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What You Can Do in the Library on Take Our Daughters to Work Day

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April 26, 2001, is the Ninth Annual Take Our Daughters to Work Day, which was started by the Ms. Foundation in 1993 to boost girls self-confidence and to encourage girls to think more positively about their futures. Studies have shown that girls in their early teens have a precipitous drop in confidence and self-esteem from their primary-school years. TODTW is not just a career day, but a chance to let girls look at the opportunities open to them.

There are those who feel an activity focused only on girls discriminates against boys. It is clear that boys have their own developmental needs and issues, but these are not necessarily the same ones as girls. Past experience with coed programs shows boys get more attention in mixed settings, that girls hold back, are less engaged and ask fewer questions. When the programs are for girls-only, the girls are allowed to shine, to be mentored and to get their questions answered. While the debate will continue about whether it should be Take our Daughters or Bring our Children (or our Kids), many schools and other organizations in response have planned special activities for the boys. A discussion of this issue and an extensive list of activities for both boys and girls can be found on The Ms. Foundation's web site www.takeourdaughterstowork.org.

As law librarians, we are presented with a great opportunity to show girls (and boys) what a great job we have and the importance of our role in an information-dominated society. Of course, what you do will depend on whether the children stop by for 15 minutes or spend several hours, but here are some suggestions gleaned from listserv archives of possible activities, in the library or in the firm (or court or school or company) as a whole:

1. Talk to the children about their perceptions of libraries and librarians. What do they think librarians do? What do they think we look like (old ladies in buns)? Why is librarianship a predominantly female profession and how does that impact our image? What is our role in assisting attorneys do research to prepare for court? How do we help people find information (buying it, organizing it, finding it in books or on-line, etc.) ?
2. Do some research that will be of interest to kids: look up a parent's previous address; check a state law or municipal statute on a topic of interest, e.g., dog bites or bicycles; pull a parent's profile from Martindale Hubbell or check a library catalog for a favorite book of theirs. Pull the reporter with a case they might have heard of (or find it on-line), such as The Amistad slave ship or Bush v. Gore or Roe v. Wade.
3. For the more adventurous, special legal-oriented activities might include a mock trial, i.e., based on a fairy tale or true case of a girl who wanted to play on a Little League team. A university law librarian told of a discussion of the legal concepts involved where the bears to sue Goldilocks. A "Goldilocks" in a blonde wig was questioned about what happened and why. Then the kids discussed the damages and argued both sides of the case and voted on a verdict. Another class discussed Rumpelstiltskin's contract with the miller's daughter.

There were contract issues and moral issues and a discussion of legal ethics. Take the kids to a real court and let them watch a trial in action, then discuss it back at the office.

Several accounts mentioned that by late afternoon the children – even if all girls -tend to get wild, so don't plan on their being extremely attentive if they are scheduled to stop by the library later in the day. Several "experts" also suggested giving them some sort of souvenir to remember the day, whether a bookmark, certificate, something they've made, etc.

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