

## Emotional Life of Girls

May 2, 2018

Facilitated by Carrie Kirkpatrick at the Teton County Library

Carrie: The Emotional Life of Girls is a big topic! This presentation is meant to touch on the general landscape of girl's emotions and paint a broad brushstroke of the topic. While I can't cover everything, I will try to touch on many important topics.

### Landscape of the Female Brain

In the book *The Female Brain*, Dr. Luoann Brizendine explains that women's brains are wired for communication, connection and emotional sensitivity. The hippocampus is larger in women which is responsible for memory formation and observing emotions in others. Men have a vocabulary of 7,000 words, women have 20,000. Women have verbal centers in both hemispheres of the brain, while men have verbal centers on the left hemisphere only. In a UT study of toddler girls vs boys, girls looked to their mother 20 times more often than boys for approval or disapproval. Girls are wired to connect! Cell phones provide a powerful tools to do it quickly and effectively.

### Then, imagine the overlay of the menstruation cycle....

Day 2 - estrogen enters the system and you feel slightly more relaxed

Day 7,8 - more estrogen and a surge of energy

Day 11,12 - peak estrogen. You are feeling flirty and confident

Day 14 -ovulation, libido surges. attraction to desired sexual mate heightened.

Day 17,18 - progesterone

Day 21 - estrogen, progesterone levels drop

Day 27 - serotonin and estrogen bottom out

Day 28- cramps, increased appetite and metabolism

### Three Steps for Dealing with Strong Emotions

1. feel your feelings
2. share your feelings
3. re-frame the situation

It is very important that you allow your daughter to feel her emotions. It is important to give girls a broad emotional vocabulary so she can learn to express her feelings. When you reframe how you are understanding her feelings, you offer her new words to put into her emotional vocabulary. (ex: You must have felt envious when she was talking about her trip to Africa) If your daughter is getting rude toward you, try saying " I don't like your tone but I do want to understand what you are upset about." (suggested by *Untangled* author, Dr. Lisa Damours)



Lisa Damour says 7 stages of Being A Teenage Girl:

1. Privacy and Isolation
2. Being Part of a Tribe
3. Good Decisions
4. Testing Authority
5. Acting Out / Consequences
6. Romance
7. Taking Responsibility (diet, sleep)

[girlsstandstrong.com](http://girlsstandstrong.com)

Great resource. Michele Kelly, LCSW, has wonderful “1 minute reads” on her blog site.

[girlsleadership.org](http://girlsleadership.org)

Rachel Simmons answers the question, “What do you do when your daughter clams up?” . Watch the video online at the above website. Lots of great information on this site.

<https://gurianinstitute.com/the-journey-to-boundaries/>

Carrie shows a video of Dr. Micheal Gurian stating that “it is a misconception that girls are just ‘dramatic’. They are learning about boundaries and closeness via there bonding. Their brains tend to process experience with up to 10 times more white matter activity than male brains often do. White matter activity keeps the brain constantly on, making internal connections, especially between feelings and words.”

Attendee Question: How do we guide our child to have empathy?

Carrie suggested being deeply empathic and just listening in the heat of the moment but then perhaps come back to the situation once things have calmed down and ask if there is any new thoughts on the relationship or a way to reframe what is happening.

Attendee Question: How do we not excuse the other girl’s bad behavior?

Attendee Answer: Rachel Simmons would say that to ask girls if they have an idea of a way they want to respond. Offer to role play. Don’t try to give suggestions or girls won’t be able to own the behavior. Ask for permission before giving advice.

Carrie acknowledged the power of asking before offering advice and compliments creating a safe conversation environment. ( see Harville and Helen Hendrick’s work, SafeConversations)

Attendee comments about the importance of modeling and sharing our own emotions.

When we are having a bad day and someone asks how we are doing, we often say “fine.” Can we expect our daughters to act any different? We can allow daughters to feel their emotions even if they seem ridiculous to us as parents.

Why is there so much depression and anxiety?

**Dr. Leonard Sax** and **Dr. Michael Gurian** say the causes are 1) Neurotoxins, which alter brain development. 2) Brain Trauma 3) Increased stress due to technology, change in sleep habits, etc. Also, we are medicalizing children and misbehavior. Americans are 40 times more likely to be diagnosed as bipolar than in Germany, for example. We are over medicating ourselves. We are a generation of parents who want to be friends with our kids, and they are suffering for it. Also, important to note that cutting is significantly on the rise (up

68% in the past three years). This non suicidal self harm practice creates exogenous opiates in some girls systems, according to Dr. Sax.

Attendee Question: What is the age when girls start to engage in social media?

Carrie: Depends on your daughter's needs. Use a contract. Enforce rules. Delay the use. Check out [waittilleighth.com](http://waittilleighth.com), a national campaign to wait to give a kid a cell phone until 8th grade.

### Other tools for understanding....

Carrie talks about one way to connect with our daughters and understand her emotional life further is by understanding their personality type and our own. One resource for this is The Enneagram Personality Types. Carrie handed out a reference sheet made by Rob Fitzel which introduces the 9 personality types.



Carrie poses the question, "When do you know when it is time to seek help?" Every girl is different, but one big clue is if your daughter says she "feels numb" or can't feel anything or loses interest in things she normally enjoys. Also, sleep disturbance issues are often a sign

that something is going on with the integration of the brain. Problems with sleeping show up before you might realize your kid has anxiety or depression.

### **In Closing**

Many girls do save emotional upheaval for home. It's a privilege to parent. It is hard, but our kids need it now more than ever. ( see Dr. Sax's new book *The Collapse of Parenting*)

