

## Chapter One

# We Have a Problem

### LITTLE GIRLS

What are little girls made of, made of?

What are little girls made of?

Sugar and spice

And everything nice.

That's what little girls are made of.

### LITTLE BOYS

What are little boys made of, made of?

What are little boys made of?

Snakes and snails and puppy dog tails.

That's what little boys are made of.

—Mother Goose nursery rhyme

Not that it should or ever did, but this nursery rhyme certainly does not describe today's boys and girls. Girls continue to break down barriers and diminish the differences between their level of achievement and that of boys in many areas, and violent behavior is no exception. As society has changed over the years, the differences between the ways little girls and little boys display anger and aggression have shifted as well. Today American girls are showing their mean streaks directly and violently.

In addition to displaying the “hidden” and “indirect” aggression (backbiting, ostracizing others, and hurtful self-directed behaviors) that has been the subject of recent best-selling books and popular talk shows, girls are turning to physical violence as well. Girls have

become a part of the epidemic of youth violence—and not just as victims. Girls are fighting, and they are not just fighting back in self-defense. Girls are fighting like boys—not as much (yet) but with a similar willingness to use physical violence.

Things have changed. There have always been isolated, extraordinary cases of female violence, like the actions of Lizzie Borden<sup>1</sup> or the young women involved with Charles Manson.<sup>2</sup> But the current changes in girls' behavior are not isolated, and they challenge traditional ways of thinking at a very basic level. Parents, extended family, teachers, judges, politicians, neighbors—all of us find it difficult to accept or understand what is happening. It is just too unsettling to acknowledge that girls are committing some of the same horrible acts of violence that boys commit.

### Our Motivation

For over a decade now we have been receiving comments and questions about girls' fighting, and they all reflect the same concerns. Middle school principals tell us, "I'm not having as much of a problem with boys fighting as I am having now with girls fighting," or, "The worst fights in my school are among girls," or, "The first time I ever had to call an ambulance to the school was when two girls got into a big fight." Then they ask us why this is happening and what they should do.

The problem is not just a middle school problem either. We get many calls for help from high school teachers and administrators, and we even get occasional calls from colleges and universities. In January 2003, after giving a Martin Luther King Jr. celebration lecture at a state university in the middle of the country, Deborah was asked by the dean of students to participate in a special meeting about six freshman girls who were involved in an ongoing quarrel. The arguments among them had started in September, at the beginning of the school year, and by that January the girls had been involved in three major confrontations (two involved physical contact and one turned into an actual physical fight that had to be bro-

ken up). College women! Fighting! Hitting and kicking each other. It didn't seem possible. Needless to say, everyone on campus was talking about the fights, the school administration was perplexed, and no one really knew what to do.

Although such physical fights are still uncommon, this isn't the only request for assistance we have received from colleges and college students' parents. Just the other day Deborah got a call from a friend whose goddaughter was being expelled from college for fighting. For many reasons, we shouldn't have been surprised. Hazing in college athletics, fraternities, and sororities is common and overlooked as a right of passage. Hazing at its best is aggressive behavior and at its worst is a euphemism for violence and brutality. Alcohol is a large problem on college campuses. Drinking can make it more likely that people will act on their aggression and anger. And at all ages, girls and young women are behaving more aggressively and more violently.

### ***Girls Are Different!***

Parents, schools, and communities must take girls' differences into account to be effective in their roles. Responses to girls' violence must reflect these differences as well. Parents, communities, and any others who serve girls cannot develop violence prevention efforts based solely on their experiences with boys. The criminal justice system cannot successfully treat girls who commit violence using exactly what is used for boys, although that is the common practice at this time. From experience we know that will not work. The consequences and costs to society will be severe if all of us continue to do this.

### ***Girls Are Not That Different!***

In addition to their obvious biological differences, girls and boys are traditionally socialized very differently. Yet many of these socialization differences are lessening, as illustrated by girls' participation

in sports, enhanced academic opportunities, and expanded job possibilities. When it comes to the portrayal of violent behavior in the entertainment media, the differences have disappeared completely. Movies and children's TV programming, including cartoons, regularly portray the female superhero as violent and sexy. We call this "the feminization of the superhero" (or *supershero*). As the entertainment media equalized the violent behavior of male and female superheroes, we expected the behaviors of real girls and boys to equalize as well over time. And they have.

We chose to write this book to provide information in a manner that is accessible to everyone. We hope this information will help parents, teachers, and other adults who love and serve children. We want to better inform those who work with girls so that they understand girls' differences and respond more appropriately to their needs. We want parents, educators, community leaders, those addressing public policy issues, and others who serve girls to become better prepared for and effective at preventing girls from engaging in violence and responding to girls who are already involved in violence.

Through real-life stories and scientific data, we suggest strategies to make things better for girls at home, in school, and in other settings. All the stories we present are based on real events and reflect the experiences of real people. In some cases these stories are composites of several situations in order to illustrate a range of issues. Of course we do not use real names or settings; we wish to respect the privacy of those who have shared their stories with us over the last two decades. We are most grateful to all of them (colleagues, teachers, friends, and especially our patients and the teens we have served) for sharing with us so that we can share with you.

### A Teacher's Story

We first met Ellen at a New England conference on youth violence in 1997, the year of her retirement. During the discussion after our presentation, she asked the then-familiar question, "What is going

on with girls, and what can we do about it?" However, before either of us could respond, she offered her own ten-minute answer that reflected her personal thoughts, reflections, and experiences. Her insight and passion so impressed us that we sought her out after the session to learn more about her experiences.

At the time, Ellen was a middle school teacher with almost thirty years of experience in a middle-class, predominantly white Boston-area suburb. In addition she had raised two daughters in that community, thus experiencing the changes in the social environment and in the behavior patterns of girls from two vantage points—as a teacher and as a mother. Her comments at the conference summarized three decades of change and brought insights and perspectives that have helped shape our thoughts on the evolving dynamics of girls, aggression, anger, and behavior.

When Ellen first started teaching in the late 1960s, girls were using teasing and name-calling as their primary methods of playing out anger and conflict. Usually, competition over schoolwork, for the attention of others, or during recreational activities such as games and sports remained overtly friendly, with little name-calling that Ellen witnessed. Occasionally she would overhear a girl bragging about some new possession her family had acquired or some accomplishment. She would also see some girls involved in classroom competition for the right answer to a problem. Believe it or not, there was even a little one-upmanship in an effort to be teacher's pet (remember those days?). But as a rule everything went along well, and everybody (with the exception of a few boys) appeared to behave well and get along. Ellen isn't pining for the good old days, however, because she saw some withdrawn and isolated girls as well—girls who were just too quiet and a few girls who seemed to do everything other girls told them to do. Ellen often thought that these girls were troubled or maybe even abused.

During these early days, Ellen could almost always tell when some girls were having a fight or argument by their comments about each other's appearance, clothing, or hairstyle. In some ways it was

a verbal form of bullying, but it was not so obvious at the time because the remarks were made with humor and a sweet manner. Ellen now knows that they just appeared to be sweet; the meanness was covered up by an innocent, girlish style that rarely provoked notice or reaction from adults. And maybe these exchanges really weren't so mean after all. They certainly didn't seem to cause the pain of what Ellen saw in later years.

During her first year of teaching, Ellen recalls witnessing a year-long scenario involving two girls who were best friends but who also competed regularly for attention and social status in the class. She could always tell when things were rocky between the two of them by the level of teasing they displayed toward each other. She noted that this teasing behavior was generally most evident when they had an audience of other girls around them,<sup>3</sup> as if they needed others to witness the putdowns and insults. But never did these exchanges reach the point of yelling or even raised voices. Overt anger was not expressed. Any meanness was always indirect and sugarcoated.

### ***Overt Expressions of Aggression Emerge***

Although Ellen does not recall seeing other forms of expressed anger, she does remember hearing a number of stories from other teachers about girls who exhibited various forms of self-destructive behaviors that reflect internalized anger. In her fifth year of teaching, she heard for the first time about an eating disorder, from a teacher in the other middle school in her town. From teachers in schools in Boston she began to hear about middle school girls who were running away, acting out sexually, and experimenting with alcohol, but she did not see or hear about such occurrences in her town at that time. However, she was beginning to formulate a picture of a range of behaviors that girls were using to express anger, conflict, depression, and frustration.

Among girls in her community it appeared that these behaviors involved the socially acceptable aggression of teasing and name-

calling. She suspected that the more destructive form of this aggression was self-directed and reflected in eating behaviors, withdrawal, and being a pushover. Ellen was aware that these behaviors might also be a sign of a broader range of issues or disorders. And she began to wonder about the acting-out behaviors (cursing, frank name-calling, and alcohol use) that Boston teachers were experiencing—an urban version of what Ellen was seeing among girls in her school. At this early point, Ellen was also seeing signs among boys of increased fighting and outright physical aggression in her suburban school. She also began reading about the more serious violence among teenage and young adult boys in the inner cities across the country. Although she did not realize it at the time, she was beginning to formulate her own version of the progression of violence that was yet to play out over the next three decades. Never did she expect the violence to reach her community, and never did she expect to see girls become as overtly vicious toward each other as they later did.

The next phase that Ellen noticed began about ten years later, in the early 1980s. Though it may have started earlier, she became increasingly aware of a new dynamic involving forced exclusion and social isolation. It looked like a group dynamic, with particular girls singled out and excluded from group activities and social events. She had seen this behavior before, but it was now happening in a more pervasive and regular pattern, and although group related, it almost always had a clear leader and almost always seemed to stem from conflicts between two girls who had a history of friendship. The rejection and exclusion were becoming more visible, and the girls who were the leaders were skillful at persuading other children to single out and turn on another girl. One of Ellen's noteworthy observations was that the girl targeted for exclusion frequently shifted and in many cases would go back and forth between two, sometimes three, girls. These shifts would often be linked to an argument or competitive event. As Ellen had seen with teasing, most of the girls in the class would play the role of observer

or follower, with a clear and smaller set of girls, generally those with stronger, more assertive personalities, in the leadership role. The “queen bees” were emerging.

Ellen frequently tells the story of two girls in one of her classes who were the trendsetters in their grade for fashion and social organizing. They had been friends since grade school and were surrounded by a large circle of girls who did almost everything together. During the course of the year, Ellen noted that at any given time, one of the two girls would essentially be in charge of much of the social planning for the group and the other would then frequently be left out of the planning and even the activity. Although the girls acted like friends, their battle for control was played out in a rather mean-spirited manner that was often hurtful. Ellen noted that often one or the other girl (depending on who was up and who was down) would appear in her classroom after school crying or just needing to talk. She successfully negotiated reconciliations throughout the year only to witness the reappearance of the negative behaviors with each new conflict. She also became aware that both of these girls came from families with considerable conflict. She began to wonder about the role that family conflict and problems might be playing in the girls’ attraction to each other as friends and their ways of dealing with their conflicts with each other. Observing and assisting these girls, Ellen was beginning to think about underlying factors that might contribute to their learning behaviors that were increasingly more aggressive.

Ellen made the point to us that in the early 1980s this kind of behavior was still relatively isolated to a couple of girls. It was still pretty subtle and well within the boundaries of socially acceptable behavior for girls. She was not yet seeing evidence of the physical aggression that was increasingly apparent among the boys in her school. Girls were still acting like girls; boys were the bigger problem and were getting the adults’ attention with respect to disciplinary consequences and concerns.



### ***Girls' Repertoire Expands: Bullying, Putdowns, and Power Plays***

By the early 1990s the next trend appeared, in the form of a jump in aggressive behavior and meanness—bullying. Bullying was a phenomenon Ellen had witnessed and been concerned about with respect to boys for quite a while. But she had seen little if any such behavior among girls. Then during the late 1980s, she began to see a dramatic presence of bullying and more aggressive victimization among girls. A kind of *meanness* had emerged, seemingly from nowhere. Rather than being content to be the queen bee for a moment and to have that designation move from one girl to the next depending on the activity and whose turn it was to be in charge, a few girls, Ellen noted, were consolidating power, doing everything possible to hold on to that power and becoming more and more vicious with their putdowns. It was no longer enough for girls to put down their competitors; now they were figuratively stomping on them while they were down and making sure they were unable to get up. The atmosphere in the school was truly beginning to feel like girl-eat-girl.

What was also different was that this behavior occurred less often among girls who were friends and more often among girls with different levels of power, based on physical attributes, personality, social status, or occasionally academic skills. Compared to earlier displays of competitiveness, this seemed to be more a display of strength versus weakness.

As they were among boys, these behaviors seemed to be recurrent and to involve clearly recognizable groups: those who bullied, those who were bullied, and—the largest group—those who just stood by. The bullies were often the most popular girls, those who experienced considerable social success, even though they were not necessarily liked by many of their peers. Those bullied were often the least socially accepted (sometimes by race and class measures) and were generally on the shy end of the personality spectrum.

Bullied children were usually different from the majority in some way and often had the most difficulty fitting in.

Ellen noted two other elements that deeply concerned her. The first was the growing presence of violent and aggressive role models in the popular media, especially movies and TV. The second was her increasing awareness of certain family and social dynamics surrounding the girls involved in the bullying behaviors (both those who bullied and those who were bullied).

### ***Ellen Reaches Out for Help***

Although she did not quite know yet what to make of the media and role model influences, Ellen was clear that there were factors in girls' family and social environments that were, at the very least, contributing to their roles as either bullies or victims. In her role as a confidant for many girls, Ellen became increasingly aware of difficult family situations, disruptive family conflict, harsh disciplinary practices, and general family dysfunction. She began to wonder about the relationships between these family settings and the behaviors she was seeing at school.

Ellen began to seek out research related to the behaviors she was witnessing, but she became frustrated at how little she could find that focused on girls. Although much was written about boys and their risk factors for aggression, fighting, and bullying, there was almost nothing about girls. Although there were articles about boys and violent media, again, there was almost nothing about girls. Ellen felt pretty much on her own in trying to understand what she was seeing. Her efforts to seek advice and insight from peers in education as well as friends in the mental health profession were met with shrugs. Others had similar stories, but no one seemed to know what, if anything, to do. In mental health, for example, the primary focus was on girls' self-destructive behaviors in the form of eating disorders, suicide attempts, substance use, and self-abusive behaviors. With respect to violence, the primary focus was on the

victimization of girls in the context of dating and domestic violence. Ellen knew these were important issues but was still concerned about the almost total lack of attention to the issue of aggression and violence among girls. She feared that violence among girls was developing a pattern that would mirror the decade-long progression of violence seen among boys across the nation.

Ellen's shared her experiences with us at a time when we were beginning to receive questions about girls' behavior from teachers and school administrators at our presentations all over the country. Our concerns about a new wave in the youth violence epidemic were growing. Yet, like Ellen, we found little research to advance our thinking about the events teachers and administrators were witnessing, and many of our colleagues dismissed our concerns as an overreaction to anecdotes—stories from individuals that might reflect only isolated incidents and a small problem.

### *The Rise of Physical Violence*

The last and most recent chapter of Ellen's story concerns her experience in the mid-1990s, when she saw verbal and nonviolent behaviors start to shift into physical aggression and fighting. It was also in the mid-1990s that the headmaster of a high school in the Midwest said to us that he had never had to call an ambulance in response to a fight at school until girls started fighting. Not surprisingly, we were more than a bit taken aback by this comment until we heard similar comments several more times from other principals in other places. It was at this time that Ellen was beginning to see and have to break up near fights between girls in her classroom. She remembers the first actual fight. During her last year of teaching, two girls started fighting over the rumor that one had spread about the other, calling her a "slut." For urban boys (and more recently girls), insulting someone's mother is asking for a fight. For suburban girls, it's calling her a slut.

## Understanding the Changes

We know that anecdotes don't tell you much about the big picture; they tell you the details of one event or one set of experiences. You have to look at data like school suspensions, juvenile arrests, or surveys of girls to get the big picture. Yet we have learned that the real-life stories are hugely important because they let you know what is happening long before the numbers do. Also, stories help you interpret the big picture, especially when the stories come from young people, parents, and school-based professionals—the front line.

We learned this from dealing with the second wave of youth violence. The first wave occurred in the early 1980s, mostly among young men in poor communities in cities of more than five hundred thousand. The second wave was the one that hit America's middle class in suburban and rural towns in the late 1980s and early 1990s. At the time when we were growing increasingly concerned that this second wave of youth violence was in the making, we were faced with denial and numbers that lagged behind the stories about violence. Yet we were getting more and more invitations to speak in smaller towns and suburban communities, and we kept hearing the stories there. When the suburban school shootings began in the early 1990s, we knew what was happening. Many of our colleagues thought these shootings were isolated events and denied the possibility of a second wave; they didn't have the benefit of the stories. (And the second wave continues to affect smaller towns. Preliminary numbers from the FBI for 2003 indicate that cities of less than 50,000 had greater increases in homicides—4 to 15 percent—than did larger cities (all with less than a 1 percent increase).<sup>4</sup> When you put current stories together with the data and the patterns from the past, it is easier to interpret the trends ahead.

Ellen's experiences as a teacher over thirty years have helped us to interpret the numbers and tie together several important lessons we have learned. Ellen witnessed girls' aggressive behaviors progress from name-calling toward more and more violent behavior. This country experienced a similar progression among boys as well; fifty

years ago teachers' biggest behavioral concerns were chewing gum, talking out of turn, and joking around. Now talking back, swearing, and fighting are major concerns, and teachers are worried about getting physically hurt while trying to stop a student fight or having students direct violence at them. Most of this bad behavior is still displayed by boys. However, the same progression toward more vicious and more violent behavior is being seen among girls.

As a society, we can ignore Ellen's experience. We can pretend that it is only certain girls in certain neighborhoods—an isolated problem. We can pretend that it will stay contained to the really “deviant” and somehow “abnormal” girls. Or we can learn from our experiences with boys, understand the patterns now occurring with girls, and commit ourselves to responding with real and comprehensive prevention efforts.

### **The Fate of the Bird: Developing a Prevention Focus**

Stories are just that, stories. There have always been tales of horrific crimes committed by girls, and there is no shortage of unusual classroom stories. The fundamental question is what if anything is different? Do the principals' comments and teachers' stories that we have heard across the country add up to anything more than stories? Do the numbers show any measurable changes in girls' behavior? The answers are yes, yes, and yes. Something has changed. Girls and young women are fighting more, and in Chapter Three we share some of the numbers with you.

What do the changes in girls' behavior mean? How are girls and boys different? These are questions we address in Chapters Four and Five. What are parents to do? What can school and educators do? What can communities do? How do we reverse the trends? These questions are addressed in the last four chapters of the book.

Are the changes in girls' behavior permanent? That we don't know. However, the story of a boy who wanted to outsmart the Wise Old Soul of his village comes to mind.<sup>5</sup> The boy's scheme was

to ask the Wise Old Soul this question: “Is the bird I am holding in my hand dead or alive?” If the Wise Old Soul answered “dead,” the boy would open his hand and let the bird fly away. If the Wise Old Soul answered “alive,” the boy would close his hand tightly and crush the bird. Either way, the boy would prove that he was smarter than the Wise Old Soul. As planned, the boy confronted the village elder and asked, “Is the bird I am holding in my hand dead or alive?” Much to the boy’s disappointment, the Wise Old Soul’s response was, “The fate of that bird is in your hands.”

Are the changes permanent? We don’t know. But we do believe in individual and collective action. We have seen the positive impact of deliberate and sustained community action in reducing youth homicide rates in Boston. We wrote about this community effort in our first book together, *Murder Is No Accident*. The current change in girls’ behavior is significant enough for us to issue a warning and offer strategies. That is why we wrote this book. We think like the old soul in the tale; the fate of this bird is in the hands of all of us.

It is clear to most people who work directly with children and adolescents that girls’ behavior has changed and that girls’ violence is now a significant concern in America; yet our society continues to act on an outdated paradigm: boys are violent and girls are made of “sugar and spice and everything nice.” Our schools, courts, and youth prevention programs have not responded appropriately with gender-specific violence prevention activities. They are finding it difficult to understand what the changes mean and even more difficult to know what to do about them. Parents and teachers are struggling to understand what is going on and what they can do.

Before this new wave of girls’ participating in the epidemic of youth violence increases even more, all of us must acknowledge and confront the issue. As a society, we must take the necessary steps to help our girls as well as our boys. Most important, parents are central to addressing this growing problem and they should have information, guidance, and options. Parents must help their daughters grow up safely and healthy—nonvictim and nonviolent.

## Life's Most Difficult Job

We ourselves are parents, and in this book we share some of our personal stories as well. We each have a daughter (Deborah's daughter, Mimi, is twenty-three and Howard's daughter, Zoë, is twenty-two) and a son (Deborah's son is Percy and Howard's son is Lee). We are not holding our children up as examples nor are we saying that we are model parents. But we are combining our professional and personal experiences to better share some knowledge and ideas with you.

Adolescence is a difficult time, and it is getting more and more difficult for girls. Constant media portrayals of sexy and, increasingly, violent images coupled with new levels of freedom and access to information and the influences of others via the Internet—add up to a bigger challenge for parents. It sometimes feels overwhelming for all of us raising teenage daughters.

Parents are often perplexed by what and what not to do in raising their children. It used to be that you didn't have to worry too much about girls. Once the biggest worry for parents of girls was pregnancy. When we say things have changed, it's an understatement. So how does the art of parenting change to keep up? What should you do and what shouldn't you do as the parent of a girl? How do you make sure she is assertive *and* not aggressive? How do you make sure that she is nonviolent *but also* nonvictim? What are the tips that can help?

## The ART of Parenting

In Chapter Six, we describe the ART model of parenting for raising girls. It pulls together in a simple format the work of many people who have studied and written about parenting and girls. It is by no means all-inclusive, but it does serve as a good framework for getting the help you need as a caring parent and providing your children with the help they need.

ART is an acronym:

- A:** Act as a role model—do rather than tell; demonstrate rather than dictate.
- R:** Reach out to others—build a community of caring adults around your child.
- T:** Talk and listen—communicate, communicate, and communicate some more.

No matter the age of your daughter, you can put the ART model into practice. In Chapter Six, we will discuss acting as a role model for your child; reaching out to others who can assist you in setting the stage for the teen years; talking and listening and never breaking the lines of communication, no matter how difficult or hurtful it gets for you; and using the in-the-car strategy.

Many parents of today's teens and young adults remember being raised in a fairly tightly knit neighborhood where other adults were expected to take some responsibility for all the neighborhood children—and did so. Now parents have to create that neighborhood or extended family around their children.

There was a time when it was easier to control the information and images a child saw. Now it's harder to do so. As society allows commercial interests in children to be fully exploited, the burden on parents becomes even greater. At the same time that parents have to counter and mitigate the commercial junk and unhealthy images that are advertised to children, they find themselves targeted by political rhetoric blaming them for their children's actions. The role of protecting children is now almost exclusively on the shoulders of parents, and parents need help; the job has gotten harder, and the training for most remains virtually absent.

We see a trend that indicates that parents of girls must now also worry about violence, criminal behavior, and arrests. And we wrote this book because we believe parenting matters. We believe there are effective responses to the things that influence children and their behaviors, responses that are prevention oriented and not lim-



ited to threats, spanking, sending a child to her room, and grounding. We believe creativity and action on the part of parents can make a huge difference. We want you to feel empowered by the strategies we put forth—empowered to make a difference, not just in the lives of your children but in your community and nation.

We feel that parents are being blamed for things over which they have no control. We want that to change. We want a society that is much more supportive of your efforts to raise your daughter. Instead of regularly placing tantalizing, unhealthy images in her path or scheduling a school coffee hour with parents in the middle of a workday, a society committed to helping parents would make different decisions. Images of violence and sexual promiscuity would not be shown on after-school and prime-time television. Enough after-school activities would be available so that children would not have to be home alone watching television until a working parent arrives. Because certain changes at the public policy level would also be helpful, in Chapter Eight we present strategies for getting more involved in increasing the level of support for families. While we hope for change in the bigger picture—in media, public policy, and resources for youth programs—we believe this book will help you with the things you do control.

### **A Call to Action**

We must all rise to the challenge, change our attitudes, improve our parenting skills, confront cultural norms and media images, take responsibility for and be concerned about all children, and make sure the schools are doing their part. We can't sit by and leave our children at risk. American society is learning a hard lesson the hard way—no child is immune to violent influences. Despite wishful thinking to the contrary, even girls can be manipulated to behave violently by a toxic environment.

This toxic environment is in part a product of certain adult attitudes and practices:

1. The glorification and “selling” of violence to children by the media and the social culture. We are sometimes asked if it is a good thing that girls are finally standing up for themselves and fighting back. Unfortunately, in a society where standing up for yourself equals violence, that is a reasonable question. Our goal for girls (and boys too) is that they be nonvictim and nonviolent.
2. The false reassurance offered to middle-class suburban families by the unfair stereotype that minority and inner-city girls are the only violent girls. In the past, false reassurances about boys’ violence and drug use meant that schools and communities were unprepared to act promptly and failed to prevent epidemics of violence and drug abuse.
3. The significant attention given to stranger violence, which often overshadows efforts to address family, friend, and acquaintance violence. Girls and women are most likely to be victims and perpetrators in settings where they know the others involved. Unfortunately, family, friend, and acquaintance violence receives little news coverage, public policy attention, or private or public resources, even though nearly half of the rapes and the homicides in America involve individuals known to each other.
4. The current boy-oriented approach to violence prevention programs, which ignores the aspects of socialization, vulnerabilities, peer relationships, and family position and the other characteristics that make girls quite different from boys.
5. The boy-oriented practices of the criminal justice system and other community institutions, including schools, which are inadequate to meet the unique challenges facing girls.

These attitudes and practices must change.

This book is a call to action. We in this society are facing a crisis. Before a girl—someone’s daughter—commits a national-attention-grabbing, horrible act of violence like the shootings at

Columbine High School, something needs to be done. All of us need to help. Everyone must be involved. The problem is not just for parents or teachers or people living in certain communities to handle. This problem affects us all, and a comprehensive response to save our children is long overdue. From improved parenting skills to better schools to healthier entertainment for our children, the fate of this bird is in our hands.

