

RESIST DIVISIVENESS

> **Jocelyn Horner**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, STRONG WOMEN, STRONG GIRLS OF PITTSBURGH



If you don't feel secure, safe and strong as an individual, it's hard to grow and be part of the larger community. Despite our majority in society, all women and girls face challenges by virtue of our gender. It's complicated by race, ethnicity, and other issues that hold power.

We've all heard about the so-called "mean girl syndrome." We are all capable of showing meanness to one another. How do you create allies, rather than enemies?

I believe that the advice we give young women in our program, which promotes a self-reflective, restorative approach, can be applied to anyone who wants to build "a community of we": Think of the impact your words and actions have on each other, and reflect on how it would affect you. Resist divisiveness.

It is a "Golden Rule" mindset that everyone should follow. That seems like a simplification, but it's so true. It's a right of all human beings to be heard and be recognized, to not be invisible.

I directed a mentoring program for girls in New Orleans. We brainstormed: What is the story you want to tell about yourself? What's your struggle? One young girl started talking about a half-sister she just found out she had, far away in Texas. She started to cry. Another young woman, not a close friend, put her arm around her. She said, "I know how you feel—I've lost touch with my dad and siblings. That hurts. You're not alone."

It was a simple, spontaneous interaction that brought the girl into a circle of friends. These young women took care of one another. We can all learn from their example.

— Interviewed by Christine O'Toole