

# Life during COVID-19:

## What girls are saying about their worries and hopes



### Introduction

“ *I'm scared my friends will forget about me.* ”

COVID-19 is an extraordinary health and social crisis, challenging Canadian and global communities like nothing they've faced in decades. As the leading organization for girls in Canada, Girl Guides of Canada wanted to explore how girls are affected by COVID-19. In an informal survey of girls ages 14-17+, we asked them what they are worried about – and what's giving them hope.

By sharing their experiences, it's clear that the impacts of COVID-19 on these girls' lives are far-reaching. School is disrupted. They can't interact in the ways they normally do with friends – often a key support network for girls. And their personal and family finances may be impacted. All of these factors appear to be affecting their mental health.

“ *...it is really hard to be alone for so long without seeing your friends and isolating is mentally exhausting.* ”

### What are girls worried about?

When girls were asked to choose the top three things they are worried about during the COVID-19 pandemic, they responded as follows:

- My education / interruption to school 63.5%
- My mental health 54.6%
- My family's health 48.6%
- My relationships with my friends 33.3%
- My family's finances 19.7%
- My part-time/summer job stability/prospects 19.2%
- My physical health 18.9%
- My relationship with my family 13.7%

“ *My mom works at the hospital. I'm afraid she will get sick and die.* ”

## What girls are saying... Highlights from what girls told us

### Their education

**63.5%** of girls who responded said they are worried about their education / interruption to schooling

School is an important part of girls' lives. While many want to do well and succeed in their classwork, COVID-19 has led to a sudden disruption to their normal school routines. The adjustment to learning at home, online schooling and the potential impact on their academic success are things that these girls are worried about.

"I don't know how this will impact my post-secondary education prospects or my future, and that worries me."

*“As someone who always strives for success in school, I fear how behind I will be when I get back and all of this will create problems when applying for university.”*

"I'm worried about school and my marks. I'm trying my best to learn at home, but some teachers don't understand that we cannot continue at the same pace that we were at school. What took me an hour to do in class with help from my teacher and my friends is taking me two hours to teach myself at home."

"I will be going into my senior year almost entirely unprepared for what's to come. That might hurt my chances of getting into a good university."

"Making the switch to online learning is difficult and hard to navigate."

"I am worried that with the online classes I will not receive the level of education needed to do well in my classes next year."

### Their mental health

**54.6%** of girls who responded said they are worried about their mental health

Almost every aspect of girls' daily lives has been disrupted and turned upside down by COVID-19. The lack of routine and missing out on face-to-face contact with their supportive peer network is proving challenging for the mental health of many girls.

"Now that I'm stuck at home, I have no distractions from what I have to deal with in my head."

"When I'm not doing anything and I'm locked inside, my motivation goes down and I feel like I'm losing my mind."

*“I had issues with my mental health before and I'm worried that I'll lose the progress I've made.”*

"Not seeing people is very difficult for my mental health and while I'm managing right now, I'm not sure how much longer I can take it."



“I am worried about my mental health because I thrive with social contact. Sure, I can FaceTime with my friends, but I can only get so far with not being able to physically touch someone and hug my friends.”

“I know my mental health is going to take a hit. My routine is non-existent, and some days the only productive things I do are eat breakfast, lunch and dinner. I’m struggling to look more than a day ahead, which isn’t helping my schoolwork.”

“Not being able to see anyone makes me feel very alone in this and I had just started to find who I really am and now I’m kind of just lost again.”

## Their family’s health

**48.6%** of girls who responded are worried about their family’s health

COVID-19 is a global pandemic with serious health consequences. Girls are worried about those closest to them, such as their family members, getting sick. For girls whose parents are essential workers – or who themselves are working during the pandemic – there is an additional worry about the increased risks of contracting the virus.

“My family’s health – I’m worried that one of them is going to get sick and that it will be my fault and that I will feel like I didn’t do anything to stop it.”

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*I’m an essential worker and I’m scared of bringing the virus home.*

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“I work in a busy pharmacy and I’m afraid of everyone that walks in the door for my safety.”

“My mom works at the hospital. I’m afraid she will get sick and die.”

“Both my parents are essential workers. My mom works in a nursing home and my dad is a truck driver. I worry about their health as they have to keep going to work and can easily be exposed to COVID-19.”

“A lot of my family, especially older members, live on a First Nations reserve and I am concerned that they aren’t prepared for a health threat of this level and they will be disadvantaged when trying to get supplies.”

## Their relationships with their friends

**33.3%** of girls who responded are worried about their relationships with their friends

For girls ages 14-17, COVID-19 means they can no longer spend time with their friends as they normally do – at school, at the park or just hanging out. While social media does offer ways for girls to stay in touch with their friends, girls’ comments tell us that it does not provide the same sense of support and connection as in-person interactions.

“I’m in grade nine. I’ve had so much trouble making friends and, right before quarantine, I had finally begun to meet people and feel happy. Now that progress could be all erased, and next year could be really lonely for me again.”



“I don’t get to see my friends face-to-face anymore and I’m worried that some friendships may fade. I just overall miss being able to go see them daily and be there for them in person when they need me.”

“Social media, staying connected through texting and phoning is hard and not the same.”

“I miss hanging out with my friends and am afraid that our relationship will be impacted negatively from this separation.”

“ I miss talking to friends and I don’t have the same LGBTQ resources because most of the programs are shut down in my area. ”

“I’m scared my friends will forget about me.”

## Their family’s finances

**19.7%** of girls who responded said they are worried about their family’s finances

COVID-19 has had far-reaching impacts on the Canadian economy. Almost one in five girls who participated in our survey are worried about how this is impacting their family financially – whether it’s parents who have lost their jobs or their family’s ability to pay bills.

“My dad lost his job and my mom doesn’t work.”

“ We are a low-income family and my inability to work will cause us to struggle. ”

“My family is three kids in a single-parent home, so things have always been difficult financially. My job was not essential so I can’t work to support myself when I move out next year for school.”

“My dad has been laid off and we have bills, the mortgage and food and other stuff to pay for.”

## Their own job stability and prospects

**19.2%** of girls who responded are worried about their part-time/summer job stability / prospects

Adults aren’t the only ones whose jobs are impacted by COVID-19 – many girls also work. Whether it’s their part-time job or looking ahead to summer work, some girls are worried about how COVID-19 will impact their ability to earn money.

“This summer I was really hoping to get a summer job... but I don’t think I will be able to since many people are now unemployed and will be searching for jobs once this virus dies down.”

“I have a lot of things to save for and I’m scared that I won’t be able to afford them without a job.”

“ I’m going into university and am worried that I will become a burden on my parents if I can’t start working again soon. ”

“Most worried about losing my income and not being old enough to claim EI but I still have a cell phone bill to pay each month.”





“

Because I work with kids in the summer, I am worried that I will not have a job.

”

## What's giving girls hope and inspiration

While COVID-19 has girls worried, they are also finding hope and inspiration – from how communities are rallying together and the dedication of frontline workers to the support they're getting from family and friends. Girls were asked what is giving them hope and what they are most inspired by during the COVID-19 crisis. Below is a sampling of what they said:

“The way communities are being so giving to those in need, supporting local businesses and being ‘together’ while being apart.”

“I have been inspired by my own family. We never get to spend time together because we are so busy with other things. But now we get to do things together we used to not do very often like play boardgames.”

“*The minimum wage workers who are still working through all of this. Doctors and nurses signed up for things like this and though I have immense respect for them, it's the minimum wage workers that really inspire me because they didn't sign up for this and they're still working as hard as they can to help the situation.*”

“My friends. We keep each other accountable and inspired. They constantly surprise me and inspire me.”

“*I have always wanted to go into a medical field. Seeing the work that all of our healthcare workers are doing has really inspired me to keep aiming towards this profession.*”

“The resilience and hardworking spirits of those around me, in our Guiding community and our world.”

“The positive attitudes of the girls in our [Girl Guide] unit. The way some of them are finding things to do when their favourite activities are no longer available to them.”

“How the whole world is united. It is very rare when the whole world shares one goal.”



## Girl Guides during COVID-19

As the country's leading organization for girls, Girl Guides of Canada is uniquely focused on supporting girls as they navigate their new reality. While in-person unit meetings are paused due to physical distancing, Guiding continues to offer ways for girls to explore, connect and lift each other up. The launch of [Guiding @ Home](#) represents a brand-new way for girls to participate in Girl Guide activities on their own and from anywhere. All girls – not just Girl Guide members – can challenge themselves, dive into hands-on activities and get creative. There are live events and a variety of activities for girls of all ages covering the kinds of topics they want to explore – from arts and science, to nature and more. [Guiding @ Home](#) is a one-stop shop for engaging activities designed just for girls, all on an easy to navigate website.

### What you can do to support girls

For parents, adults and those that support girls

- **Let her know that you're there to support her – that you're in this together.** Create space for her feelings by asking open ended questions and checking in often.
- **Model acceptance.** Let her know that her thoughts and feelings are ok, whatever they may be. Let her know that everyone is experiencing uncertainty at this time, and sharing feelings is part of healthy stress and anxiety management.
- **Help her lean into her friendships, family and the positive things happening in your community.** Foster a sense of community and connection by encouraging safe online connection with her peers and family members.
- **Give her the tools to stay as healthy as possible.** Support and maintain her healthy habits where possible, including consistent sleep and eating routines.
- **Empower her with access to accurate information from trustworthy sources** (e.g., online safety, COVID-19 health practices) and opportunities to participate in creative problem-solving conversations that gives her a sense of control in some aspects of her life.
- **Encourage her to advocate for herself at work** and support her right to feel safe at work.

If you need help and aren't sure where to turn, you can reach a Kids Help Phone counsellor 24/7 at [1-800-668-6868](tel:1-800-668-6868).

#### About the survey

This was an informal survey conducted by Girl Guides of Canada through an online poll of 246 girls ages 14-17+ between April 17 and 22, 2020.

#### About Girl Guides of Canada

Girl Guides of Canada–Guides du Canada (GGC) empowers every girl in Guiding to discover herself and be everything she wants to be. In Guiding, girls from 5-17 meet with girls their own age in a safe, supportive and inclusive space to explore what matters to them. Guiding is where girls take the lead, put their ideas into action and jump into a range of empowering activities – all with the support of women mentors committed to positively impacting girls' lives. As the country's leading organization for girls, Girl Guides of Canada conducts unique research into how girls in Canada feel about a range of important topics and the emerging pressures they face today.

For inquiries, contact [media@girlguides.ca](mailto:media@girlguides.ca)

Published May 2020. Available online at [girlguides.ca/COVID19Life](https://girlguides.ca/COVID19Life)

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