

2019

International Day of the Girl

In Real Life (IRL) Matters





Why real life friendships and connections matter

As the leading organization for girls in Canada, Girl Guides of Canada-Guides du Canada (GGC) conducts unique research into how girls in Canada feel about a range of important topics and the emerging pressures they face today. To mark International Day of the Girl 2019 (October 11), Girl Guides of Canada is releasing research exploring the sense of belonging girls in Canada have within their communities and assessing their level of social capital – whether girls feel trust, support, and connection to the communities where they live, both in the real world and online. [This study reveals the importance of community connections for girls and the importance of in-person friendships for girls' sense of belonging.](#)

The findings below are part of the broader Girl Experience Project, Girl Guides of Canada's flagship research initiative. In August 2019, Girl Guides of Canada, in partnership with Abacus Data, conducted a nation-wide survey of girls age 10-18 to understand their sense of belonging and happiness.¹ The complete findings from the Girl Experience Project will be released later in fall 2019.

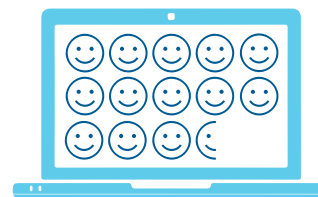
1. The survey was conducted with 1,000 Canadian girls aged 10-18 from August 6 to 19. A random sample of panelists were invited to complete the survey from the Leger partner panel. Participants were recruited through their parents, who were asked to complete a short survey before being asked to pass the device or invite their daughter/ward to complete the survey. Respondents then completed the survey alone, or with the assistance of their parent/guardian.

Where girls' friends are: online vs. IRL (in real life)

How girls are interacting is changing significantly. The number of online-only relationships are increasing and play a significant role in shaping girls' sense of belonging.



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Girls who spend more time with online friends have a lower sense of belonging overall – **18%** of girls who spend more time with online friends feel like they don't belong or don't really belong, while for girls who spend more time with in-person friends, only **10%** feel they don't belong or don't really belong.

In-person relationships are important for girls to feel accepted, cared for and heard. For girls who have stronger in-person connections:

68% feel listened to all or most of the time

85% feel cared about all or most of the time

79% feel accepted all or most of the time

79% believe they can be themselves all or most of the time

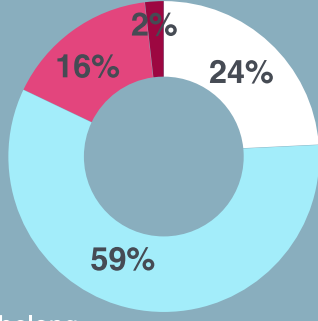
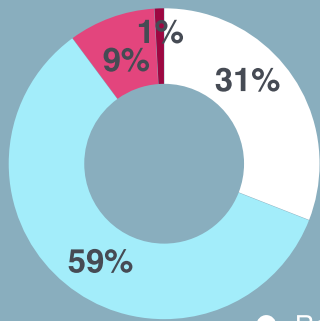
Conversely, girls who spend more time interacting online than in person report significantly lower levels of sense of belonging, both on the direct measure and every other measure (feeling like they are listened to, accepted, and cared about).



Do you feel like you belong?

Girls with more in-person friends

Girls with more online friends



- Really belong
- Sort of belong
- Don't really belong
- Don't belong

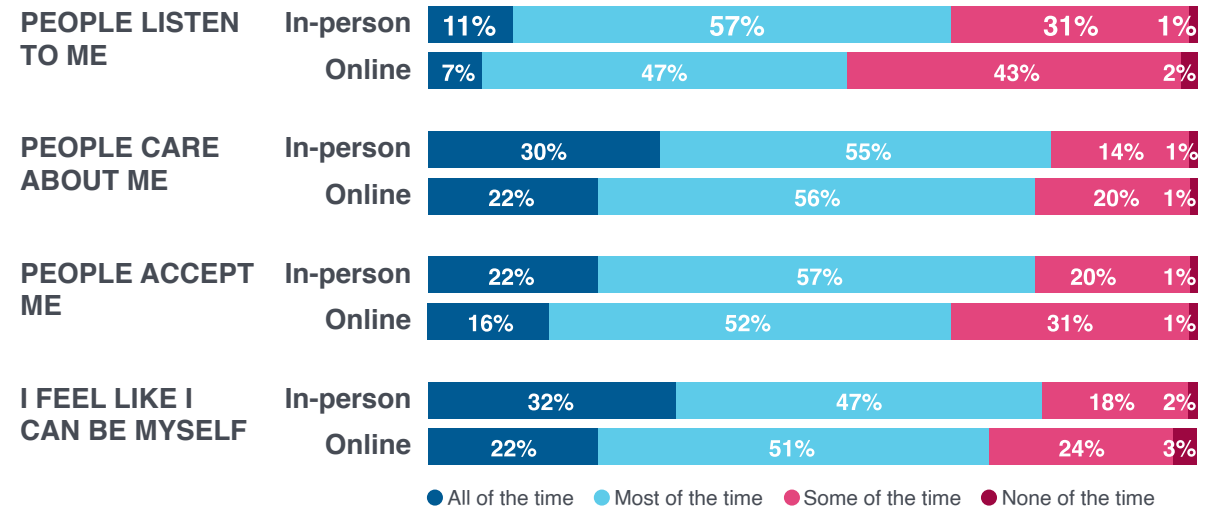
In your community (your neighborhood, school, after-school activities, etc.), do you feel like you... really belong, sort of belong, don't really belong, or don't belong?



This shift in how girls are connecting with friends has real and significant implications for girls' sense of belonging – of feeling accepted, cared for and heard among their peers, family and community. Those who have online friends and few in-person friends don't feel the same level of support from family and friends, and they don't share the same level of optimism about the future as other girls. Girls who rely on online connections have higher stress levels, lower confidence and feel less like they have a network of friends and family that can support them. What we don't know: whether girls turn to online networks for community when these IRL social connections are already lacking.

How often do you feel like....

Girls with stronger in-person connections vs girls with stronger online connections



Civic connections are impacted by income

While 4 out of 5 girls say they have "Some" or "A lot of different choices" about what to do after school, family income can be a barrier for participation.

- **21%** of girls from lower income households (\$50,000 or less) say there are a lot of choices available, compared to **36%** of those from higher income households (\$100,000 or more).
- For girls who say they really belong, **47%** say there are a lot of choices available to them. And for girls who don't feel like they belong, only **15%** say the same thing.

Why real-life connections matter for girls

Community connections are important: Girls who spend time talking to friends in person, rather than online, have a strong support network (both with friends and family), and who are heavily involved in their wider community through things like organized activities are more likely to report feeling a strong sense of belonging (approximately 20% of girls).



Overall, while online connections can add an additional network for girls, it is in-person connections that really impact how girls are feeling about themselves and whether they feel like they fit in. The kinds of connections that foster feelings of community, and contentment with oneself happen in person, rather than online.



79% of girls* believe they can be themselves all or most of the time

*with stronger in-person connections

Conclusion

There are clear benefits of providing low-cost, safe spaces for girls where they can connect, discover themselves and explore everything they want to be. Programs like Girl Guides that support these kinds of meaningful, real life interactions can have a significant impact on girls' sense of belonging. When girls have the chance to grow their peer network through in-person interactions, they feel more confident and their sense of trust in those around them increases. Girls with strong personal connections also have additional support when they face the inevitable stresses in their lives – from the pressures of social media to doing well in school and fitting in with their friends.

Through activities like Girl Guides, girls can talk about what's impacting their lives – whether that's mental health, their futures, or the environment – and build their connections with their communities. Ultimately, these connections have a positive impact on girls' outlook on their own lives while encouraging them to be themselves and find a place in their community.

For parents and those that support girls:

- Girls' online lives matter, but if they are solely making connections and relationships online, they may not be as confident, know where to go when they need help, or have a strong sense of belonging.
- It's clear that girls need time and support to develop connections within their peer networks and larger groups of girls their age from diverse backgrounds.
- There are benefits to helping create spaces for girls to have in-person relationships with peers and the adults in their lives.

When girls have places they can connect in person, they:

- ✓ Feel more confident
- ✓ Have increased trust in those around them
- ✓ Have more support when dealing with stress and pressures

