

Raising Yourself — If You Are a Female

**One extremely important thing you can do
that men can't**

Life has no guaranties

**Sex and you (no, not the gender, but the *act
of sex*)**

**Drinking (and/or drugs) and dating don't
mix**

**Dealing with boys and their abuse (verbal or
physical)**

Career stereotyping

**One extremely important thing
you can do that men can't**

Get pregnant.

No matter how badly a guy might mess up his life,
he can't mess it up by getting pregnant.

On the other hand, you can.

If it happens, and you decide to keep the baby, there's no guarantee that the father will be around to help. You may find yourself responsible for raising the child, providing education, and instilling values. Whether you do it by yourself, with the support of family, and/or with the child's father, raising a child is a heavy burden. A recently published study shows that single moms are eight times more likely to live in poverty than married couples.

OK, life is unfair.

So why make it tougher by stacking the odds against yourself?

(Note: To understand the challenges that you could face as a teen, read the book *Reviving Ophelia* by Mary Pipher, published by Ballantine Books.)

Life has no guaranties

(Be prepared to take care of yourself.)

Even if you dream of having a husband who will support you financially for the rest of your life, you need to prepare for the unexpected.

Common thought (delusion): I will marry someone rich. He will take care of me forever.

Reality #1: Unless you have a good education, plus the sophistication and social skills that come with it, rich men aren't likely to be interested, no matter how beautiful you are. In the real world, wealthy men (and women) tend to marry people on their own level. Fairy tales of rich, handsome men marrying poor Cinderella come true only in the movies.

Reality #2: Many rich guys get bored with material possessions, and chances are that's exactly how he will treat you – especially when it dawns on him that you're after his money. For him, you could be a mere plaything, easy to get rid of once he gets tired of you.

Reality #3: Even if you manage to marry a rich man for his money, what will make the marriage work? How long could you really live and sleep with a man you don't really love? And make no mistake; sooner or later, the guy will figure out why you married him. If he has any self-respect at all, he'll divorce you.

Why would you want to place yourself in that position?

As a new divorcee, will you be able to give up the expensive tastes you formed shopping at his expense? Would you be ready to deal with the sudden change in your status? After all, the friends you make as his wife will probably be his originally. And they'll probably be loyal to him, not you.

Perhaps most importantly, will you be able to overcome the feeling of being dumped? Can you come out of a divorce, pick up the pieces, and move on? Will you have something to fall back on so your mind won't be occupied with the pain of the breakup?

You owe it to yourself to think of these things before getting into such a situation.

There's just no substitute for getting the education and skills you need for a good, high-paying job. For one thing, it will do wonders for your self-esteem. If you're in a bad relationship, you'll be able to leave without worrying about supporting yourself. You'll declare your

independence, and you'll never have to stay in a relationship because you can't survive on your own. Keep in mind — successful people are like magnets, attracting other successful people.

Additionally, by acquiring education, skills, and good self-esteem, you will make an equal partner in the future relationship. Your partner can rely on your support to acquire new skills, start a business, or take risks to improve your lifestyle.

Sex and you (no, not gender, but the *act of sex*)

Here are some things you should keep in mind:

If you're having sex with your boyfriend, the chances are good that he's done the same with someone else. You have no idea what disease he might have picked up from someone else.

If you get AIDS ... well, you know that there is no cure for AIDS.

If you get pregnant, do you know for sure that he'll be around to support you and the baby? Assuming he's in a position to support you financially, are you ready to have a child? Do you know what it takes to care for and bring up a child? Have you spent a day with someone who has an infant and verified that you are ready to take on similar responsibilities?

It's wise to keep the worst scenario in mind. If you get pregnant, your boyfriend dumps you, and you have to leave home, will you be ready to raise the child on your own? Are you finished "raising yourself"?

If you plan to have sex, insist on your partner using

a condom for your own sake. But be aware of, and be prepared for, the consequences of your actions if that protection fails.

Drinking (and/or Drugs) and dating Don't Mix

It's a known fact that alcohol and drugs can dull your senses and makes you (and your partner) reckless. What you normally wouldn't do while sober, you might do while under the influence. The solution is simple: To avoid situations you'll regret later on, *stay sober in the first place.*

However confident you are of your ability to take care of yourself, you may not be strong enough when it matters the most — when you are under the influence and someone is hitting on you for sex.

One mistake under the influence could **cost you immensely ... AIDS, an unwanted pregnancy**, a car wreck, or some other disaster.

Dealing with jerks (boys) and their abuse (verbal or physical)

No one has the right to abuse you — verbally or physically.

Verbal abuse can consist of making comments about your appearance, your family, your grades, your intelligence, your physical attributes, or any other thing you're sensitive about. Such verbal abuse occurs sometimes in school hallways or other public places where boys hang out.

Physical abuse occurs whenever a boy touches you against your wishes. One common way physical abuse happens is in boyfriend/girlfriend relationships. For example, if your boyfriend hits you or shoves you, that is physical abuse. Next to murder, the most severe (and criminal) form of physical abuse is rape, which can happen on a date or even at a party.



You need to stand up for your rights.

If you are experiencing any abuse (verbal or physical), talk to someone you trust, such as your parents, a teacher, a minister, a rabbi, or a school counselor. You are not snitching (telling on your abuser) if you take action for your own safety.

Be aware that if your school fails to take action on your complaints, it can be held liable if you pursue legal action. Jenny (identity changed) was experiencing verbal abuse from the boys in her school. They called her names like “slut,” made comments on her bust size, her hair, her thighs, and other physical attributes. They abused and harassed her about anything they could.

She complained to the teachers. They took no action.

Jenny eventually stopped going to school, to avoid the boys. She took her parents into her confidence and they spoke to the school authorities. The school staff trivialized the whole situation.

Jenny's parents sought legal help and sued the school.

The court ruled in favor of Jenny and her family. The school had to pay Jenny several hundred thousand dollars, and her tormentors were expelled from school. Justice was served.

If you are experiencing abuse, speak to an older person you trust. Such a person might help you put the situation into perspective, and help you deal with it.

Career Stereotyping

There is a career for you in engineering, math, sciences, and other disciplines that are usually dominated by males. Don't let society dictate what career you should follow. You need to decide what is suitable for yourself.

If you have the aptitude for science, math, computer science, or engineering, pursue it.

Unfortunately, parents often do disservice to their daughters by excluding them from so-called "boys' activities" — working on the car, using tools, configuring the computer, programming the electronics in the house (VCR, TV, stereo equipment, and so on). Moms tend to involve their daughters in shopping, watching soap operas, prettying themselves, etc.

Be assertive. If you don't get equal access to the home computer, demand it.

You can't afford to take a back seat to activities that are gender neutral.

Don't limit yourself to the stereotypical jobs that are associated with women, such as receptionist, administrative assistant, nurse, teacher, and day care. These tend to be lower-paying jobs.

Go for careers such as medicine, law, engineering, and business. And who knows... President of the United States?

Recommended reading: *What Color is Your Parachute?* by Richard Nelson Bolles, published by Ten Speed Press.