

## **Research Tool: The Intentional Story-Telling Measure**

The Intentional Story-Telling Measure (ISM) assesses how girls transfer the skills of solving problems and being an agent of change – that is, someone who works to create positive change – from the program context to other situations. The ISM allows us to get a snapshot of how girls think about solving problems and coping with issues that come up in their social networks, in their communities or their culture, and in the institutions that affect them.

In doing the ISM, girls are asked to respond to stories at two different times, six months apart. By comparing Time 1 and Time 2 responses across all girls in the programs, we can see how their responses change to determine what kinds of problem solving, coping, and change-making skills the girls develop as a group.

The ISM was developed through learnings from the Collaborative’s capacity building site visits. The Research Team heard many powerful stories about how girls’ lives had been changed because they had learned to seek out resources or developed skills to deal differently with the complicated situations of their lives. In addition, the ISM was developed in response to requests from program staff to have a tool that could measure how girls and young women were changing as a result of being in the program. It was important that whatever tool was developed not alienate or treat the girls as problems.

The ISM can demonstrate how well the program is doing in helping girls learn to be change agents. It can be used in several ways, including the following:

- *As a pre- and post-test:* at the beginning and ending of program cycles to assess changes in girls’ knowledge over time; this would mean that the ISM is given more than once;
- *As a form of self-assessment* done with girls as a way of seeing what skills they are learning and what they are comfortable with; again, this would mean that the ISM is given more than once; and
- *To do a comparison between girls* in the program with girls of the same age who are not in the program (or are in another program); this would involve one administration of the ISM.

One strength of the ISM is that, like the VACO, it can be used to provide statistical evidence that the program helps girls learn to think of themselves as change agents and to know how to respond in difficult situations where action needs to be taken. Precautions must be taken in collecting ISM data to make sure that the statistical analyses are valid. This means that:

- The same girls need to complete the ISM at different points in time. Ideally, girls who just enter a program would complete the ISM and then take it again in a year.
- The ISM needs to be given to girls in the same way each time – individually, starting with a group brainstorming, role playing, or in whatever way works.

### **Using the ISM**

Following is a basic step-by-step guide to administering the ISM.

- The ISM is best given at the very beginning and very end of a program cycle. Set aside about 30-45 minutes for the girls to fill out their responses to the stories. If you feel that the girls need more time (and it is most likely that they will), divide the ISM into two sessions so that the girls respond to the first three stories in the first session and the second three stories in the second session. These sessions should be very close together in time – two consecutive days or within the same week. Girls will need to be in a relatively quiet place where each has a comfortable place to write.
- To assess the girls in a program, ten girls, minimum, should take the ISM. The same girls will have to take it both times. If there is concern that some girls may leave the program during the six months, then start with more than 10 girls. It would be best to begin with a new group of girls in a new program cycle.
- Staff administers the ISM to the girls. Each staff member should, in her own words, say something like this to girls as an introduction: “I’m really interested in finding out what you know about handling tough situations. Here are six stories about girls who are in some difficult situations. What I want you to do is (1) read each story, (2) come up with as many ideas for dealing with the situation as you can, (3) write all your ideas in the first space (and you can use the back of the paper if you need to), (4) write which way of dealing with the situation is the most ideal in the second space, and (5) say what you would realistically do in the last space. Be creative! Think about all the things that you

know that the girls in the story might do. There aren't any right or wrong answers.”

Please don't tell or imply to girls that it is a test – if they ask, let them know that it is a tool developed as a way for you to know more about how they think about dealing with hard situations so that you know what they need to learn more about. Let them know that *you* are very interested in finding ways to tell what they are learning and that this seemed like a good way.

- If you are concerned about literacy, read each story aloud together. You can also pair the girls and allow them to brainstorm together. But each girl needs to record her own responses on her ISM form. (Please note that responses can also be tape recorded and transferred to the ISM form or dictated to a staff member who can write them down.)
- Collect the ISM when all girls are done.
- Write each girl's age, race/ethnicity, start date with the program, and grade in school at the top of the cover sheet next to her name.

### **Creative Strategies for Administration**

The ISM can be integrated into program life by using it as a recruitment tool. Here is how this could work:

- Girls might present half the stories as role-plays at a recruiting session and have the girls respond to the stories on paper.
- After the role-plays, the girls from the program can discuss how the program has helped them to know how to respond in these situations.
- The data could be collected from the recruitment session and used as “baseline” data for girls who end up joining or to compare these girls' responses with girls of the same age who have attended the program.

The ISM can be challenging in its demand for so much writing. For young teens, this might make it difficult for them to express fully what they think and know. Here are some options:

- *Using the full ISM in one sitting:* If you feel the need to administer the ISM all at once because of time constraints, continuity, or other demands, then it might make it less

taxing for the girls to engage with group brainstorming to generate responses.

- *Doing the ISM in two parts:* Part A would be stories 1, 2 and 4; and Part B stories 3, 5 and 6. The ISM should then be given in two sessions, with girls completing Part A in one session and Part B in the other so that each girl will have completed all of the stories within a week. All six stories need to be completed *each time*.
- *Using a short form of the ISM:* If it is impossible to use all six stories, then use Part B each time because the stories capture different information. Or, select one family story (story 1 or 5), one peer story (story 2 or 3), and one community story (story 4 or 6). The set of three stories should be used consistently.
- *Alternating stories for pre- and post-testing:* Do not use different stories to try to assess change over time. The different stories are not equivalent. Even though girls may not like to work with the same stories over time, the stories have to stay the same.

Developing ways to make sure that girls can express themselves fully is very important. There are a number of possibilities:

- *Individual administration:* Each story can be read aloud or role-played to engage the girls and get them to think.
- *Group or paired brainstorming:* For each story, girls are asked to brainstorm. This can be done in a group, with the brainstormed responses recorded on a flip chart or chalkboard so that girls do not need to write them down. Or girls can brainstorm in pairs and write up one set of responses.
- ✓ *One caution* about brainstorming is that it can lead girls to egg each other on to give silly or provocative responses. It is important that girls *individually* determine their own ideal and real responses for each story.

Tailoring or revising scenarios to better suit your program can enhance the relevance of the ISM. Be aware of the following in developing your own stories:

- Keep in mind that the ISM has six stories divided into three domains: family, peer and community. Your stories should do the same.
- The different areas of girls' lives where the program should show an effect should be represented.
- The stories should contain a conflict that could have multiple solutions.

## **Guidelines for Coding the ISM Data**

The ISM data was coded to determine the following:

- the number of brainstormed solutions
- the number of brainstormed solutions that involved conflict, threats or violence
- the number of brainstormed solutions that were non-responsive to the conflict in the story
- the number of brainstormed solutions that were responsive
- the presence of conflict in the ideal and real responses
- the presence of empathy in the ideal and real responses
- whether the ideal and real responses show willingness to be a change agent
- whether the ideal and real responses show a sense of responsibility for the resolution
- for both the ideal and real responses, whether there is reliance or dependence on authorities, and which authorities were called on
- whether peers were involved in the solutions
- the congruence between ideal and real responses

The codesheet and coding guidelines are attached for use or as an example.

The ISM data can be coded more simply. They can also be used to assess different elements from those mentioned above. You can develop a way of coding the ISM based on what your program does by doing the following:

- Decide the most important ways that girls' responses might change after having been in the program. If there are particular qualities or skills that a program hopes to be imparting to girls, these could be the basis for coding the data.
- The rationale and definitions for whatever is coded for will need to be written down. For example, if the presence of conflict is important to assess, then this might be defined as "physical violence, threats or name calling." This will need to be made clear so that the coding can be done consistently.
- The data need to be checked to make sure that it is coded consistently. One way to do this is to have one person do all of the coding. From a research perspective, this is not the best way to go. The better route is to have two people code the same data (10 to 20 percent of the data) and then calculate the percentage of same scorings. A score of 85 percent or more is considered fairly reliable.
- Coding needs to be completed before statistical analyses can be done.

### **Thoughts on Preliminary Statistical Analysis**

The ISM can generate a large amount of data but the data can be analyzed fairly simply. Basic data analysis might involve exploring the different types of responses that girls gave, the numbers of options that they come up with, the different resources that they refer to, and the differences between the best responses and the one they would realistically choose. A more in-depth analysis of the data will most likely require a statistics program and the help of someone with a background in statistics. To help shape the statistical analysis, you want to ask the questions such as the following to determine what the most important changes might be in the data:

- Would you expect to see less conflict-based solutions for girls who have been in the program longer?
- Would you predict that girls would show a greater sense of responsibility for following through with the solution?

After the data is coded, statistical analyses can be conducted to determine change both between the ideal and real responses and over time.

## Intentional Storytelling Measure

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of Time in Program: \_\_\_\_\_

On the next pages, there are 6 stories about girls in some difficult situations.

1. Read each story.
2. BRAINSTORM! Think of as many ideas you have that would be good ways of handling the situation.
3. Write all your ideas in the first space under the story.
4. Put the one idea that you think would be the *most ideal* way to deal with the situation in the second space.
5. In the third space, put the idea that, realistically, you could do if this happened to you. And then write why you would do this.

**1. Mimi goes to a program after school where girls get together. One of the women who works there tells everyone that there is a special trip that the whole group is going on. Everyone needs to get their parents' permission and will need \$30 for the trip. All of the girls are really excited – there will be a sleepover and a lot of fun. Mimi knows that her parents won't want her to go. They will say that they don't have enough money.**

**A. BRAINSTORM! What could Mimi do? (Give as many suggestions as you can think of -- use the back if you need to.)**

**B. What's the ideal thing to do?**

**C. If you were Mimi, what would you realistically do? Why?**

**2. There is a group of girls who live in the same neighborhood. Everyone isn't the same age but everyone has been close since they were really little. One of the girls, Tina, turns up at school with a black eye. She says she walked into a door. Later, after everyone asked her more about it, she admits that her boyfriend hit her and that this wasn't the first time. Tina claims that it's no big deal – he was drunk and she was mouthing off to him. She knows that he doesn't like it when she acts this way but sometimes she just can't help it, she says what she thinks. Tina laughs about it. Three weeks later, Tina comes to school with a swollen lip and she has three stitches in it. When her friends ask her what's going on, Tina gets mad and tells them to mind their own business.**

**A. BRAINSTORM! What could Tina's friends do? (Give as many suggestions as you can think of -- use the back if you need to.)**

**B. What's the ideal thing to do?**

**C. If you were Tina's friend, what would you realistically do? Why?**

**3. A bunch of friends are hanging out in a park after school. Not much is happening. One of the group, a girl named Suzanne, is in a really bad mood. She keeps cursing and complaining about how bored she is. A girl who these friends don't know very well walks by -- she's wearing a really short skirt and a tight top. Suzanne starts to say mean things about the girl. The girl looks really embarrassed and scared. Suzanne laughs really loud. She turns to the group and says, "Come on -- let's get her -- let's jump her!"**

**A. BRAINSTORM! What could Suzanne's friends do? (Give as many suggestions as you can think of -- use the back if you need to.)**

**B. What's the ideal thing to do?**

**C. If you were Suzanne's friend in this situation, what would you realistically do? Why?**

**4. Every day walking home from school, two girls go past an empty lot that is filled with junk. It's all fenced up. Sometimes people drink there, sleeping or throwing bottles around. One day as the two girls are passing the lot, one says, "That's such a waste. There isn't one playground or park in this neighborhood but that lot sits empty and filled with trash." The two girls look at each other. One of the girls says what they were both thinking, "Wouldn't it be great if we could change this?"**

**A. BRAINSTORM! What could these girls do? (Give as many suggestions as you can think of -- use the back if you need to.)**

**B. What's the ideal thing to do?**

**C. If you were in this situation, what would you realistically do? Why?**

**5. Lani is part of a group of girls who are putting on a play about violence in girls' lives. They want to take the play to different schools, churches and other community groups to let people know what happens in girls' lives and what girls can do about it. The girls wanted to make the play very realistic so they only put situations in the play that have really happened. Lani has an important role in the play – she is a girl who slaps a male teacher for trying to kiss her and then the teacher hits her back. When the girls performed the play for the first time, for friends and family, Lani's mother had a very bad reaction. Afterwards, her mother said to her, "That's not the way we do things in our community. It's embarrassing for our people to see you act like that."**

**A. BRAINSTORM! What could Lani do? (Give as many suggestions as you can think of -- use the back if you need to.)**

**B. What's the ideal thing to do?**

**C. If you were Lani in this situation, what would you realistically do? Why?**

**6. A group of friends go to a meeting of the school board which decides what kinds of things can be taught in the school. The girls want the school board to say that it is okay to have a new program in the schools about sexual harassment. After they make their presentation, the man who is the head of the school board says, “Thank you, beautiful girls, for providing us with such a treat. We’ll think about what you said. But, just a word of advice, sometimes when you are looking for a boyfriend, things can get a little out of hand. It’s not just the boys’ fault.”**

**A. BRAINSTORM! What could these girls do? (Give as many suggestions as you can think of -- use the back if you need to.)**

**B. What’s the ideal thing to do?**

**C. If you were in this situation, what would you realistically do? Why?**

**THE INTENTIONAL STORYTELLING MEASURE**  
P. Catlin Fullwood, Elizabeth Debold, Ed.D., Dana Davis

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