



Ohio

State of the Girl

REPORT



Report commissioned by
Girl Scout Councils serving Ohio

Are Ohio's girls okay?

A letter from the CEOs

Together, Ohio Girl Scout Councils gathered hard-hitting data and statistics to evaluate the state of girls. This report of our findings will help us, and the entire community, better understand girls, so we can ignite change.

We had heard from girls and families that girls are struggling and the research in this report confirms it. What we found is that girls today face significant challenges that affect their ability to thrive physically, socially, mentally, and academically.

Girl Scouts has 113 years of experience in meeting girls' needs. Our national programming is designed to develop healthy relationships, strong sense of self, and positive values. We are committed to ensuring all girls, regardless of socioeconomic background, race, or ability, have access to opportunities to succeed. But Ohio's girls need more. They need more advocates, more mentors, and more opportunities that help them build confidence and skills for the future.

Our goal in creating this report is to serve as a credible source of data in our communities that will generate new efforts, actions, and investments to improve the lives of girls in our state. The more we understand their needs, the better equipped we will be to advocate for them and create meaningful, lasting change.

Today's girls are resilient but face many challenges. In this report, you'll find key insights we've learned about the state of girls in Ohio, as well as potential ways that our communities can step up to ensure that Ohio's girls recognize their worth, value their unique abilities, and have the tools they need to lead fulfilling lives.

Girls deserve better. Join us in building a future where all girls have the opportunity to be their best selves.



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girl scouts 
of black diamond



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**Thank you to our
project partners!**

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The Center for Community Solutions designed the report.

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Executive Summary

Real life is never simple. Girls' lives are complicated and messy — **but Ohio girls are also resilient.**

Girls face serious challenges.

56%

of Ohio girls in grades 9-12 reported feeling sad or hopeless, 32% seriously considered attempting suicide in 2021 and 15% reported a suicide attempt in 2021.

39%

of Ohio middle school girls and 28% of high school girls were bullied online in 2021. Bullying and cyber-bullying negatively impacts girls' emotional well-being.

27%

of girls were chronically absent from school in 2022-23, and the percent of girls proficient in math, science, and English Language Arts decreased between 5th and 8th grades.

18%

of Ohio girls in grades 9-12 reported experiencing sexual dating violence in 2021, increasing by 64% between 2019 and 2021. Sexual dating violence puts girls' physical safety at risk.



“

Right now is a hard time in society, especially for girls and young girls at that. [Girls] want to feel wanted and not left out...

They want to feel loved, wanted, and seen.

- 8th grade girl, 2023 ROX Report

“

In 2023, being a Gen Z girl means navigating a world of unprecedented change, challenges, and opportunities.

- Kennedy, Girl Scout of Ohio's Heartland Alum



Girls are resilient.

95%

of girls ages 6-18 had health insurance. In addition, Ohio teen birth rates decreased steadily between 2013 and 2022.

91%

of girls graduated from high school in 2022-23, a higher rate than boys. Girls also enrolled in higher education at a higher rate than boys.

More 25 to 39 year old women in Ohio reported they attained a STEM or STEM-related bachelor's degree than in past years.

48%

of girls participated in clubs or organizations, a higher rate than boys in 2021-22, and 55% of girls participated in sports, in 2021-22 a similar rate to boys.

Organized activities, like Girl Scouts, benefit Ohio's girls.

In addition to the health and developmental benefits of social engagement, a meta-analysis of studies examining organized activities found positive connections between organized activities and involved youth's moral and civic development.

Organized activities encompass a wide range of possible involvements for girls, including clubs and activities like 4-H, Girls Who Code, FFA, and Girl Scouts. They also include sports and unofficially recognized clubs like chess, art, or theater.

“

Girl Scouts needs us. It takes all of us to be able to support girls to be who they are in life and paving the way.

Girl Scouts paved the way for me.

- Jen R., OhioHealth, Girl Scout Supporter

“

This [Girl Scouts] is a place where you can affect young people's lives, give girls the opportunities they might not otherwise have, to become leaders, to invest in them, to help them learn skills.

- Jim M., DHL and GSOH Board Member

Learn more about this project, our data sources, or Ohio girl data specific to your county



Call to Action



Girl Scouts in Ohio believe that caregivers, youth program providers, state policy makers, and schools can work together to reduce these challenges and to build girls' resiliency, to positively impact girls' overall wellness.

Together, we need to:

- 1** Increase girls' access to positive, challenging activities and supportive adults, to build girls' self-confidence and resilience at every stage of development.
- 2** Address interpersonal aggression, including cyberbullying and dating violence, through prevention and support, to reduce its occurrence and the long-term impact on girls' mental health.
- 3** Provide access to mental health resources, including through programs, interventions and licensed mental health services.

Girls' capacity to thrive increases when they have safe spaces to grow emotionally and physically, when they are surrounded by supportive adults, when they are introduced to new experiences that help them develop new skills, and when they stay physically active and socially connected. **We have the ability to increase girls' access to these conditions.**

Caregivers

You are the first and most important caring adult in your girls' lives.

Listen & Learn

Engage in active listening daily with your girl so that she trusts that you are a safe place for her to share her reality. Display curiosity and support for the challenges she faces each day. Seek resources to help her develop resilience.

Encourage & Explore

Help your girl to explore and discover her interests and strengths. Encourage her to overcome academic challenges and help her discover the new skills she can develop through persistence. Join her in researching potential career opportunities that align to her unique strengths.

Create Community

Girls thrive when they have relationships with caring adults who support them. Connect your girl with community organizations and caring adult mentors that help her develop her unique gifts. Join a Girl Scout troop with your daughter so you can join her as she explores interests, learns to address community problems and develops friendships.



Youth Program Providers

Girls thrive when they have access to experiential learning, healthy relationships, team-based challenges and opportunities to take risks in a safe environment.

Be Informed

There are unique differences in the lived experiences and learning needs of girls and boys. Provide boys and girls with relational aggression prevention programming to stem the tide of physical and cyber bullying and dating violence.

Support Staff

Provide program staff access to resources and professional development to support today's girls. Provide mental health and trauma-informed training to adapt program delivery to the needs of participants.

Policymakers

The systems across Ohio impact the lived experiences of the girls in our communities, and you play a critical role in creating a better future for girls.

Provide Resources

Fund mental health resources and provide access to programming that supports girls' resilience. Address youth online safety to increase development of positive social networks and decrease cyberbullying.

Collaborate in Education

Enable schools to collaborate with evidence-based program providers that contribute to academic achievement, social emotional learning and career exploration to prepare girls for the jobs of Ohio's future workforce.

Support Safe Communities

Fund and provide access to in-school and after-school programming, including on school campuses, that contribute to increased attendance, healthy relationships, experiential learning and youth leadership development.

Schools

Parents tell us that they need access to additional resources for their youth, and that schools are the center of community where they seek that support. We know that a lot is already asked of our schools. Below are potential focus areas that you may already be developing.

Prepare Girls for the Future

Assess and target the gaps in meeting student needs and challenges to girls' successful progression from 3rd through 8th grade. Build the academic foundation to prepare girls for the jobs of the future. Teach digital literacy, personal safety online and cybersecurity.

Develop Faculty & Staff

Provide professional development in trauma-informed mental health and social emotional learning to ensure teachers and staff have the skills to meet girls' mental health and academic needs.

Enforce Policies

Ensure staff and faculty have the awareness and support they need to consistently enforce school harassment, bullying and violence prevention policies.

Collaborate

Team with evidence-based programs to further achievement in social-emotional learning standards that cultivate a positive school culture. Partner in experiential learning that expands girls' access to new topics and skills and improves academic achievement.



Demographics of Ohio Girls

Girls under 18 in Ohio, have grown increasingly diverse, mirroring national trends. Poverty rates for women have increased, but for Ohio households with girls under 18, the poverty rate has remained flat. Health insurance rates are high for girls, with under 5% having no insurance and 36% having public health insurance.

Demographic data are provided by the U.S. Census, which uses the following definitions:

Race: The racial categories included in the census questionnaire generally reflect a social definition of race recognized in this country and not an attempt to define race biologically, anthropologically, or genetically. In addition, it is recognized that the categories of the race item include racial and national origin or sociocultural groups.

Sex: The determination of male/female population based on biological attributes such as chromosomes, anatomy, hormones, etc.

Ohio girls by race and ethnicity, in 2022

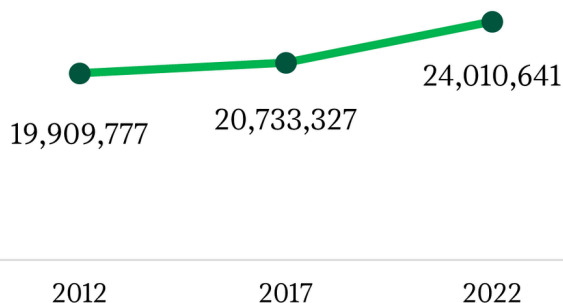
	Count	Percent
American Indian	1,807	0.14%
Asian	30,798	2.43%
Black	182,213	14.4%
Hispanic	85,674	6.77%
Native Hawaiian	587	0.05%
White	902,974	71.34%
Some other race	23,259	1.84%
Two or more races	124,072	9.80%

NOTE: The number of Ohio females and males in each demographic category is similar and therefore not provided.

The number of BIPOC girls in Ohio increased 21.1% between 2012 and 2022



The number of BIPOC girls in the U.S. increased 20.5% between 2012 and 2022



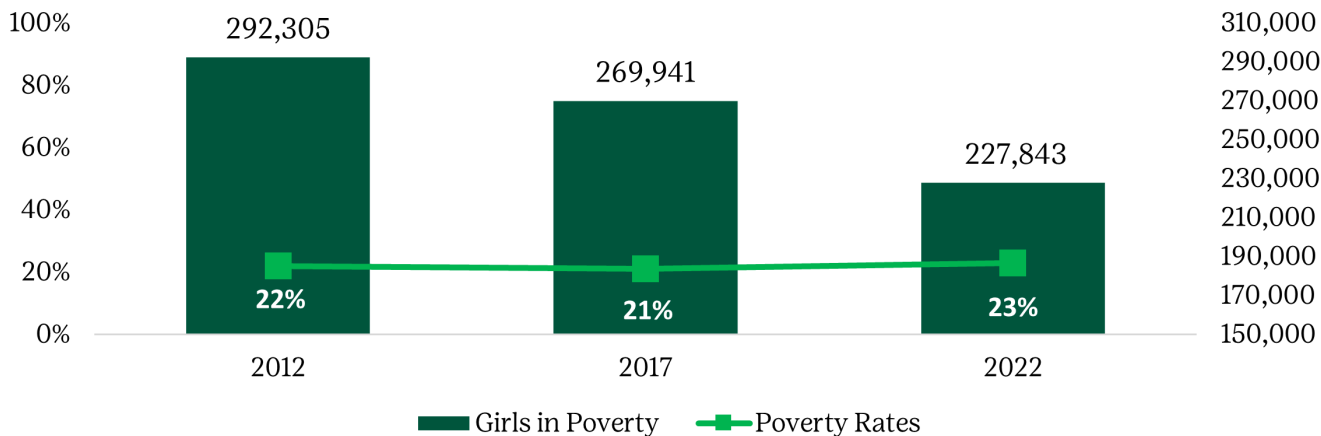
The population of Ohio females under 18 has grown increasingly diverse at about the same rate as the national average.



Poverty

The national poverty rate is currently higher than before the COVID-19 pandemic. In general, U.S. females of all ages report higher poverty rates than males. **Poverty rates for Ohio girls have remained steady since 2012.**

As Ohio population has decreased, so has the total number of girls living in poverty, however the rate has remained steady



Healthcare

More than 1.2 million Ohio females between the ages of 6-18 were covered by health insurance in 2022, but 61,956 girls had no coverage.

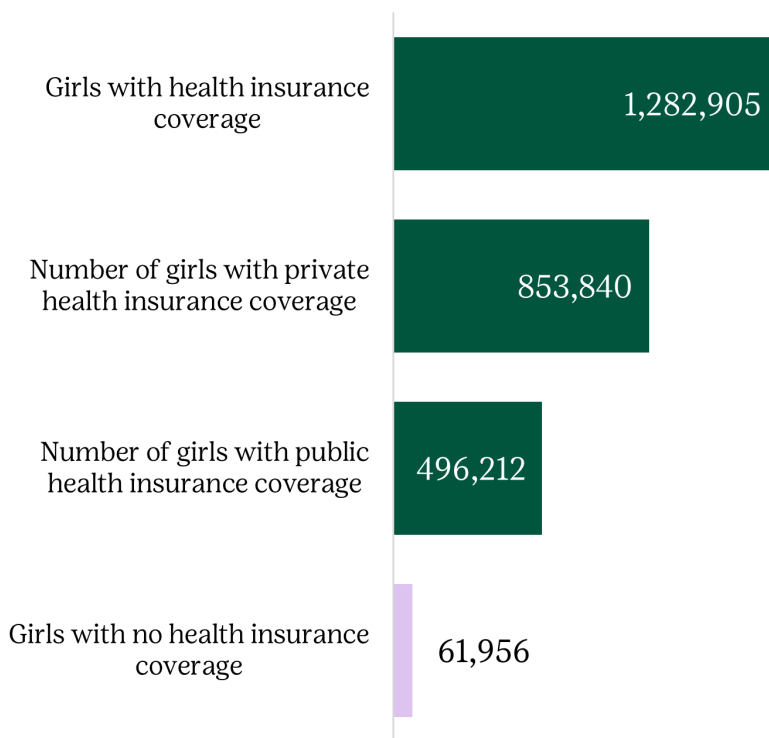
Health insurance coverage in childhood increases the likelihood of children:

- becoming healthy adults,
- having stable employment, and
- receiving less public assistance ¹

1 in 5

Ohio girls went to the emergency room at least once in 2022, which was slightly less than 21% of boys.²

Over 95% of girls in Ohio have health insurance



Physical Wellness of Ohio Girls

Girls face challenges to their physical wellbeing. Only 16% of Ohio girls participate in recommended levels of physical activity. Even more concerning, levels of sexual dating violence have substantially increased for Ohio girls. More positively, Ohio teen birth rates continue to fall.

Exercise and Wellness

The World Health Organization advises that children aged 5 to 17 engage in at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day. Activities can include play, games, and organized exercise such as after-school sports and physical education classes.³

Research highlights that increased variety and duration of exercise is linked to numerous health benefits:

- reduced risk of depression
- enhanced academic performance
- support for a healthy weight

However, only 16% of Ohio girls meet this threshold through exercise, playing a sport, or participating in a physical activity, compared with 25% of boys.

Despite participating in more exercise, boys have somewhat similar body-mass index rates (BMI) to girls. Only 59% of girls have a healthy weight, with 6% underweight and 35% either overweight or obese. In comparison, 55% of boys have a healthy weight, with 7% underweight, and 38% either overweight or obese.

What is the best thing you did in Girl Scouts this year and what made it so special for you?

**“ Learn how to take care of my body.
We did yoga and Zen gardens. I got to relax.**

- A Girl Scout of Western Ohio



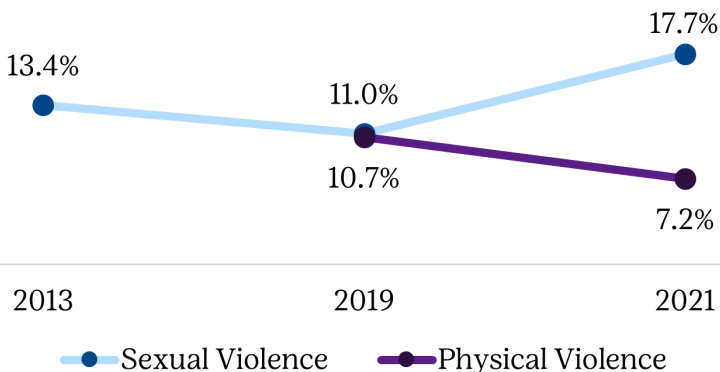
Sexual and Physical Dating Violence

Ohio girls in grades 9-12 who reported experiencing sexual dating violence at the hands of a partner, increased in 2021 to 18%. Rates of physical dating violence, which is defined as being physically hurt on purpose by someone they were dating have decreased since 2013.

A 2020 meta-analysis indicated that the risk factors for teen dating violence include:⁴

- substance use
- risky sexual behaviors
- suicide attempts
- eating disorders

Physical violence has decreased while sexual violence has increased for girls in dating relationships



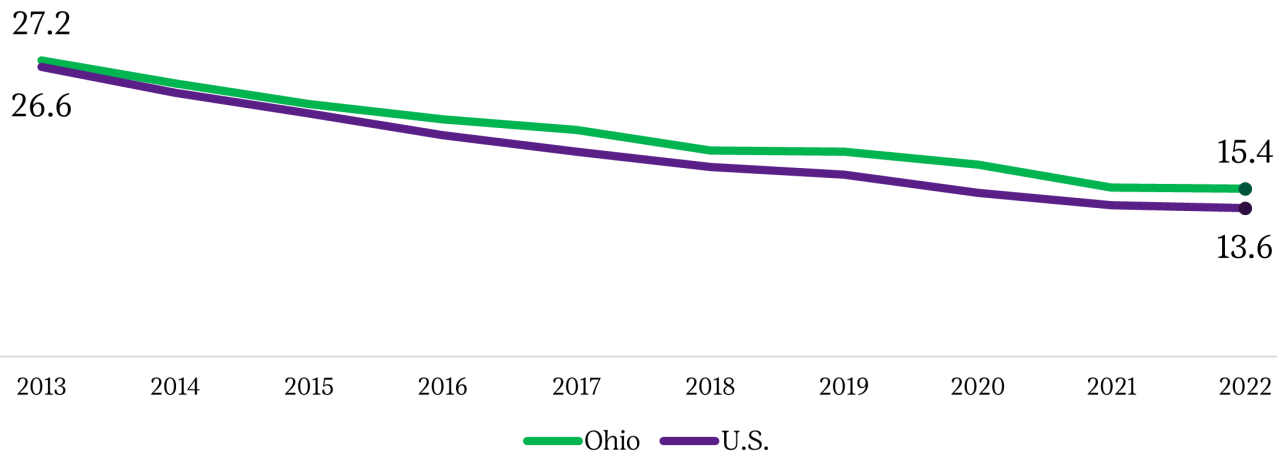
Love is Respect Hotline

If you are experiencing relationship violence, call the Hotline at 1-866-331-9474 or text "LOVEIS" to 22522. Services are available 24/7/365.

Teen Births

National teen birth rates peaked in 1991 with a birth rate of 61.8 births per 1,000 girls aged 15 to 19. Although slightly higher than national average, teen birth rates have declined dramatically in Ohio and nationally since 2013.

The teen birth rate (per 1000 girls) has been steadily decreasing in both Ohio and the nation



Emotional Wellness of Ohio Girls

Ohio girls face a range of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) associated with negative physical and mental health outcomes. More than half of high school girls reported feeling sad or hopeless, while nearly 40% of girls in need of services reported some level of difficulty accessing mental health treatment. In addition, only 54% of Ohio children reported having a caring adult who they can talk to about their feelings all or most of the time.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) refers to adversities many children experience before the age of 18. Research shows that as the number of ACEs increases, so does the risk of various negative medical and mental health outcomes in adulthood. In Ohio, boys and girls experience similar percentages of ACEs, with one-fifth of the children reporting at least one adverse childhood experience.

When Ohio caregivers were asked about their children’s experiences, 13% of households with girls indicated they had struggled somewhat often or very often to cover the basics like food or housing, while 57% of families reported they never struggled and 30% rarely struggled during the child’s lifetime.

Ohio caregivers reported girls in their household had faced other adverse childhood experiences, with 21% of girls experiencing parent or guardian divorce or separation.

Adverse Childhood Experiences reported by caregivers of girls in Ohio, in 2021-2022

Parent or guardian divorced or separated	21%
Hard to cover the basics, like food or housing, on family’s income	13%
Lived with anyone who was mentally ill, suicidal, or severely depressed	10%
Lived with anyone who had a problem with alcohol or drugs	8%
Parent or guardian served time in jail	7%
Witnessed domestic violence	5%
Victim or witness of neighborhood violence	4%
Treated or judge unfairly because of her ethnic group	4%
Parent or guardian died	4%
Treated or judged unfairly because of health condition or disability	2%
Treated or judged unfairly because of sexual orientation or gender identity	2%



Feelings of Despair and Access to Treatment

According to the U.S. Surgeon General's 2023 Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community, adults in the United States are experiencing a public health crisis of loneliness, isolation and a lack of connection.⁵ The loneliness crisis predates the COVID-19 pandemic and may increase the risk for developing mental health challenges and an increase in premature deaths at levels comparable to daily smoking.

According to mental health practitioners, the number of people who are seeking help for stress-related disorders such as anxiety and trauma has increased since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶ Unfortunately, children under 18 are also experiencing increases in the prevalence of mental health challenges.⁷

56%

of Ohio girls in grades 9-12 reported feeling sad or hopeless, in 2021.

In 2022, 31% of Ohio girls had difficulty in obtaining mental health treatment or counseling, and 8% said it was not possible for them to obtain care.

14% of Ohio parents reported in 2022 that girls in their care had received treatment or counseling from a mental health professional within the last year.

Suicide

Girls are more likely to attempt suicide, but nearly 80% of suicide deaths in Ohio were among boys. The death rate by suicide has increased for all 10- to 17-year-old Ohioans, from 2.7 deaths per 100,000 in 2007 to 6.1 deaths per 100,000 in 2022.

Of the Ohio girls in grades 9-12 who contemplated suicide in the last 12 months,

23% made a plan about how they would take their life

15% reported a suicide attempt in 2021, compared to 4% of boys

Of these, 3% reported that the attempt resulted in an injury, poisoning, or overdose that had to be treated by a doctor or nurse.

Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

If you are experiencing mental health struggles, emotional distress, alcohol or drug use concerns, or just need someone to talk:

Call or text the hotline at 988 for free, confidential help.

Services are available 24/7/365.

Support Systems

To support healthy development, children need to have caring adults in their lives who provide support and guidance. However, only 54% of Ohio children reported in 2022 that they feel they can talk to a family member or other caring adult about their feelings all or most of the time.



Social Wellness of Ohio Girls

Ohio middle school and high school girls report experiencing bullying at much higher rates than boys - and rates increased from 2011 to 2021. Of Ohio middle school girls, 51.3% reported they were bullied in 2021. Ohio girls' participation in clubs and activities has dropped since 2016 although it remains notably higher than boys. More positively, 71% of girls reported living in safe neighborhoods in 2022.

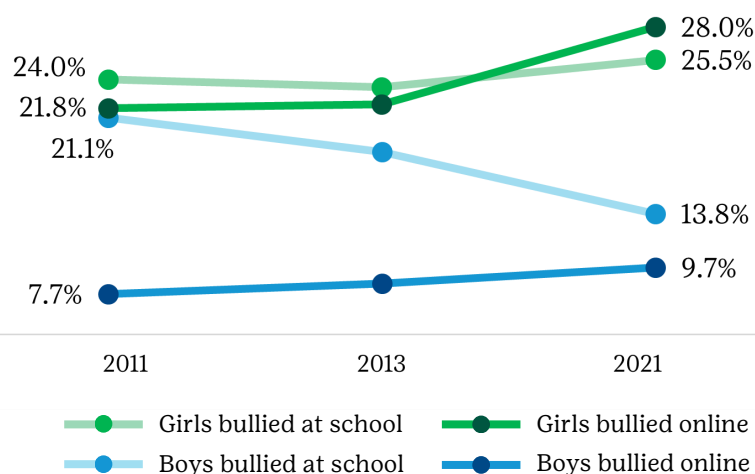
Bullying and Cyberbullying

Bullying can happen through verbal, physical, social or cyber aggression and can take place in person or online. Although bullying trends vary by age and gender, there has been a national decrease in verbal and physical bullying and an increase in cyberbullying, likely due to an increase in access to the internet and social media.⁸

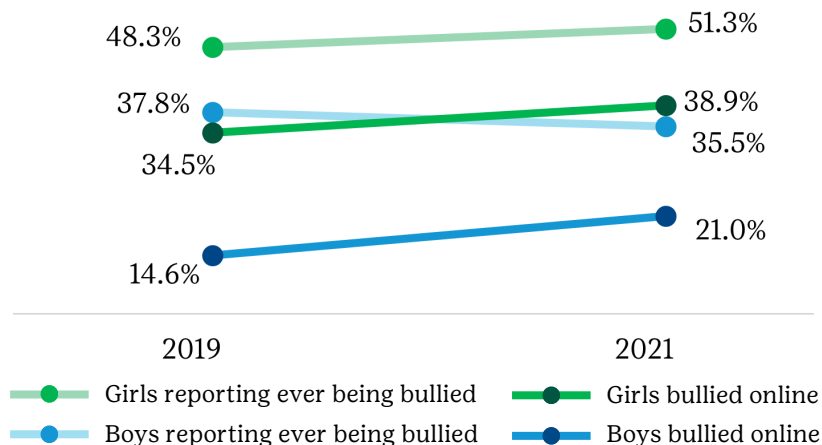
In Ohio, both middle school and high school girls reported being bullied at higher rates than boys.

Bullying increased from 2019 to 2021, affecting more than half of Ohio middle school girls in 2021 and at higher rates than middle school boys. The percentage of girls who report being bullied decreases in high school, but remains high with 28% of girls reporting being electronically bullied in 2021.

High School aged girls report bullying at higher rates than boys both in school and online



51.3% of Ohio middle school girls reported being bullied in 2021



Community Support and Engagement

Depending on the conditions, neighborhoods can provide an important place of connection for girls or can contribute to their anxiety and loneliness. In Ohio, only 8% of girls lived in neighborhoods with no amenities such as parks, recreation centers, sidewalks, or libraries. Almost half of Ohio girls (43%) live near all four types of amenities. Most girls also lived in safe neighborhoods (71%), while 4% did not live in a safe neighborhood in 2022.

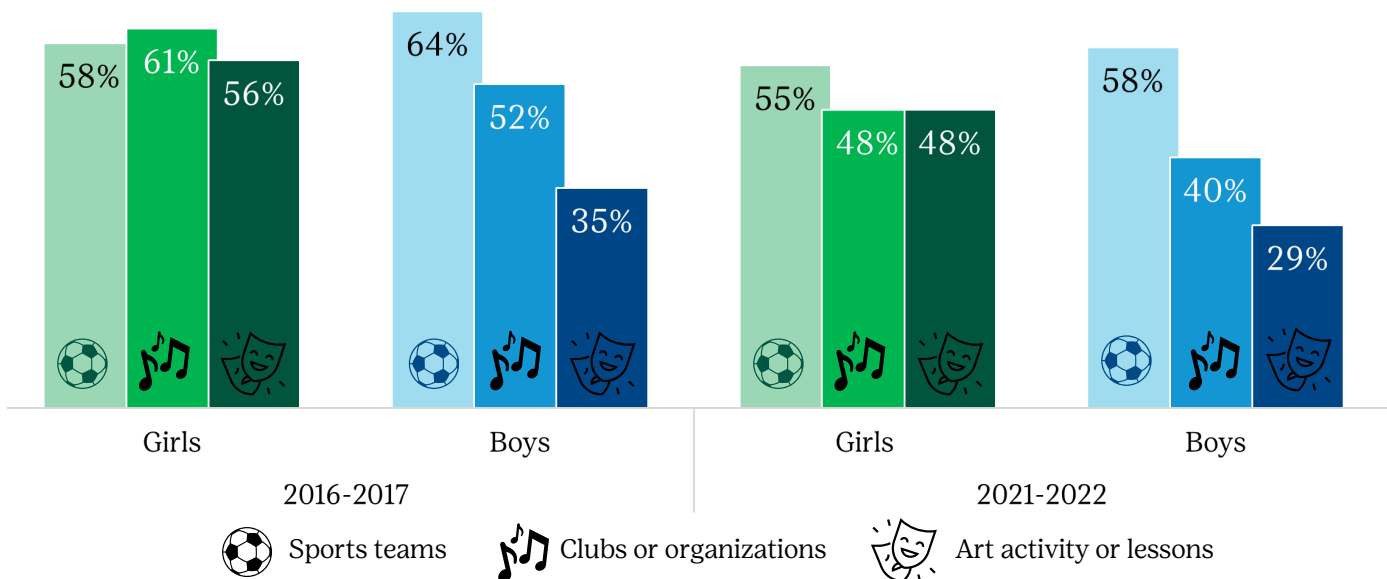
43%

of Ohio girls lived in neighborhoods that had all four amenities: parks, recreation centers, sidewalks, and libraries.

Participation in Activities

Ohio girls participated in clubs and activities such as dance, language lessons, or arts more than boys. The percentages of Ohio boys and girls ages 6-17 who participated in sports were similar over time, although participation for both boys and girls has decreased since 2016. This may, in part, be due to the impact of the pandemic that was still occurring in 2021-2022.

Participation in activities declined between 2016 and 2022 for children in Ohio



What is the best thing you did in Girl Scouts this year and what made it so special for you?

“The best thing that I did was make good friends. At school I was being picked on. In Girl Scouts everyone is my friend.”

- A Girl Scout of Western Ohio



Academics of Ohio Girls



More than a quarter of K-12 students in Ohio did not attend school regularly in 2022-2023. Girls scored higher in English skills, while in math and science, younger boys did slightly better than girls, but more striking is that the gap closed by 8th grade, while proficiency fell in math for both boys and girls. Women go to college at higher rates than men and STEM degrees have increased among Ohio women, but nationally, women are underrepresented in STEM fields.

Proficiency and Attendance

More than a quarter of K-12 students in Ohio did not attend school regularly in 2022-2023, with 27% of girls and 27% of boys facing chronic absenteeism, which is defined as a student missing 10% or more of school days for any reason, including excused and unexcused absences.

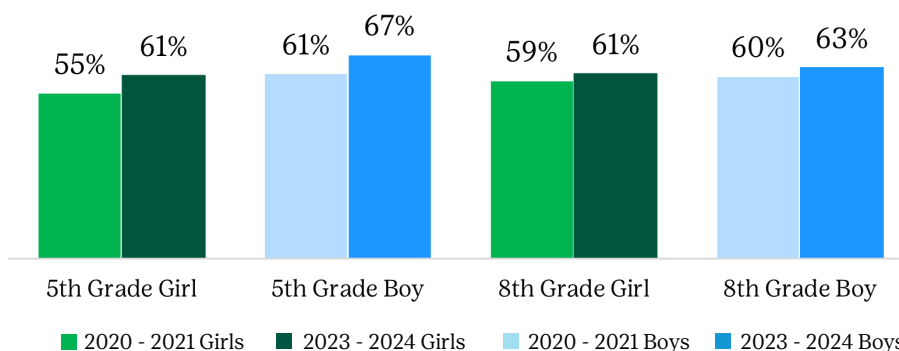
1,611,956
students were enrolled in K-12 public and non-public education in Ohio in 2022-2023.

The importance of consistent school attendance cannot be overstated, as research has indicated poor school performance is associated with lower educational achievement, lack of social support,⁹ increased inflammation and reduced immune system functions,¹⁰ and a higher likelihood of smoking, drug use, and a sedentary lifestyle.¹¹

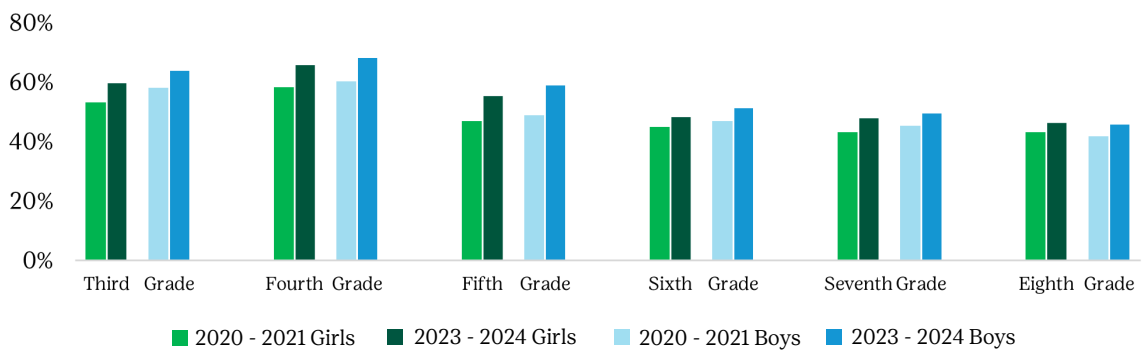
Starting in third grade, Ohio students take state achievement tests aligned with Ohio's Learning Standards. These tests aim to ensure students are meeting or exceeding grade level standards and expectations for subjects including English Language Arts (ELA), math, and science. A higher percentage of Ohio girls met proficiency standards in ELA than boys between 2020 and 2024.

By 8th grade the science and math proficiency gaps closed. Both boys' and girls' math and science proficiency scores showed improvement from 2021 to 2024.

Between 5th and 8th grade, the *science proficiency gap* closed between Ohio girls and boys



Among Ohio's boys and girls, the *math proficiency* gap closed by 8th grade, but scores for both fell between 4th and 8th grade



Graduation and Higher Education

91% of Ohio girls graduated high school in 2022-2023, compared to 87% of boys.

Nationally, women are more likely to go to college, with men being underrepresented in post-secondary education dating back to the 1990s.¹²

Ohio's public universities have a similar trend, with female enrollment outnumbering males at every type of higher education institution in fall 2023.

Ohioans aged 25 to 39 earned degrees in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) and STEM-related degrees at a slightly lower rate than the national average in 2015 and 2022. However, 25 to 39 year old women in Ohio who reported in 2022 that they had attained a STEM or STEM-related bachelor's degree had increased, from 36% to 39%. Still, national data show that women are underrepresented in STEM fields.¹³

Ohio Undergraduate Enrollment Fall 2023

	Female	Male
Community College	91,114	67,013
University Branch Campus	33,921	22,104
University Main Campus	109,287	93,356
Total	234,322	182,473

STEM and STEM-related careers

	2015		2022	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
National Average	38.7%	49.3%	41.1%	50.1%
Ohio Average	36.4%	46.5%	39.2%	47.0%



Deeper Dive

When considering the intersection of girls' social, emotional and physical health as well as academic success, three areas were identified where Ohio girls especially may need more support: **Bullying, body image, and STEM interest and careers.**

This section further explores these issues through national data and research but are not intended to be a comprehensive summary of all available data on the topics. This initial review may serve as a foundation for future stages of this project. Interestingly, building girls' confidence in themselves and providing support from caring adults are strategies that can address all three of these issues.

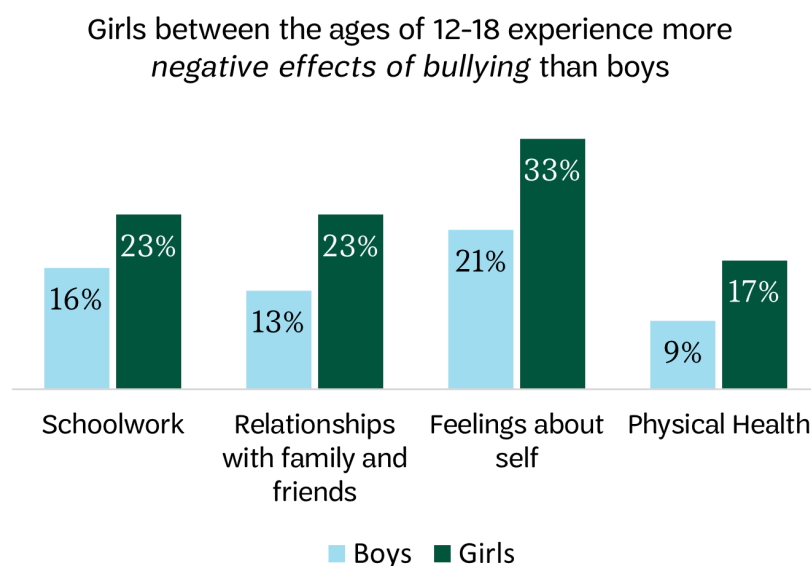
Bullying

Girls in Ohio consistently report higher rates of bullying and cyberbullying than boys ([see page 14](#)). This is of particular concern because many research studies have noted that being bullied has significant negative effects on physical health such as reduced sleep, increased stress hormones, and impaired brain functioning.¹⁴

Bullying also contributes to anxiety, depression, and self-harming behavior (especially for girls).¹⁵ Being bullied is also linked to issues with substance abuse and violence as well as poor academic performance.¹⁶

Nationally, girls also report anticipating more ongoing bullying than boys. According to the 2022 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey, females ages 12-18 who had been bullied were more likely to report that they anticipated the bullying to continue (46%) than males (36%).

Females who were bullied also reported experiencing more negative effects academically, socially, mentally, and physically than males.

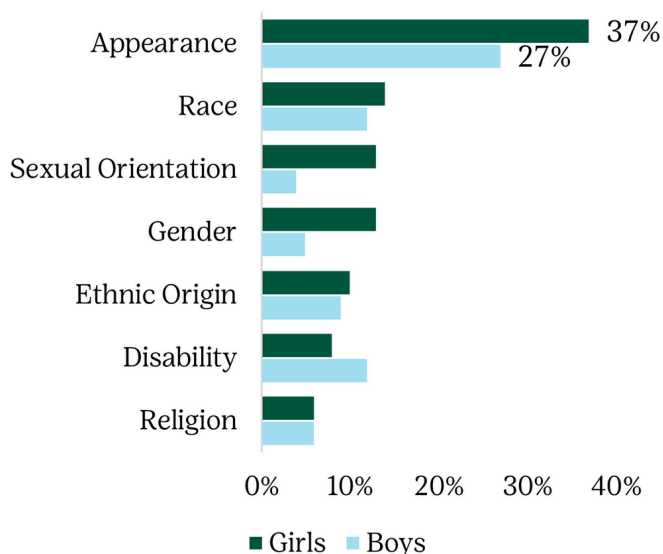


Females were also more likely than males to perceive that the bullying was related to their gender, sexual orientation, and appearance.

In a separate study, Black girls reported experiencing higher levels of harassment at school due to their race, gender, and appearance.¹⁷

Cyberbullying is especially a concern because of its prevalence and potential for devastating effects. Depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation rates are higher for victims of cyberbullying than for people who experience other types of bullying.¹⁸ Pew Research Center conducted a national survey in 2022 that found that 43% of boys and 49% of girls ages 13 to 17 reported experiencing cyber-bullying.¹⁹

Both boys and girls are most likely to be bullied for their appearance



One reason why girls, especially older teens, may experience higher rates of cyber-bullying is that they are more frequent users of social media.

Students who use the internet for three or more hours per day are more likely to be perpetrators, victims, and perpetrators–victims of cyberbullying.²⁰ The Pew Research Center study - Teens, Social Media and Technology 2023 - found that 46% of teens say they use the internet almost constantly.²¹ High school girls reported experiencing the most overall cyberbullying and were also more likely to be victims of each type of cyberbullying other than physical threats.

Students Who Experienced Types of Cyberbullying

	Any cyberbullying	Offensive name-calling	Spreading of false rumors about them	Receiving explicit images, they didn't ask for	Constantly being asked where they are, what they're doing, or who they're with by someone other than their parent	Physical threats	Having explicit images of them shared without their consent
Boys 13 - 14	41%	31%	15%	11%	12%	10%	3%
Boys 15 - 17	44%	32%	16%	18%	13%	10%	7%
Girls 13 - 14	41%	25%	24%	10%	12%	9%	5%
Girls 15 - 17	54%	36%	33%	25%	20%	10%	9%



Students who witness someone else being cyberbullied may also be at risk for mental health issues.²² Witnesses may not know how to respond when they see others being bullied, resulting in feeling more anxious and helpless. They may also take the wrong kind of action, which could negatively affect their mental health and even result in suicidal ideation.²³

Strategies to reduce bullying and cyberbullying

The federal website [stopbullying.gov](https://www.stopbullying.gov) provides resources for kids, teens, and adults to prevent and address bullying. Some strategies include:

- ▶ Help girls establish supportive connections with caring adults
- ▶ Monitor use of social media and teach digital literacy
- ▶ Encourage schools and other organizations to provide effective anti-bullying education
- ▶ Encourage provision of mental health counseling at schools

Ohio resources for prevention and reporting of bullying

Ohio law requires schools and districts to adopt policies prohibiting harassment, intimidation, and bullying.²⁴ The Ohio Department of Education and Workforce website provides schools and families with a number of resources to address bullying.²⁵

Ohio Safer Schools Tipline

Students, staff, and parents can call or text the Ohio Safer Schools Tipline at 844-SaferOH 24 hours per day.

Body Image

A healthy body image refers to when people feel comfortable in their own body and are satisfied with their appearance and self-worth.²⁶ People with an unhealthy body image are more prone to developing serious mental health conditions, such as eating disorders and depression.²⁷

Research indicates that girls are more likely to have lower body appreciation than boys, with a gender difference in body appreciation,²⁸ but people of all genders can suffer from negative body image. Unfortunately, many girls start to worry about their weight from the ages of 6 to 10, and by age 14, 60-70% of girls start to try to lose weight and may become victims of eating disorders.²⁹

Several factors may contribute to a negative body image, including pressure from relatives and peers, exposure to unrealistic body expectations from traditional and social media, and engagement in social appearance comparisons.³⁰

A national survey by Ruling Our Experiences found that most girls experience negative messaging:³¹

57% said social media makes them want to change how they look

66% said how they feel their body makes them feel less confident

88% said they are under pressure to be pretty



Strategies to support a healthy body image

Engaging in rigorous physical activities, especially in sports, can often help adolescents realize their self-worth, promote a better mental representation of what they think of themselves,³² and promote body satisfaction.³³ Additionally, having a positive body image can influence adolescent girls to participate in more physical activities.³⁴ However, the amount of physical activity tends to decline among young and adolescent girls in the United States,³⁵ which is also noted in Ohio (see page 10).

One strategy that was found to be helpful in encouraging more physical activity is providing behavioral skills mentoring.³⁶ Appalachian teens in southern Ohio were found to improve in weight loss, body mass index, and body fat after participating in a mentoring program.³⁷

Improving digital literacy is another strategy for helping children and adolescents better identify negative body image messaging.³⁸ In addition, cultivating teenagers' ability to generate self-compassion and to receive compassion from others can facilitate a healthy body image among young people, especially girls, and reduce negative behaviors related to eating and body image.³⁹

Resources for Eating Disorders

National Alliance for Eating Disorders
Helpline: 1-866-662-1235. Resources
are available Monday through Friday,
9 AM - 7 PM ET

S.T.E.M.

Science

Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) careers have many benefits, including personal development (i.e., increase critical thinking skills, creativity, logic, innovation)⁴⁰ and economic benefits (i.e., more competitive salaries than non-STEM careers).⁴¹

Technology

Engineering

However, research shows that not enough students graduate with STEM degrees and go into STEM fields to meet societal needs.⁴² STEM jobs are also anticipated to grow in Ohio, and the state is concerned about finding enough workers to fill them.⁴³

Math

Although the number of women in STEM careers has increased in recent years, they continue to be underrepresented nationally⁴⁴ and in Ohio (see page 17). Women are also more likely to pursue STEM careers in math, biology and the physical sciences rather than engineering, which is the field that makes up 80% of the STEM workforce.⁴⁵ The reason for this gender divide in professions is not fully understood but may be due to a variety of factors, including gender stereotypes and ideas of what is considered to be a “male” or “female” field.⁴⁶

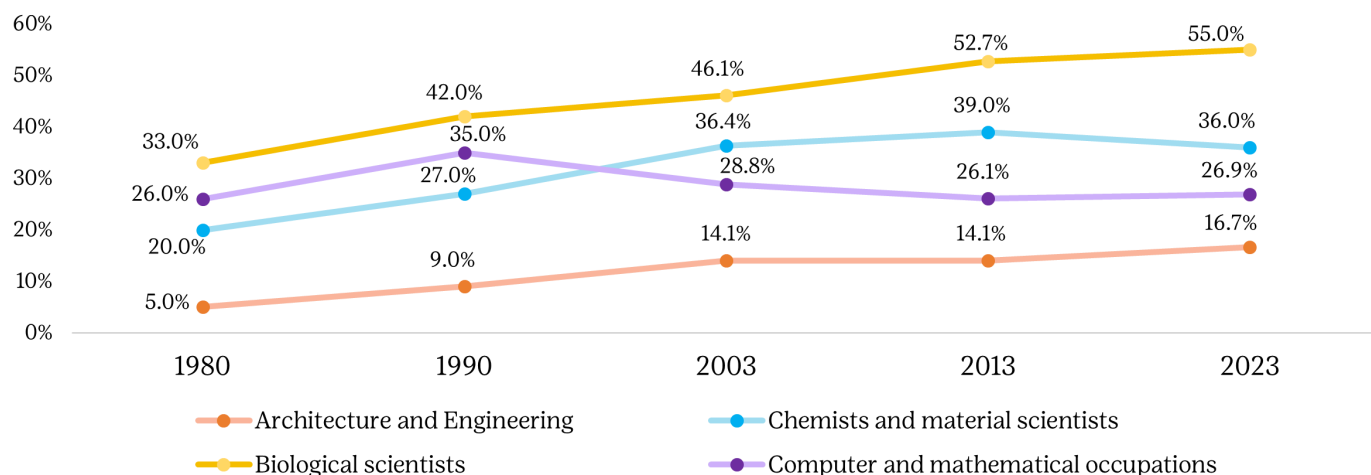


Through the many provided opportunities involving friendship, learning, skill-building, STEM and entrepreneurship, Girl Scouts has helped me to become more courageous and confident in all aspects of life.

- Brinley A., Girl Scout Junior of North East Ohio



Women in Select STEM Occupations 1980 to 2023



The Society of Women Engineers created this chart with Department of Labor data to note the number of women in biological sciences since 1980, exceeds the number of men, while only about 17% of architects and engineers are women.

Unfortunately, women in STEM fields continue to face inequity in pay, with researchers estimating women are entering the STEM work force earning \$61,000 on average annually while men on average earn an additional \$4,000 a year.⁴⁷ While the reasons for the gap in wages is unclear, one 2020 study found there may be cultural gender beliefs that contribute to feelings of self-doubt and a lack of confidence in women.⁴⁸ These doubts in self-efficacy may impact performance, leading to professional self-sorting, employer rejection, and a lack of feeling of belonging, which may impact salary.⁴⁹

Strategies to increase girls’ STEM interest and confidence

Research suggests early STEM education is crucial because student attitudes about science are largely solidified at an early age and often decline steeply in adolescence.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, girls’ interest in STEM tends to fade by 11 years old and continues to decline through the remainder of their education.⁵¹

The study did identify some successful strategies for increasing female participation in STEM initiatives, stating “it is time to stop seeing girls as the problem and accept that it might be society’s attitudes that often holds them back.”⁵²

Successful STEM initiatives had some common components:⁵³

- Build girls’ STEM identity and ability to resist existing stereotypes
- Increase awareness of STEM careers and opportunities
- Intentionally showcase women’s participation in STEM careers
- Work to shift societal perceptions of STEM careers through changes to school STEM curriculum and pedagogy to acknowledge gender inequities



Additional suggestions for increasing girls' early interest in STEM include girls-only STEM camps,⁵⁴ incorporating creative activities in STEM education,⁵⁵ and providing professional development to help educators learn to support girls' self-image as someone who belongs in STEM.⁵⁶

Overall, the key to increasing girls' interest in STEM careers is to provide early and consistent encouragement and education that counteracts negative stereotypes.

The Impact of Girl Scout STEM Programming⁵⁷

75% of Girl Scouts in middle and high school who did multiple STEM activities were interested in taking STEM classes in college, compared to only 50% among those who did not do STEM activities.

63% of Girl Scouts in middle and high school, who did multiple STEM activities aspire to a career in STEM, compared to 43% among those who did not do STEM activities.



Call to Action for Ohio's Girls

You can make choices now that increase your own well-being, and help you create an interesting and meaningful life, community of friends and opportunities for the future.

Be An Upstander

You have a unique perspective on the challenges that you and your friends face. Stand up for your beliefs – and for a community where you and other girls feel safe and are encouraged to “speak up and team up” for change. Commit to safe online practices and to developing healthy relationship skills with your friends.

Develop Your Strengths

Be curious and seek opportunities to learn about new interests and careers that build on your strengths. Develop new abilities by being willing to try “hard things” that matter to you and stick with it. Find friends and organizations that encourage you to stretch yourself.

Join After-School Programs

Seek programs that give you the opportunity to stay active and explore different interests so that you can discover your unique strengths and new potential career opportunities. Make adults aware of bullying and violence so that they can intervene. If adults don't know, they can't help.

Seek Mentors

Seek out caring adult mentors to help you navigate the unique challenges you face. There are many adults in your school and community who want to support you. Ask for help from caring adults in your school, faith or after school community to help navigate challenges.





“

I want to make the world a better place. Girl Scouts teaches you how to be respectful to the Earth and all the people around us.

- Natalie M.,
Girl Scout Brownie of North East Ohio



“

Girl Scouts has allowed me to build resilience and self-assurance. I also learned vital collaboration, communication, and problem-solving skills that have allowed me to grow as a leader.

- Kennedy,
Girl Scout of Ohio's Heartland Alum



“

Thank you, Girl Scouts, for believing in us! Thank you, Girl Scouts, for taking big steps! Thank you, Girl Scouts, for a brighter future! Thank you, Girl Scouts, for the POWER TO BECOME!

- Jasmine,
Girl Scout Junior of Ohio's Heartland



“

To me, Girl Scouts means opening up my circle and getting to meet new people and becoming more comfortable with who I am and what I can do.

- Natalie L.,
Girl Scout of North East Ohio



Thank you to the **Girl Coalition of Indiana** for their incredible work on the Indiana Girl Report, highlighting the challenges and opportunities facing girls in their state. **Together we can build a future where girls can thrive.**

Girl Scouts of Black Diamond
bdgsc.org |     

Girl Scouts of Ohio's Heartland
gsoh.org |     

Girl Scouts of North East Ohio
gsneo.org |     

Girl Scouts of Western Ohio
gswo.org |     

Find the digital report and more information about this project at OhioGirlReport.org or scan the QR code



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