

GIRLHOOD

Raising our little girls to be healthy, happy and heard

Disclaimer:

Before I continue, I need to give a disclaimer, which is one that I offer with all my work. Gender is more fluid than fixed and while respecting biological, neurological and hormonal differences – there is not an ‘all boys’ or ‘all girls’ reality. On top of that, there is social conditioning that is deeply embedded in culture and ancestry. So when I use the term girls, I will be referring to a statistically significant number of girls; however, much of what we will be sharing may also be relevant to boys or gender divergent individuals.

Why are the early years so important?

- 90 per cent of the brain is shaped and formed
- physical strengths and coordination can develop
- emotional and social competence can develop
- pathways of predictability formed
- the senses of feeling safe and loved are formed
- childlike spirituality is shaped.
- sense of self or identity is shaped
- the creation of the human mind occurs
- self-regulating systems are formed
- belief systems and mindsets are created
- social norms are conditioned and embedded in the mind

Concerns for our girls

A survey of almost 5000 parents/carers for my book *Girlhood* showed clearly the things that challenged parents/educators of young girls up to age four:

1. Meltdowns/tantrums
2. Resistance to things
3. Anxiety and irrational fears
4. Her moods
5. Sensitivities
6. ‘Mean’ behaviours
7. Friendship dramas.

... concerns for girls 4-8:

1. Friendship dramas
2. Anxiety and irrational fears
3. Meltdowns/tantrums
4. Resistance to things
5. Her moods

Social norms

Little girls are expected:

- to be nice
- to look nice
- to be quiet
- they are weaker than boys
- to put others before themselves.

Who is she?

- Ancestry
- Epigenetics
- Temperament and predisposition to coping (rooster/lamb; dandelion/orchid)
- Introversiion/extraversiion
- Innate gifts and challenges
- Birth order
- Play code
- Resilience
- Neurodiversity
- Physicality

Her emotional world

"The theory of constructed emotion – in every waking moment, your brain uses past experience, organised as concepts, to guide your actions and give your sensations meaning. When the concepts involved are emotion concepts, your brain constructs instances of emotion."

Dr Lisa Feldman Barrett, *How Emotions Are Made* (2017).

- All emotions are valid and normal there are no good or bad emotions
- Most girls tend to have more emotional intensity to most boys.
- No matter how nonsensical and frustrating our girls' feelings may seem to us they are real and important to her.

We need to remember the 3 As about emotions

- **Allow**
- **Acknowledge**
- **Accept**

For parents/educators to be able to help our little ones to develop these attributes, the best place to start is with:

1. **Strong attachment with consistently loving grown-ups**
2. **Modelling these behaviours**
3. **Emotional coaching.**

Discovering and nurturing her gifts

- music in her soul
- the magic of dance
- the gift of taste
- arts in her soul
- physical strength and coordination
- caring little protector
- our naturalists
- passions can become obsessions ...be careful of too much pressure.

Sexualisation, body image and healthy self-esteem

Sexualisation occurs when children are exposed to widespread sexualised advertising and popular culture that is mainly targeted at adults. Sexualised images are found everywhere – on our social media feeds on billboards, advertising on TV, in magazines both in print and online, advertising all the major online platforms, on buses and in betraying stations. Sadly the influence of pornography means there is also direct sexualisation occurring where children are photographed and suggestive ways to.

Remember to:

- Celebrate all body types.
- Call out the fake and digitally altered images for what they are – unnatural and unrealistic. Be mindful of the content your daughter watches online and on TV especially advertisements.
- Keep your daughter as physically active as possible doing something she enjoys in which she chooses to pursue.
- Encourage your daughter to find ways you can express yourself, stretch yourself and enjoy herself.
- Compliment girls on their energy their strength their compassion, their problem-solving, empathy, humour, memory, thinking capacity and their creativity....

Friendships

The tend-and-befriend tendency... When faced with a significant threat, women have a greater tendency to reduce stress by attending (protecting and nurturing the young) and befriending (maintaining and strengthening a social network).

Self worth – you will tend to have a belief that you are valuable and lovable regardless of what happens with your self-esteem.

1. Connection
2. Confidence
3. Control and autonomy

Play and imagination

There is an abundance of research that shows there is a strong relationship between pretend play in the development of important things like creativity, emotional literacy, empathy and social competence with other children.

Allowing our precious little girls endless hours of imaginative play builds their emotional and social competence, and protects them from many of the stressors that may be surrounding them. One of the most interesting things about the human brain in childhood is that imagined and real both appear real to a child.

Nurturing her spirit

- Allow imagination and wonder to be a part of children's lives.
- Develop a **strong connection** to the natural world.
- Ensure the arts are part of childhood—singing, dancing, music, painting, make-believe.
- Have special rituals and family moments
- Build their sense of humour
- Honour the sacredness of life
- Faith, belief in something greater
- Build strong connections and belonging in communities
- Value childhood as important

***For more resources about raising your girls, please visit the [Raising Girls section on Maggie's website](#) for articles, video and audio.
Here are a few highlights:***

Articles:

[The Wonder of Girls' Memories](#)

[Helping Your Young Daughter Find her Sense of Self](#)

[Helping Our Girls' Voices Not Be Silenced](#)

[Tips for Navigating Emotions with Little Girls](#) (extract published at The Parents' Website)

Video:

[Moods: Helping girls build optimism](#)

[Helping our girls to be heard](#)

[Who runs the world? Girlhood on The Morning Show](#)

[Maggie chats to Sunrise about raising girls](#)

Audio

[Raising strong girls on ABC Conversations with Sarah Kanowski](#)

[Raising girls with Maggie on the School of Wellbeing podcast](#)

[How to raise girls with Steve Biddulph on Parental As Anything podcast](#)