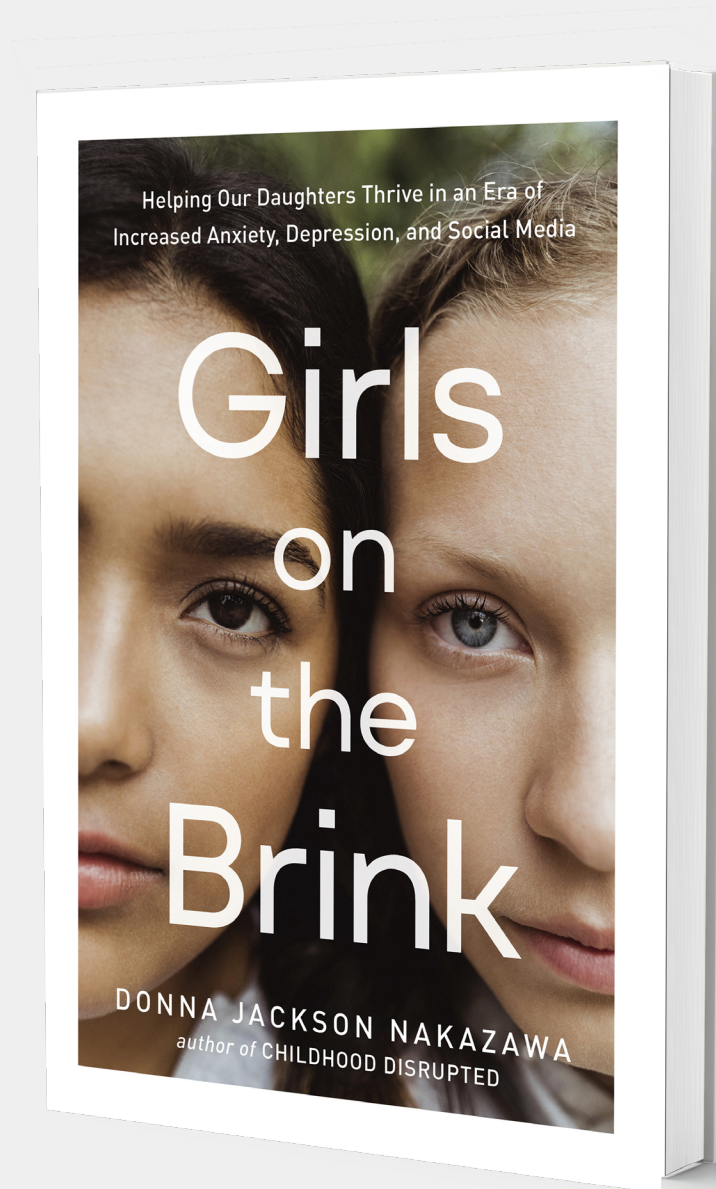


Book Club Kit



Discussion Questions: Our Girls Today

1. Did the stories of Anna, Julia, and Deleicea resonate for you? If so, why?
2. Were you aware that a growing number of girls are facing mental health issues? Were any of the statistics that the author shared surprising? For a review of these statistics, see the end of this Book Club Kit.
3. After reading the book, are you more concerned about today's girls, or more hopeful? Perhaps both? Why?
4. After learning about the science behind the struggles of modern girls, what stood out to you the most, and why? Did you find yourself revisiting any passages?
5. Do you feel that the issues you faced when you were growing up were different from those that girls face today? How does your coming-of-age compare to the current era?



Discussion Questions:

The 15 Principles from *Girls on the Brink*

Principle 1: Get in Synch—Understand the Connection Between Your Stress, Your Trauma, and What You are Communicating to Your Child at Every Age

This principle talks about how trauma affects early development—and how even the unaddressed trauma within parents can affect a child. Were you surprised that a parent’s unaddressed trauma can have a major impact on their child’s development? Discuss.

Principle 2: Observe Your Reactions in Parent-Child Interactions and Dial Back on Evaluating Your Daughter

Think back on a recent “trigger” when interacting with your child—when your nervous system felt overactivated. How did you respond? What do you think was really behind your reaction? How does being aware of our emotional triggers and our reactions help us become better parents?

Principle 3: When Your Daughter Turns to You, Make It a Good Experience for Her

What does a safe space for your daughter look like? How do you create that safe space for her? If you say your daughter can talk with you about “anything,” are you telling the truth?

Principle 4: When Hard Things Happen (and They Will) Be Prepared to Respond in Healthy, Supportive Ways, Even When Your Daughter Shares Hard-to-Hear Information

Do you allow your daughter to express her negative emotions? If you have a reflexive reaction, how do you right the ship? Talk about the power of apologizing to your child.

Principle 5: Power Up on Joy (Especially) in Difficult Times

Finding joy in a difficult moment does not need to be grandiose or monumental. What simple joy can you find right now? What can you do to help your daughter find joy when the going gets tough?

Principle 6: Don’t Solve All Her Problems for Her—Leave Room for “a Little Wobble”

Be honest: Do you try to solve your child’s problem for them most of the time? If so, why? What are the benefits of letting your child work a problem out for themselves?

Principle 7: Wonder Aloud Together to Help Build Resilience to Stress

What opportunities do you have to wonder together with your child? What does guiding rather than leading look like for you?

Discussion Questions:

The 15 Principles from *Girls on the Brink*

Principle 8: Go Slow on Development—Keep the Biological Brakes Engaged

Are you on top of what social media messages your daughter is receiving right now? How can you help steer her to appropriate messaging, as well as creative uses of her time?

Principle 9: Create Routine, Ritual, and Structure—Including a Family Media Plan

What does “family time” look like for you? What routines would you like to create as a family that limit harmful messages and foster resilience in your daughter?

Principle 10: Engage the Power of Benefactors, Mentors, and Avatars to Help a Girl Feel She Matters

Are there positive Avatars in your daughter’s life? Are you a mentor or in a network of mentors for someone else’s daughter?

Principle 11: Help Her Find “A Sense of Something Bigger”

Do you foster a sense of something larger for your daughter? What does that look like?

Principle 12: Take the Pressure Off of Your Parent-Child Relationship and Get Some Professional Help

In what way can therapy be beneficial to both your daughter and you? How do you model “self-care” for your child?

Principle 13: Encourage a Sense of Self-Mastery

This chapter asks, “How do you simultaneously start your daughter down this healthy passion project path without choosing the project for her?” What might your answer be? Is there something—or a spark of something—that your daughter has shown interest in?

Principle 14: Help Her Develop a Voice of Resistance

Growing up, were you able to develop a Voice of Resistance? How does your daughter express herself? In what ways can you encourage her to speak up for herself?

Principle 15: Have Her Write It Down to Break the Cycle of Negative Self-Talk

What are the benefits of writing-to-heel? How might you encourage your daughter to do it?

Discussion Questions: The 15 Principles from *Girls on the Brink*

Bonus Questions:

Which of these principles resonated with you the most?

Which surprised you?

What is your biggest takeaway from *Girls on the Brink*?

How do you plan to use the principles going forward?

Discussion Questions:

Adverse Childhood Experiences & Sources of Stress

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and Sources of Stress (12-13)

When considering the four major types of stress which affect children's lives and health, which do you feel affects your children, students, clients, or patients the most? Why?

- **Household Stressors:** The kind of adversity a child faces in their own home. Includes poor treatment at the hands of a parent or primary caregiver, experiencing parental separation or divorce, emotional neglect, and abuse.
- **Environmental Stressors:** These encompass natural disasters and fallout from the climate crisis, such as hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires, and mud slides; the COVID-19 pandemic; and exposure to pollution.
- **Community Stressors:** Trauma that occurs in one's community, such as growing up with the threat of racism; facing poverty and community violence; going to substandard schools; lacking adequate housing; and the possibility of school shootings.
- **Social Stressors:** These are the emotional or interpersonal stressors children traditionally meet in social milieus, amid cliques at school or in their neighborhood. Chronic stress in this domain has become more acute as children and teens live more of their lives online.

Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) (177)

- Feeling able to talk to family about feelings
- Knowing family stood by them at difficult times
- Feeling safe and protected by an adult in the home
- Having a sense of belonging in high school
- Feeling supported by friends
- Enjoying participating in community traditions
- Having at least two nonparent adults take a genuine interest in them.

“Adults with fewer PCEs (Positive Childhood Experiences) were nearly four times more likely to experience depression and poor mental health compared to adults who had more PCEs.” Has your daughter had many PCEs? If not, what are ways that you can provide support?

Author Q&A

In the opening chapters of *Girls on the Brink*, you discuss how we're living through a toxic for girls. Why is that?

A girl's sense of safety in adolescence has a tremendous effect on her long-term wellbeing. During the pre-teen and early teen years, girls need the space to deepen friendships, explore their identity, and develop emotionally and physically without pressure. A lot is happening in the brain at this stage. But girls now feel more pressure than they used to. This pressure has grown due to social media and 24/7 interactions with peers online—being liked, disliked, critiqued . . . There is constant competition, comparison, and focus on performance across all areas of their lives—their appearance, academics, popularity (including on social media)—all against a backdrop of a looming sense of unsafety as the world heats up environmentally, socially, politically.

There's also excessive sexualization of girls. Girls constantly receive the message they should look and act sexually mature, long before their brains or bodies are ready. Girls today grapple, too, with the reality that, as they get older, they're going into a world laced with gender inequities and, all too often, sexual harassment. (Just look at the headlines!) And, of course, for BIPOC girls, all of this is further amplified.

What are the consequences of these modern stressors?

This level of pressure ramps up at one of the most vulnerable times for girls' brain development. Girls can't put all of this in context at such a young age. An adult might have tools to make it all bearable, but to a girl's developing brain it can be overwhelming and feel like life or death.

The good news is that emotional adversity becomes traumatic only if a child or teen experiences that stressor as harmful or threatening to their psychological or physical safety in the world. And this, of course, is where we, as adults, come in, with new strategies, skills, and approaches. Understanding the science of girls' brain development tells us so much about how to engender girls' sense of safety during their most crucial coming of age years. In researching this book, I learned there's so much more we can do to utilize this science in our roles as parents, mentors, and educators of girls and young women.

Why does puberty mark a sudden shift in mental health among girls?

A couple of things hit girls in puberty and interact in a way that have a major impact on mental health. The challenges of being a girl today . . . social media, sexist messaging, pressures about how to be female, and exposure to that messaging across media platforms ramp up as girls reach their teens and hurtle towards adulthood. During this same period of time, estrogen floods the brain and body . . . with an impact on girls' brains in puberty that we have only just begun to understand in real detail.

Adolescence can be a turbulent stage of life. What's happening to the brain during this period?

It's a matter of our evolutionary foundations—the brain's biology in puberty—mixing with our present-day stressors. In our evolutionary past, stressful or traumatic experiences could mean death . . . and the way they're interpreted by our brain today

Author Q&A

still hinges on this ancient threat response. But today's trauma and stressors are very different from the ones with which we evolved. Sexism, social pressure . . . while not (usually) deadly, these threats can feel ever-present, especially since the explosion in smartphone use and time spent on social media (especially by girls). To the developing brain these modern stressors can feel the same on a deep, biological level, as being attacked, abandoned.

Three separate factors—being female, going through puberty, and facing chronic stressors and threats that stoke a sense of unsafety—are synergistic in the same harmful way that environmental conditions often build upon one another, such as with wildfires. It isn't just about what is happening; it's also about the cumulative effect of *all* that is happening. It's stressful, and the impact is harmful and long-lasting. Our new understanding of what happens as girls approach puberty and how the developing brain makes sense of toxic stressors helps us to help *them*.

Many parents may not realize that their children are struggling. How can we ensure that our girls are receiving the support they need?

Studies do show that we're often overconfident in our ability to see our child and her moods clearly. In one study, 90-percent of parents rated themselves as either very confident or somewhat confident they would recognize signs of depression in their child. And yet two-thirds of these same parents admitted it was difficult to distinguish their child's normal ups and downs from depression. Other studies have found that half of parents are unaware of their child's suicidal thoughts.

Our girls are struggling, but when we don't know there's a problem, we can't intervene with timely and effective help. In reporting and writing this book, it became clear to me that understanding the new science on girls' adolescent brain development can lead us towards new strategies that help ensure our girls flourish as they grow—even when facing hard things.

ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION IN GIRLS

1 OUT OF 4

ADOLESCENT GIRLS REPORTS SUFFERING FROM SYMPTOMS OF MAJOR DEPRESSION COMPARED WITH FEWER THAN

1 IN 10 BOYS

DEPRESSION IS PRESENTING EARLIER THAN IT DID JUST TWO DECADES AGO—OFTEN BY AGES

12 OR 13

GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN ARE

2X

AS LIKELY AS BOYS AND YOUNG MEN TO SUFFER FROM ANXIETY

IN 2021 SUICIDE ATTEMPTS INCREASED

51%

AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS COMPARED WITH

4%

AMONG BOYS

GIRLS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

THE MAJORITY OF CHILDREN START USING
SOCIAL MEDIA APPS BETWEEN AGES

8
and
13
yrs

EVEN THOUGH USERS ARE SUPPOSED TO BE AT
LEAST 13 TO HAVE AN ACCOUNT

2012

RATES OF TEENAGE DEPRESSION,
LONELINESS, AND SUICIDE BEGAN TO
RISE SHARPLY IN GIRLS

2009

FACEBOOK ADDED A LIKE
BUTTON AND TWITTER ADDED A
RETWEET BUTTON

AMONG GIRLS WHO FELT BAD
ABOUT THEIR BODIES

32%

SAID "INSTAGRAM MADE
THEM FEEL WORSE."

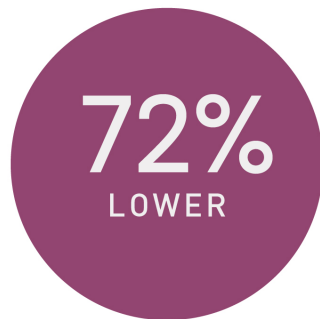
GIRLS AND STRESS

TEENS WHO EXPERIENCE JUST A BRIEF EPISODE OF SOCIAL REJECTION SHOW CHANGES IN NEURAL NETWORKS ON BRAIN SCANS AND AN **INCREASE IN DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS** OVER THE COURSE OF THE FOLLOWING YEAR

25%

OF WOMEN WHO'VE EXPERIENCED TWO OR MORE CATEGORIES OF ACES (ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES) GO ON TO DEVELOP MAJOR DEPRESSION LATER IN LIFE

THE ODDS OF HAVING DEPRESSION OR FOURTEEN OR MORE POOR MENTAL HEALTH DAYS IN THE PREVIOUS MONTHS WERE



FOR THOSE REPORTING SIX TO SEVEN POSITIVE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

GIRLS WHO FACE CHRONIC CHILDHOOD STRESSORS HAVE A **LOWER SET POINT** AT WHICH THE STRESS RESPONSE GETS FLIPPED ON

About the Author



DONNA JACKSON NAKAZAWA is the author of four books that explore the intersection of neuroscience, immunology, and emotion, including *The Angel and the Assassin*, named one of the best books of 2020 by *Wired* magazine, and *Childhood Disrupted*, which was a finalist for the Books for a Better Life Award. Her work has appeared in *Wired*, *Stat*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Washington Post*, *Health Affairs*, *Parenting*, *AARP Magazine*, and *Glamour*, and has been featured on the cover of *Parade* and in *Time*; she has appeared on *Today*, NPR, NBC News, and ABC News. Jackson Nakazawa is also the creator and founder of the narrative writing-to-heel program *Your Healing Narrative: Write-to-Heal with Neural Re-Narrating*.™ She is a regular speaker at universities, including as part of the Harvard Division of Science Library Series, and at Johns Hopkins University and the University of Arizona. She lives with her family in Maryland.

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#GIRLSONTHEBRINK