

## WHAT ARE ADOLESCENT GIRLS THINKING ABOUT?

To help you prepare for your presentation, we want to remind you what it was like to be a teen-age girl and to refresh your memory about her world. Your audience will be 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls, aged 11 - 14.

At this age girls are beginning to:

- ⊙ form their own identities;
- ⊙ learn about romantic intimacy;
- ⊙ strive toward self-reliance;
- ⊙ develop a value system.

Girls vary a great deal at this stage. Behavioral and thinking patterns, rather than age, indicate the developmental stage at which any particular girl is functioning. Some girls will demonstrate advanced capabilities, while others will need more time to develop cognitively. The attention spans of the girls will vary greatly, too. Watch for students' minds beginning to wander, especially when you are talking. Consider this a signal to move on.

The early adolescent is egocentric; she focuses on self. Early adolescents tend to think they are special or different - that no one understands how they feel (personal fable); and that nothing bad can happen to them (magical thinking). They also believe that everyone else is watching them at all times and passing judgment on their appearance and behavior (imaginary audience).

The early adolescent seeks the company of adults other than parents who can serve as role models and provide support and guidance.

### Developmental Differences from Boys

We are finding that adolescent girls experience genuine, substantial drops in self-esteem. Though boys also have a drop in self-esteem at this age it is much more significant for girls. Lowered self-esteem is believed to account for *less enthusiasm for math and science*, less confidence in their academic abilities, and fewer aspirations to professional careers.

- ⊙ Girls are more likely than boys to be concerned about their physical appearance.
- ⊙ Girls are less assertive and less aggressive than boys, and more dependent on others for approval and support.
- ⊙ Girls at this age are more sensitive to pressure to conform to sex roles than are younger girls.
- ⊙ As girls learn that aggression and dominance are not considered "feminine", they develop sex-typed ways of being powerful: manipulating, flattering, excluding others from cliques, gossiping, competing with other girls for boys' attention.
- ⊙ Girls begin to become more accommodating to what they perceive as appropriate sex-role behavior.
- ⊙ Girls are less likely than boys to develop expertise in logical persuasion, argumentation, task persistence, or power management - the crucial qualities for leadership.
- ⊙ Girls are significantly less likely than boys to have access to computers and other forms of advanced technology.
- ⊙ Girls develop more competence in sophisticated social skills (empathy, self-disclosure, ability to make friends) than do boys.

Remember in your position as a role model your messages of encouragement can do a great deal to bolster the self-confidence of the young women you meet. Be as positive as you can about them and their opportunities.