to receive a free school climate strategic planning session, eTraining, a Respect 360™ toolkit and social-emotional learning curriculum. The toolkit can help you create a culture of respect in your school community. It includes a variety of exercises, including a “Respect Pact” agreement that can be used in your classrooms and with individual students to create norms. therespectinstitute.org/training_tools/
- **Address its effects.** Sexual harassment negatively impacts students on many levels. Students subjected to sexual harassment may need emotional/mental health support, flexibility from teachers with deadlines and assignments, and safety planning to feel comfortable going to school. To learn more about Title IX and how to stop sexual harassment or address its effects, check out the resources below.

MORE RESOURCES

Equal Rights Advocates. This AFG member is chairing the steering committee that is revising OUSD’s sexual harassment policy to make it more effective and easier for students and educators to understand and follow. View the organization’s report, “Ending Harassment Now: Keeping Our Kids Safe at School.” equalrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/era-title-ix-report.pdf

Safe Space to Learn. Access free materials to prevent and eliminate peer-to-peer sexual harassment and sexual violence. safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/safe-place-to-learn-k12

Stop Sexual Assault in Schools. “Sexual Harassment: Not in Our School!” is an innovative, free online video for K-12 parents, middle and high school students, schools and community organizations. The video covers gender equality in education, students’ protections under Title IX and much more. stopsexualassaultinschools.org/video/

“It is critical that teachers and other school staff members make it clear that it is not okay to catcall, grope, make lewd gestures, or otherwise harass or demean students because of their gender or sexuality,” says Rebecca Peterson-Fisher, senior staff attorney for **Equal Rights Advocates**, an AFG member. “When students know that adults are aware of these kinds of behaviors and aren’t intervening, it sends the messages that sexual harassment is OK, that girls are not valued, and that victims are responsible for their own protection.”

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IN THE FOLLOWING SCENARIOS?

You hear a student spreading a sexual rumor.

You see a student touching someone’s body or clothes in a sexual way.

You hear a student making graphic comments about another student’s body.

A student tells you someone from school has posted a sexual image of them online.

A student tells you they were sexually assaulted by another student after school.

#5

CREATE HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS WITH GIRLS

During AFG focus groups, girls described daily exposure to crime and violence in their communities or at school—and they said that it was their job to protect themselves. A “blame the victim” mentality came up in girls’ conversations about risks to their safety. To help heal the impact of trauma and create a culture of belonging for girls at school, focus on nurturing your empathy toward girls and creating healthy relationships with them. AFG members suggest the following best practices:

- **Nurture mutual respect.** “Make respect the foundation of your relationship with girls—showing interest in their passions, reflecting their strengths, acting as a trustworthy confidant, consistently keeping promises and learning more about their lived experiences one-on-one,” says Courtney Macavinta, CEO, **The Respect Institute**. Practice using positive discipline and “connect before you correct.” Try asking: What’s happening? or What are you needing? Let girls describe in their own words (or in a quiet writing assignment) what’s going on before re-establishing your expectations. This will help them be more mindful, and can increase their trust in you—which makes you all the more influential when it comes to redirecting behavior. positivediscipline.com
- **Foster a girl-affirming environment.** “Make sure your environment is non-sexist, inclusive, egalitarian and caring,” says Whitney Morris, senior director, Learning & Service Programs, for AFG member **Girls Inc. of Alameda County**. “Offer all students the same opportunities to engage with materials, use resources and take leadership roles. Bring language, images and stories that are non-gender-stereotyped into your program and curriculum. Encourage girls

“It’s hard to be carefree when you need to always be calculating and planning for your safety. Guys can just go out. Girls have to worry.”

and young women to expand their horizons, take positive risks and sometimes fail in the act of growing and learning.”

- **Create safe spaces.** “Recognize that our role as adults is to use our access and privilege to create safe spaces for young people to learn, grow, heal and thrive,” says Holly Joshi, executive director, **MISSEY**. For example, school leaders: You can identify actual drop-in or permanent spaces on campus where girls can get trusted adult support, find sanctuary and practice solidarity. Teachers: You can make classrooms safe places during lunch or after school. Another way to create safe spaces is to “use restorative justice practices to repair, build and deepen relationships between girls on campus and other groups, especially school administrators and school police,” says Yejide Ankobia, director of Restorative Programs for AFG member **Community Works**. communityworkswest.org/program/rcc/
- **Mentor girls.** Use AFG member **The Mentoring Center’s** successful Transformative Mentoring™ framework and best practices to build relationships with girls. mentor.org/technical-assistance-training These best practices include:
 - » Offering opportunities for girls to be heard during all your interactions with them.
 - » Knowing the life, social and family circumstances for each girl in your class and for the population of girls at your school.
 - » Serving as a gateway to other people, programs and resources that can help girls succeed.
 - » Co-creating the relationship you have with girls so that you each understand the goals, roles and boundaries of your relationship.

REFLECT:

- What are ways you already create healthy relationships with girls?
- What other ways might you try to create healthy relationships with girls?
- How might you extend your efforts to the girls’ parents or other family members?

#6 BRING GIRLS' PROGRAMS INTO YOUR SCHOOL

Girls told us they need safe spaces and programs to help them grow, heal, explore their identity and build healthy relationships—especially with *each other*. In the fall of 2016, we surveyed AFG members to find out who's working in OUSD or has the capacity to serve girls in Oakland. Nearly 40 member organizations responded to the survey, self-reporting about their programs. For a more complete directory including contact information, visit www.alliance4girls.org/girls-service-directory-page

Organization	Categories
The Body Positive	Body Image, Self-Care
Career Girls	Career
Girls Inc. of Alameda County	College Prep, Life Skills, Literacy, Mental Health, STEM
Community Works - RCC Program	Conflict Resolution, Restorative Justice
The Respect Institute	Conflict Resolution, Youth Circles, Social-Emotional Learning, Teacher Training
Dimension Dance Theater	Dance
It's Time Network	Gender Equity
Gaia Girls Passages	Girls Groups, Summer Camps
Community Health for Asian Americans	Mental Health Services
PEERS (Peers Envisioning and Engaging in Recovery Services)	Mental Health, Peer Groups, Wellness
Black Female Project	Mentorship
The Mentoring Center	Mentorship
MISSEY (Motivating, Inspiring, Supporting & Serving Sexually Exploited Youth)	Mentorship, Case Management, Drop-In Center, Life Skills, Teacher Training
Shalom Bayit	Mentorship, Healthy Relationships,
HG Inc. (Hunnicut Group)	Mentorship, Life Skills

Organization	Categories
Bay Area Girls Rock Camp	Music Education
GirlVentures	Outdoor Adventure, Social-Emotional Learning
IGNITE	Political Engagement
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund	Restorative Justice, Teacher Training
Girls Leadership	Social-Emotional Learning, Summer Camps
Girls Leading Girls	Sports, Life Skills
Girls on the Run of the Bay Area	Sports, Life Skills
Legal Aid Society-Employment Law Center, Fair Play for Girls in Sports Project	Sports, Title IX
AnnieCannons	STEM
Expanding Your Horizons Network	STEM
Get MAGIC (More Active Girls Into Computing)	STEM
Scientific Adventures for Girls	STEM
Techbridge	STEM
One Circle Foundation	Youth Circles, Social-Emotional Learning, Teacher Training

WHAT GIRLS WANT

When asked how to support girls in OUSD, girls shared numerous ideas:

- » Create girls-only classes, opportunities or sports
- » Offer puberty education and sexual education for girls
- » Hold self-esteem or body-image classes
- » Develop "big sis" programs
- » Develop programs for African-American girls and women
- » Offer classes such as cooking and gardening
- » Offer respect or etiquette classes
- » Offer more girls-only sports
- » Establish drop-in rooms or spaces where girls can receive counseling, meditate or release anxiety
- » Add more counselors
- » Offer more field trips or educational excursions
- » Develop more technology based learning

FINAL CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU CAN DO

#1 Explore your beliefs about girls

Notice if and when you have limiting beliefs about girls or stereotype them.

#2 Take inventory of your approach to girls

To meet the needs of girls, infuse your teaching and school climate with best practices and tools that are gender-responsive, culturally relevant, strength-based, trauma-informed and developmentally appropriate (GCSTD).

#3 Recognize bias

Notice ways girls are treated unfairly and commit to changing attitudes and behaviors at your school.

#4 Stop sexual harassment

Understand the different kinds of behaviors that constitute harassment and do your part to stop it, address its effects and prevent it from happening again.

#5 Create healthy relationships with girls

You may be the most important person in the lives of many girls at your school. Focus on deepening your relationships with girls based on mutual respect, trust, safety and mentoring.

#6 Bring girls' programs into your school

Girls say they want more programs in OUSD. Spearhead the effort to identify and partner with programs you feel would benefit girls at your school.

MY COMMITMENTS

To better meet the needs of the girls I work with, I'll take the following actions:

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- 
- 
- 

GET TRAINED



Alliance for Girls can help your school meet the needs of girls through member programs and via toolkit implementation training. For more information, contact:

info@alliance4girls.org

www.alliance4girls.org

510 16th St #100, Oakland, CA 94612

Phone: (510) 629-9464



Photo: Girls Inc. of Alameda County