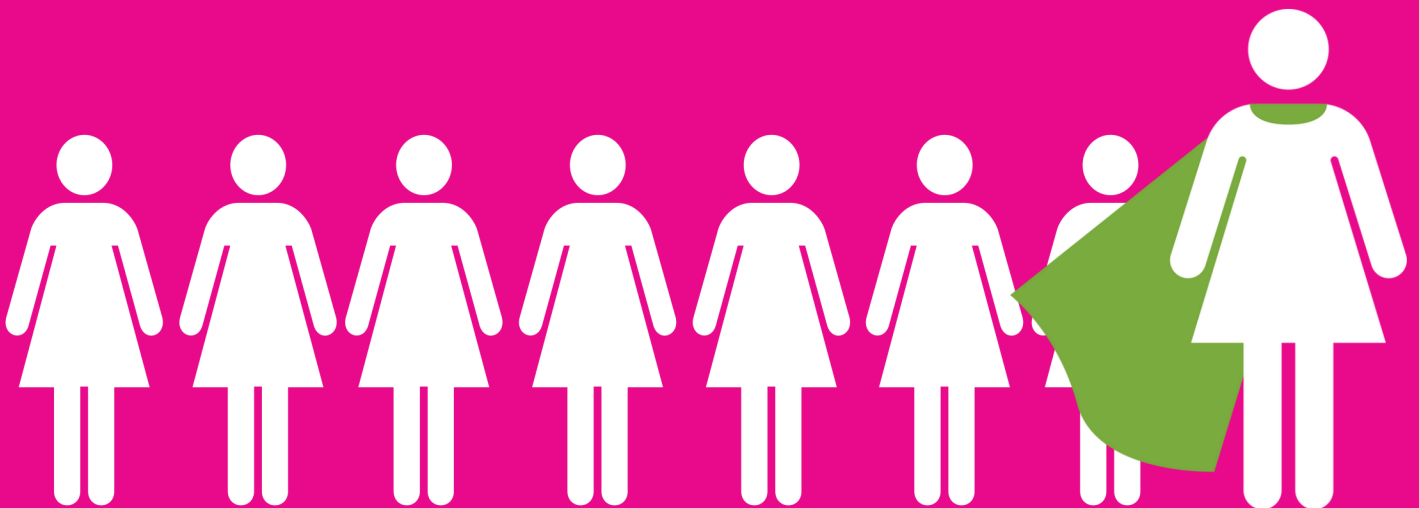


THE GIRLS' INDEX™

BY RULING OUR EXPERIENCES (ROX)



Introduction

At Ruling Our eXperiences (ROX), we have been focused on understanding girls' lived experiences since our original research and demonstration project in 2006.

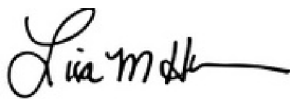
Now, with more than 15 years of programming, research and impact, ROX is leading the way in the work of creating generations of confident girls who control their own relationships, experiences, decisions and futures.

Our large-scale research endeavor, The Girls' Index, initially launched in 2017, developed a baseline understanding of what girls think, believe, perceive and need. What we learned from those 10,678 girls was surprising, frustrating, compelling and instructive.

With an expansion of the survey and the sample size, the 2023 Girls' Index illuminates new trends, highlights key data shifts and provides timely insights that deepen our understanding of girls' lives today.

It is my most sincere hope that this data serves to inform, encourage, support and motivate all who have dedicated their lives and careers to educating, empowering, parenting and creating a safer and more equitable world for girls.

For the good of girls,



Lisa Hinkelman, Ph.D., LPC
ROX Founder/CEO

The world has changed dramatically since 2017, when ROX conducted the landmark, inaugural Girls' Index survey with 10,678 girls.

The 2023 Girls' Index Research Brief is the first report in a series of data releases featuring the findings from school-based surveys conducted in 2022-2023 with 17,502 girls.

This report includes key aggregate findings from the national survey. Subsequent reports will include additional data analyses disaggregated by demographics and key topics of interest.

The Girls' Index is the
FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND
and
LARGEST
national survey designed to
develop a deeper
understanding of the thoughts,
experiences, perceptions,
beliefs and behaviors of girls
throughout the United States.

Completed with
10,678 girls in 2017
and
17,502 girls in 2023,
The Girls' Index continues to
provide new insights into the
complex world of today's girls.

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Overall Key Findings

Ruling Our eXperiences (ROX) partnered with schools across the United States to survey girls in 5th through 12th grade. The Girls' Index was completed by 17,502 girls during 2022-2023.

1

Girls' confidence has declined since 2017

Since the 2017 Girls' Index, overall rates of girls' confidence dropped from 68% to 55%. From 5th through 11th grade, fewer girls report confidence, and in 12th grade, confidence levels remain consistent.

2

5th and 6th grade girls fared the worst in the 2023 Girls' Index

Since 2017, the biggest declines in confidence and self-perception and largest increases in sadness were reported among the youngest girls in the survey, the 5th and 6th graders.

3

79% of girls say they are going to "explode" because of pressure

Even the youngest girls surveyed report high levels of pressure with 76% of 5th grade girls feeling like they are under tremendous pressure. Grades, school, friendships and family issues are girls' top-reported stressors.

4

46% of 5th graders spend 6+ hours/day using social media

In 2017, 9% of 5th grade girls reported spending six or more hours each day using social media - now 46% do. Median use has risen among this age group from less than 2 hours per day to 4 to 6 hours per day.

5

Extreme sadness and depression tripled in 5th and 6th grade girls

While reports of sadness and depression increased for girls in every grade, the rates of daily sadness tripled for 5th and 6th graders and more than doubled for 7th and 8th grade girls.

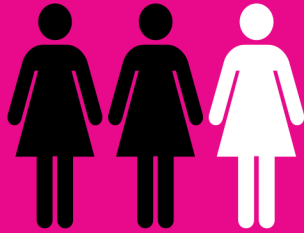
6

Girls stay away from leadership for fear of being seen as "bossy"

While 59% of girls reported that they like being in charge, more than half (55%) said that they are afraid to lead because they don't want others to think they are bossy.

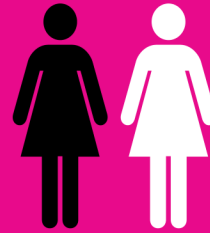
In 2017 ...

1 in 3 girls (33%) reported that they are afraid to be a leader because they don't want others to think they are bossy.

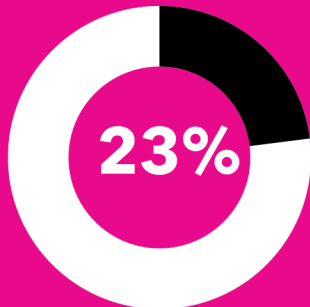


In 2023 ...

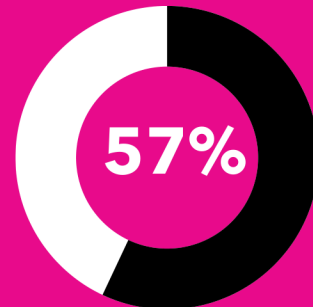
In 2023, the statistic is 55%.



23% of 5th and 6th grade girls reported that they weren't sure if they were smart enough for their dream career.



In 2023, the statistic is 57%.



In 2017, 86% of 5th grade girls described themselves as confident.

86%

In 2023, the statistic is 68%.

68%

Key Findings by Topic

Girls are faring worse than they were in 2017 on key concepts addressed in The 2023 Girls' Index. Their confidence levels are lower, their perceptions of their abilities - and of themselves as leaders - have declined significantly, and they are more likely to report increased levels of stress, pressure, sadness and depression. This decline is most evident among 5th-8th grade girls.



Confidence

Overall, 13% fewer girls described themselves as confident in The 2023 Girls' Index than they did in 2017. 5th grade girls experienced the steepest decline, with a drop from 86% to 68%.



Social Media

95% of 5th grade girls reported using social media, and 46% spend 6+ hours each day - up from 9% in 2017. Girls' social media use is correlated with negative body image and lower reports of confidence.



Stress & Well-Being

79% of girls reported that they are under so much pressure that they feel like they are going to "explode." Additionally, rates of sadness and depression tripled for 5th-6th grade girls and doubled for 7th-8th grade girls.



School

School is one of the top stressors for girls, followed by grades and friendships. 49% of girls say that drama and fighting make them dislike school, and 31% say they don't take certain classes because so few girls are enrolled.



Leadership

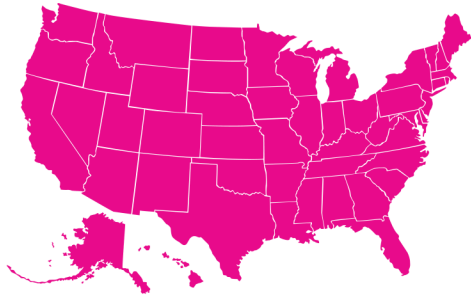
66% of girls reported that they do not say what they are thinking or disagree with others because they want to be liked - up from 46% in 2017. 55% said that they fear leadership because others will think they are bossy, compared to 33% in 2017.



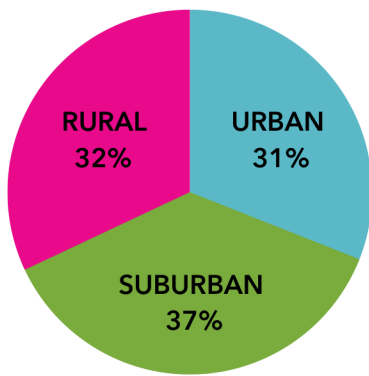
Relationships

Girls report challenges in relationships, with 67% reporting that most girls are in competition with one another. Additionally, 76% of girls do not believe that boys their age are respectful of girls.

THE GIRLS' INDEX PARTICIPANTS



ROX partnered with K-12 schools throughout the United States to survey 17,502 girls in grades 5 through 12 during 2022 and 2023.



Geographic Regions

The schools that girls attended were categorized as urban, suburban or rural. Thirty-seven percent of participants attend suburban schools, 32% rural and 31% urban.

Age

Girls in grades 5-12 participated in The Girls' Index. 38% percent of participants were in grades 5 and 6; 32% in grades 7 and 8; and 30% in grades 9-12.



THE GIRLS' INDEX PARTICIPANTS

The majority of The 2023 Girls' Index participants attend public schools.

While girls in all types of schools participated in The Girls' Index, most (90%) attend public schools. 7% percent attend charter schools and 3% attend private or parochial schools.

Socioeconomic Status of Schools

% of participants in 2023 Girls' Index who attend the following schools:

High Poverty

76% or more students receive free or reduced-cost lunch

Mid-High Poverty

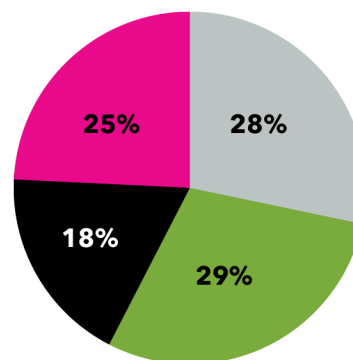
51-75% of students receive free or reduced-cost lunch

Medium Poverty

26-50% of students receive free or reduced-cost lunch

Low Poverty

0-25% of students receive free or reduced-cost lunch



Ethnicity	The Girls' Index	The 2020 U.S. Census
Asian	4.9%	5.9%
Black or African American	18.6%	12.1%
Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander	0.3%	0.2%
Hispanic/Latina	16%	18.7%
Multiracial	3.2%	3%
Native American or American Indian	2.8%	1.3%
White/Caucasian	53.7%	57.8%
Other	0.4%	N/A

“
Right now is a hard time in society, especially for girls and young girls at that. They aren't sure how to navigate the world and are being pulled every which way. With social media and kids at school, girls are exposed to a lot of things. Some good and some negative. A lot of girls are worried about how they look, appear, sound, fit in, smell, appeal.

Girls want to appeal to boys, and get their recognition from boys and girls. They want to feel wanted, and not left out. Because of boys, girls can turn on each other and when they are supposed to be there for each other, they go against each other in battle to win over guys. They want to feel loved, wanted and seen.

They want to fit in.

- 8th grade girl, California

”

CONFIDENCE

KEY FINDINGS



1

Overall, girls' confidence has declined since 2017

Overall, 13% fewer girls described themselves as confident in The 2023 Girls' Index than they did in 2017. 5th grade girls experienced the steepest decline, with a drop from 86% to 68%.

2

Body image and social media use impact girls' confidence

Nearly 2 out of 3 girls (65%) report that how they feel about their body makes them feel less confident. Additionally, the more time girls spend on social media, the less likely they are to describe themselves as confident.

3

Girls do not believe they are smart enough for their dream job

58% of 9th-12th grade girls report that they do not believe they are smart enough for their dream job, up from 46% in 2017. Among 5th and 6th grade girls, it is 52%, up from 23% in 2017.

4

School belonging and acceptance bolsters girls' confidence

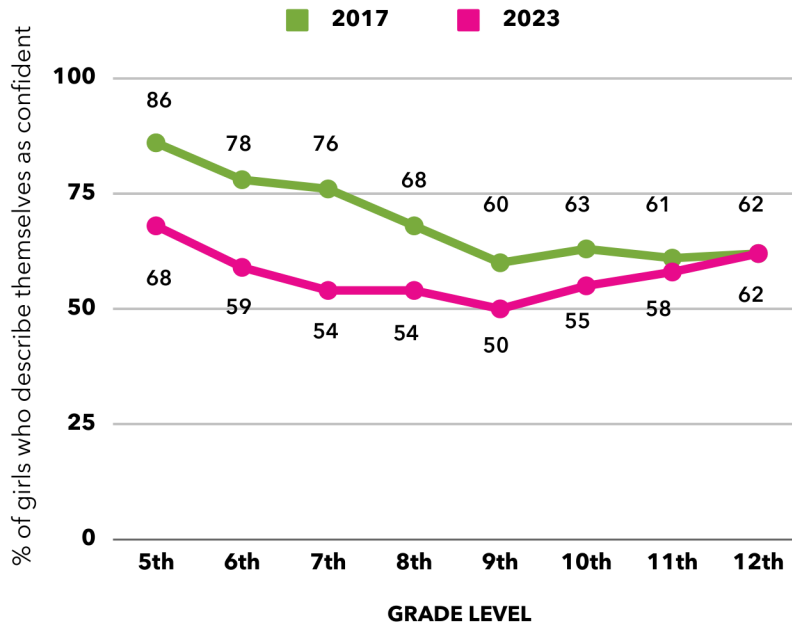
Girls who feel like they "belong" at school are 7 times more likely to also describe themselves as confident. Also, girls who attend schools where they can "really be" themselves report higher confidence.

GIRLS' CONFIDENCE DECLINES AS THEY GET OLDER and their belief in their own abilities and opportunities shifts as well. While most girls believe that they are good at lots of things (75%), they don't see themselves as smart enough for their dream career. By high school, 11% fewer girls report that they are happy the way they are compared to middle school girls (68% vs 79%). Both of these percentages have declined since 2017, when they were 76% and 89% respectively.

**"Girls my age don't feel happy the way we are.
We want to be someone else."
- 7th grade girl, Vermont**

CONFIDENCE

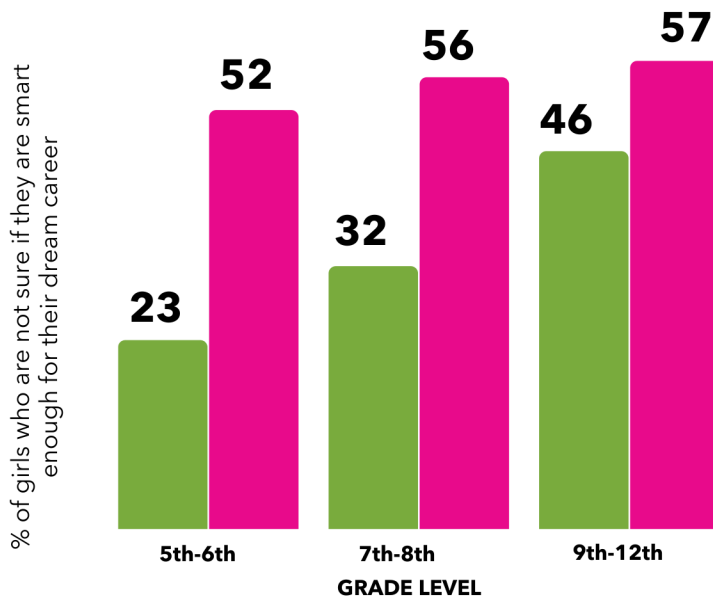
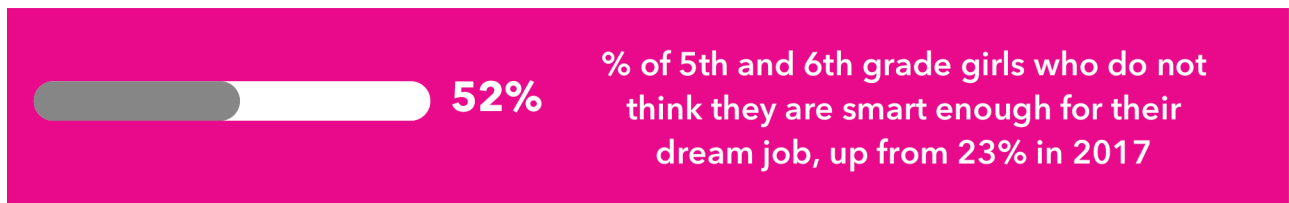
The percentage of girls who rate themselves as confident is significantly less than it was in 2017, particularly for girls in 5th through 8th grade.



GIRLS WHO LIKE THEIR BODY "THE WAY IT IS" ARE NEARLY

10x

MORE LIKELY TO BE CONFIDENT

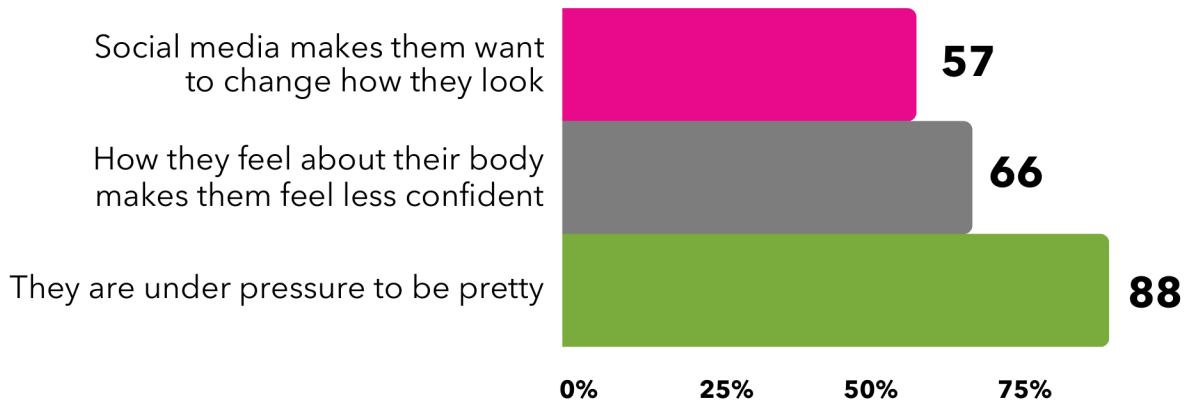


Despite the fact that the majority of girls do not think they are smart enough for their dream career, they do show some traits of possessing a growth mindset. Most (66%) believe that they can increase their intelligence, and 82% report that they like to try new things. This finding may be tempered by the fact that 78% of girls report that they "do everything that they can to avoid messing up or failing."

CONFIDENCE

There are many variables that impact girls' reports of confidence. In the 2023 Girls' Index, the way that girls felt about their bodies and appearance was correlated to their reports of confidence. Additional appearance-related findings are included below.

% OF GIRLS WHO REPORT:



THE 2023 GIRLS' INDEX FOUND THAT CONFIDENT GIRLS ARE MORE LIKELY TO:



- **Feel that school is a place where they belong**
- **Believe that they can be their "true self" at school**
- **Get along well with other girls**
- **Have supportive adults in their life**
- **Like trying new things**
- **Speak their mind**
- **Want to lead**

“
My parents can stop worrying about
my weight. I like my body, and I'm
confident with my body, and I love it.
”

- 6th grade girl, Michigan



SOCIAL MEDIA

KEY FINDINGS



1 There is a relationship between confidence and social media use

Lower levels of social media use correlate with increased reports of confidence among girls. Increased time spent on social media is correlated with reports of lower levels of confidence.

2 Most 5th and 6th graders spend 4 to 6 hours per day on social media

95% of 5th and 6th grade girls report using social media. Fewer than 3% of all girls reported that they do not use social media. By high school, 99.9% of girls are on social media.

3 Social media makes girls want to change their appearance

Overall, 57% of girls report that scrolling through social media makes them want to change their appearance. The older girls are, the more this is true (5th-6th: 46%; 7th-8th: 63%; 9th-12th: 66%).

4 Girls' social media use goes largely unmonitored by adults

Overall, 2 out of 3 girls report that their parents "rarely" or "never" monitor their social media. Among 5th and 6th grade girls, it is 58%, 7th and 8th it is 63% and 9th-12th is 78%.

GIRLS' REPORTED USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA HAS INCREASED SINCE 2017, especially among 5th through 8th grade girls. In 2017, the median amount of time that 5th and 6th grade girls reported spending on social media was fewer than 2 hours. In 2023, it is 4-6 hours per day. Among high school age girls, time on social media has stayed relatively stable, with median use remaining steady at 6 hours per day.

"I think because of social media that girls my age and above are held to a standard that is not fair for everyone."

- 5th grade girl, Texas

In 2017,

9%

of 5th grade girls
spent

6 OR MORE HOURS

each day
using social media.

In 2023,

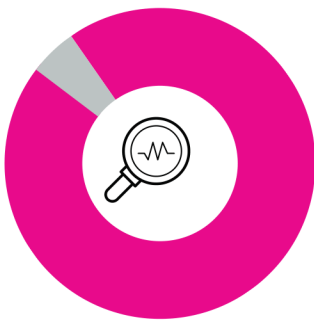
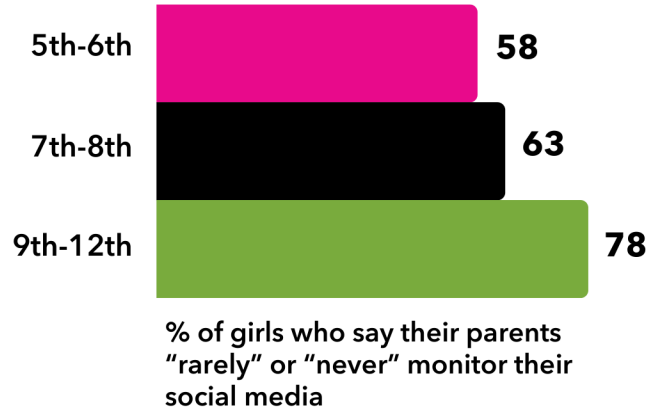
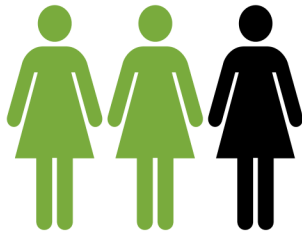
46%

do.

SOCIAL MEDIA

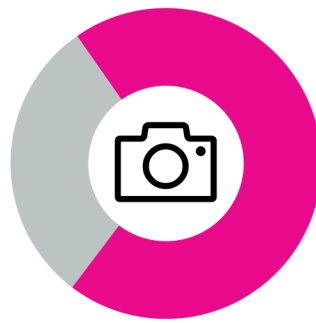


2 IN 3 GIRLS SAY THAT THEIR PARENTS "RARELY" OR "NEVER" MONITOR THEIR SOCIAL MEDIA



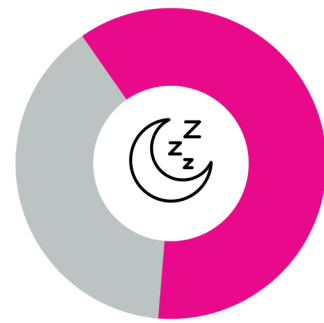
95%

% of 5th and 6th grade girls who say they use social media



69%

% of high school girls who say that most students their age send sexually suggestive photos or videos to one another

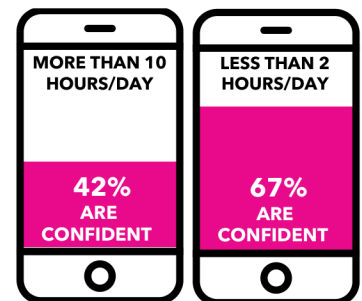


61%

% of girls who say they "often" or "once in a while" stay up all night using their phone

GIRLS WHO SPEND MORE TIME ON SOCIAL MEDIA ARE LESS LIKELY TO DESCRIBE THEMSELVES AS CONFIDENT

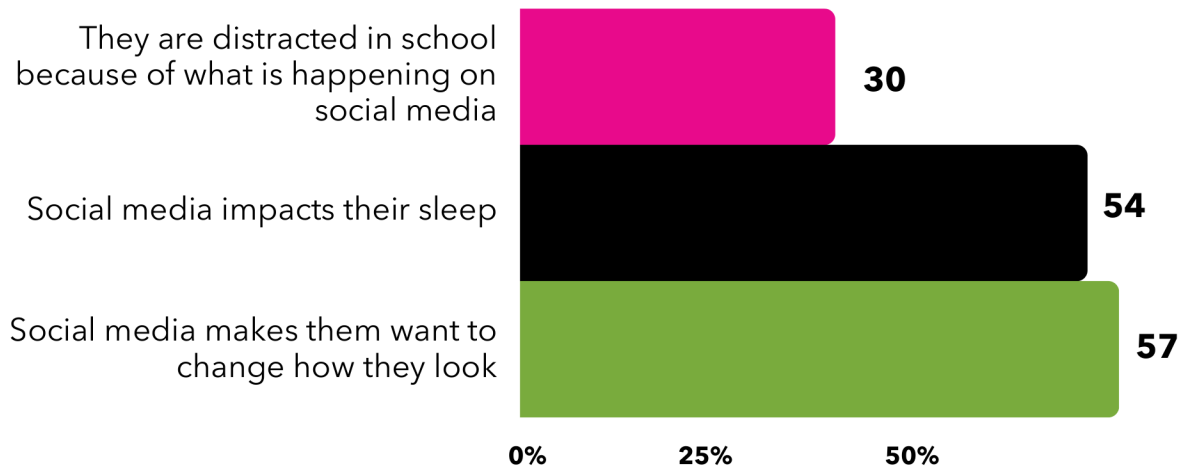
Girls who spend the most amount of time on social media (10+ hours per day) are 25% less likely to describe themselves as confident than those who spend the least amount of time on social media (under 2 hours per day).



SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media use impacts several other areas of girls' lives, including their perceptions of their appearance, their attention in school and their nighttime sleep.

% OF GIRLS WHO REPORT:



THE 2023 GIRLS' INDEX FOUND THAT GIRLS WHO USE LESS SOCIAL MEDIA ARE MORE LIKELY TO:



- Report lower levels of sadness and depression
- Be involved in extracurricular or enrichment activities like sports, music, clubs and troops
- Have supportive friends
- Like going to school
- Be happy with their body and appearance

“
Lots of girls are on social media, especially TikTok, and a lot of the times I feel excluded because my parents are very anti-social media. Even though I don't have social media, I am still influenced by things. I think a lot of girls my age are developing body image issues and developing eating disorders at a young age because we constantly see other girls on social media who are skinny and gorgeous as heck, and a lot of the time what we see isn't realistic.

-6th grade girl, Texas

”



“

Social media influences girls' ideas of attractiveness and perfectionism.

-9th grade girl, Georgia

”

“

Social media is taking over and making girls believe things about themselves, and then they worry about their weight and that what they do is being watched and that they have to please everyone.

-9th grade girl, Utah

”



STRESS & WELL-BEING

KEY FINDINGS



1 Extreme sadness and depression tripled in 5th and 6th grade girls

While reports of sadness and depression increased for girls in every grade, the rates of daily sadness tripled for 5th and 6th graders and more than doubled for 7th and 8th grade girls.

2 79% of girls say they are going to “explode” because of pressure

5th and 6th grade girls report high levels of pressure, with 75% feeling like they are going to “explode”. Grades, school, friendships and family issues are girls’ top-reported stressors.

3 65% of girls pressure themselves to be perfect

2 out of 3 girls put pressure on themselves to be perfect, and 36% also feel pressure from adults to be perfect. High school girls are the most likely to report pressure from adults (48%).

4 Girls’ sleep is impacted by phone and social media use

61% of girls report that “once in a while” or “often” they stay up all night using their phone, and 54% report that social media impacts their sleep.

GIRLS ARE REPORTING HIGH LEVELS OF STRESS AND PRESSURE alongside increases in sadness and depression. At every age, girls’ reports of daily sadness and depression have increased since the 2017 Girls’ Index. The sharpest increase is among 5th and 6th grade girls, where the rates have tripled from 5% to 15%.

“Girls are trying to figure out who they are and figuring out relationships, friendships, etc. Girls also get very stressed out, and I feel like now more than ever, girls are not confident with their image because of social media.”

-8th grade girl, Iowa

STRESS & WELL-BEING

Girls' reports of feeling sad or depressed have increased markedly since The 2017 Girls' Index. In examining "significant" levels (4 or more days per week sad or depressed) and "extreme" levels (7 days per week sad or depressed), girls in 5th grade showed the steepest increases in reporting rates.

2017

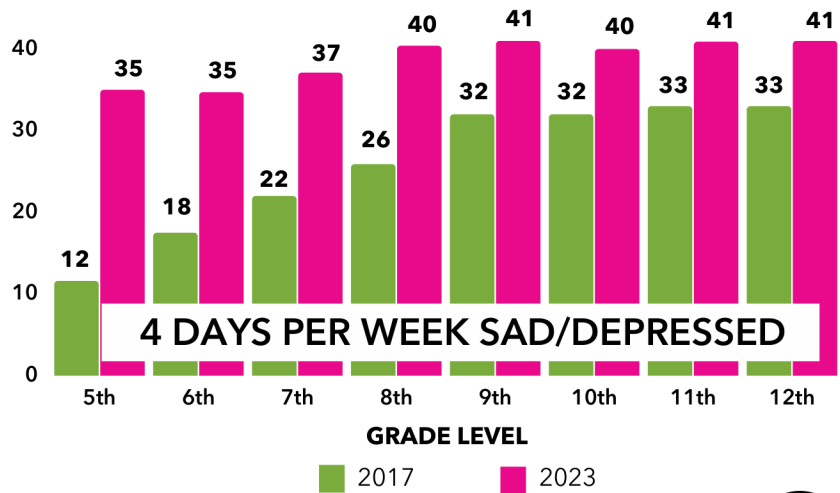
% of girls in 2017 who reported feeling sad or depressed 4 or more days per week

2023

% of girls in 2023 who reported feeling sad or depressed 4 or more days per week



"SIGNIFICANT" LEVELS OF SADNESS & DEPRESSION TRIPLED FOR 5th GRADERS



2017

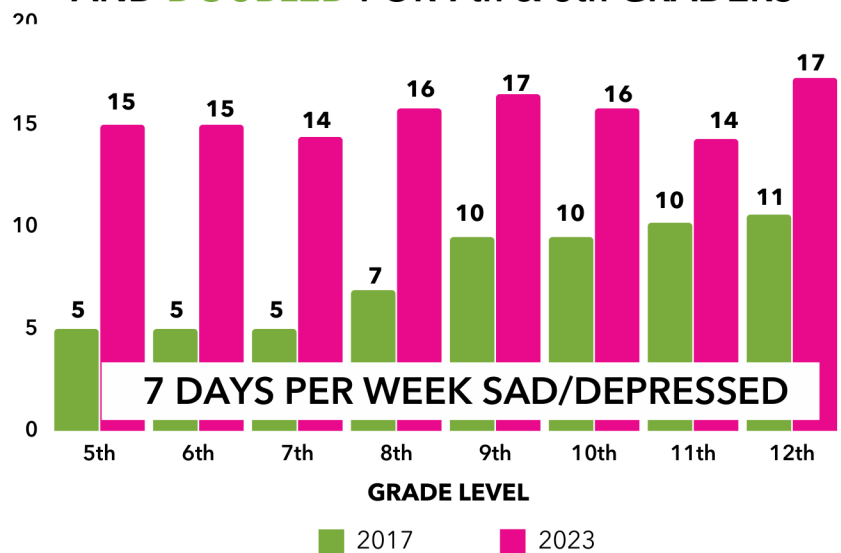
% of girls in 2017 who reported feeling sad or depressed 7 or more days per week

2023

% of girls in 2023 who reported feeling sad or depressed 7 or more days per week

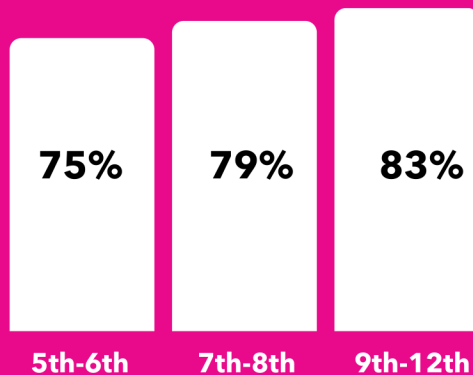


"EXTREME" LEVELS OF SADNESS & DEPRESSION TRIPLED FOR 5th & 6th GRADERS AND DOUBLED FOR 7th & 8th GRADERS



79%

of girls report that they are under so much pressure that they feel like they are going to “explode.”

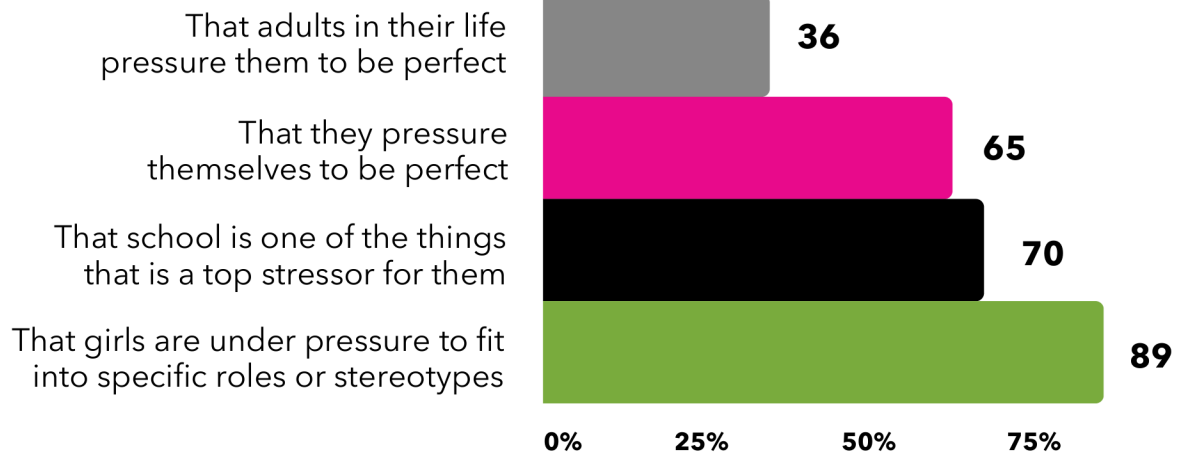


% of girls who feel they are going to “explode” by grade level

STRESS & WELL-BEING

Girls report stress and pressure from both internal and external sources. Most pressure themselves to be perfect and also experience pressure from school, parents and society.

% OF GIRLS WHO REPORT:



THE 2023 GIRLS' INDEX FOUND THAT GIRLS WHO SAY THEY ARE CONFIDENT ARE LESS LIKELY TO:



- Report high levels of sadness and depression
- Report pressure to be perfect
- Report pressure to be pretty
- Feel like they are going to “explode” with pressure

SCHOOL

KEY FINDINGS



1

Overall, 55% of girls report that they like coming to school

Since 2017, girls' overall desire to come to school has decreased. The sharpest decline is observed among 5th grade girls. In 2017, 87% reported that they liked coming to school - now 68% do.

2

Drama and fighting impact girls' desire to attend school

41% of girls report that girl drama and fighting keep them from wanting to attend school. 54% of 5th and 6th grade girls report this, followed by 52% of 7th and 8th graders and 45% of girls in grades 9-12.

3

Girls who can be themselves at school like going to school

Girls who feel that they can "really be" themselves at school are 6 times more likely to report that they like going to school.

4

Supportive adults are critical to girls' connection to school

Girls who have adults at school who care about them are 65% more likely to enjoy school and 76% more likely to feel like they belong at school.

THE RELATIONSHIPS AND EXPERIENCES THAT GIRLS HAVE IN SCHOOL MATTER.

While just over half of girls like going to school, there are variables that correlate to increased enjoyment of school. The school environment matters. Specifically, when girls can be authentic at school and when they have adults who care about them at school, they are more likely to want to attend school and feel like they belong there.

"Mental health is a big thing right now for everyone at my school. Whether that's stress over things like grades, colleges, affording college, graduating and so much more."

-10th grade girl, Massachusetts

“

For some reason, you don't teach the boys to be **RESPECTFUL** and keep their hands to themselves, yet you teach us to cover up and be insecure in our own bodies since the **STAFF** and the **LITTLE BOYS** obviously can't handle it. Extremely sexist, dress code is 98% for women and young girls and not for these little boys who can't handle a little shoulder? Boys don't immediately start closing in on a girl just because she has her shoulder out. Maybe girls wouldn't try to "rebel" and wear crop tops if you taught us we can be comfortable in our own bodies in the first place.

-11th grade girl, North Carolina

”



SCHOOL

THE 2023 GIRLS' INDEX ADDED NEW QUESTIONS FOCUSED ON GIRLS' SENSE OF BELONGING AND CONNECTION TO SCHOOL



39%

% of girls who feel like they belong at their school



39%

% of girls who feel like they can really be themselves at school



43%

% of girls who feel like people at their school really care about them



75%

% of girls who feel like their teachers treat them like they are smart

87%
OF
5th GRADE
GIRLS LIKED
GOING TO
SCHOOL
IN 2017

68%
LIKE GOING
TO SCHOOL
IN 2023

6x

AUTHENTICITY

Girls who feel they can "really be" themselves at school are 6 times more likely to like going to school

65%

CARE

Girls who have adults at school who care about them are 65% more likely to enjoy going to school

70%

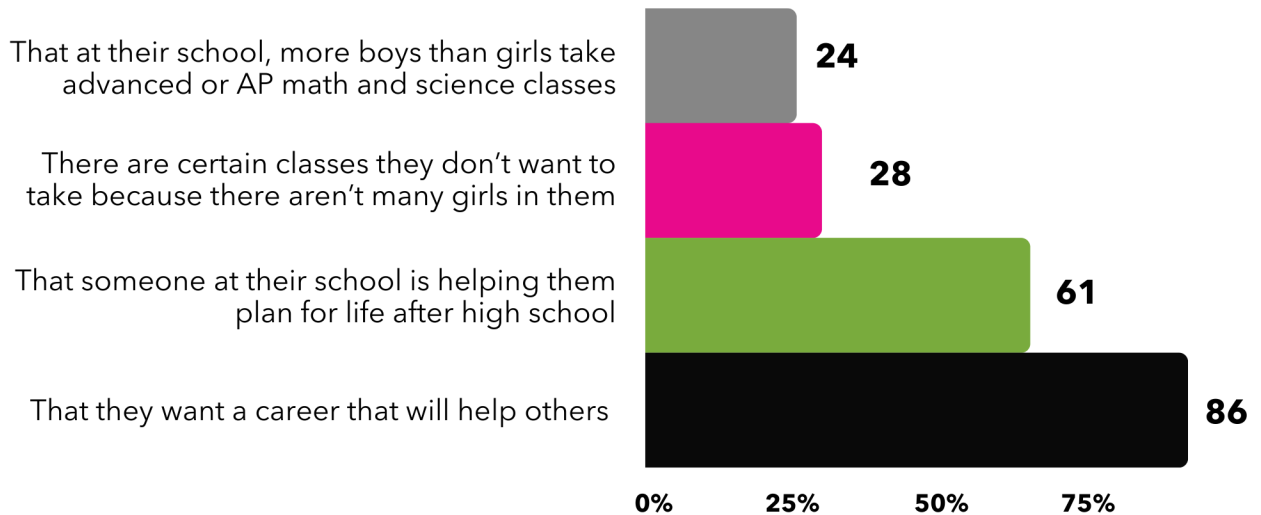
BELONGING

Girls who feel like school is a place where they belong are 70% more likely to enjoy going to school

SCHOOL

Overwhelmingly, high school girls report desiring careers where they can help others. 61% report that they have someone at their school who is helping them plan for life after high school. Additionally, about 25% of high school girls notice gender differences in enrollment in specific courses.

% OF HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS WHO REPORT:



THE 2023 GIRLS' INDEX FOUND THAT GIRLS ARE MORE LIKELY TO WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL WHEN:



- They have adults at school who care about them
- They can be their authentic self at school
- School is a place where they feel like they belong
- Their teachers treat them like they are smart

LEADERSHIP

KEY FINDINGS



1 Girls want to be in charge, but fear being seen as “bossy”

While 59% of girls reported that they like being in charge, more than half (55%) said that they are afraid to lead because they don't want others to think they are bossy.

2 Girls' desire to be liked keeps them from speaking up

Speaking up is a challenge for girls, with 67% reporting that they don't say what they are thinking or disagree with others because they want to be liked.

3 67% of girls have been told they are too loud or opinionated

Most girls have been told that they are “too loud” or “opinionated.” However, girls who hear this “often” are 24% more likely to shy away from leadership for fear that others will think they are bossy.

4 86% of girls want a career that will help others

As girls think about their futures, their desire to be helpers is evident. Girls at all grade levels want a job where they help others (85% in 5th-6th, 83% in 7th-8th and 87% in 9th-12th).

NEARLY 60% OF GIRLS REPORT THAT THEY LIKE TO BE IN CHARGE; however, more also report that they are afraid to be a leader for fear that others will think they are bossy. Additionally, since 2017, 21% more girls report that they don't say what they are thinking or disagree with others because they want to be liked (46% vs 67%).

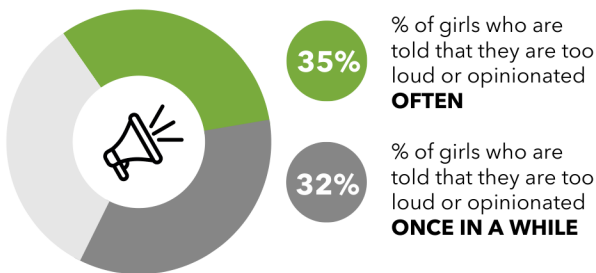
“Girls are being told that they can't do anything because they are weak.”
- 7th grade girl, Ohio

LEADERSHIP

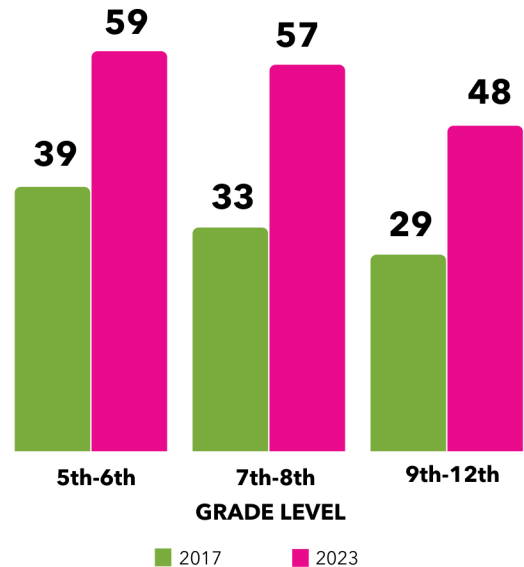
SINCE 2017, THERE WAS A STEEP INCREASE IN THE % OF GIRLS WHO FEAR BEING PERCEIVED AS **BOSSY**

At every age, girls continue to be concerned about others' perceptions of them. A factor that may influence this perception is that

67% OF GIRLS HAVE BEEN TOLD THEY ARE TOO LOUD OR OPINIONATED.



% of girls who are afraid to be leaders because they don't want people to think they are bossy



41% % of girls with a 4.0 or higher grade point average do not think they are smart enough for their dream career

GROWTH MINDSET

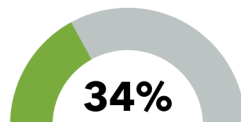
Overall, girls reported that they like trying new things and they believe they can increase their intelligence. These are characteristics of possessing a growth mindset. However, a high percentage of girls also actively avoid messing up or failing.



% of girls who report that they like trying new things



% of girls who do everything they can to avoid messing up or failing at something

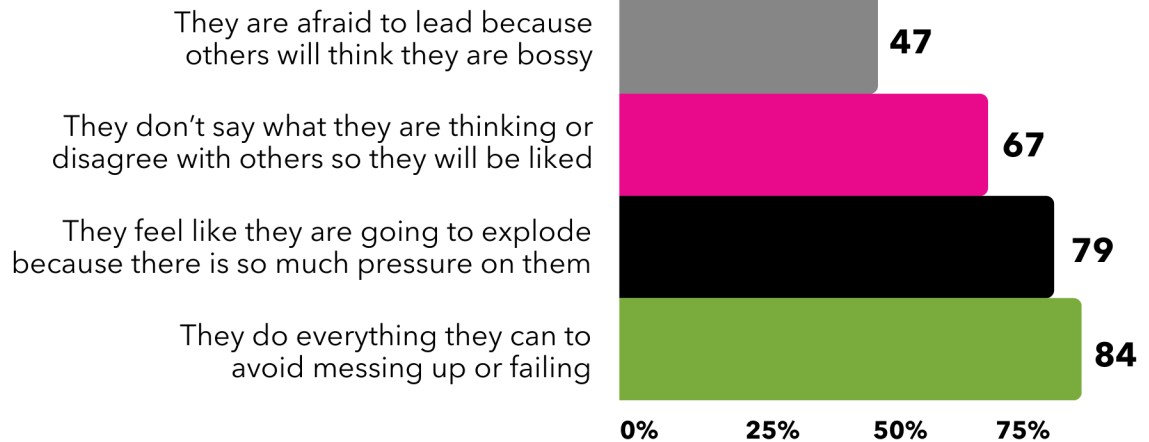


% of girls who believe that they cannot increase their intelligence

LEADERSHIP

Girls with the highest academic performance (those with a 4.0 or higher grade point average) are not immune from pressures and confidence challenges that can impact all girls. They too, struggle with low self-perception coupled with high reports of pressure.

% OF GIRLS WITH A 4.0 OR HIGHER GRADE POINT AVERAGE (GPA) WHO REPORT:



THE 2023 GIRLS' INDEX FOUND THAT GIRLS WHO LIKE BEING IN CHARGE WERE ALSO MORE LIKELY TO:



- **Feel like they can be their true self at school**
- **Speak their mind**
- **Have been told they are too loud or opinionated**
- **Describe themselves as confident**
- **Stand up for themselves**

“

“People assume girls are weak and can't do anything for themselves. They think us girls can't handle heavy jobs. I've been told stuff like, 'girls belong in the kitchen.' It makes me so mad because they don't know what girls are capable of.”

- 9th grade girl, Texas

”



RELATIONSHIPS

KEY FINDINGS



1 Supportive adults are essential to girls' school connection

Girls who have adults at school who care about them are 65% more likely to want to come to school and 76% more likely to feel like they belong at school.

2 76% of girls do not feel that boys their age respect girls

Girls of all ages do not feel that boys their age are respectful of girls, with increases in reporting as girls get older (69% of 5th and 6th grade girls, 79% of middle school girls and 84% of high school girls).

3 Girls with healthy friendships report lower levels of sadness

Girls who trust other girls, who get along with other girls and who have supportive friendships report fewer days per week feeling sad or depressed than girls who do not have these relationships.

4 Girls have good friends, but report high levels of girl competition

Overall, most girls report that they have supportive friends and adults in their lives who they can talk to about serious issues; however, competition and distrust can also impact their relationships.

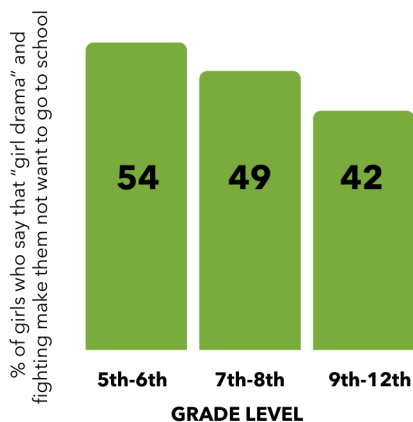
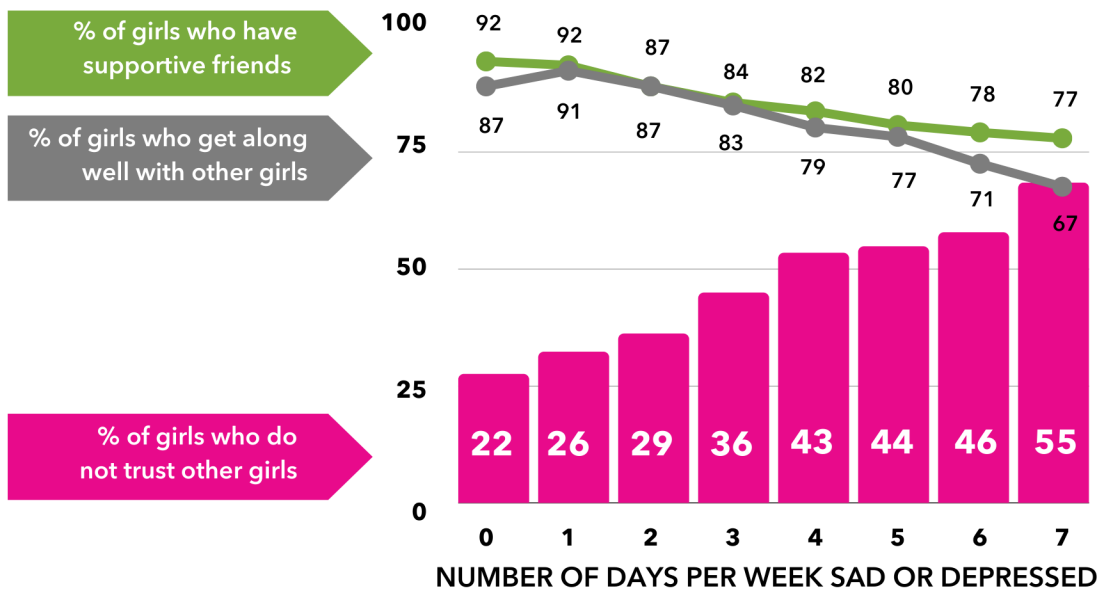
SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS ARE CORRELATED TO KEY POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR GIRLS. When girls have supportive relationships with both adults and friends, they enjoy school at higher rates, have lower reports of sadness and higher reports of confidence. Time that girls spent using social media was not correlated with whether or not girls reported having supportive friends - a change since The 2017 Girls' Index, where more time on social media was correlated with lower reports of having supportive friends.

**"I think I have a very strong support system. But no matter how hard adults try, they're not gonna understand. It's better for them to just listen."
- 8th grade girl, New York**

RELATIONSHIPS

Girls' relationships can get increasingly complicated as they get older, and "girl drama" and fighting keeps 49% of girls from wanting to come to school. However, girls who have healthy and supportive relationships with other girls are more likely to want to come to school and also report lower levels of sadness and depression.

GIRLS WHO HAVE SUPPORTIVE FRIENDS, GET ALONG WELL WITH OTHER GIRLS AND TRUST OTHER GIRLS REPORT FEWER DAYS PER WEEK FEELING SAD OR DEPRESSED

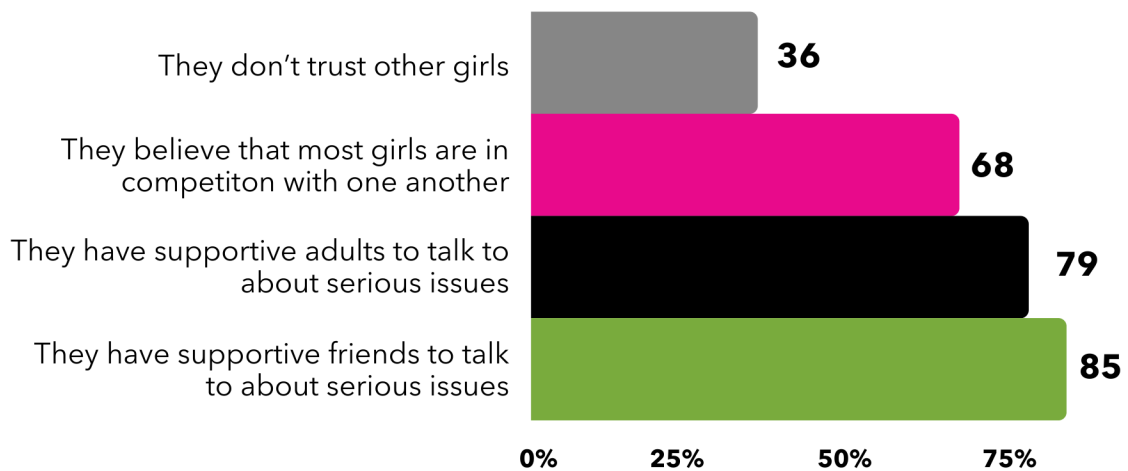


5th AND 6th GRADE GIRLS ARE THE **MOST LIKELY** TO REPORT THAT "GIRL DRAMA" AND FIGHTING IMPACT THEIR DESIRE TO GO TO SCHOOL

RELATIONSHIPS

Most girls report that they have supportive friends and adults in their lives who they can talk to about serious issues. However, competition and distrust can also impact their relationships.

% OF GIRLS WHO REPORT:



THE 2023 GIRLS' INDEX FOUND THAT GIRLS WHO HAVE STRONG, SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS ARE ALSO MORE LIKELY TO:



- **Stand up for themselves**
- **Speak their mind**
- **Describe themselves as confident**
- **Trust other girls**
- **Enjoy going to school**
- **Believe that girls can get along with each other**

76%

of girls do not feel
that boys their
age respect girls.

**Boys punch us because they
are so-called flirting.**

- 8th grade girl, Arizona

RECOMMENDATIONS

The world has changed profoundly in the 6 years since the 2017 Girls' Index was released, and the impact on girls is evident. From drops in confidence, to increased stress and pressure, to ubiquitous social media use, a girls' life appears to be as complex and complicated as it has ever been. The experiences, exposures and engagements that girls have today are different than even 6 years ago, so the support and encouragement that is provided needs to change and keep pace with this reality. The data suggest several areas of focus:

1. Provide girls, especially tween girls, with social, emotional and mental health support.

This age group had the steepest declines in confidence and mental health when compared to their middle school and high school-aged peers, and they are often overlooked when it comes to acknowledgment of the severity of their emotional distress. The recent trends that call for increased focus on teen mental health may be leaving behind the youngest and most vulnerable students who are evidencing rapid deterioration in well-being. While there is often a perception that the challenges that impact girls do not begin until middle school, The Girls' Index data confirms that younger girls require our concerted and specific attention right now.

Today's 5th and 6th grade girls are faring worse than their middle school and high school age peers were just 6 years ago. Their reported confidence is significantly lower than it was in 2017 (68% vs 86%), and their reports of sadness

and depression are substantially higher ("significant" and "extreme" reports of sadness and depression tripled for 5th and 6th grade girls).

Isolating the cause of this decline is challenging; however, one factor may be the steep increase in the amount of social media that 5th and 6th grade girls are consuming on a daily basis. Since 2017, the largest increase in social media use was reported among 5th and 6th grade girls. In 2017, 9% of 5th grade girls reported spending 6 or more hours a day on social media. Today that statistic is 46%.

2. Help girls cultivate supportive relationships with other girls and with caring adults.

The positive impact of strong and supportive relationships in girls' lives was clearly illuminated in the data. Girls who have supportive relationships were at lower risk for specific negative outcomes, including confidence and leadership challenges, dislike of school and reports of sadness and depression. While most girls do report having friends who support them, 68% think that relationships with other girls are competitive. Girls' relationships are often characterized by high levels of conflict and "drama," often the result of

CONTINUED

RECOMMENDATIONS

girls having difficulty with assertive communication, boundary setting and confidence.

These relationship skills are important for girls to learn as they are developing meaningful and reciprocal relationships with friends and with dating partners. Creating opportunities to teach and practice these skills gives girls the chance to develop comfort in standing up for themselves, setting and enforcing boundaries, communicating their needs and engaging in brave conversations.

3. Provide engagement, understanding and involvement as girls start and sustain social media use.

Most girls spend between 4 and 8 hours each day using social media, and at every age, girls report that their parents “rarely” or “never” monitor their social media. While monitoring is one form of engagement, a harsh monitoring protocol can serve to increase mistrust and secrecy while decreasing open communication.

Girls need adults who walk alongside them in their social media journeys and who help them learn the skills that they need to navigate the content that they are consuming. In a similar way that an adult would help a girl dissect or understand new content or concepts in a movie or a book, adults also need to help her make sense of the overwhelming amount of information that she is receiving online.

Adults can connect with girls in order to better understand their social media interests. They can stay up-to-date on topics relevant to social media use and engage girls in meaningful conversations. Whether it is an introduction to algorithmic bias, having a laugh over the newest viral sensation or launching a hard conversation about privacy and tracking, starting the conversation helps foster an ongoing and open dialogue.

4. Recognize that high academic achievement does not equate to social and emotional well-being.

Oftentimes girls who perform well academically and appear to “have it all together” can be overlooked for having social or emotional challenges. Because high-achieving girls often do well socially and academically in the school environment, they are assumed to not require the traditional support provided for students who struggle more overtly. The 2023 Girls’ Index showed us that girls with the highest grade point averages still struggle with confidence, leadership and speaking up for themselves.

High academic achievers are often mislabeled as confident because their outward success can be thought to equate to their inward self-perceptions.

CONTINUED



RECOMMENDATIONS

High school girls with a grade point average above 4.0 were only 6% more likely than their lower-performing peers to see themselves as confident. Among this group of high achievers, 40% reported that they weren't sure if they were smart enough for their dream job. Adults need to understand the complex influences that contribute to girls' confidence development, including the girls who are excellent academic performers.

5. Create meaningful places of belonging in schools and ensure that girls are accepted and respected.

68% percent of 5th grade girls report that they like going to school, down from 87% in 2017. Overall, girls' enjoyment of school has decreased at every age, but most significantly among the 5th and 6th grade girls. Creating school environments where students want to be is an important task of school staff and administration and appears especially important at the high school level, where only half of all girls say they like coming to school.

The Girls' Index indicates that there are factors related to how girls feel at school and experience the school environment. Overall, girls who feel like school is a place where they belong are 70% more likely to enjoy going to school. Connecting girls to meaningful activities, programs, clubs and teams is important for creating a sense of belonging and community.

Creating a welcoming environment for students can also include a review of the policies, procedures and protocols that are implemented throughout a school community. When students see themselves represented and respected (e.g., leadership representation, equitable dress code policies and enforcement, sexual harassment policies, affinity group offerings, etc.), they are more likely to see themselves as an insider versus an outsider.

Additionally of note, 76% of girls report that boys their age do not respect girls, and many girls shared their experiences of degrading, demeaning or harassing behavior. While a fuller analysis of this topic will be forthcoming in a subsequent report, The Girls' Index showed that girls who believed that boys their age were respectful toward girls were also more likely to enjoy school. Ensuring that the school climate is not accepting of, or neutral toward, gender-based discrimination or harassment helps to foster an environment of belonging, care and respect.

CONTINUED



RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Ensure girls have opportunities to cultivate their leadership and to share their thoughts and opinions in forums that celebrate their efforts and their contributions.

Girls report that the fear of being called “bossy” can keep them away from leadership. The percentage of girls who endorsed this sentiment increased drastically since 2017. For 5th and 6th grade girls, the percentage rose from 23% to 52%, with similar substantial increases among middle and high school girls.

Similarly, girls continue to struggle with speaking their mind or disagreeing with others, with more than half of girls reporting difficulty in this area. Despite the fact that most girls (59%) like to be in charge, the opinions and perceptions of others can negatively impact their thinking, their behavior and their perception of themselves as leaders.

Ensuring that girls have safe environments filled with supportive people who will celebrate their accomplishments can provide the conditions that girls need to expand their leadership capacity and competence.

Despite the fact that most girls like to be in charge, the opinions and perceptions of others can negatively impact their thinking, their behavior and their perception of themselves as leaders.

ADDITIONAL DATA RELEASES

This report is the first in a series of Girls' Index reports. This in-depth overview highlights key aggregate findings of the experiences, opinions and perceptions of girls throughout the United States with a high level of reliability. The sample size of 17,502 provides a 99% confidence that the findings of The Girls' Index are generalizable to the greater population of girls in the country, +/- 1%.

In addition to the large sample size, the 2023 Girls' Index also includes a demographically representative and diverse group of girls from various backgrounds, regions, ethnicities and economic statuses.

ROX will continue to take the lead in disseminating additional findings from The Girls' Index. This Research Brief is the first look into the complex world of girls and helps illuminate many of the strengths and challenges facing today's girls. Forthcoming Girls' Index Impact Reports will further delve into important within-group variance and allow deep examinations of additional topics, populations and variables. Subject-specific reports will provide deeper knowledge on the issues impacting girls and serve as catalysts for the needed support, resources, policy changes, motivation and encouragement that girls need to be successful.

We look forward to continuing to share this information with others who share our commitment to creating generations of confident girls who control their own relationships, experiences, decisions and futures.



Ruling Our eXperiences (ROX) is the national nonprofit authority on research, education and programming centered on girls. We put data into action to create generations of confident girls who control their own relationships, experiences, decisions and futures.

The school-based ROX Program for Girls is delivered by licensed counselors, social workers and educators and operates in hundreds of schools throughout the United States.

The ROX Institute for Research and Training conducts and disseminates large-scale national research and educates the adults who impact and influence girls' lives.

ABOUT THE GIRLS' INDEX

The Girls' Index is a proprietary, anonymous, voluntary survey that girls were invited to complete at their school, during the school day, during 2022 and 2023.

School leaders authorized their school's participation, and the ROX Research Team supported school officials to administer their survey. The survey administrators were given an administration protocol, including a script to read to students regarding the voluntary nature of their participation. Girls self-identified and opted in to complete the survey, and adults remained with them as they completed the 75-item survey, which included open-ended and scaling questions.

A third-party, independent data partner developed the secure, electronic survey interface and compiled the aggregate survey responses, which were then further analyzed and reported by Ruling Our eXperiences (ROX).

To ensure the anonymous nature of the survey, and to remain in compliance with the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment, girls were not asked sensitive, personally-identifying information and were free to skip any questions in the survey.

Each school that participated received a custom data report of their school's findings and met with a member of the ROX Research Team for a data review.

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Topics addressed in The Girls' Index:

- Confidence
- Social Media
- Stress & Well-Being
- School
- Leadership
- Relationships

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