

Does guiding boost girls' wellbeing?

Research by Girlguiding shows that girls' confidence drops during adolescence, but that Girlguiding's work helps mitigate this – and can even raise girls' confidence higher, on average, than boys'.



The findings

Research carried out by Girlguiding, the UK's largest youth organisation dedicated to girls, using their own survey data and Understanding Society, has found that:

- There's no statistically significant difference in girls' and boys' confidence between the ages of 10 and 11
- From 12 to 15, there is a noticeable and often increasing gap between boys' and girls' confidence
- Girls who have experienced Girlguiding have higher levels of confidence than girls who have not
- Girlguiding supports girls in mid-adolescence when they are more vulnerable to lower resilience, self-efficacy and self-worth
- Girlguiding raises its members' confidence beyond the UK youth average.

The work represents the start of a long-term project, the Impact and Experience Study, which aims to generate evidence of Girlguiding's impact on girls' and volunteers' lives.

Aims of the research

Existing research on girls' wellbeing has suggested that girls' confidence drops during adolescence due to gendered expectations, particularly around their academic success and body image. Girlguiding carried out research to gather its own evidence on the effectiveness and impact of its work.



Girlguiding aims to "help girls know they can do anything", and has around 370,000 members – 300,000 girls aged 4-18 (Rainbows, 4-7; Brownies, 7-10; Guides, 10-14; and Rangers, 14-18), and 70,000 volunteers. The organisation believes that girls face pressures and expectations in every area of their lives. Earlier research by Girlguiding shows that girls feel limited by gender stereotypes, and face barriers to accessing things they need to feel happy. Girls say they don't feel safe in their daily lives.

The Impact and Experience Study aims to analyse members' and volunteers' experiences and outcomes to find out:

- what activities, discussions and relationships girls report having during their time at Girlguiding
- the impact those experiences have on self-reported confidence, life satisfaction, resilience and community engagement, compared to national averages.

Measuring confidence

Girlguiding carried out their own survey of over 13,000 young members in 2021 and 2022. The anonymous random stratified sample represented about 4% of total membership in 2023, and was representative of the overall membership. They also used Understanding Society's youth questionnaire data from Waves 10-12, when the questions in both surveys offered the best match.

The research looked at four measures of different aspects of confidence – based on responses to four statements:

- 'I get nervous and lose confidence in new situations' – which assesses confidence and nervousness
- 'I can usually solve my own problems' – measuring self-efficacy (our belief in our ability to achieve tasks we set ourselves)
- 'I am as able as most people' – also measuring self-efficacy
- 'I feel I have a number of good qualities' – to measure self-worth

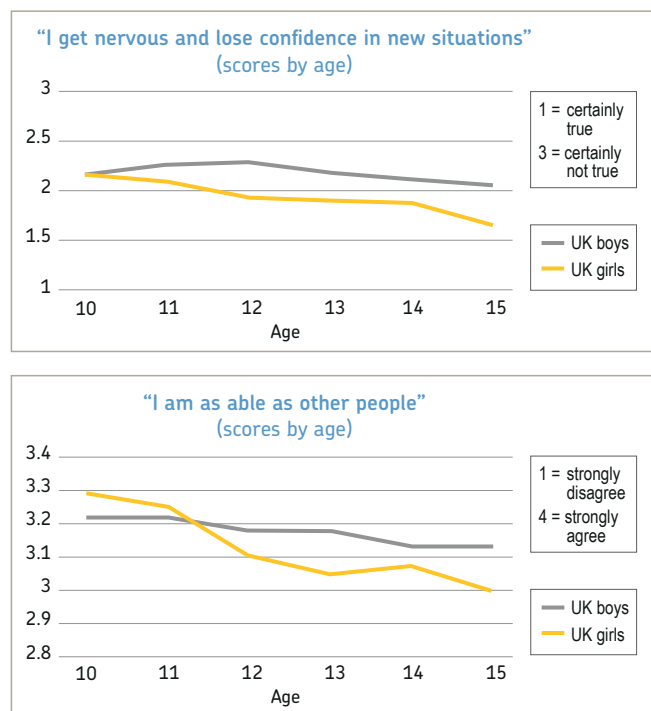
Girlguiding tested these measures using two types of analysis, mean scores from the above measures and regression analysis, reporting only findings that met a 95% confidence interval.

Confidence gap

The Understanding Society data on their own show that boys and girls have similar levels of confidence for all four measures between the ages of 10 and 11, but there is a noticeable and often increasing gap between boys' and girls' confidence between 12 and 15.

Boys are more likely to be confident, have higher self-worth and self-efficacy, and less likely to be nervous. Understanding Society data suggest that this starts at around the age of 12. When the researchers compared boys' and girls' confidence between the ages of 12 and 15, boys disagreed 17% more than girls with the statement about getting nervous in new situations at age 12. This almost doubles to 24% by age 15.

Mean confidence scores, UK boys and girls 10-15



This is all consistent with existing research which shows that girls' confidence drops during adolescence because of gendered expectations, particularly around girls' academic success and body image.

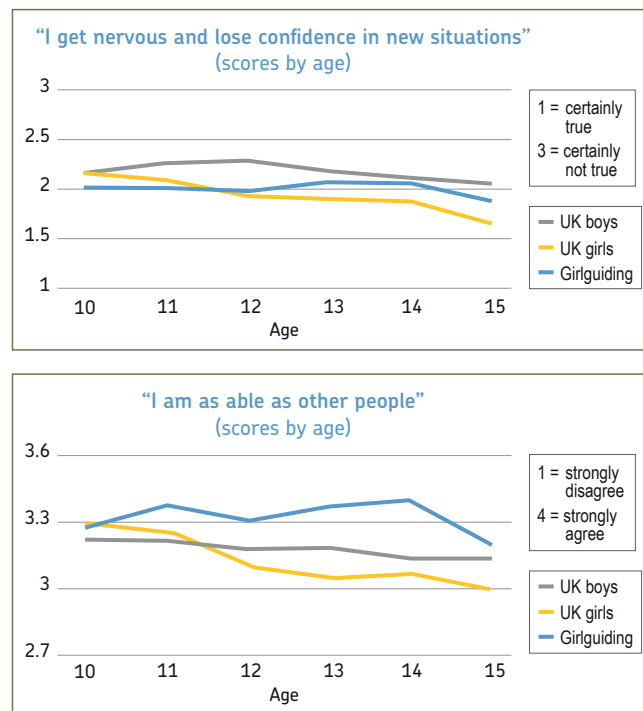
The effect of Girlguiding

When the researchers compared their own Girlguiding data with Understanding Society figures, they found that Girlguiding helps mitigate girls' lower confidence. Those in guiding experience less significant drops in confidence compared to UK girls as a whole – and guiding also supports them when they are more vulnerable to lower resilience, self-efficacy and self-worth during mid-adolescence.

Using regression modelling, they saw girls who are part of Girlguiding were between 4 and 12% more likely to report higher confidence than UK girls as a whole, with the biggest difference in responses to the question about getting nervous in new situations.

The modelling also shows that the influence of guiding increases into adolescence. Girlguiding girls aged 12 were 8% less likely to be nervous than non-Girlguiding girls – and this effect almost triples by age 15 to 23%. Looking at self-efficacy ('I am as able as other people'), this is 4% more likely for girls aged 10 in guiding, and 11% more likely by age 15.

Mean confidence scores, UK boys and girls and Girlguiding girls 10-15



Girlguiding doesn't just mitigate girls' declining confidence, though. It can also raise confidence beyond the levels reported by UK boys. Compared to UK boys and girls combined, being in Girlguiding is associated with being 3-7% more likely to report high self-efficacy and 3% more likely to report high self-worth ('I feel I have a number of good qualities').

Again, the influence of guiding increases as adolescence continues. At 12, those in Girlguiding are 14% more likely to report lower nervousness than UK youth scores as a whole – and this rises to 23% more likely by age 15. Girlguiding is also linked to 3% greater likelihood of high self-worth at age 11, and 11% greater likelihood of high self-worth at 14.

Possible causes

The researchers couldn't draw firm conclusions, but the length of time girls spend in guiding could be a factor. Older girls who are part of the movement are more likely to have joined at younger ages – as Rainbows or Brownies. It's possible that the higher scores for girls in guiding is due to the cumulative long-term effect of having a supportive community and trusting relationships with adults. Both factors have been shown to correlate positively with better girls' wellbeing outcomes in Girlguiding's wider impact evaluation.

Ultimately, the evidence suggests that Girlguiding and other girls' empowerment organisations can help to mitigate the impact of inequality on girls' wellbeing, helping to build a more equal and cohesive society for all. The Insight team at Girlguiding plans further research, working with Understanding Society and others, to learn more about how they can – in the organisation's own words – "help girls know they can do anything".



evidence suggests that Girlguiding... can help to mitigate the impact of inequality on girls' wellbeing



Results of Girlguiding's recent impact evaluation can be found in their [2023 Impact Report](#). For more information about Girlguiding and their work, please visit: www.girlguiding.org.uk.