

Title: Growing Confident Girls

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Texts:

For you formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them. Psalm 139:13-16

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. John 10:10

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 1 Peter 5:8

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. James 1:5

Statement of Purpose:

To equip parents, grandparents and church leaders to encourage, equip, and challenge girls to live confidently as the beautiful and unique young women God created them to be—boldly living out His plan and purpose for their lives.

Materials Needed:

Laptop, Power Point software, and a projector. This seminar will probably take about 1.5 hours.

Introduction

She burst into the room wearing a princess dress. "Look at me; I'm a princess!" she declared with joy as she twirled and danced. She soon disappeared and then reappeared in a different princess dress but with the same exuberance and joy. The innocent little girl was sure that everyone in the room loved her and would delight in and celebrate her.

Today that same little girl is thirteen, and her perspective of herself is changing. Instead of twirling, she changes outfits several times because nothing looks right. No longer declaring she's a princess, she's too often focused on what isn't right about herself and her appearance. Like most girls her age, she's a complex mix of emotions and thoughts— sometimes jumping from one to another without any warning on unsuspecting parents.

Transitioning from Princesses to Teens

The transition from little girl to teen is hard. And it impacts girls physically (think hormones, body changing), emotionally, socially (friendships, peer pressure), and mentally.

Their bodies are changing, and hormones are wreaking havoc on their emotions and thoughts. Suddenly our little princesses are no longer sure that anyone—let alone everyone—loves her, delights in her, and wants to celebrate her. She’s not even sure she likes herself.

Girls feel the need to be perfect and do everything—and do it all well:

- fit in while also standing out
- take advanced placement classes
- take college credit courses while in high school
- participate in sports, music, and a host of other extra-curricular activities
- be thin, pretty, and wear the right clothes/makeup
- have lots of friends.

Their schedules are packed, but they’re afraid that they’re not doing enough.

Social media adds a new level to the pressure— even when girls know that many “perfect” pictures have filters on them. “Then you think you should look that way with filters too,” a seventeen-year-old girl recently shared as she talked about the battles and pressures that she and her friends face daily. Suddenly, who you are isn’t enough. There’s pressure to grow up and be perfect, look perfect, and do everything not only well but excel. It’s no wonder that anxiety and depression are at an all-time high and growing, especially among teen girls. (Davis, 2019)

Ypulse, a polling firm that focuses on Generation Z and millennials, surveyed more than thirteen hundred girls, ages eight to eighteen, on the topic of confidence. The results were dramatic.

- There was a 30 percent drop in confidence during puberty.
- The number of girls who said they were not allowed to fail rose from 18 percent to 45 percent from the ages of twelve to thirteen (that’s a 27 percent increase in just one year!).
- Girls under twelve shared that they “make friends really easily. [They] . . . can go up to anyone and start a conversation.” By the age of fourteen, they reported, “I feel like everybody is so smart and pretty and I’m just this ugly girl without friends.” (Kay, 2018)

Many girls do not believe they are good enough. One report states, “7 in 10 girls believe they are not good enough or do not measure up in some way, including their looks, performance in school and relationships with family and friends.” (Fund, 2014)

This lack of confidence causes girls to avoid taking risks or trying new things and keeps them from believing that God has a plan for their lives. They do not believe that who they are and what they are good at are acceptable. They often tend to try to please everyone around them (parents, teachers, friends, boys), and they expect perfection from themselves. And no matter how hard those who love them try to encourage them and tell them they’re still princesses, these girls no longer believe it.

Feeling like they're not good enough often causes girls to focus on negative feelings and thoughts. As a result, their brains become hardwired to think negatively. Each thought creates a path in the brain. The more we think that thought, the stronger the path. For instance, you look in the mirror and think, *I'm fat*. A path is created. The next time you look in a mirror, your brain remembers and thinks, *I'm fat*. You accept that thought, and the path deepens. Soon every time you look in the mirror, you see someone who is fat without even thinking about it— no matter what you really look like. (How many of us have looked back at pictures of ourselves when we were younger and thought we were fat only to realize we weren't?) The path becomes a deep rut in your thinking. It becomes the truth of who we are in our minds: "I'm not good enough."

This is the foundation teen girls are building on as they transition from girl-to-teen-to-adult, causing them to battle with confidence and self-esteem and not see their God-given uniqueness as a good thing, nor appreciate their specific gifts or abilities.

Downplaying and Dismissing

Peggy Orenstein, author of *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self Esteem and the Confidence Gap*, found that middle school girls repeatedly dismissed their academic triumphs but willingly embraced their failures. (Murray, 2006)

Ask a girl (or adult) to make a list of what they are good at and like about themselves, and they will struggle, hesitate, doubt themselves. But they can easily make a list of what they're not good at or list their failures. Girls (and adults) tend to downplay their strengths and successes and focus on their perceived weaknesses and failures.

EXERCISE

Let's test this out. Take a sheet of paper and create two columns. For one minute, we're going to list the things we're good and like about ourselves in the first column. Go. (Give them one minute.)

Now for the next minute, we're going to list the things we're not good at or don't like about ourselves in the second column. Go. (Give them one minute.)

Look at both columns. Which one has the longer list? Which one was easier to create?

They also tend to diminish their strengths and successes—as if they really aren't a big deal. People compliment them and they diminish it or disregard it.

For instance, someone says, "You did a great job with that school project!" Girls may respond with things they could've done better or differently. Or point out the flaws in the project.

Someone compliments an outfit or hairstyle and they say, "This old thing?" or "I don't really like it." Or "It's not as nice as Kaleigh's."

At the same time, they hear people's critical words, think about them, repeat them over and over again in their heads, and accept them as the truth about who they are. but then dismiss words of affirmation with barely a thought.

More Than Just Hormones

Hormones and body changes are just one part what's happening in the hearts and minds of girls. We have an enemy. The Bible is clear.

- The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. John 10:10
- Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 1 Peter 5:8

Each of us, including our teen girls, has an enemy out to steal, kill, destroy, and devour. He does not want girls living confidently in the value and unique abilities God gave them. He doesn't want them to believe they are who God says they are. And he also wants to take out their trust and faith in God.

The enemy will use the messages that girls hear through words spoken to them, messages from social media, their interpretation of words and situations and cause them to believe that they aren't enough. That they don't have what it takes. He will do all he can to damage their relationships—with parents, friends, teachers, etc. And sadly, most of the time, we don't even recognize that it's the enemy. Girls will believe the things they are hearing as the truth about themselves instead of recognizing the lies and going to God's truth instead.

The teen years are a crazy mix of hormones, growing pains and transitions, and an enemy using all to cause girls to doubt themselves and to even feel shame about who they are, their appearance, their abilities (or their considered lack of abilities), so that instead of just feeling like they've failed or disappointed, they will think they ARE a failure or disappointment.

What Can We Do?

So what can parents, grandparents, youth leaders, Sabbath School teachers, and other caring adults do for the girls in our lives?

Pray Like Crazy

One of the most important and powerful things you can do is pray for her. Regularly. Every time she comes to your mind.

- Pray that God will reveal Himself and His love in undeniable ways to her
- Ask for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in her life and that He would have all power to speak, encourage, convict, and guide her
- Pray for the promised wisdom of James 1:5 for yourself as you love and disciple her and for her—that she will be able to discern the enemy's lies and God's truth

- Ask God to bring her godly friends who can encourage her and affirm her—build her up instead of tear her down
- Pray that God would give His angels power to protect her—not just from physical harm, but emotional, mental and spiritual wounds as well
- Ask God to give you confidence—not just to encourage and mentor her, but confidence that you can live out in your own life as an example

Pray with her. Let her hear you praying for her and all the beautiful things you're asking God to do in and through her. Let her hear you thanking God for her and for specific qualities and characteristics. There is something powerful and life impacting about hearing another person pray for you.

Model

You compliment her. Cheer her on. Tell her she's doing great and is beautiful, but your daughter still puts herself down and beats herself up. What gives?

She may be learning how to talk about herself from you and others—but not from your affirmation and encouragement. How you talk about yourself is her example of how women see themselves. Be careful how you talk about you. Your daughter is learning how to talk and think about herself not just from the things you say about her, but by how you talk about yourself.

We need to learn to talk good about ourselves. Stop trash talking ourselves. The trash talk becomes so ingrained in our minds that it's what we naturally think about ourselves. We can change that by talking good about ourselves to ourselves. Be a friend to ourselves. We wouldn't talk to our friends like we talk to ourselves. So, pretend you're your own friend. What would you tell you?

Model the courage to try new things. To do things you're not good at. Show her how to handle failure, by failing and not beating yourself up, but instead learning from the experience and trying again. Teach her what it is to have friends and work through the hard in relationships. Show her how to depend on God by living it out—letting her see and hear when you pray, how you use scripture to encourage yourself, and having godly friends who pray with you and for you.

There may be areas where you, too, need to grow. Do the work. Let her see you putting in the effort to learn to talk about yourself in a positive way and being grateful for the gifts God has given you instead of comparing yourself to someone else and feeling less than.

Help Girls Learn to “You do You”

While at the High School for the Performing Arts in New York City, Jennifer Anniston was performing a highly dramatic scene from *The Three Sisters* and could hear the audience laughing. She walked off stage wondering why they were laughing when it was supposed to be drama.

Her acting teacher later told her, “Jennifer, they're laughing because you're funny.”

She responded, “But I don't want to be a funny actress, I want to be a serious actress.”

“No, you've got it wrong,” he said. “This is a wonderful thing.”

Jennifer realized that she had a natural tendency to make people laugh. She was good at making people laugh. She had never seen it as a strength or something to pursue—it was too easy.

She shares, “I realized I had to accept this aspect of my personality—my natural tendency to make people laugh—but place it in a larger context of what I wanted to achieve...So instead of rejecting the funny side of myself, I embraced it. And channeled it into something I love to do and that makes me unbelievably happy and, amazingly, makes other people happy, too.” (Others, 2002)

Help girls learn that God created each of us with unique abilities and characteristics on purpose, intentionally designing them for ways to impact the world around them like no one else can. Then guide them in discovering their abilities and strengths, and to see the possibilities of how they can use those to make a difference. We can do this by affirming the abilities, strengths and characteristics we see in them and by coaching them to identify these themselves.

EXERCISE

Let's do a simple coaching activity designed to help girls identify their strengths. This is an example of something you can do with girls—either individually or in a group setting like Sabbath School or a youth group. We'll try it ourselves. (Everyone participate!)

Leader ask: What are you good at? What are your strengths? What have you been successful in doing? Have participants make a list of their strengths. Challenge them to see how many they can list in five minutes.

Give the group five minutes to make a list. Then invite people to share one or two things with the group.

Leader ask: Sometimes identifying where we've been successful can also help identify our strengths and abilities, so take a moment to list three things you've recently successfully accomplished. What are three things you've wanted to do and were able to accomplish? Things you did that turned out well?

Allow time for people to make a list and again invite people to share a success or two and then ask them, So what strengths or abilities enabled you to be successful in this? Brainstorm with the group all possibilities of strengths that might be needed to be successful for this result. Then encourage the participant who shared to consider if any of these are their strengths.

Do What You Love

One more way to help girls discover who they are and live confidently as the beautiful person God created them to be is to encourage and support her getting involved in things she enjoys. And encouraging her to try new things. Try “on” different things to see if they “fit.” For example, take an art class, try a new sport, or try something she's never done before and see if she likes it and can learn to do it well. Being bold and trying new things sometimes opens up new possibilities.

Ask her, “If you had more confidence, what is one thing you would do or try?” Then coach her through the steps she can take towards accomplishing that goal. Challenge her to schedule a date to take that step and begin living boldly.

EXERCISE

Let's try it out. Leader ask: What's one thing you would do or try if you had more confidence or thought you couldn't fail?

Go around the room and let people share.

Leader ask: Now let's take five minutes to think of three steps you could take towards actually trying what you just shared. What would the first step need to be? Second step? Third step?

Give them time to work on three steps. Then ask: When can you take that first step? Schedule it. Let's make this real so that you'll have an experience to share with girls. Give them one to two minutes to schedule their first step.

Encourage Her and Build Her Up

Compliment and affirm her in areas other than just appearance. What is she good at? What are the characteristics that you can affirm? Where have you seen her go above and beyond? Be kind to someone? Tell her about it.

Also affirm her effort and not just accomplishments and performance. Girls today report that they feel the need to do everything perfectly. Let's take the focus off the results and move it onto the effort that's gone into what she's doing.

When girls are struggling and express their doubts and discouragement, we may think we're helping by saying things like, "It's not so bad." Or "You just need to try harder." Instead, we need to acknowledge their feelings and not ignore or dismiss them, then speak confidence in their ability. "This is tough, but so are you." Or "As hard as this feels right now, I do think that you'll get through it."

Teach Her to Care and Connect, Not Compare and Compete

God didn't create any two of us the same. He never intended for us to compare ourselves to others, but to live as the unique person He created us to be. When we compare, we tend to take the negatives we see about ourselves and compare them to the positives we see in others. Talk to girls about their perspectives of social media posts and others and then challenge them to consider past the surface and see that others are struggling and doubting themselves, too. Even when she's expressing frustration with a "mean girl", help her to see the possibility that the person could be mean because she's hurting or insecure. Learning empathy will help build her emotional intelligence and grow confidence.

A note about friendships. Sometimes parents and youth directors think that girls need to have a ton of friends to be confident and popular. However, studies by (Lisa Damour, 2019), a psychologist who specializes in ministering to teen girls, finds that confident girls often have just one or two close friends. Those in larger group friendships are more likely to find themselves comparing and competing for position within the group. Girls with just one or two close friendships feel secure in their relationships and thus more confident with they are.

Encourage and help provide opportunities for girls to build friendships with girls who are confident and have similar values. Empower girls to navigate the tricky friendships, especially during middle school, where comparing, competing, and bullying often run rampant. Tell them that it's okay to be friends but not best friends with people. Explain that there are all different levels of friendships—acquaintances, peers with whom you share classes and activities, and close friends with whom you spend time and share secrets. Choose wisely. Not everyone is close friend material—and that's okay.

Media

Teens today face challenges unlike generations before them because of social media. Cyberbullying. Sexting. Constantly seeing everyone else's Instagram-filtered lives—which they accept as reality and often compare to their own boring lives, leaving them to feel less than and/or left out.

It's important to teach our girls how to look at social media critically—not just accepting it all as fact or real. Engage her in discussions about the use of photoshopping and filters on posts. Remind her how many photos a person may go through before they post one. Equipping her to think critically as she scrolls will enable her to not view other girls' posts with more thought.

Talk about cyberbullying, walking her through possible scenarios and how she could respond—whether she is the target of the bullying or a friend is.

It's also important to talk about guys' requests for sexting photos. "An analysis of nearly 500 accounts from 12- to 18-year-old girls about their negative experiences with sexting found that over two-thirds had been asked for explicit images (Damour, 2018)." However, focusing on the possibility that this photo will be shared and seen by hundreds of other people isn't enough to cause her to stop. If a girl believes the guy really likes her, she may trust him and believe he'd never share them with anyone else. Instead, help her understand that it's wrong to request nude photos. Girls aren't going to want to just say no—if they say no, they'll be viewed as a prude and it may impact her social standing. A frightening possibility for teens who are all about social connection. Yet if she does and the photos get passed around, there is a bigger impact. Some helpful questions to get her thinking the situation through include:

- What's the worst possible thing that could happen if you say no to a guy's request?
- What's the best possible thing that could happen if you say no to his request?
- What's the worst possible thing that could happen if you say yes to a guy's request?
- What's the best possible thing that could happen if you say yes to his request?

Discuss her answers. Help her plan ways to respond if or when she is asked to sext. Equipping her to face difficult situations will help build her confidence and respond instead of react and create better results.

Equip Her to Live Confidently

Confidence enables girls to make good decisions without wavering or second guessing themselves. We can help her learn how to make decisions confidently, by giving her opportunities to make choices. Start with easy choices. For instance, asking her where she wants to go for lunch. Then go there to lunch without second guessing her yourself by asking, "Are you sure? Wouldn't you rather go...?" There will be moments when you'd make a different choice if it was up to you, but if it really isn't

critical, then go with her decision. If it is critical, ask her if she's considered the different possible scenarios that could happen, helping her to think through the possibilities herself.

Instead of giving advice about situations, ask open-ended questions that help her think of solutions. Gently guide, but enable her to think through the different possibilities, pros, and cons of each, and make a thought-through decision. Questions become key in helping them think for themselves and learn to figure out how to react, respond, and what to do. One of the biggest gifts we can give our girls is to teach them to think for themselves and to work through the challenges that come their way.

Believe in her. And let her know it.

Listen when she tells you about things at school and in her friend circle. Pay attention. Make time for her. Every day. Tell her you love her and are proud of her. Ask questions, but don't interrogate—be genuinely interested.

Equip Her to Handle Failure

Teach her how to handle failure. Encourage her to try things that she may fail out and help her to learn it's not the end of the world. Let her make mistakes and learn how to respond. Share your experiences with failing and making mistakes, what you learned, and how you recovered. This helps your daughter know that even you aren't perfect and make failing a bit more okay.

Katty Kay and Claire Shipman, authors of "The Confidence Code for Girls", found that the percentage of girls who say they are not allowed to fail rises 150 percent between the ages of 12 and 13, with 45 percent of 13-year-olds indicating they don't feel able to fail. (Staff, 2020)

While we should look at our failures, examine our weaknesses, and learn from what we see, God never intended us to focus on them. Learn. Grow. Change. Yes, but He doesn't want us to let negative thinking cripple us. Our feelings of failure or of not being enough can paralyze us and keep us from being all God created us to be.

Equip Her to Celebrate Her Successes

It might be just words of affirmation but celebrate when she succeeds at something. Whether it's a school project or breaking a habit or speaking to someone new, celebrate each victory and success. Buy her flowers or a new scarf or a little something she's wanted. Toast her success with a cup of cocoa (or whatever her favorite beverage is.) Post the success on Facebook. "Diane just finished her science project on time, and it is amazing!"

Equip Her to Take Care of Her Heart

As females, we are born caregivers. To everyone but ourselves. We take care of our friends and, as adults, we take care of our families. But we need to also take care of ourselves. How can girls care for themselves?

- Do the things that make her feel better—about life and about herself whether that's going for a run, reading a book, or talking to a friend (encourage non-food comfort!)
- Keep her room straightened up—creating a "oasis" in her room.
- Get out and get fresh air.
- Take a nap.

- Get plenty of sleep.
- Treat herself to things she enjoys from time to time. A good book. A new craft project. Music she enjoys.

Equip Her to Fight the Battle

Hormones and the changes taking place in her body are a big part of her fading confidence. But it's not the only part of the story. We have an enemy who is out to steal, kill, destroy, and devour. Help girls to see that the battle is real. When they're believing a lie about themselves or a situation, remind them of the battle. "Do you think this could be the enemy lying to you? What would God speak into this moment?"

Identifying the lie enables us to speak truth into our hearts and minds. You can't defeat what you don't define. Once we recognize and identify the lie, then it's important to replace the lie with the truth. Memorizing and repeating scripture. Telling ourselves what God says and what He has promised. Then live like we believe what God says instead of what the enemy says.

Teach her how to spend time with God. Not just reading the Bible or praying because you should or have to, but spending time talking and learning like you would a friend. Our goal is not for her to check off a certain amount of Bible reading or prayer time every day, but to equip her to fall in love with God and build a strong, intimate relationship with Him.

EXERCISE

Leader ask: When are the moments you most experience or have most experienced God? Invite participants to share. Then ask: After listening to everyone's answers, what new possibilities can you share with girls and/or help them experience God and fall more deeply in love with Him?

Conclusion:

The enemy doesn't want girls to live confidently. He wants to discourage them and cause them to doubt themselves and doubt God. He knows that if they believe that they are fearfully and wonderfully made, designed intentionally with a purpose that will cause them to impact their world, and can truly do all things through Christ, that they will do amazing things for the kingdom. Our jobs as parents, grandparents and church leaders is to encourage, equip and challenge girls to live confidently, trusting God with who they are and the plan He has for their lives.

Discussion Questions:

- What is your biggest takeaway from this seminar?
- What are three things you will do as a result of today's conversation?
- How will you pray differently for your girls as a result of this information?

Resources

*Enough: Discovering a God Who is Enough When You're Not by Tamyra Horst (Pacific Press Publishing)

*Real You by Tamyra Horst (AdventSource)

Praying Like Crazy for Your Kids by Tamyra Horst (Pacific Press Publishing)

Untangled: Guiding Girls through the Seven Transitions into Adulthood by Lisa Damour, Ph.D. (Ballantine Books)

Under Pressure: Confronting the Epidemic of Stress and Anxiety in Girls by Lisa Damour Ph.D. (Ballantine Books)

**Much of this seminar was taken from materials in "Enough" and "Real You".*