

GIRLS FIRST

Canadian girls in today's world

In order to ensure that we are well positioned to meet the needs of Canadian girls today and into the future, Girl Guides of Canada—Guides du Canada (GGC) launched Girls First, a comprehensive five-year review and revision of our programming and program delivery. As part of our goal to strengthen our ability to deliver relevant and engaging programming, GGC undertook a comprehensive review of current research on the cognitive, physical, emotional and social factors that impact the lives of Canadian girls. This research provides a unique insight into today's world from a girls' perspective and will help shape both the content and delivery of our programming moving forward.

Below are some of the most notable findings from this research report:

Mental health is an important issue for Canadian youth:

- In Canada 14 - 20% of youth 12 - 19 suffer from a diagnosable mental health disorder; 50% of mental health issues develop by age 14 and 75% by age 24.
- Up to 25% of individuals meet the criteria for depression at some point during the teenage years and 12% of female youth experience a major depressive episode between the ages of 12 and 19. There is a sharp rise in the incidence of depression in girls at age 13.
- Only 50% of youth would reach out for help if needed; the other 50% don't for fear of losing friends, looking weak, being ostracized, or due to the lack of a confidant.
- Depressive episodes can be prevented from developing into depression through strong social networks, coping mechanisms, and high self-esteem.
- GGC has a role to play by providing safe spaces, providing emotional literacy, building self-esteem and confidence, and promoting nature as a space for healing.

Many women and girls in Canada are exposed to violence:

- It is estimated that half of all girls and women in Canada over the age of 15 have experienced physical or sexual violence. For GGC members, this potentially translates to 36,903 girls who have experienced or will experience violence.
- Girls are 56% more likely to be a victim of family violence than boys and eight-times more likely than boys to be a victim of sexual violence.
- Girls who are exposed to violence experience emotional stress that can harm their cognitive development. They may exhibit limited social skills, sleep problems, risky or delinquent behaviour.

- GGC can educate girls about their rights and how to exercise them and guide them toward confidence and self-esteem.

We live in a wired world where social contexts have changed for youth:

- 18% of teens report cyberbullying others, peaking between grades 7 - 10 (12 - 15 years old).
- The repercussions of cyberbullying include difficulty forming relationships, low grades, anxiety and self-harming behaviours and other mental health issues.
- Those with low self-esteem and minority groups are most at risk.
- GGC can provide safe spaces and rights-respecting environments, build resilience, interpersonal skills and peer support, and teach girls about digital citizenship.

Traditional bullying still impacts girls' lives:

- Traditional bullying (TB) peaks in grade 9 for girls in Canada.
- 34% of 9 - 17 year olds have been victims of TB during the school year, of which 27% were victims of cyberbullying in Canada.
- GGC can offer programming that gives girls information about their rights, the rights of others, and how to exercise them.

Body image remains an issue for girls:

- 80 - 90% of individuals with eating disorders are girls and women.
- Poor body image is directly related to feelings of low self-worth, shame, depression, inferiority of cognitive and physical abilities.
- GGC can help girls and women through teaching media literacy and promoting health and self-esteem.

Social development for girls in rural communities is impacted by several factors:

- Distance from medical facilities and reduced services.
- Higher rates of mental health issues.
- Girls and women in rural communities site gossip as a serious concern, adding to feelings of isolation and marginalisation.
- Fewer and lower quality youth programs; programs do not reflect values of the many First Nations communities that live in rural areas.
- Considering that approximately 26% of GGC members live in rural or remote areas, GGC can find its niche in rural and remote environments through helping to build strong communities and by providing relevant programs for girls that will lead to increased confidence and self-esteem

Sexual orientation and gender identity is another important social factor:

- About 5% of the population identifies as a sexual and/or gender minority, which potentially translates to 3,682 girl members.
- There are challenges in some communities around differing norms about privacy and gender roles.
- Being inclusive to groups including the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community is an opportunity for GGC to create safe spaces while celebrating diversity.

Girl Guides has a role to play in positive youth development:

- Youth programs that promote positive youth development are more likely to be active in their community, be active and engaged citizens, exhibit healthy habits, avoid delinquent behaviours and pursue careers in science, technology and engineering.
- 83% of confident women in Canada had a positive female role model in their youth.
- GGC is perfectly poised to provide positive youth development programs to girls so that they may be better equipped to respond to these challenges.