

HELPING GIRLS BUILD CONFIDENCE & AUTHENTICITY



“When was the last time your daughter felt limitless—like she could write her own story?” asked Kim O’Malley. Sensing an underwhelming response from the audience, O’Malley went on to explain, “Girls are experiencing more academic success than ever, but alongside that is an internal struggle to feel perfect and to meet the expectations of others. Consequently, girls today have twice the rate of anxiety and depression as boys.” O’Malley elaborated, “By third grade, 42% of girls wish they were thinner. Their sense of self-worth becomes tied to what others think of them and what the media tells them they should look and act like.”



PIN’s November presentations featured Kim O’Malley and Simone Marean of the Girls’ Leadership Institute, a nationally recognized group that teaches girls the skills they need to in order to know who they are, what they believe, and how to express themselves.

“Girls have never had as much opportunity, but the pressure to please others is increasing,” explained Marean.



“When girls get good at pleasing others, they often lose touch with their own needs, thoughts, emotions, and their ability to self-advocate.” This tendency can result in a loss of confidence, causing girls to become less likely to raise their hands in the classroom and less willing to take healthy risks. Their priorities instead become being nice, looking pretty and meeting the expectations of others. Marean and O’Malley discussed steps parents can take to help their daughters:

Share your not-so-perfect feelings. “Parents should model for their kids how they really feel about their day, giving them permission to experience ‘bad’ feelings like jealousy, rage and loneliness,” said O’Malley. By teaching them to be specific in how they feel, parents can encourage their daughters to express themselves in a way that helps them understand what they’re truly feeling, and to know that even difficult feelings are okay.

Talk about your mistakes. “Perfectionism makes it hard to own your mistakes,” explained Marean. “That can lead to denial, exaggeration and drama,” she said. Parents can help by willingly admitting their own mistakes, showing their daughters that it’s okay to not be perfect. O’Malley talked through the double-sorry technique, in which both participants in a conflict own what they can in terms of how they contributed to the fight. This takes the focus off of blaming and helps girls grow in personal responsibility.

Practice conflict together. “When your daughter comes home upset, offer empathy, but avoid giving advice at that point since that can put up a wall,” advised O’Malley. Parents can help girls debrief the conflict through role playing different scenarios, acting out what needed to happen. Role playing constructive outcomes can help prime girls to engage in conflict in a healthy way and to speak up for themselves.

By modeling authentic feelings and working through problems, parents give their girls scripts they can use later on to live life more confidently. Visit girlsleadership.org to find out about upcoming parent-child workshops and receive a monthly newsletter. To hear the podcast, go to PINccsd.org.

Next at PIN: Join us on **12/1** for *Attention and Memory: Critical Players in the Digital Age*. This talk will focus on proven solutions for kids who struggle with focus and organization.

By Bobbie Turner, PIN Publicity.