What Girls Say About Emotional and Social Health

Girl Scout Research Institute
Girl Scouts of the USA
Roundtable
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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

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