


research


The Girl Scout Research Institute is a center for research and public policy information on the healthy development of girls as they mature toward adulthood.

What Girls Say About Emotional and Social Health

**Girl Scout Research Institute
Girl Scouts of the USA
Roundtable
September 1st, 2009**



Girl Scouts.



Girls view emotional health and physical health as equally important.

"Health is about your friendships with people and how social you are." Teen girl

For girls, being healthy is about:

- Emotional and physical well-being
- Feeling good about oneself, being supported and **appearing "normal"**



Emotional Health

- Girls are generally more worried than boys about everything.
- 26% of girls have some dissatisfaction with their weight.
- Stress grows with age, but nearly half of 3rd – 5th grade girls already say they are often stressed.
- Approximately 1/3 of girls worry about being teased, bullied, threatened or having their feelings hurt when spending time with peers; participating in groups; and trying new things.



Emotional Safety

46% of girls define safety as not having their *feelings* hurt.

Girls who do not feel emotionally safe are *more likely* to:

- Have trouble paying attention in school
- Have trouble making decisions
- Often feel sad and unhappy
- Often feel there is no one to talk to

And *less likely* to:

- Think they can do anything if they try hard enough
- Get along with their parents or guardians
- Have a lot of friends



Connecting the Emotional and Physical

- ***Active Identities:*** The more physically active girls are, the greater their self-esteem and the more satisfied they are with their weight, regardless of how much they weigh.
- ***Emotional Barriers to Exercise:*** Fully one-third of girls do not exercise because they don't think their bodies look good or that they are skilled enough.
- ***Stress Eating:*** Girls report eating more when they are stressed out, and overweight girls are much more likely to report eating more in times of stress (55%) than normal weight girls (23%).
- ***A Mother's Influence:*** A mother's weight, body image, and health habits are strong predictors for her daughters health status in these areas.



Implications

- A strict focus on physical health does not work with girls. Embrace a holistic definition of health that includes the emotional components important to girls.
- Address the connection between emotional and physical health.
- Include physical and emotional safety as a critical aspect of youth's healthy living.
- Give girls opportunities for physical activity that take into account their fears around emotional safety. Emphasize the positive emotional benefits of physical activity.
- Target adult role models—especially mothers.



The Girl Scout Research Institute

- For more information contact the GSRI:
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<http://www.girlscouts.org/Research>



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