

More Than Just a Girl Curriculum

By Leah Oviedo

This curriculum was created to accompany the book; *I Am More Than Just a Girl*. I hope you can use this curriculum for the young women you work with. **As the famous equal rights crusader, Mary Wollstonecraft said "I do not wish for women to have power over men, but power over themselves". This is not anti male. It is pro female, pro equality, and pro individual. This is designed to teach young women that they are in control of their bodies, minds and emotions.**

My goal is teaching young women to have the confidence to take on the world despite challenges and obstacles life brings. The approach of this curriculum is to inspire young women to be unafraid to ask questions, create their own opinions and not rely on what they see in the media.

Challenging popular beliefs can be intimidating so I have created a format for you to use along with the book. Young women need positive reinforcement to back up the lessons in this curriculum. That is where you can make a difference. Discussions and creative exercises are important to create a fun and enjoyable learning experience. As the leader, you may want to use personal and or local situations reported in the news to help young women connect with these lessons. Creating an ongoing dialogue with this book is recommended. Gender inequality and individual empowerment are too invasive in our society for one program to solve everything. I recommend using this book in your ongoing education and empowerment of young women.

How to Use This Curriculum: It is divided into two sections. Part one includes topics for discussion. Each topic includes a goal, discussion points and questions. In each lesson there is space in between each point and question for you to write your own notes. Part two includes creative exercises and activities.

This book and curriculum includes the following:

- A brief introduction about women's rights from the late 1800's to the present and a discussion about creating positive change in our lives and communities.
- Creative exercises with affirmations, meditation, and positive body image.
- Guide to self defense using illustrated images showing specific moves and a discussion about staying aware and safe in all surroundings.
- Stress and anger management. Using positive words, thoughts and actions through our daily lives.
- Creative exercises with motivational techniques and journal therapy. Honesty is encouraged.
- Education, volunteering, community involvement and careers.

- Caring for our bodies and minds with laughter, exercise, meditation and yoga.
- Relationships, sexual assault, domestic violence and bullying. This includes a list of hotline resources concerning problems such as suicide, eating disorders, pregnancy, assault, runaways, child abuse and LGBT.
- Acceptance and tolerance. This book includes journal pages and instructions for various creative and motivational exercises.

Welcome to Becoming More Than ‘Just’ a Girl.

As a young woman you may have already noticed the inequality concerning women and men. Girls and women are not always considered equal to boys and men. This is an unfortunate belief that has permeated our world for thousands of years. Less than 100 years ago our government recognized women as voters. Prior to that, women were not allowed to decide who would lead their country. We were in fact second class citizens. A lot has changed since then.

Amazing women such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony advocated for a women’s right to vote in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s. They risked their lives for equal rights for women so we could have the same opportunities as men. After women were given the right to vote a new generation of activists followed. These were women such as Gloria Steinem who gave a voice to women in the media, Septima Clark and Raylawni Branch both fought for education and civil rights, and Aung San Suu Kyi who is still active in civil and political rights in her country of Burma. Activism was not the only route opened up to women, business and political opportunities became an option as well. Wilma Mankiller was the first female chief of the Cherokee nation in the USA, Laura Chinchilla was the first female president of Costa Rica and Oprah Winfrey has used her billion dollar business to become a global influence for women’s rights. Thanks to all these brave women, you have the opportunity to become presidents, successful business owners and leaders that prove women are just as capable as men at any task. Younger women are proving that you don’t need to be in politics, wealthy or even over the age of 18 to make a positive difference. Chi Nguyen works with street children in Vietnam and Severn Suzuki spoke at the United Nations when she was just 12 years old. All these women have sparked revolutions and turning Earth into a friendly place for girls to grow up.

In many progressive nations women have the right to an education, to attend college, have a career outside of the home, are not forced into marriage and may live freely with whomever they wish. In other countries women are oppressed, refused education and considered property of men. This curriculum was designed with each of you in mind. You are the future leaders of our world and you have a right to information and resources to create a positive difference for all people.

Part 1: Discussion Topics

Beauty and Body Image

The goal of this lesson is to challenge the current unhealthy standards of beauty which are marketed to young women.

There are images everywhere of how people are supposed to look. Young women see models and movie stars with perfectly smooth skin, skinny bodies, wearing revealing clothing, painfully high heels and a gallon of makeup. This is only one idea of beauty. It is not real though. It is an illusion. They are being sold a way of looking and told they will only be beautiful if they look that way. True beauty is relevant to each individual. There is no uniform opinion of beauty.

Discussion Points and Questions:

- The media sells beauty via cosmetics and skin care. If you didn't want or need to buy these items they would be out of business.
- Makeup is a fun way to express your style and to accentuate your features.
- Thin is not always healthy. Since we all have different body's one universal ideal body or beauty standard is not realistic.
- Obesity is also not healthy. Eating a balanced diet is important for staying at a healthy weight. A healthy diet can also reduce acne and blemishes on your skin.
- What is beautiful to you?
- Do you believe you have to look a certain way to be beautiful?
- Do you wear makeup to express yourself or do you feel that you must wear it every day to fit in?
- What is the media really selling?
- Is it selling beauty or insecurity?
- What are your favorite features?
- When do you feel the most beautiful?

The head in your book is the students to decorate in a way to express their true beauty. There is no right or wrong.

Journal Activity: Write what you love about yourself.

- Include your outer and inner beauty.
- Answer the question 'Who am I?' with a short description of yourself. Use positive words.
- It is healthy to feel beautiful and admit that you are beautiful. Can you look in a mirror and say 'I am beautiful?'
- What do you like about yourself?
- Write a beauty affirmation in your journal.

Other options for writing in a journal can be video journals, art journals, writing songs, poetry, or keeping a blog. The main reason of encouraging young women to keep a journal is to give them a safe and private outlet to express their feelings. Bottling up emotions and feelings leads to increased stress and mal adjustment.

Staying Safe, Self Defense

The goal of this lesson is to encourage young women to stand up against physical confrontation or threats of violence. Confidence building is an important part of having the ability to stand up to bullies.

Don't be afraid to use your voice. Speak up when someone harasses you. Nobody deserves to be treated badly. If someone hurts or threatens you, they are wrong and you have the right to take action. You have the right to protect yourself.

Discussion Points and Questions:

- What are ways that you can be safe when out with friends?
- How can you stay safe when you are alone?
- Do you feel comfortable fighting back?
- Why are girls and women not encouraged to physically fight back?
- How can you encourage your peers to stand up for themselves and for others?
- What non-violent actions can you take to defend yourself?
- How can you counteract negative stereotypes?
- What can your school do to encourage respect between young women and men?

Journal Activity: Staying safe and having the courage to protect ourselves starts with confidence. In your journal pages write reasons why you feel confident.

- Include experiences and moments where you felt confident. Include any of your accomplishments. This can encompass school, sports, art and personal growth.
- Consider ways you can create a feeling of confidence in any situation.

Relationship Red Flags

The goal of this lesson is to open the eyes of young women to warning signs concerning both romantic and platonic relationships

Healthy relationships are based on trust and mutual respect. Starting in middle school/junior high young women forge bonds with other young women, and begin romantic relationships with both women and men. This can be quite challenging for even the most logical person. Some important reasons for this are that they lack experience, are going through hormonal changes and attempting to figure out who they want to be. It can be difficult to see warning signs without guidance from mature adults. This is where you can help young women be aware of warning signs before it is too late.

Discussion Points and Questions:

- What qualities are important to you in friendship and a relationship?
- How often do you let disrespect happen because you feel that if you stand up to it, your peers will make fun of you or ostracize you?
- How do you feel when your boyfriend/girlfriend refers to you as “ho” or “bitch”?
- How do you feel when your friends make sarcastic comments about you regarding the way you dress, mistakes you make or for disagreeing with them?
- How does gossip make you feel? Have you ever had a friend who gossiped about you behind your back?

Relationship Warning Signs

- Your boyfriend/girlfriend does not want anyone to know you are dating. This means they are embarrassed by you or they want to use you while they date another person. Don't expect that person to eventually decide you are worthy. This person is using you.
- Your boyfriend/girlfriend says they do not want to get serious. This is very honest and upfront. It means they do not want a real relationship. It does not mean that in a week or a month they will change their mind. Many young women will try to wait for that person to love them.
- Your boyfriend/girlfriend is mean to you and to others. They are a waste of time. Get away from them FAST. Do not try to change them. Only that person can change their bad attitude. It is not your responsibility.
- Your friend does not keep a secret they swore to keep. This is not a real friend. No matter how juicy a secret is, your real friends will never gossip about you.

- If you bonded with a friend through gossip about other people they will eventually gossip about you. You can still be nice to this person, but you will not be able to trust them. Gossip always comes back to you so it's best to not gossip about other people at all.
- Your best friend since elementary school suddenly is hanging out with a different crowd and blowing you off to spend time with them. You can either hang out with the new crowd as well or you can make new friends. We all go through changes and sometimes we do not have enough in common with people to stay friends. It can be very sad to lose a friend, but rest assured there are many more people for you to become friends with.
- If your friends and family express concern about your friend or partner being abusive to you or others it is a good idea to take a closer look at your friend's actions. It can be easy to ignore bad behavior when you are in love with someone or enamored by their popularity. It is true that some people start rumors out of jealousy. However, if most of the people you know well warn you about someone it is good to listen.
- The most important action you can take in any relationship is to be aware. Don't ignore bad behavior and hope it goes away. Immaturity, gossip, cruel jokes and prejudices can change, but you cannot change that in someone else. It is up to that person to decide how they act. Change is an inside job.

Sexual Harassment and Assault

The goal of this lesson is to teach young women to be aware of what sexual harassment is and how they can fight back.

Sexual assault covers a variety of issues including rape, attempted rape, molestation and any unwanted sexual contact or threats. Sex is an act to be enjoyed -when and only when- a person is ready and willing.

Sexual harassment is never acceptable but is often used in a joking or humorous manner. Turning sex into a joke that is meant to hurt or oppress someone is not funny. This "it's just a joke" attitude can cause the victim to feel like they should just go along with the harassment because their peers act like it is not a big deal.

Sexual assault is a violent act used to control another person. It is never the victim's fault. When someone is assaulted there are steps to take in helping police identify and arrest the attacker(s). Reporting a sexual assault crime is up to each individual and can seem intimidating, scary or pointless. However reporting a crime can help authorities stop an assailant from hurting more victims.

Discussion Points and Questions

- Can you define sexual harassment?
- What do you want to say or what action do you want to take to someone who is harassing you? What do you normally say or do?
- Does music and media encourage sexual harassment?
- How do you feel about the saying 'boys will be boys'?
- How do words like slut, whore and tease make you feel?
- Have you ever used those words or similar ones to describe another female?
- If so, how did that make you feel?
- Do you know what to do if you or a friend is sexually assaulted?
- Sexual Assault can be acted out verbally, visually and physically.
- Verbal: starting and continuing the spread of rumors, suggesting sexual favors, and name calling.
- Visual: writing sexually offensive graffiti, obscene gestures, displaying pornography, and leering.

- Physical: pinching, unwanted touching, pulling on clothing, and stalking.

Fighting Back

- What can you do to defend yourself and others who are being assaulted?
- If a girl does not defend herself immediately does that mean she is not offended?
- Report sexual assault or bullying to your teacher, principle, guidance counselor, parents, coaches, security guards and police.
- Tell people clearly and strongly to stop harassing you.
- How do you feel about confrontation?
- Do you ever get scared to stand up for yourself?
- What can you do to feel more secure about expressing your feelings?
- Think of a time when you stood up for yourself. What gave you the strength to do that?
- How can you recreate that feeling of being powerful?

Stress and Anger Management

The goal of this lesson is to teach young women how to control anger and relieve stress.

Anger is a healthy emotion, but when we act out violently it becomes unhealthy. Stress is often a cause of anger so teaching young women to deal with stress can reduce angry outbursts. In the past, it has not been “lady like” for women or girls to express anger or unhappiness. These days we are encouraged to speak out and express ourselves, but we are not taught how to handle stress or how to voice our anger and disappointment in healthy ways. Young women are encouraged to act out and attack other people emotionally and verbally. They are naturals at communicating so it is important to teach them positive ways to manage their own emotions.

Stress makes us physically ill. This can be especially difficult for teenagers who are still developing mentally and physically. Encourage the young women you work with to discover the root problems and from there find healthy solutions. Suggestions for stress and anger management are positive thoughts and affirmations, meditation, laughter, exercise and talking to a trusted friend.

Discussion questions

- How often do you feel stressed out?
- What actions do you take to feel better?
- How often do you feel angry enough to lash out at others either verbally or physically?
- How do you feel after you have taken your anger out on another person?
- Become aware of what is causing your stress and pay attention to how you react.
- Discuss methods listed above that will reduce stress and contain anger.
- Who do you feel comfortable discussing your problems and bad days with?
- When have you noticed you were stressed out and taken control of the situation?
- How can you remember that positive action for a stressful event in the future?

Thoughts and Actions

The goal of this lesson is to teach young women that how they think about themselves and the actions they take are in direct correlation to how their life is working.

Discussion Points and Questions:

- Thinking about how others words can hurt or encourage you. How do your personal thoughts influence your confidence?
- Do you often talk to yourself negatively?
- Are you judgmental and negative towards others?
- When we complain too much, we fill our mind and emotions with negativity.
- Realize that certain circumstances are beyond our individual control, but not all circumstances.
- When you begin to complain, ask yourself if continuing will improve or worsen your situation.
- Choose the way you think and you will have power to change your situation.

Empower Yourself

The goal of this lesson is to show young women a path to success by utilizing their passions and desires for a life that will resonate with their true selves.

When we follow our passions greatness becomes a part of our everyday life. We are happier and we can enjoy life without feeling pressure to simply keep up with people who have more than us. You can guide young women to make positive decisions that will help them create a positive life. You can do this by listening to what they want and creating a map of goals they need to accomplish.

Discussion Points and Questions:

- What career do you want when you are older?
- What are your passions?
- Do you know what goals you need to accomplish so that your dream life comes true?
- Volunteer with an organization whose mission corresponds with your own personal goals. This accomplishes three things. It makes you feel happy because you are improving lives, improves your community and looks great on job resumes and college applications.
- Education and knowledge give you power to make informed decisions. How far do you think you can go if you do not obtain a high school degree?
- Expand your experiences by learning a new skill. Take a class and learn a new language, musical instrument or hobby that interests you.
- Start or join a club at school around your passion. Ask your friends to join with you. This is a great way to make new friends with common interests.
- Create a community garden and grow your own food. This is great for forging strong community relationships because you work together to create a more sustainable city. Gardening is also very therapeutic and healing for our bodies and minds.
- Get active! Try out for a sports team or take time to pursue recreational activities you enjoy. Exercise releases endorphins, chemicals in your body, which make you feel good. This is good for your body and also for your spirit. Being active can also lift your mood if you feel depressed.

Part 2: Creative Exercises

Beauty Exercise

This two part exercise involves all the young women sharing compliments with each other and proclaiming their own beauty. The students can take a small piece of paper and write the name and a compliment on the outer or inner beauty of every other student in the class. These papers can go in a hat or box and be pulled out with anonymity. Hand out all of the compliments for each student to keep.

The second step requires a mirror, preferably full length. Have each student stand in front of the mirror, look directly at their reflection and clearly state "I am beautiful.", "I love you." and "I love my body."

Meditation Exercise

Meditation is a wonderful way to relax. Have students find a comfortable quiet place where you can sit for at least 15 minutes. Start a timer once everyone is sitting down. Instruct student to start with deep breathing.

- Take a deep breath in and exhale slowly. Repeat 4 times.
- Continue to breathe slowly, but not as deep
- Focus on all the parts of your body and how you feel.
- Don't think about your troubles, just focus on your breathing and your body.
- Imagine a place that creates a safe and warm feeling. You can imagine you are in your room, in a quiet forest with a stream nearby or sitting next to the ocean with the waves breaking.
- Allow the remaining time for quiet reflection.
- When the timer alarm sounds have students open their eyes and stand up to stretch.

Another meditation technique is to have students draw and color a picture. This allows us to slow down and clear our mind as we focus on a simple task.

Self Defense Exercise

Goal: To learn about our inner strength for standing up to bullies and against verbal attacks.

Supplies: Poster board or paper and thick markers.

Directions: Create signs with the poster board and markers. Have each student share something offensive they have been told or seen and write it on a board. Choose one board to hold up and have the students form a single file line. Ask each student to step forward directly and have them respond to the offensive. They can say a simple "No!" or make up their own snappy comeback. Make sure the students use a clear loud voice every time they respond.

Every student will have a turn to loudly and clearly stand up for themselves in the face of each offensive sign. At the end of this exercise ask students to reflect on how it felt to stand up for themselves before the first sign and after the last sign. Encourage each student to share with the class how they felt. Some or all students may be scared or nervous to talk back and sharing out loud gives each student a chance to see that how they feel is not unusual or wrong.

Affirmation Exercise

The words we use and the way we think impacts every part of our lives. When we constantly tell ourselves that we cannot accomplish an action or that we are not good enough, then we begin to believe that. Creating an affirmation is as simple as stating your goals by using only positive words. Below is a sample affirmation that is also in the book

I am in control. I am strong. I am smart. I deserve equality. I am beautiful. I am powerful. I am a survivor. I can create positive change.

Affirmation Poster Activity

Goal: Increase awareness of positive thought and encouragement. Students can hang these posters up in their rooms or keep in a private journal.

Supplies: Paper, markers, pens, pencils, glitter, glue, magazines, scissors, cardboard or poster board.

Directions: Have students design a poster with a positive affirmation of their own words. Use photos from magazines to decorate or have students draw pictures. Be sure to use only positive words in the affirmation. Focus on the present tense. Mount the finished poster on the cardboard or poster board.

Memory Box Activity

Goal: The memory box is a great activity that can be kept for years and pulled out whenever we feel sad or are having a bad day.

Supplies: Empty shoe box, glue, magazines, broken jewelry, craft supplies, markers, pens, pencils, and scissors.

Directions: Have students choose a box and decorate it with magazine cutouts and drawings that make them smile. The box can be immediately filled with the beauty compliments from the previous beauty exercise. Students can add photos, awards, letters, cards, report cards and even comic strips that make them laugh. Remind the students to bring out their boxes whenever they have a hard day.

This concludes the curriculum. The book, *I Am More Than Just a Girl*, is available at www.Bookemon.com. Discounts for educators are available.

I donate \$1 from each book sale to youth organizations. For example if you buy 5 books for your organization you would receive \$5. There is no limit on this donation, so buying 10 books would give you \$10, 20 books would give you \$20, etc. Some suggestions are to ask donors, sponsors, parents and community members to buy books for your organization. This is also a great way to get people involved who cannot afford large monetary donations. Either way you get books and money for your programs. For more information contact Leah Oviedo at 760-487-8567 or InvestingInWomen@gmail.com