

Section 1: Foundation

Understanding the Work: Awareness vs. Therapy

What This Work IS:

- Awareness-based: Helping girls notice their thoughts, feelings, and patterns
- Developmental: Age-appropriate exploration of identity and voice
- Relational: Building trust through shared reading and reflection
- Educational: SEL-informed discussions about body image and self-worth

What This Work is NOT:

- Therapy: You are not treating mental health conditions
- Diagnosis: You are not identifying disorders
- Crisis intervention: You follow referral protocols for serious concerns
- Personal processing: You don't share your own trauma story to bond

The Goal:

Girls leave with greater awareness of who they are—not with all their problems solved.

You are creating space for noticing, not fixing.

Who Can Facilitate

Appropriate Facilitators:

- ✓ School counselors
- ✓ Social workers
- ✓ Teachers with SEL training/background
- ✓ Advisory period leaders (with support)
- ✓ Youth development professionals
- ✓ Community-based mentors with training

Prerequisites:

- Read *Girl, You Cute* cover to cover
- Understand the difference between awareness and therapy
- Know your school's referral protocols
- Complete basic trauma-informed care training (if available)
- Have capacity to hold emotion without fixing

Not Appropriate for:

- × Untrained volunteers
 - × Teachers without SEL background or support
 - × Parents/family members of participating girls
 - × Anyone uncomfortable with emotion or silence
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Reading the Book Before You Begin

Why This Matters:

You cannot facilitate something you haven't experienced yourself.

Your Pre-Work:

1. Read the entire book (don't skim)
2. Do the Mirror Talk prompts in a journal
3. Notice your own reactions:
 - Which chapters resonated?
 - Which chapters made you uncomfortable?
 - What memories came up?
4. Consider your own 12-year-old self:
 - What would you tell her?
 - What did she need to hear?
5. Identify your edges:
 - Which topics might trigger you?
 - Where might you need to co-facilitate or get support?

Remember: Your awareness of your own story helps you hold space for theirs.

Group Agreements & Safety

Why Group Agreements Matter:

They create psychological safety without being preachy.

Essential Agreements (Adapt Language for Age):

- 1. Right to Pass** - "You can always pass on sharing. Listening is participating."
- 2. Confidentiality** - "What we share here stays here. We don't repeat names or stories outside this room. But if someone is being hurt or in danger, I have to get help."
- 3. Speak from "I"** - "Talk about your own experience, not someone else's."
- 4. No advice-giving** - "We're not here to fix each other. We're here to listen."
- 5. Respect the process** - "Silence is okay. Crying is okay. Not knowing is okay."
- 6. One voice at a time** - "No side conversations. When someone is speaking, we listen."

How to Introduce Group Agreements:

- Read them together in first session
- Post them visibly in your meeting space
- Refer back to them when needed
- Ask girls to sign (symbolically) or affirm agreement

**Template available in Section 7*

Referral Protocols: When and How

Your Role:

You are a noticer and a connector—not a diagnostician or therapist.

ALWAYS Refer Immediately for:

- Self-harm ideation or behaviors (*"I've been thinking about hurting myself"*)
- Suicidal ideation (*"I don't want to be alive anymore"*)

- Abuse disclosure (physical, sexual, emotional abuse or neglect)
- Current safety threat ("*He's waiting for me after school*")

ACTION: Stop the session. Follow mandatory reporting laws. Contact school counselor/admin immediately.

Refer Within 24-48 Hours for:

- Persistent sadness lasting multiple sessions
- Extreme anxiety that interferes with participation
- Eating disorder behaviors (restricting, purging, excessive exercise)
- Trauma symptoms (flashbacks, dissociation, panic attacks)
- Prolonged grief that impacts daily functioning
- Signs of depression (hopelessness, withdrawal, sleep/appetite changes)

ACTION: Document what you observed. Contact school counselor. Loop in parent/caregiver with appropriate messaging.

Consider Referring (Use Clinical Judgment) for:

- Girls who benefit from the work but need deeper support
- Complex family situations (Chapter 10 may reveal this)
- Undiagnosed learning differences (Chapter 2, 4 may reveal this)
- Significant peer conflict beyond normal drama
- Repeated attendance issues or disengagement

ACTION: Have a one-on-one conversation. Offer resources. Check in with school counselor.

How to Make a Referral:

1. Talk to the girl first (unless it's abuse—then follow mandatory reporting)
2. Use language like:
 - "I've noticed you're carrying a lot. I think talking to someone who specializes in [issue] could really help."
 - "What we're doing here is awareness work. It sounds like you could benefit from some extra support."
3. Provide clear next steps:
 - a. School counselor contact info
 - b. How to access services

- c. Reassure her that getting help is strength, not weakness
- d. Document:
 - Date, time, what was said
 - Who you referred to
 - Follow-up plan

What You Don't Do:

- × Diagnose ("I think you have depression")
- × Give clinical advice ("You should take medication")
- × Promise confidentiality when you can't keep it
- × Try to handle it alone

**Full decision tree in Section 5*

Cultural Responsiveness & Equity

Key Principles:

1. **Center Each Girl's Experience** Don't assume you know what a chapter means to her based on her identity.
2. **Acknowledge Difference Without Stereotyping** "Some of you may relate to this chapter differently based on your experiences with race, culture, or family background. All of those experiences are valid here."
3. **Don't Make Any Girl a Representative** Never say "As a Black girl, how do you feel about Chapter 9?"
4. **Validate Multiple Truths** Girls can have different reactions to the same chapter. Both can be true.
5. **Know Your Own Positionality** How does your race, class, gender identity, etc. impact how you facilitate?

Special Considerations:

Chapter 7 (When He Closed His Eyes):

- About father loss, but not all girls have fathers
- Some may relate to loss of another figure
- Create space for various types of loss

Chapter 9 (When They Called Me Angry):

- Addresses racial stereotyping, particularly "angry Black girl" trope
- Don't assume only Black girls will relate
- Don't force discussion of race if girls don't bring it up
- Validate emotions without making it a teaching moment about racism

Chapter 10 (To the Mamas and Aunties):

- May surface different family structures
- Some girls may not have mothers
- Some may be raised by grandparents, aunts, fathers, foster parents
- Language like "the people who raised you" is more inclusive

Language Matters:

- Use "family" or "caregivers" instead of "parents"
- Use "partner" instead of assuming heterosexual relationships
- Use "people" or "they" until you know preferred pronouns
- Ask, don't assume

**Full guide in Section 6*