Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in School

by

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Appendix A
Girls, We Got You!
A Q&A for Girls, Parents, Community Members, and Educators

I want Black girls to know that they are that important, that powerful.

—Yejiode Ankobia, Bay Area

Our girls are sacred, and they are loved. With a deeper understanding of the complex challenges and dynamics encountered by Black girls, and a framework from the final chapter for altering and expanding our vision of their education, it's time for a closer look at the everyday concerns and obstructions Black girls grapple with in order to shape the path forward. The collected wisdom gathered here is intended to aid anyone searching for insight on how to improve conditions for Black girls.

What follows is a series of questions and answers, organized into three sections: one for girls and young women, one for parents and the extended community of loved ones that embrace girls’ healthy development and well-being, and one for teachers and educators working with Black girls. Share this appendix, especially the first section, with the young women and girls whose experiences mirror or relate to the ones included in this book—and the adults who support them.
For Girls

Why should I care about school? I need to make some money.

How much money do you want to make? Black women who have some high school education and no diploma earn just $861,353 over their entire lifetime; but those with a high school diploma will earn $1.07 million! Black women with a bachelor’s degree from college earn $1.86 million in their lifetime, and those with a master’s degree earn $2.3 million in their lifetime. In other words, school is about giving you options and the skills that will make you more marketable in the workforce.

Life can sometimes get hard, and that can make school seem less important. But remember that if you want a career, something more than just a job that pays the bills, you have to plan and prepare for it. That planning includes completing your education. Consider it an investment—in yourself, which will produce the maximum return. Once you have an education, no one can take that from you. And in fact, being educated will only make you a stronger candidate for success in life, not just for the moment.

Sometimes I feel like school is not for me. How can I get motivated?

First, take a moment to think about why you are feeling this way. Ask yourself: “Why do I feel this way about school? Who is associated with how I feel about school? Is there something about school itself that makes me not want to go, or is it about something else that’s happening around me? When did I start to feel this way about school? What happened?” Once you have collected your thoughts, get a piece of paper and draw a line down the middle. On one side, list all of the things you like about school, and on the other, list all of the things that you don’t like about school. Now, turn the paper over. Make a list of the things that you want to accomplish in life. Sometimes these can be as basic as “leaving this
town” or “having a house of my own,” but you can also dream big, like “own my own business” or “become a lawyer.” Sometimes women fail to give ourselves as much energy as we offer to others around us. Love is supposed to make you stronger, but sometimes we allow fear to drive our practice of love—and this is more prone to happen when we haven’t laid our foundation first. As a young woman, a central part of your foundation is your education. Make a promise to focus on your own well-being. Here are two active steps you can take:

- **Find someone at school, at home, or in another part of your community (such as a community center or agency) who can help you create an educational plan.** Ask this person to help guide you toward fulfilling your plan. Find an academic mentor or coach who can check in on you to make sure you’ve finished your homework and to encourage you to focus on going to school. Their support will help you to be the strongest student you can be.

- **Surround yourself with people who want to achieve, like you do.** People who encourage you to stay away from school—whether they are girlfriends, boyfriends, family, or other adults with power—do not have your best interest at heart. People who love you want you to have your best chance in life, and that begins with staying in school and taking care of yourself.

What do I do if I feel like my teacher is picking on me?

It’s hard to feel picked on or bullied by your peers or your teachers. Truthfully, this is an issue that probably can’t be resolved with a few words of advice, or even in the course of a school year. In general, you would be best served by taking the high road. Take control of the situation by documenting (writing down or recording) what is happening and what you are observing. If you’re struggling with this, try to find an adult you trust to help you record
your experiences. As you document each incident, be sure to include a careful description of what happened just before the teacher acted or reacted, and what you did in response. Record every detail and be sure to honor how you might have contributed to escalating the situation. Just thinking about what is happening will help you slow down a heated situation and be more aware. Paying close attention to the situation might even cause you to choose or act differently, even if you are being disrespected or treated unfairly. Once you have collected enough information to support your claim, and if you feel safe enough doing this alone, first try talking to your teacher one-on-one about how the situation could be resolved. Schedule a meeting to talk about behavior —yours and theirs. If your first meeting only results in a one-sided rant, or if you do not feel that you otherwise have a respectful enough relationship with your teacher to have a helpful conversation, then try to schedule a meeting to have a conversation that includes you, a parent or loved one, your principal (or a dean or counselor), and the teacher. Keep track of the following questions in this meeting:

- Is there anything different about how everyone involved is seeing the situation? What is the difference?
- What is similar about each version of the story?
- What do I want to change about our relationship?
- What actions will I take to change the situation between my teacher and me? What or who do I need in my corner to help me do the things I've agreed to do?
- What actions has my teacher agreed to take to change the situation? Who will hold the teacher accountable?
- How will we hold each other accountable for our agreements? Is there a written agreement? Are there regular conversations and check-ins? Do we need other people to be there for these meetings?
How should I respond if I keep being challenged to fight in school?
First, stop and breathe. Let's start with some facts: You are the only person who controls your actions, no one else. No one can make you hit that other person who is provoking you, and no one is making you walk away. You control your own behavior. Now, let's deal with reality: It is possible that you are feeling pressured to fight. There might be social pressures, or maybe you want to feel in control. You could also be triggered to fight after being bullied by other girls or boys who talk about you, spread rumors about you, call you names (in person or on social media sites), or try to intimidate you in some way (in person or on social media sites). You could be feeling pressure to fight in order to keep your relationship with another person intact. Take a moment to check in with yourself about why you are feeling like you want to fight. Learn your triggers. As soon as possible, find an adult or another friend who can intervene. That adult should be able to guide you both in a conversation that allows you to get to the bottom of why you are fighting and think about how you can overcome the urge to come to blows.

How do I know if I'm in an unhealthy relationship?
Every relationship has its ups and downs. But if a relationship is causing physical or emotional reactions in your body or your spirit that are not positive, then you need to check in to see if this is the right relationship for you. How frequently do you feel upset with your partner? Do you feel jealous, suspicious, or envious of your partner? Is there constant arguing? Do you feel put down, controlled, or manipulated? If you are nodding or answering yes to these questions, then you might take some time to think about why you are in this relationship. These are not feelings that you should feel in a committed and loving relationship. Sometimes the thrill of a relationship, especially if that person is popular or powerful in some way, can make us overlook these feelings. Maybe
you feel like you have no one else who understands you, or no one else to rely on. But if you are more unhappy than you are happy, love yourself enough not to ignore your own well-being. In other words, remember that you are sacred and loved. If your relationship does not honor this basic idea most of the time, you may want to reconsider if your partner is the right one for you, even if you love or have love for this person.

Why do people call what I do “human trafficking” or “sex slavery”? My boyfriend takes care of me, and I don’t feel like a “sex slave.”

Love feels good. But it’s not love if it brings you harm—physically, emotionally, or sexually. If you are under the age of eighteen and in a relationship with someone who asks you to share your body with them or someone else in exchange for money, clothes, shoes, jewelry, or other goods, then you may be in a situation that is considered “human trafficking.” Let’s be honest. Prostitution is a hustle—one that gives some people a chance to buy things that make them feel good about how they look, and to be treated (at least at first) like they are not invisible. But human trafficking is a serious thing, and love or “being taken care of” should never come with a price, especially one that requires you to sacrifice your body.

What should I say to people who tease me on the stroll?

Don’t say anything to them. You are not required to justify your life conditions to anyone. You should, however, find an adult or a friend that you can trust, to help you figure out the best way to remain safe (and free from judgment at school) while you figure out your next step in life. As soon as you can, contact an organization or someone you trust to help you gain control of your life. You can get off the streets, but it’s really hard to do it alone. You’ll need help, and there are lots of organizations that can help you. As soon as possible, contact GEMS (see list at the end of this
appendix) to get a copy of A Survivor's Guide to Leaving. Adult survivors of sex trafficking believe this booklet is a very helpful tool as you launch your journey. A list of additional resources is included at the end of this appendix. If you're in a different city, contact one on the list and they will help you find someplace closer that can help.

Why do I get so annoyed when people look at me? Sometimes, when we feel a little self-conscious, someone's look can feel like a judgmental stare. This stare can feel rude. It can be challenging. It can be sexually provocative. People try to pretend that a look or an expression isn't that important, but those things do matter. They matter because they give us an indication of what someone is thinking about us, and what we are thinking about ourselves. Looks have meaning, words have meaning, and physical actions have meaning—we know this instinctively. But it's our interpretations that give them that meaning. In other words, only if you feel inadequate in some way do looks or words have a meaningful impact on your life. When you feel whole, it's harder to be triggered by another person's problems, issues, or judgments of you.

Here's the thing to remember: Your life is beautiful. Their looks are about them, not you. Just because you may not be where you want to be yet, or have all of the material things you want—and that everyone else seems to think are important—doesn't mean that you are any less worthy of respect than the next person. Find ways to be true to yourself under all circumstances. That doesn't mean lashing out with your own special stare or with words at anyone who seems to be challenging you. It also doesn't mean that you have to belittle people who do have some of the material things that might be nice to have. No matter who has what or where you or anyone else comes from, think about the ways that you can treat everyone around you with respect.

Consider that you might be able to turn what feels like a judgmental stare into something else, by smiling at them. Say hello. Teens are notorious for calling that kind of reaction to something
"weird"—but don’t worry. Just do you. Don’t worry about what others think about you. How do you want to feel about yourself? Are you happy with who you are becoming? If the answer is yes, then that’s really all that matters. Everyone else will fall in line. If the answer is no, then think about why. It may help you start to see what’s missing or what’s not working, and how you might be able to lead a more fulfilling life. Ultimately, approval of your life needs to come from inside of you, not from someone else. Focus on what it takes to make you feel whole. The closer you get the more you’ll recognize that what used to feel like a challenging or angry state might actually be a glance of admiration.

How do I get along better with my mom?
The mother-daughter relationship can be tricky. It can also be one of the most sacred and beautiful experiences in life. It can be a bond like no other, which is why—even when our mothers get on our last nerve or when they make mistakes in their own lives—we forgive them. We are forever connected to them. Remember, mothers are people too. If you can, find a time when you can calmly sit next to your mother and talk about what’s going through your mind. Nothing beats a good conversation when you’re trying to get at the heart of what is bothering you. Ask her to tell you her story. Maybe she’s already told you some things about her life several times, but ask her to tell you what her story is. What was life like for her growing up? What’s it like for her now? What did she want to do when she was your age? What was her relationship like with her mother? What are her hopes and dreams for herself? Chances are that the same hopes and dreams that she had for herself growing up, she also has for you. Maybe those are not consistent with the dreams you have for yourself—or maybe they are. But you’ll never know unless you talk about them.

The problem with differences usually isn’t that they exist. Rather, it’s all the assumptions we tend to make about other people—even our mothers. Even if you don’t always see eye to eye, talking openly
and regularly can transform your relationship. Try to carve out a regular time for the two of you to sit down together and share stories. Once she's done with her story, then you should tell yours. Yes, whether you're twelve, fifteen, or nineteen years old, you have a life story. Sharing with each other builds a foundation for mutual respect and, hopefully, a more fulfilling relationship. This strategy may not work for everyone, but give it a chance. Sometimes it helps to bring in other people—a friend, an aunt or cousin, a therapist or counselor—if it's hard or if it seems impossible to start the conversation on your own. If this strategy doesn't work, or if your mother isn't around for you to talk to, try to find another older woman to connect to. Whether or not you have a good relationship with your mother, focus inward and prepare for when it is time to lead your own life. You can make it.

I am lesbian (or gay, or bisexual, or transgender, or queer, or questioning). How can I stay safe at school?
Your sexual and/or gender identity is your own business. You do not have to share your personal business with anyone. That said, you should never have to hide who you are or live under a cloak of oppression. If you feel alone, please consider forming or joining a group of students who can provide you with a community to share feelings, experiences, or activities of shared interest. Clubs like Gay-Straight Alliances, Campus Pride, or other LGBT youth-led efforts in your area can help you create or develop the right club for you. Your school should not prevent you from being you, and instead it should actively support your full growth and expression. First and foremost, know that you are loved. Second, know your rights. Lambda Legal's website (lambdalegal.org) offers a host of resources that you may find helpful along your journey, including a report called *Out, Safe and Respected: Your Rights at School*. Become familiar with this report and identify allies and supportive adults and/or peers on campus. They can help you co-create safe spaces for your learning. Organizations such
as the Safe Schools Coalition, BreakOUT, and Ambiente Joven (for Spanish-speakers) can offer you additional resources and guidance as you seek to establish or further develop a respectful and inclusive school climate. You've got this!

**For Parents and Community Members**

**How do I start a conversation about the effects that school discipline policies are having on Black girls?**

Starting a conversation is a very important part of initiating change. It may be helpful to approach the PTA or other parental leaders to inquire about the impact of a school's discipline policies on Black girls. You may want to begin by just asking questions such as: What are the behaviors or actions that are leading Black girls to get into trouble? What are the typical disciplinary actions that are assigned to Black girls who get into trouble? Talk to your daughter or the student that you wish to support and begin to collect anecdotes that support your interest in exploring broader school discipline issues on campus. Ask the school’s principal to collect and review data on referrals and then convene regular discussions about the trends these data reveal. Once you have a clear idea about what may be contributing to these trends, partner with parents to explore possible ways to bring alternative disciplinary practices to your school.

**What should I do if my daughter (or sister, or niece) keeps getting in trouble at school?**

Be patient and do not immediately side with the school or teacher before hearing what the young person has to say. Ask her what is happening at school and why she thinks things are getting out of control. Ask her to tell her story, and then tell the version you got from the school. Ask her to share her experiences and talk through the best and worst aspects of school. Ask her to share what she is feeling and observing about her teachers, about her
classmates, and about herself in school. Ask her to list, in detail, what is happening in school and to keep a log of the things that are triggering her negative behavior, and possibly, the negative behavior of others (students or educators) toward her. She can treat this log as a journal that she reviews once a week with you or another adult in her life. As patterns emerge for her (and you) regarding the triggers, brainstorm together how you all might address behaviors or conditions to keep her out of harm’s way. It’s important not to jump directly to harsh punishment or accusations, because there will be more to unpack. Give it time, but stay on top of the situation and remain consistent in your efforts to prioritize your girl’s well-being, in partnership with the school.

What do I say to my daughter to encourage her to go to school?
This is an opportunity to ask questions and better understand why your daughter might be avoiding school. Is she tired? Does she get enough sleep? If not, maybe you should help her establish a new night routine that facilitates rest and a more balanced diet. Also, ask her why she doesn’t want to go. Is her safety threatened? Are rumors about her distracting her from her studies? Once you have ruled out some basic physical health issues, perhaps explore whether there are conditions in school that are making her feel that she doesn’t want to go to school. Ask your daughter what she wants to accomplish in life, and when she replies, ask her if she understands why education is important to her ability to achieve this goal. Explain to her that education is a tool to move forward. We all have days when we just need a break, but try to reinforce the importance of staying true to her commitments, and then be clear that education is her commitment to herself for the future. Consistency is very important for children, so checking in on her progress regularly and establishing a routine will be very important. If you sense that she is not comfortable talking with you about what’s going on in her life, ask her if there’s another adult
she would be willing to talk to or if she would talk to a counselor. It might hurt to feel like she can’t share with you, but in the long run finding her someone she can talk to may help her get back on track.

**What can we do at home to support my daughter in school?**

Establish a routine for your daughter that includes quiet study time and an area where she can devote her attention to studying. While every person has her own study style—and some may respond to the additional stimulation of music—explain to your daughter that most television shows, popular music, and social media are distractions and should be minimized during her study time. If she’s strong-willed about it or resistant to the idea, make agreements about one or more hours of the day that are free of all electronic media (even when homework involves computer time). Ask your daughter if she has carefully checked and completed her homework assignments. If you suspect that she is lying about not having any homework or having finished an assignment, then check it. Establish a line of communication with your daughter’s teachers so that you know your daughter’s progress in school _before_ parent-teacher conferences. Prepare at least five specific questions about your daughter before attending a parent-teacher conference so that you can ask more than the general “How is she doing?” or “Why are you failing my daughter?” Often there are many reasons and many people involved—parents included—when a girl seems to be “failing” in a subject or in some other way. Ask your daughter’s teachers what they need from you to support your collective vision for the academic success of your daughter. Work out a plan that you create _with_ your daughter to determine how she can take the lead in this shared vision for her success. Don’t forget, this is about her! She should be just as involved in discussions and planning about her school life as everyone else, if not more.
How do I build trust and get my daughter to talk about what is bothering her?
Depending on your relationship with your daughter, you may or may not be the person your daughter goes to first when she is in trouble. If you’re not, that’s okay. But you need to know who that person is in her life and build a relationship with that person. There are many ways in which you can build enough trust between you and your daughter to ultimately find out why she may be acting out in school. Begin with setting aside a specific time each week for just the two of you. Initially, you two can decide to do something that just brings you joy—play a game, watch a television show that you both enjoy, or take a walk. Once you have established this rhythm, you can start to share your story—specifically the incidents in your life that shaped your educational journey, and what you have learned from these experiences. Don’t be afraid to share the bad with the good, but be sure to discuss the consequences associated with bad behavior and provide a space for your daughter to add her perspective. Remember to breathe through the aspects of her story that may not resonate with your own or that you may struggle with; work through these issues together and always end the conversation with how you are going to resolve the issue. Most of all, try not to judge her. Guidance and judgment can be hard to separate, especially if you are “old-school” and find it important to direct your daughter in the way that she will go (if she knows what’s good for her). However, in today’s society, where young women are exposed to so much so early, it might be more beneficial to listen to her story with an open mind. If you can’t hear it, then ask her to write it. If you can’t read it, then ask her to pick a song that captures how she’s feeling and then talk to her about why the song speaks to her. Sharing stories in this way can help you both get to the bottom of what might be bothering her and why she is feeling the need to behave in ways that are disruptive to her learning. If you don’t get an answer or a response right away, that’s okay. Buy some time to do your research. Seek out
others in your community who can help you think through what is happening or even ask your daughter if there is someone that you both could talk to that could help to resolve the problem. The important thing is that you establish some way to brainstorm with your daughter ways to deal with what is triggering her bad behavior. Ultimately, express your appreciation for her honesty and ask her to help you to understand how her actions could better reflect her future as a queen. Then ask her how you can help her queen shine. Two lights illuminate the hidden treasure all the more effectively.

For Educators

I want to keep my school and classroom safe. How can I do that without security?

Once upon a time, our schools didn’t need armed security guards and police officers to manage the activity of schools. Community accountability and the leadership of principals, deans, counselors, teachers, coaches, faith leaders, and other volunteers helped to create a school climate where the majority of students felt safe. Yes, times have changed and the availability of guns, drugs, and other harmful conditions is a reality for too many of our children. But the most fundamental piece of this puzzle has remained constant—children are still children. They still co-construct their lived experiences by bringing their unique peer cultures to the adult world. They will still respond favorably to interventions that are rooted in a respect for them as people and that address their most basic needs. This can all be done without armed security guards on campus, which is evident in the fact that not every school in our nation has this structure in place.

When girls are engaged in violent interactions, it is often in response to them feeling disrespected. So the question we should be asking is, how can my school facilitate a culture of mutual respect? There is no cookie-cutter response to these issues. Each school is
composed of a unique collection of young people who can help to think through ways that they might help to keep their schools and hallways safe. As long as there are school resource officers and security guards on campus, they must be extensively trained to respond and work with victims of sexual exploitation. These individuals should be rigorously screened for their own competence with respect to strategies to prevent and reduce the retraumatization of girls who have experienced sexual assault and victimization. There should be ongoing conversations with students—female, male, and elsewhere along the gender continuum. Ultimately, while adults should take on a leadership role in the development of these school-specific strategies, youth should have a voice too so that they also are invested in the policies or norms that are developed.

There is ample room for innovative approaches to this dilemma that are already being explored but deserve wider adoption. For example, schools are asking for grandparents, businesses, and other agencies to volunteer to help schools keep their hallways orderly and safe. One powerful example comes from an elder-volunteer program in a Southern California alternative high school. These community volunteers altogether replaced the “security” formerly found in so many high-poverty schools or schools that educate formerly incarcerated children. Not only did these elders help to tutor the students, but I witnessed these grandmothers also serve as enforcers of school rules when young people got out of line. These elders were respected as authority figures by the schools, and when they intervened, they did so with love, which was well received by the students. When we collectively expect our children to do better, they rise to the occasion.

**How can I manage my classroom without sending a girl for referral?**
Classrooms are places of learning. Ensuring the safety of students should remain a priority, so the question for teachers and all
of us always comes back to how this is done. What we’ve learned is that ensuring safety for some or many students shouldn’t, and doesn’t, have to mean creating an unsafe or unhealthy learning environment for others. There are many strategies that are used to manage classrooms, including mindfulness, merit-driven practices, restorative approaches, and buddy systems for accountability. Removing a student from your classroom should be a last resort. Before you start your lesson, establish or revisit norms for the classroom that you co-construct with the class on day one. This means that as the instructor, you can lead a five-to-ten-minute conversation with your class about the way all of you want and expect to engage. If someone speaks out of turn, how should it be handled? If someone has a disagreement with something that’s been said, how will the class respond? How will the class respond if a student is being too disruptive? Establishing these norms as early as possible helps to create a culture in the classroom where students feel respected and engaged in the shared-responsibility of keeping a classroom safe and free of major disruptions.

Mindfulness practices that allow students to breathe and get centered before learning are also important to maintaining the safety of the students and the classroom. More often than not, students are disruptive because they have a lot on their minds or are masking something. Providing a space for students to acknowledge the issue(s) that they must set aside in order to be present for class is a first step toward making all children feel that they are in a safe space to learn.

How can I get parents involved in keeping their daughters from fighting?
Before you approach a parent about getting involved, do some thinking about how to structure questions and talking points in a way that doesn’t trigger parents into combative behavior. In your conversations with parents, search for common ground and inten-
tionally look to elevate issues and approaches on which you both agree. Also, talk directly to the young woman or girl at a calmer moment and ask her, “What’s going on that makes you come to school so angry?” Parents, guardians, and other caregivers in the life of a child play a significant role in the partnership to keep our girls from internalizing negative behaviors (and ideas)—the kind that lead to them becoming both perpetrators and victims of violence. On your back-to-school nights and at each parent-teacher conference, establish a protocol for reaching out to parents if there is a question about their daughter’s performance or behavior. One idea is to collect parents’ mobile numbers and send a text update on a regular basis. Be sure not to reach out only when something is wrong. Parents want to know when their daughter has been involved in an incident that requires their attention, but they also want to know when their child has done something good. Each school should establish its own parent-led leadership group, if it doesn’t have one already, that can effectively communicate parental concerns about administrative issues, and partner with teachers and administrators. National organizational models, partners, and/or resources in parental advocacy include the National Parent-Teacher Association, PTO Today, Opportunity to Learn Campaign, National Parent Academy, and Tellin’ Stories, a program from Teaching for Change.

How can I keep girls from coming to school dressed inappropriately?  
More important than whether a girl or young woman arrives at school dressed “appropriately” is whether she arrives at school ready to learn new material and engage productively as a student. Dress codes, as I have addressed earlier in the book, function to stigmatize girls and undermine their ability to attend class. Schools should work with their students to construct what is appropriate dress for school. As novel as it sounds, asking girls why they are
wearing pants that sag, leggings, short shorts, or tank tops is part of the process that facilitates leadership and decision making about how they want to present to the world. Also ask girls what kind of attention they think their current clothing attracts and talk to them about whether they are aware of other ways to get the attention they may be seeking. Adults should be prepared to receive answers that may not align with what they expect or want. Develop mutual agreements and compromises that allow a young woman to present in a way that reflects her personality without judgment. However, also engage them in conversations about why their clothing might be perceived as unsuitable for certain environments.

Whatever you do, though, do not punish girls for the inability of boys or other girls to keep their hands to themselves. Talk to boys and teach them why unsolicited comments about a girl’s developing body are inappropriate in school or elsewhere, and explain that they are responsible for their own respectful behavior in school. Engage teachers and school leaders—female and male—to lead regular discussions about their identities, about racial and gender stereotypes that objectify Black girls, and about how they can unlearn negative behaviors. Importantly, adults and the policies they create should model for girls that it is the development of their brains, not their bodies, that is most salient in the school environment.

What should I do if I suspect that my student is being trafficked?

Sex trafficking involving a minor is sex abuse. If you suspect that a child is being harmed in this way, it is your responsibility as a mandated reporter to report it to a local authority. You should begin by completing a report of suspected child abuse and then work with a school therapist, counselor, or other person trained in providing specialized services for girls who are being trafficked. As the facilitator of the intervention, you should be mindful that a girl, depending on her level of involvement with the trafficker,
may be in danger of physical harm if special protections are not in place. Do not assume you know what's best for her; seek the advice of experienced professionals.

Refer to your district policy regarding responding to suspected human trafficking among students. If your district or school does not have a policy, work with other concerned teachers and with school and district leaders to create one. Remember the teacher in Northern California who said that we need to be comfortable with teaching more than just the curriculum? She was right that there is a greater opportunity for schools to get involved in the development of life and social skills that can facilitate a safer learning environment for girls. Schools have the unique ability to engage with students—however they identify and express along the gender continuum—about healthy relationships and personal accountability.

Schools can play an important role in a preventative strategy by educating young people and the adults who work with them about the dangers of human trafficking (both sex- and labor-related). However, school-based training and other events addressing this issue should be consistent with curricula that are premised on liberative principles and that can help to dismantle the oppression that fuels an acceptance of the exploitation of girls. Establishing regular professional development opportunities and training sessions that equip teachers and other school personnel on recognizing and responding to suspected student involvement in sex trafficking is important. Also important are regular conversations with students. Schools can engage guest speakers and others who can bring firsthand experience and knowledge about how they can protect themselves against commercial sexual exploitation.

How can I build trust with the Black girls and young women in my school?

Be there for them. Girls want to know that you will consistently show up for them, have their backs, treat them with respect, and
give them your attention. This can be challenging for some, and it’s important to remember that our girls understand more than words. They absorb nonverbal cues as well. Taking the time to build relationships on the front end can reduce the time spent responding to crises on the back end. Other actions that you can take to build trust include greeting them by name when you can and actively working to build relationships with them outside of the classroom. Call them out in front of others for doing something good—and do the same with their peers. Tell girls you teach or work with about your own journey and find a way to connect with them. However an adult identifies along gender, race, and class continua, telling your story is a critical part of making yourself accessible and vulnerable enough to meet the girls where they are. Make time when they want to see you after class, or designate a time when they can reach you to talk about how they are responding to the material. In these conversations, you can share why it is important for them to go to school and why their education is your priority. In other words, demonstrate for them that you care. Small and random acts of kindness are more powerful than you might think.

Each of these actions is also about establishing a climate of mutual respect. Respect is the foundation for developing that relationship. Contrary to the rhetorical refrain in schools throughout the country, respect—especially in the context of schools—is not something that should first have to be earned. It’s a human right. It is about engaging each person with dignity and honoring that she or he has valid thoughts, feelings, and actions. While respect can be eroded, lost, and earned back, every child should be granted it. That’s important, because to build trust, we need to be standing on the same foundation. Adults in school have tremendous power over students, and they know this. As we observed from many of the narratives in this book, some girls take this basic imbalance of power as disrespect, or an affront to their independence.
I'm a teacher and school counselor and I can develop programming for boys because there is money to support those efforts. How can I support the needs of girls when I don't have the same financial resources?

Not every investment requires money. As the girls in this book have shown, they want to know that people care about them and their well-being. They want to be seen and acknowledged for who they are and what they can contribute to the learning environment. Our collective community can respond to their needs by being there for them. But many schools around the country have also established girls' groups as a way to provide encouragement for girls simply by convening them in regular conversation and sisterhood check-ins. These are good ways to facilitate conversation and to launch the next level of investment—one that does require financial resources. Join efforts to raise awareness about the conditions of Black girls in the racial justice movement.

How can school resource officers and security officers better support girls?

Every SRO should be trained to respond to girls as if they potentially have been exposed to sexual trauma and victimization. Remember, 68 percent of sexual assaults go unreported—the actual number is much higher than statistics reflect. Security officers must understand that they are not in schools to instigate fights between girls or to allow conflict for their own entertainment. All security and law enforcement professionals should be screened and trained in trauma-informed first responding, which prioritizes the physical and emotional safety of the girl and/or young women who are involved in the conflict. The role of law enforcement, as long as it is in schools, should transform so that it is part of the school community and an active participant in efforts to increase the use of alternatives to exclusionary discipline and force. Training for school resource officers could include specific, localized, and tailored protocols involving other informed organizations.
and agencies that work with girls and their families. School safety is so much more than enforcement. It involves prevention, nurturing, and collaboration. Work to combat implicit bias by constantly revisiting specific decision-making criteria for actions that are taken against girls in schools, and continue to work with the school administration, teachers, and students—as well as other organizations providing services to schools—to develop partnerships that can result in pre-arrest diversion opportunities.

SROs should also try to experience students in other ways than those that are punitive, by observing and celebrating school performances or sporting events, spending time talking to students, and asking them about their weekends or how they are doing in class. They should take a moment to see these children in a different setting and consider that when girls act out, they may not be necessarily responding to the SRO—or even the uniform—as much as they are responding to the conditions in their own lives that make them vulnerable, or that inform their harmful actions toward others. Ultimately, SROs need tools and expectations so that their responses to student misbehavior are oriented toward repairing relationships among peers and between girls and the adults and institutions that are tasked with supporting their healthy development.
Resources and Programs for African American Girls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afro-Latino Association for Policy and Advocacy</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alliance for Girls</td>
<td>San Francisco, Bay Area</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anna Julia Cooper Center at Wake Forest University</td>
<td>Winston-Salem, NC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beautiful Black Girls, Inc.</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black Girls Code</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black Girls Rock Youth Enrichment Programs</td>
<td>New York metro area</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black Youth Project 100 National</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blossom Program for Girls</td>
<td>Brooklyn, NY</td>
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<tr>
<td>BreakOUT</td>
<td>New Orleans, LA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children of Promise NYC</td>
<td>Brooklyn, NY</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Works West</td>
<td>Oakland, CA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delta GEMS Program</td>
<td>Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dignity in Schools Campaign</td>
<td>Nationwide</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education Law Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eve's Circle</td>
<td>Montgomery, AL</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Fannie Lou Hamer Institute of Advocacy &amp; Social Action</td>
<td>Raleigh, NC</td>
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<tr>
<td>GEMS</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
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<tr>
<td>Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Girl Power! Rocks</td>
<td>Miami, FL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Girls for Gender Equity</td>
<td>New York area</td>
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<tr>
<td>Girls, Inc.</td>
<td>Nationwide</td>
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Girls in Gangs, Youth Policy Institute  
Los Angeles, CA

Girls Rule  
Chicago, IL

GrassROOTS Community Foundation  
Newark, NJ

Gwen's Girls  
Pittsburgh, PA

Impact Family Counseling  
Birmingham, AL

Lead4Life, Inc.  
Baltimore, MD

LifeBuilders  
Chicago, IL

A Long Walk Home  
Chicago, IL

The Mentoring Center  
Oakland, CA

MISSSEY  
Oakland, CA

MomsRising  
National

My Sister's Keeper NW  
Portland, OR

National Black Women's Justice Institute  
National

National CARES Network  
Nationwide

National Crittenton Foundation  
National

National Human Trafficking Resource Center  
Washington, DC

National Hotline:  
1–888–373–7888

National Women's Law Center  
National

NYC Young Women's Initiative  
New York (City Council)

PACE Center for Girls  
Florida statewide

Rise Sister Rise!  
Columbus, OH

A Servant's Heart Youth Ministries  
Upper Marlboro, MD

She Dreams of Freedom Consulting Group, LLC  
New York, NY

Sisters of Today and Tomorrow  
Atlanta, CA
South Side Coalition on Urban Girls
Chicago, IL

Southwest Key Programs
Texas, Wisconsin, California, New York, Florida, Arizona

Tomorrow's Girls
Philadelphia, PA

Trans Sisters of Color Project
Detroit, MI

Women and Girls of Color Initiative
Washington, DC

Women with a Vision
New Orleans, LA

Young Enterprising Sisters
Nationwide

Young Women's Freedom Center
San Francisco, CA