

Speaking out about girls' wellbeing



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

A note about language

Prior to colonisation Aboriginal people primarily communicated through oral use of language, were well versed in multiple languages in order to converse with surrounding groups for different contexts and responsibilities dependant on where you were located. Seasonal movement was quite common for hunting, gathering and other related responsibilities and language was often expressed through various forms of art, dance, songs and storytelling. The written form of language where the interpretation of Aboriginal words were captured by historical documentation and later on by non-Aboriginal linguists who relied on western interpretation of sounds. This then created various forms of spelling of Aboriginal words which can differ and are often accepted and recognised. For example, Noongar, Nyungar, Noongah.

For the purposes of this report, the term 'Aboriginal' encompasses Western Australia's diverse language groups and also recognises Torres Strait Islanders who live in Western Australia. The use of the term 'Aboriginal' in this way is not intended to imply equivalence between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, though similarities do exist.

Suggested citation

Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2023,
Speaking out about girls' wellbeing, Commissioner for Children
and Young People WA, Perth

Alternative formats

On request, large print or alternative format copies of this report can be obtained from:

Commissioner for Children and Young People

Level 1, Albert Facey House, 469 Wellington Street
PERTH WA 6000

Telephone: 08 6213 2297

Freecall: 1800 072 444

Email: info@ccyp.wa.gov.au

ccyp.wa.gov.au

ISBN: 978-0-6455927-7-1



The images of Western Australian children and young people used in this report are generic and do not infer a particular school or student's involvement in the Girls' Wellbeing Survey.



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

Speaking out about girls' wellbeing



Acknowledgement of Country

The Commissioner for Children and Young People proudly acknowledges and pays respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands across Western Australia and acknowledges the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation upon whose lands the Commissioner's office is located. She recognises the continuing connection to culture, lands, skies and waters, families and communities for all the Aboriginal peoples.

The Commissioner and her team also pay their respects to all Elders, past, present and emerging leaders. They recognise the knowledge, insights and capabilities of Aboriginal people, and pay respect to Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing.

Table of contents



Message from the Commissioner	4
--------------------------------------	----------

Executive summary	6
--------------------------	----------

Key findings	7
Male and gender-diverse respondents	13
Recommendations	13

Introduction	14
---------------------	-----------

Background	16
-------------------	-----------

Role of the Commissioner	16
Advisory Committees and YARiC project	16
Girls' Wellbeing Survey	17

1. Self-esteem	20
-----------------------	-----------

Processes that shape girls' self-esteem	22
What helps girls feel good about themselves	30
Gender diverse young people's views and experiences	34
Male young people's perspectives	34
Female and gender-diverse young adults looking back	35



2. The transition from primary school to high school	36
Influences on the transition	38
What can help during the transition	43
Gender diverse young people's views and experiences	50
Female and gender-diverse young adults looking back	51
3. Belonging	52
Influences and experiences of belonging	53
Barriers to belonging	61
Gender diverse young people's views and experiences	66
Female and gender-diverse young adults looking back	67
4. Gender inequality	68
Understandings of gender inequality	69
Everyday experiences of gender inequality	70
Impact on future choices and opportunities	76
Male young people's perspectives	80
Gender diverse young people's views and experiences	82
Female and gender-diverse young adults looking back	83
Recommendations	84
For young people	85
For families and other supporting adults	86
For schools	88
Conclusion	90
Endnotes	91



Message from the Commissioner

As the Western Australian (WA) Commissioner for Children and Young People, I have a legal obligation to monitor and promote the wellbeing of children and young people under 18 years of age, with particular regard for those who are vulnerable or experience disadvantage for any reason. I fulfil this duty by undertaking a range of research projects and activities, including surveys and consultations, then reporting and publishing the findings of that research, to help improve the lives and everyday experiences of WA children and young people.

Message from the Commissioner

In 2021, my office undertook the second Speaking Out Survey (SOS21), which captured the views and experiences of 16,532 children and young people across WA. One of the key findings of SOS21 was that female young people consistently rated their wellbeing below that of their male peers, and experienced higher rates of stress and lower life satisfaction. To better understand the reasons for this gender wellbeing gap, my office developed and conducted the Girls' Wellbeing Survey.

The survey was open to anyone in WA aged 12 to 24 years and attracted 938 participants, who generously shared their views and experiences on the topics of self-esteem, the transition from primary to high school, belonging, and gender inequality.

Responses to the survey showed that many girls experience the same or similar challenges in various aspects of their lives, but also enjoy many positive experiences with family, friends, teammates and members of their communities. Participants also shared their ideas for how to better support female young people with their self-esteem, relationships, schooling and sense of belonging.

I am honoured to be able to report these valuable perspectives and hope that the voices of participants resonate with parents, families, teachers, schools and all those who have the privilege to influence and positively shape girls' lives.

My sincere thanks to all the children and young people who took part in this important piece of work.



Jaqueline McGowan-Jones
Commissioner for Children and Young People

In 2021, the Speaking Out Survey captured the views and experiences of

16,532

children and young people
throughout WA





Executive summary

A key finding from the Commissioner for Children and Young People's Speaking Out Surveys, conducted in 2019 and 2021, confirms that female young people in WA rate their wellbeing less favourably than male young people in WA.

Recent literature shows a marked and steady decline in girls' wellbeing, experienced in various aspects of their lives, as they mature into adolescence and enter high school. This decline is not as apparent for male young people. While girls and boys in primary school report similarly high levels of self-esteem, interpersonal connection, safety and belonging, this changes as they enter high school, with many female young people consistently rating their wellbeing and life satisfaction below that of their male peers.

To further explore the reasons for this gender wellbeing gap, the Commissioner for Children and Young People conducted the Girls' Wellbeing Survey, which invited anyone in WA aged 12 to 24 years to answer several open-text questions about:

- 1. Self-esteem**
- 2. The transition from primary to high school**
- 3. Belonging**
- 4. Gender inequality**

This report presents a thematic analysis of the 938 participant responses received and is the final report in the Commissioner's Girls' Wellbeing Project.

Executive summary

Key findings:

1. Self-esteem

Self-esteem is shaped by multiple, often intersecting influences in a young person's life. For respondents, there were two key interrelated processes that shape their self-esteem: receiving external validation from others and comparing themselves to others.

These processes were most evident in four key areas:

- The opinions of others
- Social comparisons
- Social media use
- Performance in school and sport

Girls told us that the opinions of people close to them are very important, but that the views of almost anyone around them can strongly impact how they feel about themselves. Girls think deeply about what others say and how they say it, and many girls said that receiving compliments boosts their self-esteem, while criticism is very diminishing. Many female young people also said they experience sexualisation in the form of unsolicited attention and comments about their bodies and appearance, particularly from males, which often leads to increased body surveillance and low self-esteem.

It is also common for girls to compare their attributes and abilities to others, including people they know and strangers they see online or in other media. Physical appearance, particularly body weight, was the most common attribute girls use to compare themselves to others. Coupled with idealising other people, especially other girls, this often results in feelings of inadequacy and enduring pressure to meet 'impossible'/'unrealistic' beauty and body weight standards. These feelings were sometimes overcome by consuming social or other media that promotes diversity and body positivity.

Many respondents said they feel immense pressure to be good at school and sport, while also being pretty, thin or attractive, and caring and responsible. Girls told us that if they are doing well in school and/or sport, they feel good about themselves, while low grades or sport performance made them feel bad about themselves. Some female young people commented that they would feel better about themselves playing sport if there was less focus on how the body looks and more emphasis on being active and healthy.

This report presents a thematic analysis of the

938
participant
responses
received

and is the final report in the Commissioner's Girls' Wellbeing Project

Questions were asked about four areas:

1. **Self-esteem**
2. **The transition from primary school to high school**
3. **Belonging**
4. **Gender Inequality**

Executive summary

Analysis of responses indicated there are four key practises that help girls feel good about themselves, including:

- Turning to supportive people
- Doing activities they enjoy
- Setting and achieving goals and having healthy habits
- Looking good

Read more about self-esteem on page 20



Girls told us that having someone supportive to turn to is critical for their self-esteem. Being able to “be myself” without feeling judged underpins the extent girls feel supported by their parents, friends and other people in their lives. Similarly, participants said that having support to do activities they enjoy, and to set and achieve their own goals helps them discover their own likes and strengths, which boosts their self-esteem.

Girls who engage in healthy habits, including being active, playing sport, eating well, getting enough sleep, taking time for ‘self-care’ and having a positive mindset reported how helpful these practises are for improving their self-esteem. ‘Looking good’ was also important to girls and was often linked to feeling confident about expressing their identity through clothing, hair, or makeup.

2. The transition from primary school to high school

The transition from primary to high school is a critical time that coincides with the onset of puberty when young people undergo rapid physical and neurological maturation. It is also a period of identity formation during which young people become increasingly independent from parents and family and start to reflect more on who they are and the people and things that are important to them.

While participants reported a spectrum of experiences, there were three key influences on the transition to high school, including friendships, the cultural shift into a different social landscape, and how prepared they felt for the change.

For most participants, friendships were critical to how well they adjusted to high school. Those who moved to high school with existing friends or who were able to make new friends relatively easily, found the transition easier than those who struggled to keep or make friends. This is consistent with other research showing that the quality and duration of friendships is very important to girls.

Executive summary

Respondents also frequently commented on the cultural shift into a new social landscape that was very different from primary school. Larger campuses and more older students were intimidating for many students, who felt particularly vulnerable if they did not 'fit in', or if they got lost and needed help to find classes.

Students who felt unprepared for the many changes that came with high school, often reported a negative high school transition experience, saying the jump in workload and social and behavioural expectations was a shock. Some students however, enjoyed the new structures and experiences of learning in high school.

Overwhelmingly, students want to feel more prepared and supported as they make the leap from primary to high school.



Analysis of responses revealed five key areas that students feel would be most helpful for the transition, including:

- Transition programs in primary school
- Secondary school programs to support them once at high school
- Feeling supported by teachers, school staff, and other students
- More respect and kindness from others, more self-confidence and being taught coping skills
- Accepting that some challenges are normal

Multiple orientation days in Year 6 and/or early in Year 7, programs to assist with developing friendships, and information and advice on managing workloads were consistently identified by participants as important ways to help them adjust to high school. Receiving kindness and reassurance from others during this time was also considered vital for many respondents, while others felt that some of the challenges they experienced are a normal and even necessary part of growing up.

Read more about the transition from primary school to high school on page 36



3. Belonging

Feeling socially and culturally connected helps young people build healthy relationships and assists with identity formation, yet research shows that significantly fewer female than male young people feel a sense of community connection and belonging.

Participants in the Girls' Wellbeing Survey reported a range of places and activities that give them a sense of connection and belonging, most commonly:

- Shared activities including sport
- With friends
- At school
- Other communities online and in real life

Girls who participate in shared activities, such as organised sport, arts or music programs, reported a greater sense of belonging than those who are not involved in such groups. Having similar interests and being included as part of a team that provides support and encouragement were key aspects of belonging for girls.

Similarly, friendships were often cited as a community in which girls feel they belong, often because they can 'share problems' and 'be themselves'. Conversely, a strong theme throughout responses was that many girls feel pressure to 'fit in' in order to belong with peers, friends or their community. Girls commonly said they feel the need to look and act a certain way to 'fit in' and belong. This focus on achieving appearance-based standards often results in low self-esteem and unhappiness.

School was reported as a place where girls found a sense of belonging, usually through participation in sub-groups, such as friendship, sport or music groups. A number of other communities were also cited by participants as places they feel they belong, including religious or cultural groups, the LGBTQIA+SB community, and online gaming or chat groups.



Executive summary

Three key barriers to girls feeling like they belong to a community include:

- Girls being subject to different social and behavioural standards than boys
- Social interactions and relationships being more intense for girls than boys
- Gender bias in community-based activities and opportunities

Almost one-half of female participants aged 12 to 18 years said they feel they do not belong because they cannot meet the social and behavioural standards placed on them by others. This included feeling pressure to ‘be perfect’ in all aspects of their lives, from physical appearance to academic and sport performance and in their personal relationships. Many participants linked these expectations and pressures to gender stereotypes, sexism and social norms that are not evident to the same degree for male young people. One commonly reported example was the normalisation of some boys’ anti-social behaviour being excused as “boys will be boys”, which exacerbates the pressure girls feel to be flawless and highlights ongoing double standards.

Participants also reported that one reason it is difficult for girls to feel like they belong, is because social interactions and relationships are more intense for girls than for boys. For instance, many girls commented that girls are judgemental, form cliques and compete with and exclude each other, whereas boys tend to be more easy going and inclusive.

Many girls also highlighted that community-based activities are often male-oriented, making it hard for girls to feel comfortable joining in. Public spaces for young people, such as skate parks and basketball courts, were two common examples highlighted by girls. Participants also observed that “there is a major culture around boys and sport” (17 year-old female). Many girls felt there is a presumption that boys have an inherent ability and love of sport while girls don’t, resulting in greater support for boys to pursue sports.

**Read more about
Belonging on
page 52**



4. Gender inequality

Although gender equality has improved significantly in Australia over the last 50 years, a majority of female and gender-diverse young people told us they feel gender inequality still impacts many aspects of their everyday lives and is seen as a barrier to them leading a full and happy life.

Participants understand that gender inequality results in differential treatment of a person based on their gender. Almost all young people could describe either direct or indirect experiences of gender inequality.

Executive summary

For girls and gender-diverse young people, these experiences included:

- Gender inequality through stereotypes
- Boys getting more opportunities and freedom than girls
- Sexism
- Feeling unsafe

Many female respondents told us that gender stereotypes are pervasive and result in being treated differently to their male siblings, cousins and peers. In families, this was sometimes linked to cultural norms and in school settings, girls said they are not encouraged or given the same opportunities as boys to engage in activities or subjects that are considered 'masculine' (e.g., science, technology, engineering, mathematics, woodwork, metalwork, sports). Many girls also felt very strongly that the message teachers give when asking for 'strong boys' to help with physical tasks, is that girls are weaker and less capable than their male peers.

Similarly, many respondents told us they get less freedom and opportunities to be active in the community than boys, usually due to fear of gender-based abuse, sexual assault and violence, which "guys don't have to worry about" (15 year-old, female). Many respondents recounted direct experiences of sexism in the form of verbal and physical harassment, being sexualised, or experiencing 'sexual double standards', where males are praised for certain sexual behaviour while females are shamed for it.

Feeling unsafe in various settings was another very common experience for female young people, which they clearly linked to being overtly sexualised and objectified by males. Many girls reported feeling unsafe due to the behaviour of males from a very young age and often contrasted this with how carefree and safe boys can feel.

Most respondents said it is possible that gender inequality will impact their future choices and opportunities, with many girls saying that being female limits their career prospects, particularly in traditionally male-dominated industries. It was also common for girls to feel worried that they will be denied equal pay, promotional or other development opportunities due to their gender, and that they will be forced to juggle or choose between having children and having a career. These worries were seen as another burden that males do not have to overcome, at least not to the same extent as females. A minority of girls felt their gender would not limit their future, due to pursuing a female-dominated career path, having a privileged background, or feeling determined to forge their own future.

**Read more about
Gender Inequality
on page 68**



Executive summary

Male and gender-diverse respondents

Male and gender-diverse young people generously shared their views and experiences on the same survey topics as female young people. Analysis of responses indicate a range of common experiences and views among female and gender-diverse young people, which differ, quite markedly in some cases, from male young people's perspectives.

Recommendations

There are a range of practises and activities that help girls feel safe, supported, good about themselves and that they belong. These are summarised below as key recommendations for young people, families and other supporting adults, and schools.

For young people

- Be patient finding yourself, your friends and other support people
- Find and do things you enjoy
- Be kind to others and to yourself
- Set and work towards your own goals
- Get active

For families and other supporting adults

- Listen, without judgement or criticism
- Support girls' passions and interests
- Encourage girls to be active, regardless of ability

For schools

- Give young people more time and opportunities to adapt from primary to high school
- Support students by listening to and following up on their concerns
- Build a culture of respect, equal opportunity and inclusivity
- Help students manage expectations and stress from school

See page 84 for more information 



Introduction

In 2019, the Commissioner conducted the inaugural Speaking Out Survey, which asked a broadly representative sample of 4,912 children and young people in Years 4 to 12 (aged 8 to 18 years) about their day-to-day lives and wellbeing. One of the key findings of the survey was that female young people in Western Australia (WA) consistently rated their wellbeing below that of their male peers.

In this large-scale survey, female young people in WA were:

- Twice as likely as male young people to report not feeling happy with themselves, feel unable to achieve their goals or to deal with things that happen in their life
- Much less likely than male young people to feel like they belong at their school
- Significantly less likely than male young people to feel safe in their neighbourhood and on public transport.¹

To help understand the reasons for the wellbeing gap between male and female young people, the Commissioner's office undertook a literature review on current evidence regarding female young people's wellbeing. The review confirmed that significant numbers of female young people in Australia and globally experience a decline in their mental health and wellbeing, emerging around puberty and during the transition from primary to high school, from foundations which may have been laid years earlier. Concerningly, this decline in wellbeing has been increasing over recent years.²



Introduction

Based on this evidence and data from the 2021 Speaking Out Survey, which attracted a total of 16,532 participants in Years 4 to 12 across all regions of WA, the Commissioner established the Girls' Wellbeing Project. This project involved:

- Conducting additional analysis of the Speaking Out Survey data and publishing the report: Girls' wellbeing: Insights from the 2021 Speaking Out Survey
- Further consultations with young people through an online survey, the Girls' Wellbeing Survey
- Working closely with two advisory committees on topics related to girls' wellbeing
- Developing and delivering the Young Aboriginal Researchers in Community (YARiC) project, to empower young Aboriginal women in the Goldfields to develop research skills and support them to conduct peer-research into girls' wellbeing.

This report is the final publication of the Girls' Wellbeing Project. It showcases the voices of participants in the Girls' Wellbeing Survey and incorporates overall reflections on the other components of the project.

The Girls' Wellbeing Survey (the survey) was an anonymous, online questionnaire, asking young people aged 12 to 24 years to answer a number of open-text questions relating to self esteem, the transition from primary to high school, belonging and gender inequality.

The survey sought young people's views and experiences on these topics and while the survey focused on girls' wellbeing, it was open to all WA young people. Participants were asked different questions depending on their gender and age.

This report provides a thematic analysis of all participant responses, presenting the views of young people in their own words.

It is important to note that, given the survey topic, most responses were young people identifying as female. Findings in this report therefore present largely female perspectives and experiences even though boys and gender diverse young people also experience challenges with their self-esteem, mental health and school transition. Their perspectives are also highlighted throughout the report.

The aim of this report is to help parents, families, educators, local communities and policymakers better understand and support children and young people, particularly female children and young people, with issues they have identified as critical to their wellbeing.

The Girls' Wellbeing Survey was an anonymous questionnaire, asking young people aged

12–24
years

to answer a number of open-text questions



Background

Role of the Commissioner

The Western Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People (the Commissioner) has a statutory responsibility to monitor and promote the wellbeing of all children and young people under the age of 18 years, with particular regard for those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged for any reason. To fulfil this responsibility, the Commissioner undertakes a range of research activities and projects, including engaging with children and young people through surveys and consultations, and reporting and publishing the findings of this work to improve the lives of children and young people in WA.

Advisory Committees and YARiC project

Two advisory committees were established by the Commissioner's office and ran throughout 2022, to inform the Commissioner's ongoing work on girls' wellbeing. Two student groups from Margaret River Senior High School and Penrhos College worked with the Commissioner over the course of the year, advocating for free period products in schools, early consent education and the need for more inclusive school environments. The advisory committees also engaged with school leaders, local councils and local members of Parliament on various topics concerning young people. Their efforts were celebrated with an afternoon tea co-hosted by His Excellency, the Honourable Chris Dawson APM, Governor of Western Australia and the Commissioner at the end of 2022.

The Young Aboriginal Researchers in Community (YARiC) project provides culturally safe research training and experience in all aspects of community research for young people including project planning, peer consultation, data analysis and reporting. The Commissioner for Children and Young People's office has previously partnered with Aboriginal organisations to train young Aboriginal people in the Kimberley and Pilbara as community researchers as a way to gain further insights into the lives of local young people through consultations with peers who share similar experiences and languages.

Background

In 2022, seven young Aboriginal women from three Kalgoorlie high schools formed the YARiC group to learn about ethical community research methodologies and explore topics related to girls' wellbeing. In this project these young women completed three days of intensive training designed and facilitated by Mandy Downing, Indigenous research ethicist and Dean of Indigenous Futures at Curtin University. They then used this knowledge to collect the views of 54 young people from their community about wellbeing and gender.

The findings of this research were published in May 2023 in the report entitled: 'Young Aboriginal Researchers in Community YARiC Wellbeing Survey'.

Girls' Wellbeing Survey

Analysis of the Speaking Out Survey 2021 results showed that many female young people in WA have poor life satisfaction and low self-esteem, feel they do not belong, often feel unsafe at home, at school and in public, and feel unsupported by people close to them.

Through the open text comments in the Speaking Out Survey, another critical issue identified was that sexism, gender stereotypes and gender inequality are commonly experienced by female children and young people. Despite this, there is limited qualitative research exploring Australian children's and young people's views and experiences on these topics.³

To further explore these issues, in 2022, the Commissioner's office conducted the Girls' Wellbeing Survey. The Girls' Wellbeing Survey was an online survey, asking young people aged 12 to 24 years to answer up to seven open-text questions about:

- Self-esteem
- The transition from primary to high school
- Belonging
- Gender inequality.

The survey was open to all young people with different questions asked depending on their identified gender and age:

- Female young people aged 12 to 18 years were asked seven open text questions on the above topics
- Male young people aged 12 to 24 years were asked subsets of questions on self-esteem and gender inequality.
- Female and gender diverse young people aged 19 to 24 years were asked reflective questions on each topic (e.g. 'Thinking back to when you were in high school...').

To further explore the Speaking Out Survey 2021 results, the Commissioner's office conducted the

Girls' Wellbeing Survey

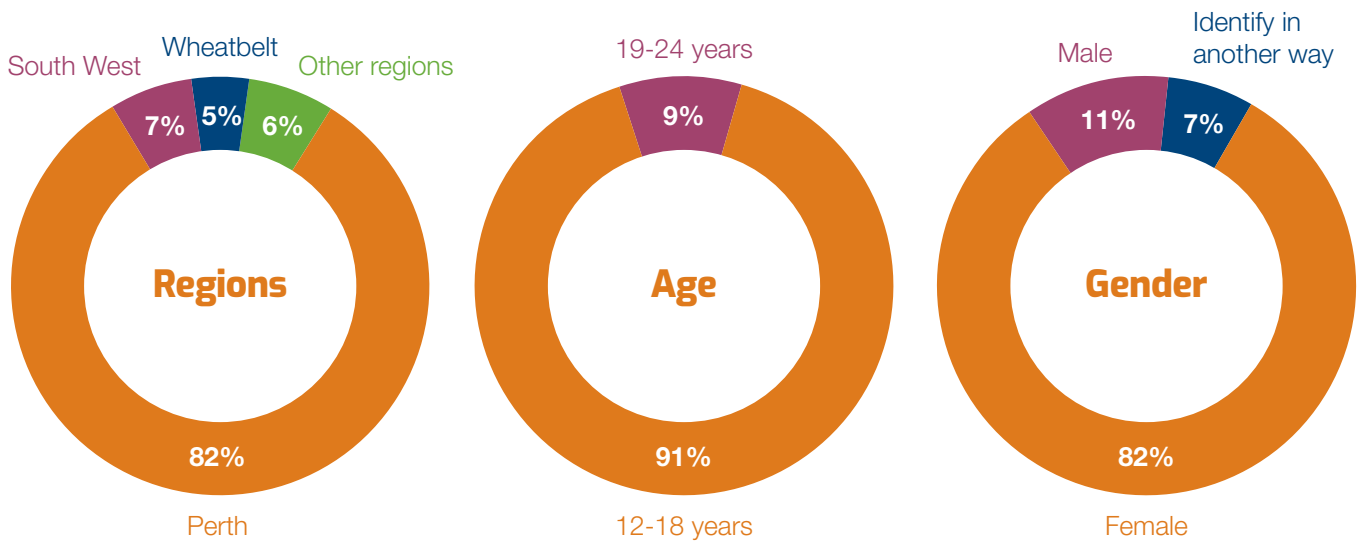


Background

The survey was promoted via the Commissioner’s website, social media and direct approaches to other key stakeholders and organisations. The survey was anonymous, collecting only broad demographic information. All participants provided active consent to complete the survey.

A total of 938 children and young people participated in the survey, which ran for a period of five weeks, from July to August 2022.

Profile of participants



Over half of participants (774) lived in Perth at the time of the survey, with 61 living in WA’s South West region, 43 in the Wheatbelt region, and the remainder living in other regions throughout WA.

The age range of eligible participants (12-24 years) was sufficient to hear from school-aged young people (aged 12-18 years) and those beyond school years (aged 19-24 years). Considerably more school-aged young people (850) than young adults participated in the survey (88).

Participants were asked “How do you describe yourself?” and could select either “Male”, “Female”, or “In another way” and were given an open text field to elaborate their answer if they wished. Most participants (772) identified as female, 104 identified as male, and 62 identified their gender in another way. Those who identified in another way described their gender identity in multiple ways including: gender fluid, non-binary, gender non-conforming, gender queer, transmasculine, demi-girl, demi-boy, feminine neutral and as “a person”.

In a follow-up question, participants were asked “Have you always described yourself in this way?”, with the response options “Yes”,

Background

“No”, or “I would prefer not to say”. Seventy-four participants who identified as female or male said they had not always described their gender this way, and 36 participants indicated they would prefer not to say.

For the purposes of this report, the term ‘trans and gender diverse’ is used and is intended to be inclusive of all children and young people who are transgender and/or have a gender diverse identity. This includes, but is not limited to, children and young people who are trans, non-binary, gender fluid, gender queer, agender or questioning their gender.

Almost a third (272) of participants identified as part of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex + Sistergirl Brotherboy (LGBTQI+SB) community.

One hundred and seventy-nine (179) participants (19%) said they identified as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD). One hundred and seventy-six (176) participants spoke a language other than English at home, including Vietnamese, Filipino/Tagalog, Afrikaans, Arabic, Mandarin, Cantonese and German.

Overall, 40 participants (4%) indicated they were an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.

Three hundred and twenty-six participants (35%) indicated they were living with a mental health condition. Forty-six participants identified as a person with both a mental health condition and a long-term physical health condition, with about two-fifths of these participants (18) also living with disability. Overall, 65 participants said they were living with a long-term physical health condition and 64 participants indicated living with disability.

Analysis and presentation of survey data

The survey was implemented online through a customised survey platform. The survey responses were analysed using qualitative data analysis software (NVIVO). All responses were read and thematically coded. Through this analysis, key themes were identified.⁴ This report has been structured around these themes so that the key issues and concerns of the respondents are highlighted.

This report presents the views of children and young people in their own words. The quotes are unedited to ensure the voice of the young person is authentically presented. Editing has only been done where necessary for clarity, understanding or for confidentiality, and any changes or omissions have been marked with square brackets or an ellipsis (...).

40
participants

were an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person

272
participants

identified as part of the LGBTQI+SB community

179
participants

identified as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)

326
participants

were living with a mental health condition

65
participants

were living with a long-term physical health condition



1.

Self-esteem

Self-esteem greatly improves young people's ability to deal with adversity and stress and is protective against poor mental health.⁵ Yet research consistently shows that female young people are much more likely than male young people to have low self-esteem.⁶

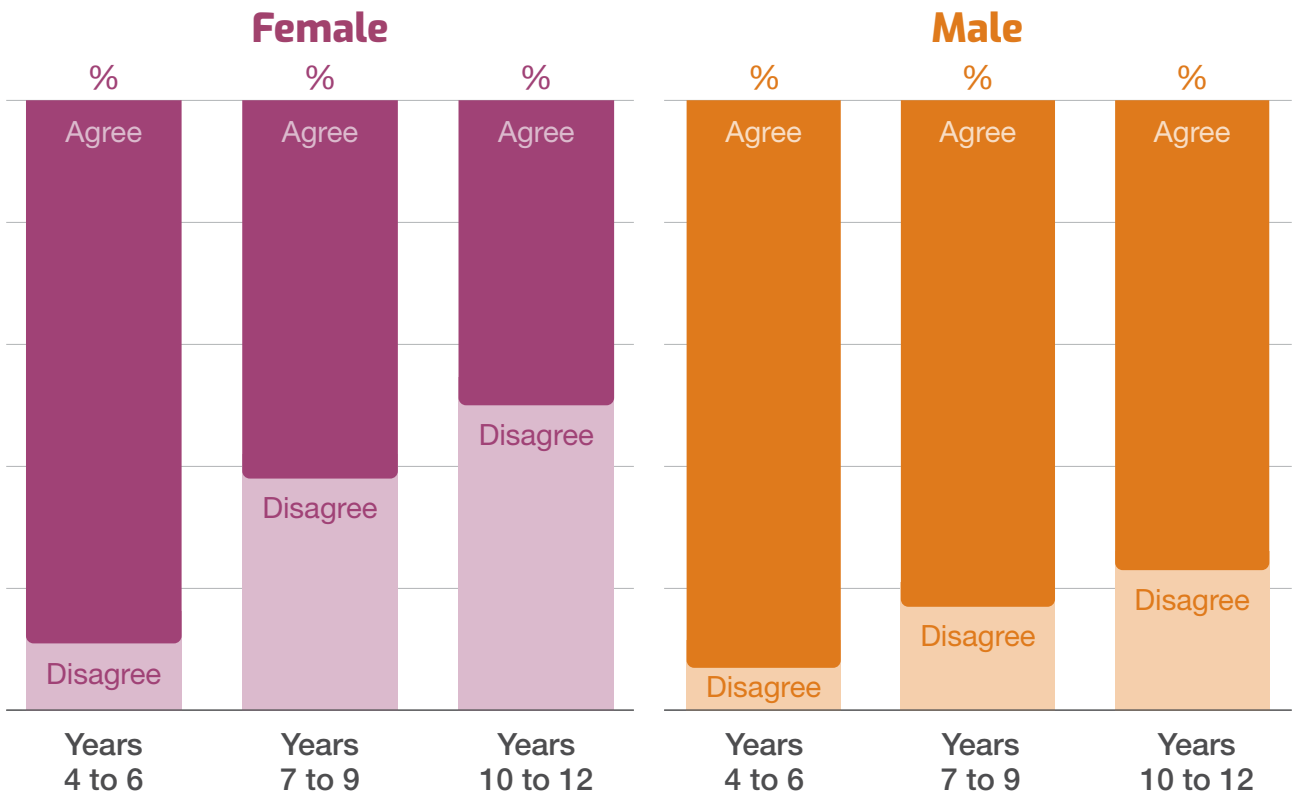
Self-esteem

Data from the Speaking Out Survey 2021 shows that WA primary school girls are as likely as boys to feel good about themselves. However, as children enter adolescence/high school, a gender wellbeing gap emerges whereby female children and young people become significantly more likely than their male peers to report low life satisfaction, negative mental health experiences and low self-esteem. For many girls, this decline in wellbeing is substantial and persists throughout high school and sometimes beyond.⁷

The Speaking Out Survey results show that in Years 10 to 12, one-half (50%) of female students do not feel good about themselves, compared to almost one-quarter (23%) of their male peers.

In Years 10 to 12
50%
female students
 compared to
23%
male students
 do not feel good about themselves

Proportion of students agreeing or disagreeing that they feel good about themselves



Source: Speaking Out Survey 2021 Data Tables [unpublished]

To further explore why female young people in WA experience a decline in self-esteem, female participants aged 12 to 18 years were asked the following questions in the Girls' Wellbeing Survey:

- Tell us what things influence how you feel about yourself?
- What helps you feel good about yourself?

Processes that shape girls' self-esteem

International research suggests that critical influences on self-esteem, particularly for girls, are feelings of adequacy or competency in the academic or work sphere (e.g. success), physical aspects (e.g. appearance or sports) and social capabilities (e.g. popularity).^{8,9}

Consistent with the research, many female participants report that their self-esteem is shaped by multiple, sometimes intersecting influences related to these spheres of life.

The responses in this survey highlight two key interrelated processes that shape girls' self-esteem: receiving external validation from others and comparing themselves to others. These processes are strongly evident in four key areas:

- The opinions of others
- Social comparisons
- Social media use
- Performing well in school and sport.

The opinions of others

Many survey respondents highlighted that having positive and supportive people around them is critical for their self-esteem. They talked about the influence of family and friends but noted that the views of acquaintances and strangers can also strongly influence how they feel about themselves.

“The way others describe me, family influence or pressure. The way my peers around treat me, teachers. Basically, everyone around me may influence me, except those who I consider not important.”

17 year-old, female



What others say, even when they do not mean it hurtfully, I read a lot into what people say and their body language as they say things.”

13 year-old, female

It was also clear from responses that many female young people can think deeply about the meaning of other peoples' comments, body language and behaviour. This focus on what others say and how they say it was often accompanied by negative connotations of self, hurt feelings and low self-esteem.

“Little things people say (especially my friends). They might mean it as a joke or not really mean anything by saying it but just little things like (if I'm making something) ‘That's supposed to be a ...?!’

Self-esteem

If there is fights with my friends, I will usually think about every little thing I could of done to be a better friend to them, and then feel bad. Feeling bad about myself doesn't usually last long though."

12 year-old, female

Research shows that friendships are a critical source of support for female young people.¹⁰ Further, there is a strong correlation between feeling your friends care about you, or that you are good at making or keeping friends, and self-esteem.¹¹

Many survey respondents highlighted that having good friends is critical to how they feel about themselves. Their friends' opinions of them are also important.

Another closely related theme is that receiving compliments and praise on a regular basis from other people, increases female young peoples' confidence and self-esteem. Conversely, the absence of compliments or receiving criticism, feeling judged or a lack of support makes female young people doubt and feel bad about themselves.

"I feel bad when people criticise me."

12 year-old, female

"Compliments other people (anyone at all – boys, girls, younger kids, older kids, strangers) give me – positive effect..."

15 year-old, female

"The people around me impact how I feel, either negatively or positively. I don't take criticism well so if I hear certain negative things about me, I struggle with the idea of knowing that someone thinks of me this way. I like to think that everyday I'm always trying my very best so if I know someone is putting me down for it, I start to doubt the person I am becoming."

17 year-old, female

A reliance on external validation is also evident in the few cases participants reported trying to ignore others' opinions and be positive about themselves.

"Trying to block out what they are saying and focusing on myself."

16 year-old, female

“

If someone compliments me, I will usually wear or do that thing more than once because people like it."

13 year-old, female

Self-esteem

“

(I am) trying to develop my own self confidence without the validation of another individual.”

16 year-old, female

Research shows that female young people feel more pressure than male young people to gain ‘likes’ for the images and other content they post online.¹² Survey responses suggest that for many female young people, the desire to be liked or gain approval from others is not confined to the online world.

A number of female respondents talked about how male young people’s behaviours or views affect their self-esteem. They report that negative or sexualised comments about their bodies and other disrespectful behaviour from male young people make them feel uncomfortable and bad about themselves.

“Sometimes some of the boys in my classes make comments on girls. The comments are usually rude but not out-right rude at its obvious but enough that it’s kind of offensive but again not enough to say anything to them with out being called sensitive.”

16 year-old, female

“The feeling of having to look a certain way boys expectations inappropriate comments or actions towards us.”

16 year-old, female

Research shows that as part of the onset of puberty, girls often experience increased sexualised attention and focus on their bodies, particularly from male young people and older men.¹³ This overt sexualisation coincides with many girls starting to engage in body surveillance, body shame and appearance-based social comparisons – all of which have significant, usually detrimental impacts on their self-esteem.¹⁴



Self-esteem

Social comparisons

Many respondents in the survey explained how their self-esteem is strongly shaped by an internal process of comparing themselves to others.

This is where they evaluate their own attributes in comparison to the images portrayed by other people, including people they see in-person, online and in other media.

Many female participants report that the way they compare themselves to others often results in feeling excluded or not being 'good enough'.

“Mainly just comparing myself to other people and wishing I was them and not who I really am.”

13 year-old, female

“What I can see others doing that I can't. Feeling that I am not good enough.”

14 year-old, female

While some female young people report comparing their abilities to others, by far the most common attribute used to compare themselves to others is physical appearance and/or perceived attractiveness.

“Other girls mostly since they seem to have little perfect lives with perfect hair and face and skin and body, and when I look at my self I think 'disgusting'.”

12 year-old, female

Participants often talked about comparing their body weight with others, as a measure their self-worth. This supports the Speaking Out Survey data which show that even if they are within a healthy weight range, female young people are more likely than young males to report being overweight or dissatisfied with their body, and happiest if they perceive themselves as underweight.¹⁵ The 'thin-ideal'¹⁶ is clearly evident in responses, where participants equate being thin or skinny with being desirable and attractive, and feeling 'ugly' if they are not thin.

“I feel ok about myself, but sometimes I feel fat and cry.”

12 year-old, female

“When I don't eat it makes me feel skinny.”

16 year-old, female

“

External influences like family's opinions, how my peers look and act compared to me, how certain features are automatically considered more admirable, and you're excluded if you don't fit into these social ideas.”

17 year-old, female

“

If I see other people who are tall and skinny like my sister, it makes my feel uncomfortable around them sometimes. I feel as though I need to be skinny and fit too.”

12 year-old, female

Self-esteem



Seeing someone who is effortlessly very happy and pretty at the same time can sometimes set off a negative train of thoughts in my mind, which are, I will admit, hard to get rid of.”

15 year-old, female

Many participants also report idealising other people, particularly other girls, which often led to feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem and enduring pressure to meet ‘impossible’/ ‘unrealistic’ beauty and body weight standards.

“Comparing myself to other girls with the ‘ideal’ body type, and looking in the mirror and telling myself that I can be better.”

12 year-old female

“The standards you compare yourself to, disregarding if they’re realistic or not.”

17 year-old, female

In many cases, beauty and body weight standards directly influence how female respondents talk, dress and behave. Even when they recognise these standards are unrealistic, many respondents report trying to achieve them. This results in low self-esteem, poor mental health and sometimes disordered eating or other problematic thinking and behaviour.

“[It] seemed like everyone had a ‘glow-up’... whereas I just gained weight. I think I struggled with that a lot, and honestly still do, and it made me go as far as having suicidal thoughts. I often also starved myself for a few days and then binge ate after, making me feel worse than before.”

13 year-old, female

Social media use

Social media is an increasingly integral part of young people’s lives and does have benefits for social connectedness.¹⁷ However, research strongly suggests that social media, and particularly the way that female young people interact with social media, is causing negative mental health outcomes.^{18,19}

Female young people are more likely than male young people to use image-based social media platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, and focus on image-based content that encourages social comparisons and body image pressures. Research shows that many female young people critique themselves based on the images they see, and curate and ‘filter’ images of themselves for validation online.²⁰

Social media was one of the key influences on self-esteem identified by respondents.

Self-esteem

“Sometimes social media influences me, but I don’t realise it until it has already happened.”

15 year-old, female

“Social media influences dramatically how I feel about myself because when I see influencers they are everything I want to be and not it ruins my self esteem. Also cyber bullying through social media is a [huge] impact as people always comment about appearances.”

17 year-old, female

In the same way some female participants report feeling ‘ugly’ and inadequate when they compare themselves to people they see in-person, their self-esteem is impacted when they compare themselves to people they see online, particularly other girls on social media.

“The people I see around me, in real life and also online. Like when influencers and people post pictures of themselves and their nice lives.”

17 year-old, female

Overwhelmingly, most participants who said social media influences their self-esteem, report it has a negative impact, with many participants trying but failing to look, talk and act like the ‘influencers’, celebrities, other girls and friends they see on social media. This is strongly evident even when female young people recognise they are trying to achieve unrealistic beauty/body weight standards.

“The main thing that influences me is the content that I am exposed to on different social media platforms. It creates these ideas about what is considered ideal, whether it is physical beauty or the way you should act. Even if I am aware of this, it is hard to ignore it and it often impacts how I feel about myself.”

15 year-old, female

In contrast, few respondents downplayed the role of social media in girls’ mental health and self-esteem.

“SOME social media related things (but not all, so please for the love of god stop saying that EVERYTHING is to do with social media).”

16 year-old, female

“

Social media is a massive influencer and had a really bad impact on my mental health because it’s toxic and creates unrealistic standards for women. I don’t feel good about myself ever I constantly am trying to improve things about myself and make goals that sometimes I can’t get like a perfect body.”

15 year-old, female

Self-esteem



Seeing people like myself in TV shows, it helps me realise that women can present and act however they want and still be loved without being forced into stereotypes.”

15 year-old, female



Because there are higher standards for women to live up to, we have to care more and are judged for every little thing we do.”

15 year-old, female

Some female participants noted that seeing diversity and body positivity in social and other media can help them feel good about themselves.

“Creators/ influencers that show us how real and human they are without using filters, advertisements of women that have more diverse body shapes and races.”

16 year-old, female

“Following social media accounts that promote body positivity etc.”

18 year-old, female

Nevertheless, very few female participants suggest changing or reducing social media use to improve their mental health and self-esteem.

It is important to recognise that social media and online communications are integral to young people’s lives^{21,22} and participants rarely considered banning its use as a way to protect their mental health and self-esteem. Other strategies and practises are therefore necessary.

Performance in school and sport

Another factor that strongly impacts some female young people’s self-esteem is their sense of being good enough, either at school or in sport and fitness, or both. Research has found that female young people are more likely than male young people to feel the need to ‘be perfect’ in the various domains of their life.²³

This was clearly expressed by a number of participants in the survey, who said they felt under pressure to be good at school and in sport, while also being pretty, thin or attractive, and caring and responsible.

“Girls have this heavy pressure on them to be perfect and beautiful all the time and walking around with this pressure all the time is draining on a young girl.”

17 year-old, female

“We get told to be ladylike but then get made fun of for being ladylike. We get told to be smart and then get disliked/less liked by males for being smarter than them. We get told to exercise, but not too much because then we’ll be too toned the whole thing is very contradictory and when all of this is pushed on a young girl (e.g. year 7) it confuses us.”

17 year-old, female

Self-esteem

Research shows that female students are more likely than their male peers to be engaged at school, with generally higher academic achievement and lower incidence of school disengagement.²⁴ Yet, at the same time, female students are more likely than male students to feel pressure, stress and anxiety about school and their schoolwork.²⁵

Many female respondents in the Girls' Wellbeing survey highlighted that if they are doing well at school and/or sport, they feel good about themselves. Conversely, making mistakes, doing poorly in tests, and not completing schoolwork are common sources of disappointment for female respondents, and can impact their self-esteem. Many participants reported that these feelings come from their own sense of responsibility as well as the expectations of parents/family members.

“Things that [influence] how I feel are [definitely] my grades [they’re] not always the best and always make me feel [disappointed] in myself seeing how angry and [disappointed] my [parents] are.”

13 year-old, female

“My academic achievements, I often discredit myself for not having a high enough score and although I have had many achievements I tend to ponder more about my failures.”

17 year-old, female

“I’m a perfectionist, so how well I do in something (e.g. sport) influences how I feel about myself. If I do something badly in front of others, the way I feel about myself is much more negative than if I do badly by myself.”

13 year-old, female

Some female participants commented that they would feel better about themselves when playing sport if there was less focus on their bodies and more emphasis on being active and healthy.

“I think a lot of girls feel insecure and nervous about joining in on things because they’re worried about their image and embarrassing themselves.”

16 year-old, female



What helps girls feel good about themselves

While many female young people struggle to 'live up to' the conflicting pressures they face, they also consistently report a range of things that help them feel good themselves.

Analysis of responses revealed four key practises that help female young people feel good about themselves, including:

- Turning to supportive people
- Doing activities they enjoy
- Setting and achieving goals and having healthy habits
- Looking good.

Turning to supportive people

Young people need to feel safe and supported in their relationships with others, particularly parents and other supporting adults. Research shows that positive relationships with these people helps adolescents maintain good mental health, build resilience and sustain healthy relationships into adulthood.²⁶

For female participants, the most commonly reported source of feeling good about themselves is having supportive people around them, including friends, family and other supporting adults, such as teachers and coaches.

Female participants reported that being able to "be myself", and not feel judged are crucial elements of feeling supported, which reinforces other research showing that girls' peer relationships are often founded on high levels of communication and sharing personal thoughts and feelings.²⁷

"If I think negatively about myself I talk to people who love me."

16 year-old, female



Spending time with my friends and family is the most important thing as being around people that uplift you helps you to feel better about yourself."

15 year-old, female

Research shows that as children enter adolescence and seek greater autonomy, their relationships with friends and peers becomes more central to their lives than their relationship with parents.²⁸ While parents remain a key source of support for adolescents across all life domains, female young people report a decline in the quality of their relationship with parents, which is not as apparent for male young people.²⁹ By age 14 to 15 years, girls are more likely than boys to rely on friends for help with their problems.³⁰

Self-esteem

The results from the survey correspond with these findings, with female young people saying their friends are central to feeling good about themselves.

“Encouraging best friends who are truly there and have been since the start, and have proven to be there when others won’t be and will stick with you no matter what.”

15 year-old, female

Doing activities they enjoy

The second most referenced practice that made female respondents feel good about themselves is doing activities they love and enjoy.

Listening to or playing music was the most commonly cited activity, followed by reading, writing or journaling, doing art/craft, painting or drawing, and taking part in other hobbies, including digital based pastimes. For these participants, engaging in activities they enjoy is a way to explore different dimensions of themselves, take time out from pressures they may be experiencing, and build connections or share experiences with like-minded people.

Setting and achieving goals and having healthy habits

Many participants report that setting and achieving their own goals and having a positive mindset gives them a strong sense of self-worth. Internally setting and achieving goals and practicing positive thinking were two of the most commonly reported strategies that help female participants override negative social comparisons and poor self-esteem.

“I feel good when I do something that boosts my self esteem like when I do a good painting or finally finish a book series I have been reading for ages.”

13 year-old, female

“I feel good about myself when I solve a hard problem; when I have the confidence to walk like I belong on this planet; when I empower and have a positive influence on other girls and women; when I can look anyone straight in the eye and know that I can do anything and be anything I want to be in the whole world.”

15 year-old, female

“

Achieving academically also helps increase my self worth and gives me something to be proud of. The idea that girls should base their happiness on beauty and likes only sets them up to be miserable.”

14 year-old, female

Self-esteem

Healthy habits have a strong positive effect on female young people's wellbeing. The most frequently reported healthy habits that help female participants feel good about themselves are being active, playing sport, exercising, eating well, getting enough sleep, and setting aside time for 'self-care'.

Reinforcing other research,³¹ some responses indicate that the social aspects, and focus on what the body can do rather than how the body looks during sport, are key to girls feeling good about themselves when playing sport or being physically active.

"... I feel happy in my own body during and after sports, when I can appreciate my body for being so amazing and humane, and when everyone else's opinion doesn't matter."

15 year-old, female

A number of respondents noted how playing sport made them feel good and gave them a sense of belonging. Consistent with other research showing the many benefits and protective effect of girls playing team sport,³² many participants cited the sport they play as something that helps them feel good about themselves.

"My soccer club [is where] I can let the rest of my life and worries go whenever I turn up at the oval, and it helps so much with the state of my mental health. The other stresses in my life like friends, jobs, school, grades, expectations, social media and money become minor, and in turn, much more manageable. Every time I leave that soccer oval after a run around and a kick of the ball, my heart is content and I know that I can and will survive whatever life throws at me next. Everyone talks to everyone there, and it gives me a chance to look at the bigger picture, through other people's problems."

15 year-old, female

Many female respondents said they use positive self-talk, gratitude and acceptance as deliberate strategies to build their self-confidence and deflect negative social comparisons.



Self-esteem

These strategies are consistent with other research which suggests that higher levels of self-compassion in adolescents relates to lower levels of stress, anxiety, depression.³³

“Sometimes I get insecure about myself thinking in my head that I am not good enough, always comparing myself to other girls who might be better than me. But what I always put in my head is to always think positive and just be myself. Because I am unique, and I have my own things that I am talented with and I have something that only I can do that no one else can do, that is what make me unique and positive. All girls should be the thinking that they are enough.”

12 year-old, female

“I have a rule in my mind. Even if life is crap, I always support myself. I do not feel bad about myself, instead my mindset is to always try and love myself.”

17 year-old, female

Looking good

Many female young people talked about how ‘looking good’ helps them feel confident and good about themselves. This included ‘getting dressed up’ or wearing clothes they like and feel comfortable in and having nice hair, skin and nails.

“If I find clothes and things that suit my body type and they look good I am happy about myself.”

12 year-old, female

“Dressing up even if I’m not going anywhere just so I can feel a bit better about myself...”

14 year-old, female

Although in most cases girls did not explicitly report trying to look good to receive validation from others, it is clear that some girls’ idea of ‘looking good’ is often based on whether others think they are attractive.

“Getting dressed up and getting random compliments.”

12 year-old, female

“When other people compliment me I feel like I present well.”

16 year-old, female

“

Wearing clothes that I like and make me feel like I’m dressing for myself instead of needing the validation of others to make me feel confident.”

13 year-old, female

“

When I’m wearing a cute outfit, and as much as I hate to admit it, when I get validation from guys.”

15 year-old, female



It is quite common for me on the inside to worry about my looks and appearance compared to others, which sometimes brings down my mood.”

14 year-old,
non-binary



Supportive friends and/or people that understand what I've been (through/am) going through.”

14 year-old,
transmasculine

Gender diverse young people's views and experiences

Influences on self-esteem

“My grades as I do try my best to keep them high and not disappoint anyone or my family members.”

14 year-old, non-binary

“Guys opinions on our bodies, cat calling, insults about our body, the 'beauty' standard we 'have' to live up too.”

17 year-old, gender fluid

What helps you feel good about yourself?

“Doing things that making me feel good, both mood-wise and my self esteem, such as art, music or even dancing (though I am terrible at it).”

12 years-old, feminine-neutral

“Sleeping enough, eating well, wearing clothes I like, engaging in schoolwork, doing homework/study, spending time with friends.”

15 year-old, non-binary

Male young people's perspectives

A number of male young people also responded to the following question in the survey: Girls tend to report being less happy and more stressed than boys. Why do you think this is the case?

“I fell that a lot more pressure is placed on girls about there looks and social status etc. than boys. (Though this isn't true for all boys).”

15 year-old, male

“I think that girls report to be less happy and stressed more than boys because girls speak up on their issues more than boys. Boys tend to bottle it up and try to push through it or suffer in silence instead of talking about it..”

17 year-old, male

“I think most girls are more complicated than most boys and they find it harder to focus on the good parts of things and stress about what might happen later on rather than living in the moment.”

13 year-old, male

Self-esteem

Female and gender-diverse young adults looking back

Some older female and gender-diverse participants shared their ideas about what could help support girls in high school, and the advice they would give their younger self about friendships and belonging during that time.

“That you don’t need to please everyone and it’s okay to be yourself. And it’s really not the end of the world if not everyone likes you. Things will always get better, just takes time and making changes to yourself and your environment.”

20 year-old, female

“I would tell my younger self that you don’t have to appeal to everyone right now. Being different, not being ‘cool’ and not being the most popular is actually a good thing. Once you leave school you get to interact with people/adults who value your differences! When you study or work in your area of choice the people you work/study with have similar values, interests and beliefs so you will be able to make friends. The people who you think are ‘cool’ and popular right now who look down on others will more than likely peak in high school and will have no hold over you in the real world.”

22 year-old, female

“Sport/PE classes to not be graded but allowing students to build athletic skills and lifelong confidence to continue to be healthy through their life. Encouraging students at their level. Giving students options for their post school years, discussion of TAFE, Uni, working straight out of school. Discussing these options and also discussing that most people don’t find what they love straight out of school and it’s okay to experiment and try new things. There are lots of options for continual study after school and you do not need to base your life around [an] ATAR score.”

24 year-old, female



I, as a boy personally think that boys experience an equal amount of stress to girls, especially teenagers. In my opinion I am regularly stressed, but I just choose to act like everything is okay on the outside.”

15 year-old, male



2.

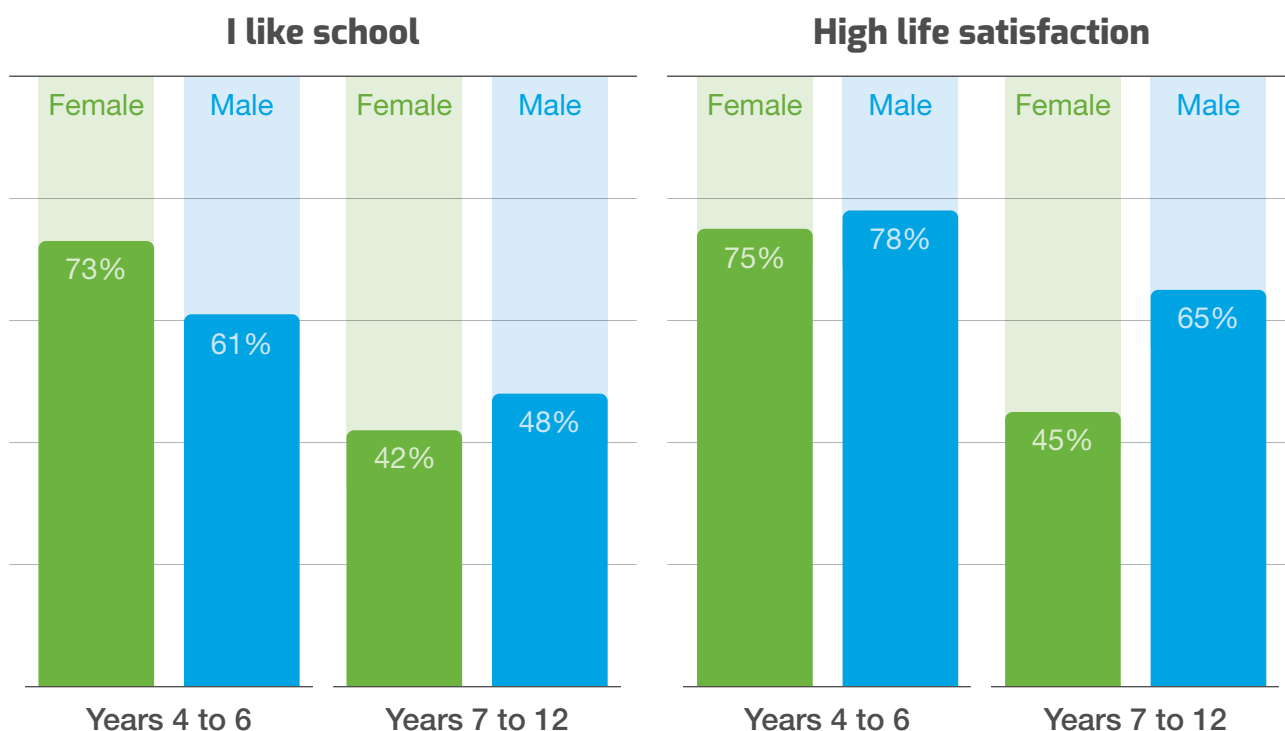
The transition from primary school to high school

The transition from primary to high school is a period of significant change and adjustment. It is a critical time that coincides with the onset of puberty when young people undergo rapid physical and neurological maturation. This is also normally a period of identity formation, where young people reflect more carefully on who they are and the things that are important to them.³⁴

The transition from primary school to high school

The Speaking Out Survey data suggest that female young people in WA experience a significant decline in their wellbeing during the transition to high school and/or the onset of puberty, which is less marked for male young people. The relative decline experienced by many girls in WA during this period is shown in the graph below.

Proportion of students reporting how they feel about school and rating their life satisfaction



Source: Speaking Out Survey 2021 Data Tables [unpublished]

* High life satisfaction is defined as a rating of seven to 10 out of 10, where “10” is the best possible life and “0” is the worst possible life.

This finding is supported by other research which suggests that male, female and gender-diverse children and young people can experience the transition to high school differently.³⁵ That is, male and female students can have ‘different concerns and face different challenges during the primary-secondary school transition’.³⁶

To further explore why WA female young people can experience a decline in their wellbeing during the transition to high school and beyond, female and gender-diverse participants aged 12 to 18 years were asked about the experience of moving from primary school to high school. Although young people experience challenges throughout high school, questions on other transition periods during high school were not asked of participants.

The transition from primary school to high school

Influences on the transition

Friendships are critical

Adolescence is a critical period when young people are increasing their independence from family and friendships become more important. Friendships provide young people with social and emotional support and can be a protective factor against bullying and mental health issues.^{37,38}

During puberty and the transition to high school, it is important for young people to feel that they fit in, are respected, liked and supported. Research shows that boys tend to be content with less intimate, more transient friendships, while the duration and quality of friendships is very important to girls.³⁹ Therefore, the many changes that come with starting high school can have a significant impact on girls' wellbeing.

In the survey, female respondents who had an overall positive transition talked about the importance of having an established group of friends that they retained or finding good new friends. For some respondents, moving to a new school provided an opportunity to find new friends for a clean break and fresh start.

“I didn’t have a good primary school experience, but high school has been so much better and much more enjoyable for me. I was scared at first transitioning, but I used to be very shy and kept to myself – it changed me, made me open out of my shell, and I’m glad I did.”

16 year-old, female

“As someone who wasn’t popular in primary school, it gave me a chance to have a fresh start in high school.”

16 year-old, female

For many students who moved into high school without existing friends, the initial process of finding new friends was often very stressful. Young people who reported a bad transition experience also often talked about losing friends, finding it difficult to make friends or experiencing bullying and exclusion.

“I had a hard time figuring out which friend groups I fit in and it was a period of great identity struggles.”

16 year-old, female



It was great, I still had my primary school friends with me and made more friends that came from other primary schools so I’d say my experience was pretty great.”

14 year-old, female

The transition from primary school to high school

“It was really hard for me. I did not seem to fit in or have any friends. I am shy and not great at talking to people, and none of my primary school friends went to the same high school, so I really struggled to make friends.”

13 year-old, female

“I felt fine for the first 2 weeks then slowly got left out of my friend group and was angry and lonely.”

14 year-old, female

For a number of female young people there was considerable anxiety attached to the transition, with some feeling scared and nervous about the move even before starting high school.

“Very rocky since I didn’t know what high school was meant to be like.”

16 year-old, female

“Scary and stressful, also unequipped to deal with the change, how to study, and the eventual test fails that came with being unprepared. It was a lot better in the second semester when the change became normal and everyone had others to sit around.”

17 year-old, female

Cultural shift into a different social landscape

Many respondents reflected on how the social experience in high school was very different from primary school with more judgement from peers, pressure to ‘fit in’ and experiences of bullying. Further, these issues were often exacerbated by the larger number of students.

“It was very difficult. Primary school was easier and more active. High school has more judgement and more pressure to fit in the social norm. There is more bullying and [division] of groups.”

16 year-old, female

“It was ok, there was a lot of pressure to fit in a be ‘cool’ as well as a lot of peer pressure from both boys and girls.”

17 year-old, female

“

I moved to a high school where nobody from my primary school attends. I needed to create new friendships. This was particularly daunting to me because I am a shy person and I was also afraid of what people would think of me.”

13 year-old, female

The transition from primary school to high school



The kids are really scary though. Some are so much older and bigger. They are really loud and some treat younger kids really badly.”

12 year-old, female

For many female respondents, the experience of being in a larger school was intimidating and challenging. This was sometimes due to the scale of the campus and finding their way to class but was also from older students being seen as scary and intimidating.

“... I felt small and naive, like I didn’t know exactly what I was doing and that therefore everyone could see my fear and all my mistakes. Feeling that the older kids were judging you for even just walking around.”

18 year-old, female

Some girls also noted that their interactions with some of their male peers became increasingly negative and disrespectful.

“I went to a Christian private school and I personally experienced that a lot of people around me we changing quite fast over the transfer. Most just tried to fit in or pretend to be more mature, but as time went on (throughout) high school the boys started to hit puberty, got a bit more confident, touchy and with that I experienced a lot of trouble.”

17 year-old, female

Feeling unprepared for the change

Consistent with other research on school transitions,⁴⁰ many respondents talked about the significant change in the format of secondary school compared to primary school, including the challenges of going to a much larger school, the change in class structures, the significant increase in workload and changed expectations regarding their maturity and independence.

“Not very good to say the least, was very lost and confused. Hated the amount of people, work and how massive school was. It is a big change from dependence to independence.”

15 year-old, female

The increase in workload was a significant concern for many participants, who said they felt unprepared for the jump in expectations and responsibility.

“It was kind of shocking because high school is very different from the primary school I went to, the workload increased and suddenly I had much more expectations and responsibilities put on me. I also became more introverted and quiet in my classes.”

13 year-old, female

The transition from primary school to high school

“I became very obsessed with wanting to make friends and this distracted me from my academics thus leaving me feeling very depressed when I didn’t perform as well as I expected. My primary school didn’t prepare me for the workload.”

15 year-old, female

In contrast, some respondents thrived on the new experiences and enjoyed the structure of learning in high school.

“The first couple of weeks was nervous and confusing, but I thoroughly enjoy high school more than primary school, because we have more freedom, we were introduced into more subjects and specialised in sciences and main subjects. It also made me feel like I was a young adult, and led me to meet some of current friends in the first week.”

16 year-old, female

Some respondents who are neurodivergent or have other health challenges or disabilities noted that being ‘different’ worsened their transition to high school.

“Primary school was hard for me, a lot of neurotypical people, not much understanding of autism among the children or the teachers for that matter... When I transitioned into high school it was quite daunting, but I managed to build a supportive friend group consisting of both friends from primary school and new friends from high school (but) I got bullied every day and would constantly be mocked for how I talked and how I looked (and) since it’s only little things like name calling or teasing I can’t do much except ‘ignore it’.”

14 year-old, female

“

It was a bit hard at the start but I enjoy high school so I found it exciting to meet new people and have different classes.”

12 year-old, female



The transition from primary school to high school



Seeing how quickly everyone had matured from year 6 made me want to mature faster too, and this was a factor of why I was so insecure.”

16 year-old, female

A number of respondents talked about how the change to high school also required an evaluation of their identity and feeling a need to ‘grow up’ to fit in.

“I felt like I needed to change because I wasn’t just a little kid anymore I had to act mature and change myself so people would like me e.g. wearing makeup to school whether it only be highlighter, blush and mascara.”

13 year-old, female

“Was a huge shift because I felt like this was when childhood ends and you had to start becoming more serious which prompted me to feel like I needed to change myself too.”

17 year-old, female

Some young people said their worries about starting high school were moderated by feeling prepared for the challenges or expecting that some discomfort was normal. Other respondents explained that even though moving to high school was initially scary and overwhelming, they eventually adapted and felt comfortable.

“It was difficult, but I think in the way that it’s expected to be difficult e.g. losing friends and being nervous about change.”

17 year-old, young person identifies in another way

“It was hard at first. Leaving friends and teachers that have helped me learn and grow as a person, however it slowly got easier, as I met new people and started to settle in.”

12 year-old, female

“I was scared at first and I didn’t want to go to high school, but then I realized that there is nothing to be scared about and I started to really enjoy high school.”

12 year-old, female



The transition from primary school to high school

What can help during the transition

Transition programs in primary school

Respondents were positive about transition programs and familiarisation activities in primary school. Those who received them reported feeling prepared and relatively comfortable with the transition. Preparation that started in primary school including “getting to know you” activities and school tours were considered valuable.

“When we were in year 6 our class teacher came with us to high school one day each week for a few weeks and we were like trainee high schoolers but with her supporting us, so it wasn’t so scary. We knew what to expect and had a good idea of where everything was. She also set us up with some students she had taught before and they were like our mentor.”

12 year-old, female

“More events leading up to the start of year 7 where you could meet people that do similar programs at the high school to you (e.g. meeting other kids that do music before the school year so you know people you have something in common with).”

17 year-old, female

Girls report wanting information and advice to deal with not only the academic shift, but the social changes. They also expressed a desire for changes to be more gradual, with more time to find friends, meet teachers, and take on new responsibilities.

“More guidance on friends, how to make them and stay with them, and develop those relationships. Some advice and reassurance that not every day will be a good one, unless you choose it to be that way, would have been very helpful.”

15 year-old, female

“I think if primary school prepared us less about study skills and more about all this social stuff (popularity, self esteem, fitting in, bullying), it could have been better!”

12 year-old, female

“

It would have really helped to have had spent like, a week at the high school before I permanently attended (e.g. at the end of year 6) and to have more time to meet everyone (not just the people in my classes).”

15 year-old, female

The transition from primary school to high school



I knew nobody there when I first moved to the school I'm at now, but we had a transition day, and I made some friends."

12 year-old, female

Secondary school programs to support the transition

The key areas that participants talked about wanting or finding useful once at high school were programs to assist with developing friendships, multiple practical orientation days and tools like school maps or duty teachers to help find classes.

"I would've liked to have more than 1 day (orientation day) to get used to the school and figure out where everything is... maybe having 3 or 4 orientation days spread out in 2 to 3 weeks."

12 year-old, female

"Possibly touring the school more, knowing what to expect from the school and finding out what classmates I would have earlier so that I could get to know them, and feel comfortable at the new school. Maybe a small book guideline of how to manage high school and what is expected would have helped."

13 year-old, female

Some students also talked favourably about having designated spaces for Year 7 students, so that they have a safe place to hang out.

"My transition was quite smooth, we were given school maps, introduced to the staff, and we had our own personal year 7 block to stay in. Most of the issues just evolved around becoming less nervous with classmates and finding new friends, but activities like asking each other favourite hobbies and if they had pets worked quite well."

16 year-old, female

"I felt like I belonged almost immediately. Our school had a special year 7 area which made it easy to integrate at my own..."

16 year-old, female

In terms of the workload, a number of respondents highlighted that the school could manage the workload better, particularly in Year 7. They also noted that more support to develop good study habits would be useful.



An openly advertised place for year 7's and 8's to congregate who haven't found a friend group yet, to meet people. A lunch club run in the library or one of the classrooms."

17 year-old, female

The transition from primary school to high school

“If the teachers talked to each other it would make things easier too; they just dump tests and assessment on us all at once and stress us out. I remember one time my friend had four tests in one day... Firstly, how are we supposed to study for them all? There isn’t enough time in the day to study and revise. I remember girls not eating cause they were too busy cramming for tests, and then crying and having panic attacks because they didn’t get enough study in because there wasn’t enough time!”

14 year-old, female

“Teaching study skills and how to deal with bad school results that would have helped put me on a stronger path into further developing these skills for senior school.”

17 year-old, female

“Initially more support in developing study skills and then allowing room for independence.”

17 year-old, female

Feeling supported by the teachers, school staff and other students

Having supportive, friendly and kind teachers, staff and other students at the school made a difference to many of the respondents.

“I didn’t really have that many problems in the transition from primary school to high school... What was good about the transition though was that people were mostly very nice and welcoming, and tried to help wherever possible.”

13 year-old, female

“... At the beginning found organisation quite difficult, however my school handled scheduling, timetables and organizing me quite well in the transition from primary school to high school. My experience was definitely made easier since I... had lots of supportive teachers who would send out rosters throughout the year.”

15 year-old, female

“

I found it ok. Teachers were very understanding and helpful and most older students helped me find my way around. Teachers didn’t give us too much homework, but obviously there were little things to adjust to.”

13 year-old, female

The transition from primary school to high school



I would have appreciated teachers paying more attention to students and actually trying to connect with them as children are human beings with feelings.”

15 year-old, female

Many respondents felt teachers or other staff could be more understanding and better at providing practical support, which included “reaching out” and “actually listening”.

“Having someone you can talk to at school... who is not a teacher. And you can talk to during classes its not like you have to wait.”

12 year-old, female

“If teachers were more supportive. I think my school does a great job of offering services for people struggling but often people are scared to reach out so I think it would be better if the teachers asked us.”

15 year-old, female

“What would have helped is teachers and/or staff keeping their word. Every school says come talk to us if you need a chat but never around when you need them. I and others have been in and out of student services to talk to someone to get help or to vent to someone about something bothering them and they just tell you to go back to class.”

17 year-old, female

Some respondents said that hearing the experiences of older students or having a buddy or mentor would have been useful.

“If I was taught techniques on how to properly study or if I had a mentor, I would’ve gotten through the first year of high school a lot more easily.”

16 year-old, female

“A small group that meets together in the morning where you have a buddy to ask questions too.”

13 year-old, female

Many participants reported generally just wanting someone to listen, show understanding and provide reassurance.

“Having someone to talk to who won’t make my issues feel small as in the moment the last thing I’d want is to think that my issues ‘aren’t a big deal’ and have proper advise.”

15 year-old, female

“More adult/teacher support and constant reassurance that there was more to life, than what I saw in front of me.”

17 year-old, female

The transition from primary school to high school



Instead of people telling me 'that I am going to lose friends' and 'switch friend groups' and "that girls are just mean' I wanted someone to tell me that I will still keep alot of my friends but we are just not going to be as close as we where before."

13 year-old, female

The transition from primary school to high school

“

Family support, not putting pressure on me studying hard. Letting me select what I want to do, not verbally abusing me when I needed them there for me.”

17 year-old, female

A small number of respondents also discussed a lack of support from their family, noting that they felt their concerns and worries were not taken seriously.

“I feel that a lot of things that happened during year 7 may have been prevented if my parents were supportive and willing to help me during that time. However, I do also feel that if I maybe had more confidence in myself, I would have opened up about my struggles and received good support sooner.”

15 year-old, female

“I wish someone would have had understood. Especially my parents would say ‘this is for attention’, ‘it’s a phase’.”

16 year-old, female

More respect and kindness from others, more self-confidence and being taught coping skills

A strong theme that came through was that secondary school creates a significant shift in the social landscape and for many female students this comes with friendship breakdowns, identity crises and often an increase in bullying and exclusion.

Many female young people said they felt judged by their new peers and that it would be helpful if their classmates were kinder and more respectful.

“Quiet nice people instead of gangsters, hooligans, loud people who swear, graffiti, abuse, destroy and be very mean and rude in which I am talking mostly about the arrogant boys.”

12 year-old, female

“The popular group to not be such jerks.”

15 year-old, female

“If [year] seven boys were taught manners.”

17 year-old, female

“Everybody being kind to each other and helping each other belong as not everybody knew each other.”

17 year-old, female



The transition from primary school to high school

A number of the respondents recommended that increased education on safe and respectful relationships was necessary.

“More education for all genders on the female and male body to normalise the changes we go through during this period. Including stuff on self-image and respectful relationships.”

16 year-old, female

“(If) there was a lot more education about identity and sexuality and gender and even sex education in primary schools because then it would be easier for everyone to accept everyone else, instead of being picked on for being different, whether that was gay, Asian, fat, etc.”

15 year-old, female

There was also recognition from some respondents that their lack of self-confidence could be a barrier to making good friends.

“Putting myself out there more and not worrying so much about what people thought about me.”

16 year-old, female

“Just being yourself so you can find the right people.”

12 year-old, female

Accepting that some challenges are normal

Although many girls had suggestions for improving their experience, for various reasons, a significant number of other girls felt the challenges they faced were “normal” or “inevitable” and thought nothing much would have helped or were unsure of ways they could be supported during their move to high school.

“I don’t think anything really could’ve helped what happened was completely normal and most people went through that I say it was just a normal aspect of life to find friends and stuff.”

17 year-old, female

“I don’t think I would have wanted to change this as it has taught me lessons, and helped me develop thick skin.”

16 year-old, female



“

I think if I focused more on improving myself rather than pleasing others, I would have been happier and more content with my experience.”

17 year-old, female

The transition from primary school to high school

Gender diverse young people's views and experiences

“Stressful. There’s a lot of people trying to find themselves and often they turn against each other. Being LGBT was really scary in the first year of high school; it was a really toxic environment.”

15 year-old, non-binary

“It also would’ve helped if teens are just not so judgemental and mean, being brought up to be kind and understanding of people and their differences. It would be nice if people could be whatever they want to be with being free of judgement.”

16 year-old, gender queer

“I hated it. So suddenly everything got so much harder and I really struggled and I’m still really struggling now as well. Socializing, making friends and containing healthy relationships became much more difficult... It felt like people also became a lot meaner too, judging you on anything and everything, to the way you looked, how you acted, and even to the things you liked.”

16 year-old, gender queer

“It was a stressful experience, people went from seeing you as a child to seeing you as an adult and while this is helpful it’s also extremely stressful for me as I feel I cannot live up to these expectations.”

15 year-old, young person identifies ‘in another way’

“

Better staff, and teachers that were able to change up their usual style of teaching to better fit the students instead of leaving us to be confused about it with only a ‘you’ll figure it out.’”

15 year-old, demi-girl

The transition from primary school to high school

Female and gender-diverse young adults looking back

“Kindness goes a long way, help those who you notice struggle. After high school, everyone matures and moves on with their life.”

20 year-old, female

“I would tell myself that even if you don’t feel like you belong at high school, once you leave, there are so many opportunities to find a place where you fit in and meet so many like-minded people.”

23 year-old, female

“Close friendships are better than multiple friendships. It doesn’t matter how many friends you have. This is the perfect time to make mistakes, create and end friendships, and explore your own identity. That way, you will start to learn who you are and are not, what you value, and the person you want to be in the future. You get to decide who you want to take on that journey with you and who you want to leave behind.

I know it feels like that’s all that matters, but beyond high school, you have a whole life ahead of you and you need to look after your mental health and wellbeing to ensure you can thrive mentally, physically, and socially in the future.”

24 year-old, female



The quality of your friendships is more important than the quantity. Friends who judge you based on your appearance and who pressure you are not worth it.”

21 year-old, female





3.

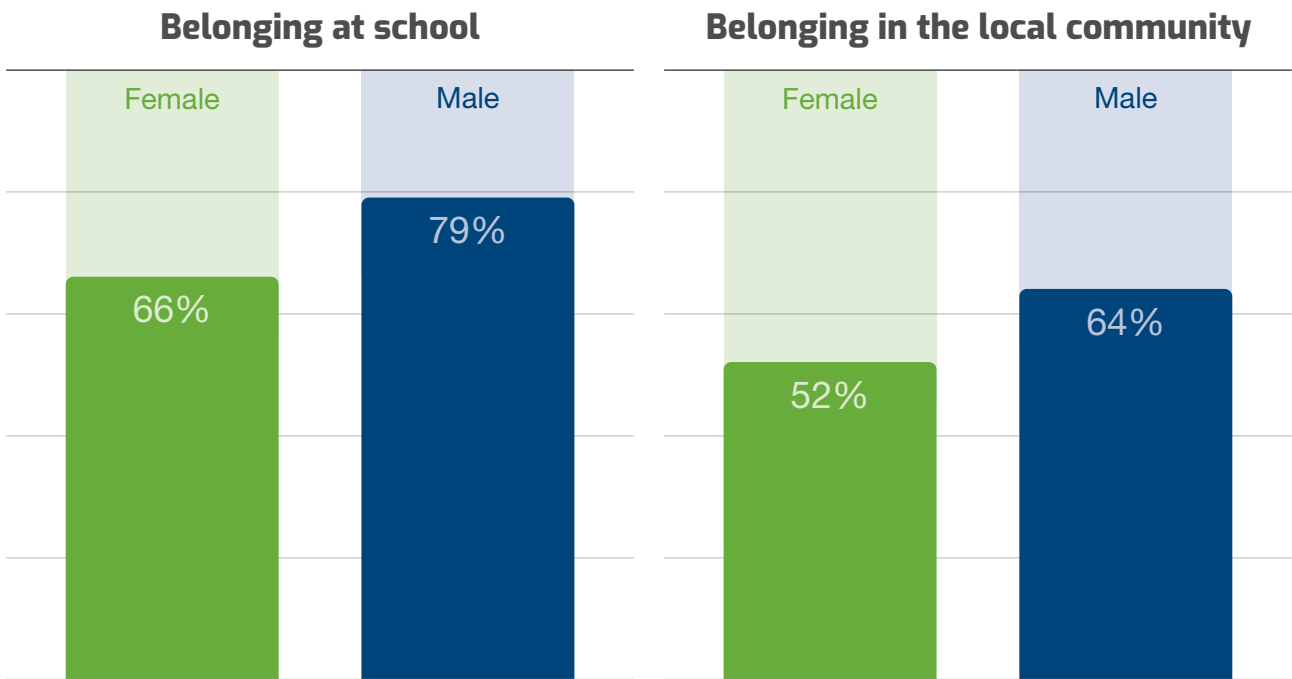
Belonging

Evidence suggests that significantly fewer female than male young people feel they have community connections and a sense of belonging.⁴¹ Various studies show that feeling socially and culturally connected helps young people foster healthy relationships with support people and role models beyond their immediate family, which can in turn help with identity formation.^{42,43}

Belonging

Data from the Speaking Out Survey shows that WA female young people are less likely than their male peers to feel like they belong in their school or local community.

Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students agreeing or strongly agreeing that they feel like they belong at their school or in their local community



Influences and experiences of belonging

To explore what helps female young people feel part of a community we asked two open-text questions on belonging. The responses highlighted the following key processes and activities that impact feelings of belonging:

- Participating in shared activities including sports
- Friends and 'fitting in'
- Feeling a sense of belonging at school
- Other communities – online and in real life.

Participating in shared activities including sports

The most common response regarding a community female young people feel they belong to, was participating in shared activities or groups, including dance, music, religious groups or sport. This supports other research which shows that being involved in community-based activities, especially sport, is highly beneficial for female young people.⁴⁴

Many respondents talked about their sporting community as a place where they feel welcome and safe.

“My horse facility, where I volunteer, ride and vault at the RDA. I feel like I belong, because everyone there has a disability, so we are all the same.”

14 year-old, female

“... My sporting community is also very special to me as I love sport. Being able to come home from school, forget about anything negative in the day, and be able to go to training is amazing. The team environment is also a great thing, including the coaches that are so enthusiastic and not just all about winning, but also having fun. I'm not sure exactly how I could explain these things more but I don't know where I would be without them.”

16 year-old, female

The other extracurricular groups and activities commonly mentioned as places girls feel they belong are music programs and creative arts or dance groups.

“Yes, I am apart of an amazing dance community that allows me to be myself and it is my safe place and home away from home. You can even say my second family.”

17 year-old, female

“Yes, my dance community. It is filled with supportive and humble people. They encourage you to do your best and cheers you on for you to improve. Dancers in my community all came from different (backgrounds), cultures and experiences, there is no (hierarchical) orders in the community, everyone are on the same grounds and they give each other critical comments at the same time as supportive comments to push you forward.”

18 year-old, female



Yes, my basketball community. We all have similar interests and ideas. We are diverse and inclusive which makes us a welcoming space to be apart of.”

15 year-old, female

Belonging

“Yes I love my community. I feel like I really belong in my school as I am in the music program and have rehearsals pretty much everyday and love having goals to work towards such as concerts/performances. It also makes me a more organised person and it has taught me how to deal with stress with was really helpful during ATAR. I also belong to a church, where I play on the music team every couple of weeks. I feel so connected and loved in this community, and I have built really strong friendships through this. I also play tennis at my local club and surf on the weekends, where I get to meet other people from the community and enjoy the social aspect of this.”

18 year-old, female

Friends and ‘fitting in’

Research shows that during adolescence girls’ relationships with friends overtake their relationships with parents as a key source of safety and support.^{45,46}

Many of the female respondents talked about friends with whom they can ‘be themselves’ and ‘share problems’. This is consistent with research findings that show female young people value close friendships characterised by high levels of “cooperation, social conversation and self-disclosure”.⁴⁷

Many female young people report a sense of belonging and happiness in their friendship groups supporting the finding that healthy friendships are protective against low self-esteem and poor mental health.

“Well I have a big friend group of freaks like me that doesn’t care about their image, and we are always helping each other out and we welcome new people as long as they are not annoying.”

12 year-old, female

“I got good friends I can rely on to love me for me. We are very different people and not your basic high school stereotypes which allows us to be unique with each other and embrace our differences without judgement or harshness.”

16 year-old, female



I ffeel like I belong with my group of friends. I’m always happy when I spend time with them, and feel comfortable sharing my problems and achievements with them. I also find I can laugh about my problems rather than stress about them with my friends.”

14 year-old, female

Belonging



Girls have this heavy pressure on them to be perfect and beautiful all the time and walking around with this pressure all the time is draining on a young girl. Girls take a while to settle in with themselves as we are trying to figure out our style and just our sense of belonging.”

17 year-old, female

Having close friends gives female young people a sense of belonging, while feelings of exclusion and bullying can mean they feel very strongly like they don't fit in and don't belong. A theme throughout the responses was that many girls feel strong pressure to fit into stereotypical categories.

“... I think that the popular group was like this thing we fantasised about joining because they are what we should be aiming for, whether it's because they get all the guys, or they all have straight hair or they're all skinny. I think you never really felt like you fit in until you were in the popular group.”

15 year-old, female

“Because girls must fit into a category whether that be popular or nerdy etc. When they don't fit into a category they are 'shunned' away and aren't accepted for who they are. I mean, most of it probably comes from within: not believing that you belong because you don't look a certain way, or don't have the same experiences etc.”

16 year-old, female

Due to the high standards girls think they must conform to, if they do not they are more likely to feel excluded as they do not 'fit in'.”

17 year-old, female

A number of participants noted that physical attributes (appearance) also can have a strong bearing on whether you feel like you belong.

“Because society at the moment expects perfection from girls, but it is very, very, very difficult to be perfect in societies standards. You could be classed as too big so you loose weight but then get classed as too skinny, so the feeling of never being good enough is a huge thought in many girls minds.”

16 year-old, female

“We feel like we have expectations on us and put expectations on each other on how we should dress and behave and etc. we're afraid to be the sloppy outlier.”

16 year-old, female



Belonging

Some respondents report compromising their values and authenticity to 'fit in', even if this does not work or makes them feel unhappy.

"I tried to stay true to myself, but it was very challenging because it felt like the only way I would be accepted was to be someone else. There were very defined groups in our class, the Popular Girls (I am not and never was), and the Quiet Girls. The boys were all very immature and uninterested in befriending girls (especially unpopular ones). I was definitely not 'cool', and so could never fit in with the popular girls, and while I was shy, I didn't want to be one of the Quiet Girls. No person should feel that they have to limit themselves or change to fit in."

13 year-old, female

"No, I don't feel like I belong anywhere... my friend group is popular and I sit with them and I've known them forever but I feel like that all hate me and are just waiting for me to leave and never come back, my siblings are all perfect and I have to try to live up to that but I can't because I'm not like them but no one seems to get that, I do sport but I'm never at the top, even when I am in a top team I'm the worst one there and I can tell people are judging me and it doesn't make me feel like I belong anywhere because I am always getting those judge-y looks. How am I supposed to feel good or feel like I belong with those looks dragging me down all the time?"

14 year-old, female

A number of participants drew a link between low self-esteem and feeling the need to fit in and belong.

"I feel that low self-esteem contributes to this issue quite a lot, given that low self-esteem is especially common in girls. As low self-esteem usually causes one to feel less confident in themselves and their abilities, it often results in feelings of estrangement."

15 year-old, female



If you're with white people you don't act as black to fit in but when your with your mob they laugh if you act to white and it makes you feel like how should I act if I have to act different in front of certain people."

14 year-old, female

Feeling a sense of belonging at school

While data show that female young people are less likely than male young people to feel like they belong at school,⁴⁸ many respondents talked positively about their sense of belonging at school.

Participants reported various reasons for feeling like they belong at school and while some feel part of the broader school community, others report belonging to smaller sub-groups such as friend, sport or music groups within their school community.



Yes I do, I feel I have many 'communities' that I belong to. My schooling community, as my school is so large, there are a lot of people to get to know but it also makes it easier to find a friend group to stay with. The teachers are also very friendly which makes me more confident to have completely random and open conversations with them."

16 year-old, female

"Most of the time I always feel like I belong in schools really. I feel like school you can express your feelings more to others, like there's more freedom. I like going to school to communicate with a lot of people I try to get to know. School is one of the ways to finding who you (truly) are. It's a place where you challenge yourself with lots of things you experience. You get educated over there, you develop a lot of friendships out there and it's more of a practise thing because you'll be meeting a lot of new people out there in the world."

12 year-old, female

"I feel as though I belong to my school community to some degree, especially certain social circles or after-school co-curricular clubs... Most communities that I feel I belong to are because of shared interests or goals that we are working towards together; which brings us together and makes us feel like we belong. However, I don't usually feel as though I belong to the 'entirety' of a community, rather to a smaller, intricate group within that community. (A social circle of friends, or one of many smaller groups within the overall group, if that makes sense). This is most likely because it's easier to identify with a smaller group of individuals if you know them all on a more personal level than on a wider scale."

15 year-old, female

For others, school is a less welcoming place.

"... I feel as if I definitely belong with the community of close friends I have, but at school, I feel as if my peers in my year are people I just can't seem to get along with/feel like I belong with."

15 year-old, female

Belonging

Other communities – online and in real life

Almost equal in proportion to participants who report they belong in their school community are participants who feel they belong in their local community. Most of these participants report living in a “small town” or in close proximity to people with whom they have a safe and positive relationship. Additionally, a number of these respondents talked about having a job or working with/for people in the local area.

“Yes. With a population of approximately 2000 people, the community is highly supportive and caring because it is easy to talk to them. It’s hard to not be involved in my community because there are many nice people who treat us all like close friends. So, living in a small community has really benefitted me in the fact that it’s easy to communicate with everyone because they are very supportive.”

16 year-old, female

“Yes I do, as I am from a small community town and I participate in sports and I work 2 jobs which helps me to connect with people and the community.”

18 year-old, female

A number of participants talked about their cultural or religious communities and how safe and welcome these communities made them feel.

“I’ve been part of the Indian community most of my life, and it’s very supportive, you always feel like you have people around you who care about you.”

15 year-old, female

“Yes, the Eritrean community in Perth, absolutely love it, and belong to it perfectly as that is where I come from, people look like I do, speak the same language, and share similar thoughts and feelings, also the Muslim community, love it so much.”

16 year-old, female



Yes, it’s a small area but a big community. everyone knows everyone pretty much. and also it’s a very multicultural area which is nice.”

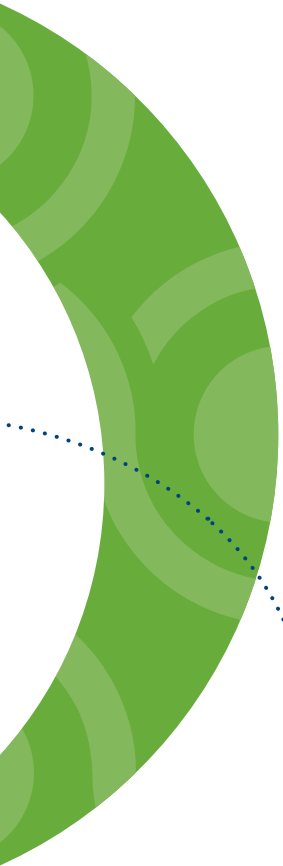
15 year-old, female



Yes. Bhutanese community – when I see people wearing our traditional clothes and speak our language it makes me happy and safe.”

14 year-old, female

Belonging



Another community in which a number of participants strongly feel they belong is the LGBTQIA+SB community. Almost all participants who report 'fitting in' with this group mention their feelings of belonging stem from shared experiences of queer/trans-phobic bullying or harassment and the high levels of understanding, inclusivity and support provided by others within the LGBTQIA+SB community.

“I feel safest in a community of LGBTQ+ people as I know that they are some of the most accepting people and are very unlikely to judge you or make fun of you because they have experienced the same and they know that they don't like it.”

13 year-old, demi-girl

“I belong to the LGBTQIA+ community. The people in this community are so loving, understanding and inclusive. As so many of us have been through similar unpleasant experiences we really connect to each other, because of how difficult it is to be queer, and the amount of hate this community receives. Sharing advice and love to each other to help others get through difficult times. The community really uplifts you and celebrates our differences. I'm so glad to be a part of this wonderful community.”

16 year-old, gender queer

Responses also show that for some young people, online communities can provide a sense of belonging and support.

“I don't really have a community. The only people I really feel like I belong with a friends I talk online with.”

13 year-old, female

For some respondents, family is where they feel safe and most like they belong.

“Yep, it is my family. They are extremely kind and caring, and accept me.”

12 year-old, female



I think technology is adding to disconnect. I have a lot of online friends but I don't feel connected to many of my friends.”

16 year-old, female

Belonging

Barriers to belonging

Participants reported several significant barriers to belonging. When asked to consider why more female than male young people do not feel part of a community, three key barriers to belonging were identified by participants, including:

- Girls are subject to different social and behavioural standards than boys
- Social interactions and relationships are more intense for girls than boys
- Gender bias in community-based activities and opportunities

Girls are subject to different social and behavioural standards than boys

Around one-half of female participants aged 12 to 18 years reported that the reason female young people feel they do not belong is because they cannot meet the social and behavioural standards placed on them by others.

Many respondents said they feel others expect them to be 'perfect' across multiple domains, including their physical appearance, academic and sport performance, and in their personal relationships. Moreover, participants report that these expectations are inherently linked to gender stereotypes, sexism and social norms that are not evident to the same degree for male young people.

“Girls are often expected to act a certain way, boys are too, but are often given more freedom to discover who they are. Girls are told that they are supposed to behave and look a certain way by people in the community and especially from the internet, making them feel uncomfortable and alone.”

14 year-old, female

“**Because there are lots of standards about how girls should look, what they should say, do, etc. This also applies to boys, however, I feel like it is more common in girls, that hype of looking pretty, being social, being good at school and sports and overall being the girl that EVERYONE likes and knows.**”

14 year-old, female



Girls all over the place have high standards hung over their heads such as academics and appearance, so when making friends they are self conscious and reserved, therefore they may feel like they don't belong.”

13 year-old, female

Belonging



Girls are often sexualised and made to feel lesser from the day they are born. its deeply ingrained in society and I think that plays a massive part in why its harder for girls to feel like they fit in when misogyny is around every corner.”

14 year-old, female

Many girls also talked about not feeling like they belong in their community and in society more broadly, due to gender stereotypes.

“I guess throughout my short life I’ve come to terms with the fact that girls are always told that they don’t belong e.g. workplace, school, hospital, courtroom, etc. and I think that boys where ever they may go its ok because they are ‘strong’, ‘not emotional’, ‘smart’, while women are ‘weak’, ‘emotional’, ‘housewife material’, so we don’t feel we belong because we are not welcome we are judged to be in that community or environment.”

13 year-old, female

“I think this is because there’s a lot more pressure and responsibility of being a girl. (Society) has stereotyped females into looking after ourselves, having a good occupation, looking a certain way etc. and if girls don’t meet this criteria we feel out of place.”

16 year-old, female

Similar to findings that appearance-based validation is central to girls’ self-esteem, participants often reported that physical attractiveness is key to being accepted by others. Many respondents consider appearance-based validation from males as critical for social acceptance, however, when male approval is in the form of sexualised attention, participants report being too uncomfortable to be themselves, inhibiting their ability to build connections with others. Participants also felt that equivalent criteria to be attractive to be socially accepted do not exist for male young people.

“Boys aren’t often mocked for their appearance or encouraged to care about how they look to other people.”

12 year-old, female

“Our whole lives seem to revolve around if we are ‘pretty’ enough and if the boys think that.”

16 year-old, female

“Because girls are more pressured by society to look good to impress guys or get male validation.”

16 year-old, female

Belonging

“... Girls are sexualised and/or teased for having certain interests. This prevents girls from reaching out to others, even if they are aware of a community space out there for them, because they are made to feel like they can’t share their interests with anyone else, for fear of ridicule or unwanted sexual/romantic advances.”

17 year-old, female

The social acceptance of boys’ mistakes is another commonly reported aspect of social expectations that many participants feel impacts their sense of belonging. The way the anti-social behaviour of some boys is normalised and excused as “boys will be boys” exacerbates the pressure many participants feel to be flawless and highlights the ongoing double standards.

“More pressure on girls to be perfect, act or look a certain way so when they naturally don’t as these expectations are irrational and impossible, they’re almost shunned from their groups. Boys however will always ‘be boys’ and there is no pressure on them to act a certain way. They’re even encouraged to make mistakes and irrational decisions.”

16 year-old, female

“Guys have always been praised for the same things girls are shamed for.”

16 year-old, female

Social interactions and relationships are more intense for girls than boys

Many participants feel girls have a lower sense of belonging than boys due to the greater intensity of girls’ social interactions and relationships. Responses strongly support previous research showing that boys tend to form friendships in large groups through “rough-and-tumble play, competitive activity, and organised play”,⁴⁹ while girls build more intimate connections based on high levels of self-disclosure that also makes them more vulnerable to relationship breakdowns.^{50,51}

Many participants contrast the way boys are more ‘easy going’ and less judgemental than girls when developing connections with others. Similarly, many participants report that, unlike boys, girls compete with each other for social approval, put each other down, and actively exclude one another from particular social circles, making it much more difficult for girls to feel they belong than boys.



If girls do wrong or make a mistake in their life choices then they are painted as a bad or disgusting person for the rest of their life as when a boy do something wrong it’s just cause they’re ‘boys’ and are excused for their behaviour/ mistakes.”

17 year-old, female



Belonging

“From my experiences I feel like girls need close friends and they have to have someone they know they can trust and that is really close to them and they know really well and the relationships are often intense-ish, almost like having a girlfriend/boyfriend. But boys are a lot more laid back in friendships and are a lot more casual going into it.”

14 year-old, female

“In my opinion, boys are very chilled and relaxed, and have more spontaneous personalities, so would be more inclined to go up to almost anybody in public and start talking. They would make friends easier I reckon, just because of their chilled out approach to life. I often envy boys because of this. I believe girls worry more about expectations, definitely what other girls and boys think of them, and stress over the fact that they ‘have to impress’ someone, or ‘make good impressions’.”

15 year-old, female

“I don’t know many statistics but I do feel as though boys are more comfortable making friends (on the large scale, so not all boys but more boys than girls) which means that most girls lack a sense of belonging.”

14 year-old, female



Because girls are mean and turned against each other by most social standards and the formation of cliques etc. Not only this but a lot of the time are forced into feeling isolated from their differences etc.”

16 year-old, female

Many participants talked about how female young people can form cliques, be competitive with each other and judgemental.

“Boys are much more welcoming than girls, as girls tend to form specific friendship groups with certain people, and the fact girls can be more judgemental than boys and girls are effected by others (more) than boys.”

14 year-old, female

“The social pressure to be skinny and pretty causes us to be judgemental and distant.”

16 year-old, female

“Because we as girls are nastier to each other where as boys seem to encourage others. I feel girls would rather see other girls fail then fail themselves. No words of encouragement comes out of random girls mouths, where boys seem likely to do so.”

17 year-old, female

Belonging

Gender bias in community-based activities

A number of respondents also felt that community participation is geared towards male-oriented activities, making it difficult for female young people to belong. Many participants reported that boys have more opportunities to connect with community, especially through sport, and this was seen as a result of gender expectations that boys inherently have a “love for sport” while girls don’t.

“Most activities in a local area are more ‘male targeted’ such as basketball courts and skate parks. These activities are more stereotypically male dominant so girls don’t feel welcome there.”

18 year-old, female

“Boys are more likely to have sport and continue as they get older. Lots of girls either don’t do sport or drop out of sports unless they’re really good. This is the whole being part of a team and being part of something. If you’re not into sport, what else is there, especially in country areas.”

12 year-old, female

“I think because there are less opportunities for girls to be more active in their local area and community. Sports in my community is more dominated by the boys than girls. I think a lot of girls feel insecure and nervous about joining in on things because they’re worried about their image and embarrassing themselves.”

16 year-old, female





Because if you don't fit into a category of how most girls see you as everyone makes you an outcast or a 'loner'."

14 year-old, demi-boy

Gender diverse young people's views and experiences

"It's harder. There are less activities, for example, there are so many different sports, clubs, music things and other things that boys were typically in. And they all support each other but when girls come in they get picked on. So girls are left with dance, netball and gymnastics. All of which require a certain body type and ability that a lot of kids don't have. It's harder to feel like you belong somewhere when there's nothing to do."

15 year-old, demi-girl

"Because boys feel more like they belong, they are out in the community which is quite intimidating for young girls going out and seeing lots of loud teenage boys – it's almost expected that boys will fit in and girls don't which can make you think you don't belong when you do – there's a lot more vocal and prominent societal expectations of girls that make it harder to be involved in the community e.g. 'playing sports is a boy thing' makes girls feel like they can't play sport and therefore not interact with the community."

17 year-old, young person who selected 'in another way'



Belonging

Female and gender-diverse young adults looking back

“I would tell my younger self that everyone experiences the same struggles with belonging that I did. I would tell her to cherish her friendships and to make time for them even when school got busy because I will never get that time back and I regret somewhat how much time I spent studying and how little time I let myself spend time with friends in high school. I would tell her that friendships also change over time, but that does not make them any less special as the time I spent with my friends shaped who I am but it doesn't mean they are going to be in my life forever or in the same ways they were in high school. In telling her this, I would also emphasise to cherish her friends in the moment. I would tell my younger self that she will find her people, that she will find that sense of belonging.”

20 year-old, female

“That it's OK to have moments where you don't feel like you fit in or belong. School feels like it's your (entire) world but there is a bigger one out there. Find what you're passionate about and throw yourself into it and finds your sense of belonging and meaning through that.”

24 year-old, female

“... Coming from a culturally diverse background [it] took a while for me to find a crowd that I would fit in with and its still something that I struggle with today. I would tell my younger self to be proud of my roots and stop second guessing myself for who I am.”

23 year-old, female

“

I would tell myself to worry less about what people think of you as they are probably thinking the same thing about themselves and life is too short to worry about how others perceive you and to take chances talking to different people.”

22 year-old, female



4.

Gender inequality

While there has been significant progress in improving gender equity in Australia over the last 50 years, there are still many areas of everyday life where inequality remains for Australian women and girls. Research shows that adults continue to treat male and female children differently,⁵² which embeds gender stereotypes and ideas of appropriate behaviour for boys and girls and men and women.



Gender inequality

As a young person, gender inequality can be felt in everyday sexism or experiences of sexual harassment and sexual violence.

A significant majority of the female and gender-diverse young people responding to the survey were clear that they felt gender inequality is still a significant barrier to them having a full and happy life.

Understandings of gender inequality

Many of the female respondents explained how they feel gender inequality is still a significant issue in society today.

“Gender equality is a huge issue. It has improved over time but there are still the stereotypes lingering in our society today. Gender inequality suppresses men into not showing emotion and suffering with mental health in silence but it also just as damaging on women. Women still are not being paid the same as a man for the same work load. Women are suffering in silence from sexual assault, domestic abuse, and rape... in fear of speaking up to not be seen as weak. This world we live in today is so mentally damaging.”

17 year-old, female

“Gender inequality is a big issue, as girls are not always given the same opportunities to succeed, especially in certain areas as boys. This is also true for gender diverse people. Girls are told to fit certain ideals and aren't encouraged to enter into areas such as STEM. The gendering of toys and other gender stereotypes further this message and make it seem like there is only one way to be a girl, which isn't true.”

14 year-old, female

“It is a global major issue. Even though it is being promoted at my school, not many boys or girls act in a way that treats the other gender fairly. Boys are often too scared to cry, talk about their feelings or dress the way they want. Girls are often too scared to dress the way they want without being called a ‘slut’... Stereotypes of both genders are still evident in society today...”

17 year-old, female

Gender inequality



Because boys are always stereotyped into roles, and girls are always stereotyped into roles so we feel like we can't wander from them... We are trained into it from when we are even just born."

12 year-old, female

Everyday experiences of gender inequality

In this survey, female and gender-diverse young people were asked: can you tell us about a time when gender inequality impacted you, and almost all participants reported they had been treated differently due to their gender in various aspects of their lives.

Experiences of inequality through stereotypes

Many female respondents talked about gender stereotypes having an impact on their daily life, including being treated differently to their male peers and siblings.

"[At] my work, my male [co-workers] who are similar fitness capabilities as I are assigned jobs like lifting heavy items and putting stock on the shelves while I as a female are forced to do tasks such as cleaning and customer service."

18 year-old, female

"In my day-to-day life I do experience examples of society's conditioning of women to act a certain way, and gender stereotypes/expectations of certain genders to act a certain way. A few simple examples include many get-togethers I've been to; where boys have been allowed to continue playing, whilst young girls were expected to help serve food or clean up afterwards. Although this isn't exactly an example of purposeful discrimination, it is an example of most-likely-accidental stereotypes of 'women's roles' at a gathering, and the lack of expectations for males of the same age or older. Another simple example is that often, when I've gone to all-female schools, they often offer electives such as 'sewing', 'home-economics' and 'embroidery', whereas boys schools offer more 'traditionally masculine' activities, such as 'wood works', 'metal works' or 'plastic working'."

15 year-old, female

Gender inequality

A number of girls experience being treated differently to the boys in their family, sometimes for cultural reasons.

“It impacts me when people say, ‘sit up straight’, ‘don’t forget to smile!’, and the worst one, ‘sit properly! It’s not lady-like!’ I mean, would someone tell my brother to sit properly? I think not! Some of this stuff happens in my own house, and that isn’t right at all!”

12 year-old, female

“My grandparents are slightly sexist and prefer my older brother to me. Because of this, whenever we go to their house, he gets treated better and more attention, and are always going on about how good he is and ignoring me and my own achievements. Also, my parents are very overprotective when it comes to me. When he was my age, he was already allowed to go out by himself and I’m not allowed to go anywhere without a parent or sibling.”

13 year-old, female

“I believe that gender inequality is an issue in aboriginal families because boys always get to do whatever they want while girls are always told what do and not do. It’s also very unfair how little freedom girls have.”

16 year-old, female

Many female students explained how they are treated differently to male students at their school based on their gender. In particular, many girls said they are not encouraged or given the opportunity to do more trade-related or STEM subjects (e.g. woodwork, metalwork, science, technology, engineering, maths) or do sports that are considered more ‘masculine’. Other girls commented on having different dress standards and expectations around behaviour at school than boys.

“Yes, at my school we have cooking and textiles as our electives options. At our brother school they have metal work and woodwork. They can come to our school and cook and use our facilities but we can’t go to their school and use their facilities? Make that make sense. Also the general stereotypes surrounding a girls school where we have very strict rules and can’t even spill water whereas our boy school can literally tackle one another and teachers don’t even bat an eye.”

14 year-old, female



At home, my parents and brother make me and my mum do all the chores but my dad and brother get to play video games. I don’t necessarily blame them, it’s just the way they’ve been brought up by their parents.”

13 year-old, female

Gender inequality



Yes, girls aren't encouraged to take courses such as computing and metal work and when we do the environment feels unsafe."

17 year-old, female

"I was very young, but I was told in year 2 that I couldn't play soccer for my school because it was a boys sport. I talked to the coach and... In the end they let us trial and we all got to play. However the most concerning part is that this gender inequality was being implemented so early on in kids lives that it limits their freedom of choice and to explore new sports or friends."

16 year-old, female

"Gender equality is 100% and issue... Even at my school STEM club – I am the only girl in year 9 because the 3 girls that join quit by year 9 because of the number of boys in the club. Boys are presented with more opportunities and have more leeway than girls while we have more expectations put on us and less help given."

15 year-old, female

"[When] students are told what's acceptable for their uniforms, girls at my school are told they can't wear leggings because they're inappropriate or make others uncomfortable meanwhile the boys are constantly lifting their shirts and are never punished. Another example as well as many more is swearing. I have friends who have been scolded for saying shit or hell, while the boys are yelling across the oval f*g/ot, c*nt and white boys yelling n*gger and no-one gives it a second glance."

14 year-old, female

Another key comment made by many of the female young people was how teachers and other adults will ask for some 'strong boys' to help move things or do physical work. Girls feel very strongly that this is telling them they are weaker and less capable than boys.

"Asking for 'strong guys' to help with moving tables and chairs etc. It's insulting."

13 year-old, female

"Yes I do. I feel women are treated differently by some, unconsciously. At a young age little girls hear there teacher saying, can I have some strong boys help me move these chairs. This makes girls think they are less strong and valued then men."

17 year-old, female

Gender inequality

“Very much so. Especially in primary school and early high school, there were a lot of moments which weren’t huge, but still played a part in gender inequality. When the teachers would ask for someone strong to help lift things, as a very physically fit dancer I would always raise my hand because I enjoyed helping, but instead got told to sit down and let the boys do it for me because they didn’t believe I was strong enough even though I was stronger than half the boys in the class at the time. This exact scenario happened around 8 more times after that. I gave up trying to help after that...”

17 year-old, female

Similar to the other topics outlined in the report, many of the respondents particularly discussed appearance-based inequality.

“The standards I’m held to, and the stereotypes many boys at school put on me. I’m a girl, and recently cut my hair short. I’ve been bullied since then at various levels of intensity on the basis of people believing I’m non binary, trans or an emo. Just because I like my hair short. I don’t have any issues with people who actually identify this way, but... because of the amount of times I’ve been fed the idea that I will never be womanly enough, I feel as though I am not worthy enough of the “cisgender girl” title, even if that is how I feel.”

14 year-old, female

“As girls grow up they are told to change for men, don’t walk alone at night, don’t wear that, etc. Schools make the girls have dress code/uniform rules so that boys don’t get ‘distracted’. Why are we telling women to change instead of teaching boys to be better? We all know the saying ‘boys will be boys’. That saying is extremely harmful because it is teaching girls to go oh well that’s just the way men are and we have to change for them.”

17 year-old, female



Gender inequality



Yes 100%, my younger brother is allowed to go out whenever he would like, even if it's late or my parents don't know everyone going. But I cannot go out without asking first because it's deemed unsafe for me because i'm a young girl."

16 year-old, female

Boys get more opportunities and more freedom

Many respondents talked about their male peers and siblings being given more opportunities to be active in the community and more freedom as a result of their gender.

"Yes, it is always an issue. Today me and my friends were talking about if we were allowed to go into the city or to Fremantle at night and pretty much unanimously we wouldn't be able to because there's always a chance a creepy man might kidnap and rape us or something like that. It's unfair because if we were guys we could totally go out at night because guys don't have those types of things to worry about."

15 year-old, female

Experiencing sexism

Many female young people reported experiencing sexism from boys at their school and other adults and young people in the community, particularly in the form of harassment, being sexualised, or experiencing 'sexual double standards',^{53,54} where males are praised for certain sexual behaviour and females are shamed for it.

"[As] much as boys have beauty standards to fit into, they have less than girls, as well as the fact that girls have more pressure on them to fit in to the standards. Women are judged more harshly than men, and we are pressured to be flawless people. We're essentially pressured to be a filter. If we're not straight, we're fetishised. If we're fat, we're fetishised. Society has so many standards for women, the standards contradict themselves. Be this, but be that too. Like, what do you want us to do? We can't be both. Sexism is also running rampant. It's not ok."

12 year-old, female

"It used to impact me a lot in primary school when boys my age would pick on me and be mean to me, they would pull my hair or make snide remarks about my appearance or personality, yet when I would tell my teachers or parents about it they would brush off my worries and tell me "They probably just have a crush on you, boys will be boys". This mentally lead me to being taken advantage of in many ways and being bullied because I thought it

Gender inequality

was normal behaviour and that I should just let them do whatever. It also accounted for many of the insecurities I still hold with me till this day.”

16 year-old, female

“Boys can never do any wrong apparently because its always just ‘boys being boys’. I’ve been assaulted and harassed AT SCHOOL and have reported it only to be met with ‘oh well it’s just boys being boys’ – even after seeking police action etc. It was still excused because I’m a girl and being sensitive? Girls are never listened to and constantly shunned aside and honestly it’s horrible.”

16 year-old, female

“It is. There are a lot of double standards that happen a lot. When men have slept with lots of women its praised upon; however when the roles are reversed the girl is called a whore. Women have been treated as an object sexually and even out on the streets as a minor I get catcalled all the time by fully grown adults yet I have seen nor heard no man express the same experiences as me, especially from men who are over 15 years older than I am.”

15 year-old, female

“Being called a slut, whilst the guy is praised for getting the girl in bed.”

16 year-old, female

Feeling unsafe

Many female respondents reported that it is very common for girls to feel unsafe in various settings, mainly due to the way they are sexualised by males. Respondents often contrasted their experiences of feeling unsafe with how carefree and safe boys feel in their everyday lives.

“Stereotypical views towards women in many different ways can effect the way women are treated. Do men feel unsafe and scared walking home alone and night?”

15 year-old, female

“I do not feel as safe as guys do. I can’t just go out and party without worrying a guy has slipped a drug in my drink or spiked with alcohol. I don’t feel safe around a lot of the males especially ones who rave about how much



Work – I work as a waitress. Customers were rude and sexually harassing me as I am female, then very polite to my male co-worker.”

14 year-old, female



Because girls are frequently shamed for being ‘weak’ and they are sexualised so they dont feel safe walking anywhere without being stared down by a bunch of old men.”

13 year-old, female

Gender inequality

they love sex. I feel on edge and need to keep a barrier. I also think Males get to have the unrealistic expectations around dating. As soon as a girl is friendly they 'have feelings for you' and when the girl doesn't then the girl is in the wrong for not liking the male because he was being so nice and friendly to her. Why do we have to owe males a relationship or sex if we are just being friendly? Why do males expect this?"

17 year-old, female

"... When explaining to my guy friends why I couldn't just walk home alone in the dark, they couldn't wrap their heads around it because they've never had to worry about the dangers that come with walking alone like females do. Even when I'm with a group of friends at night time I don't feel safe."

17 year-old, female

Impact on future choices and opportunities

We asked female young people whether they thought their gender could impact their choices and opportunities in the future. The majority of respondents felt that this was possible.

"Yes, I know that in the future it's going to be so much harder to get a job. I know that I will have to work twice as hard just to get a promotion or do anything. To put it simply I'll be a [woman] in a man's world. Although we strive for equality and whatever but honestly the fact is we still get [paid] less. All girls my age know it. Girls younger than me know it. We all know it. Men will be chosen first for any good opportunities. If I'm in a board room with all men it's likely they will try to manipulate me or try to do something to me. It's possible that I might even be groped and only be given opportunities if I let it happen."

14 year-old, female



Gender inequality

A large number of respondents felt it was likely that their gender will impact their future career opportunities. Girls who are considering careers in traditionally male-dominated industries are particularly concerned about their prospects.

“Yes I do. I think that being a girl I will have to work 100x times harder than a guy to get where they are whatever path I go down especially seeing as I am looking at going into law or economics. Both these careers are dominated by men which isn’t good. I also think that if I choose to have kids in the future solely because I will be the one giving birth my income and employment supplies will drop. I also know I will be given less [opportunities].”

15 year-old, female

“Yes, I want to go into the medical field, and I expect that I’m going to be assumed to be a ‘nurse’ instead of a doctor, and that it will be inferred that my future husband will be the one making my family money. I also work in hospitality at the moment, and even after only 6 months, I don’t know how long it will last as it can often be quite confrontational for me as a teen girl.”

16 year-old, female

“Yes, the job I’m hoping for is very male dominated and I know I’m going to be harassed or manipulated by other male colleagues at some point.”

17 year-old, female

Other respondents said that being female means they will need to juggle or choose between having children and a having career or feel they will be denied work or other personal/career development opportunities due to their gender.

“I want to go into a field that requires researching and camping and going bush and going rural and all sorts of things outdoors. I’m scared that they’ll look at me and say ‘she’s a girl so she won’t be strong enough/fit enough/smart enough to keep up’ I’m also scared that when I get married, I’ll be made to cook and clean and look after the kids, even though I think it should be 50/50.”

15 year-old, female



As someone who wants to work in a male dominated industry I do believe that there will be less opportunities for me and I will have to work a lot harder than my male peers to achieve the same level as them.”

16 year-old, female

Gender inequality



What happens when I decide to have children? I am expected to take time off to care for those kids, while my husband is at work. What if I am the one who wants to work? Society will frown on me.”

15 year-old, female

“I feel like in the future I will have less opportunities open to me or get paid less than a boy will or that when I grow up, if I want to have children, that will take the place of whatever career I end up in.”

15 year-old, female

For some it was not just about their gender, but also their sexuality or cultural background.

“Yes, I feel like those who are sexist will just plain refuse me because I’m a woman, even though I would put 1000000% into the job, it doesn’t matter. I also feel like men who think they’re superior will think they have a right to push me around and take liberties. Or they’ll just look down on me. I also feel my sexuality will impact my future, but I’m unapologetically me so the haters can go screw themselves.”

12 year-old, female

“Yes, especially since I wear the hijab, that’s like double trouble. It’s known that women are often paid less than men, and men can get more opportunities than women, mainly in a work-place setting.”

13 year-old, female

“Yes of course. Statistically as a woman who is not white, it immediately reduces my opportunities in the future and contributes to the ever so growing prevalence of boys over girls.”

17 year-old, female

“Definitely and so does my ethnicity e.g. racism, sexism and misogynistic people.”

14 year-old, female

For a number of female young people, the choices they have made regarding their future career path mean they feel confident that they will not be disadvantaged.

“No, I feel the field I would like to pursue has many opportunities for women, and today sometimes it can almost be better to be a woman in some circumstances.”

18 year-old, female

Gender inequality

“I think now it’s good that pretty much all jobs have gender equality between their workers, except in the building/engineering field but I hope that’ll change with the next generation. Personally, I would like to be a Primary school teacher so I don’t think I’ll have any problems getting a job as a girl in the future.”

13 year-old, female

“Maybe, however I wish to be a nurse which is always seen as a more feminine job (even though it isn’t) so opportunities shouldn’t be too limited for me.”

14 year-old, female

A number of girls recognised their own privilege and felt that this would mean their future pathway was relatively secure.

“No, I am a white girl from a middle class family, living in Perth. I think my future is going to be pretty good.”

15 year-old, female

“No, for everything else about me is has society’s privileges. I am of European decent, I have rich parents, no disability. My generation has more of a conscience for diversity and equality too.”

15 year-old, female

A substantial minority felt that their gender would not influence their future for a variety of reasons.

“Luckily no, I live in a great, diverse place and do not think my gender will limit me in any way.”

12 year-old, female

“I like to think no as I am a strong girl and will fight for respect for myself.”

14 year-old, female

“Nope, I think that I can do anything that a boy can.”

17 year-old, female

“

I feel gender inequality is slowly getting better and I think/hope that in the future people will not be discriminated against because they are a girl/boy.”

12 year-old, female

“

Yes, the boys in fact get treated worse than the girls.”

13 year-old, male

“

I don't see it as much of an issue in Australia besides the fact that women still don't get payed as much for the same job as men.”

13 year-old, male

Male young people's perspectives

“In today's society I feel there's a lot of pressure on girls. The outdated pressure of them needing to be housewives and perfect, added with new modern pressure of being independent and needing to find a job, all while being expected to have children affects girls mentally.”

14 year-old, male

“I'm not sure. Equality is a social construct that humans made up because we think we're better than any other species on this planet. Men have more testosterone, and this is why they are stronger and more powerful and aggressive than women. Whilst on the other hand, some men use that to their advantage and got some idea that women are useless, but without a female organism, mammals can't reproduce. Men aren't meant to be feminine, that's not how nature works.”

14 year-old, male

“I often distance myself from discussion of gender politics, but for an inclusive answer I would have to say that anyone that identifies as an extended type of gender(s) (non-binary, etc.) experience a tenfold increase in discrimination. Whether this discrimination (bullying, harassment, pay inequality) is in the workplace, school and other licensed premises, institutions will be less prepared to handle these groups of people. This is mainly due to how undeveloped written law is concerning these nuanced gender ideas that only started to noticeably gain recognition in the last few decades.”

18 year-old, male

“Yes, I do believe it's an issue. Gender inequality can be harmful for both genders, but has been most detrimental for females. Gender inequality could lead to social expectations, including gender-specific roles in work and social environments, differences in pay and differences in personal development. Gender inequality can lead to some people of the same characteristics having different career and life outcomes. Gender role expectations can increase the barriers for males to be nurses or females to be successful athletes, in comparison to their opposing gender counterparts.”

20 year-old, male

Gender inequality



I think it is a problem within today's society, but it is not as big as people think. It definitely needs to be confronted and dealt with because no one should feel like a minority or a lesser person just because they are different. And I believe that girls get more respect than other people from what I can see in my classes at school."

16 year-old, male

“

I was sexually harrassed on a train and then when I went to go tell someone about it at student services they then brought in a man who would have no idea what it was like and just gave me advice on how I should cover up more.”

17 year-old,
gender fluid

“

Yes, because some companies don't support LGBTQIA.”

12 year-old,
gender queer

Gender diverse young people's views and experiences

“Apparently I was [not] allowed to go on a camping field trip and I was too ‘girly’ and ‘weak’ they said I wouldn’t last 3 days camping as I was a girl.”

14 year-old, non-binary

“Yes, sports for example – there are generally boys and girls teams for sports, but boys get basketball and AFL and soccer. Cricket, baseball, softball. Girls get netball, and volleyball. If I’m honest I’d rather do basketball then either then those, but it’s a boys team so I can’t. Many gender-diverse kids aren’t treated as I think they should be, with many people avoiding using correct pronouns, going out of their way to be rude and disrespectful and being outright obnoxious when it comes to sensitive topics regarding someone’s previous identity. Girls are expected to look a certain way and that brings on a ton of mental and physical health issues, like eating disorders, depression, anxiety and general body dysmorphia. I’m not saying this doesn’t happen to boys as well, because it does, but I think it happens more with girls. We are expected to look soft, and pretty, and skinny, with a certain figure and way of speaking. Skirts, dresses, heels, makeup.”

15 year-old, gender fluid

Gender diverse young people were particularly concerned about their future prospects.

“Yes, being non gender confirming will impact my future, no matter what I pursue. Even if I am not open about my identity, it will still impact my personal life.”

15 year-old, gender fluid

Gender inequality

Female and gender-diverse young adults looking back

“Yes, I have to think about having kids by a certain age, how that will impact my career progression and work life. Men never have to worry about this.”

21 year-old, female

“I’m AFAB and gender non-conforming/non-binary. I make sure that my gender and sex don’t limit my opportunities, but I have experienced difficulty when co-workers and others in a professional environment don’t respect my identity. I’ve found it easier to let people assume that I’m female, as I experience less discrimination and less condescension. I hope that as people become more aware, I can be truly me and express my gender as I wish and be addressed...”

21 year-old, non-binary/gender non-conforming

“Yes 100%... I feel I have to work twice as hard as a man to be taken seriously and you can’t have a laid back personality, you have to be on the ball all the time... I think working full time/wanting to start a family is a difficult choice in the future that I will have to make. I know for sure that a man’s super will accumulate more money than a woman’s because of expected roles and duties with childcare and that is a worry for me as I know the pension age will have gone up by the time I am older.”

22 year-old, female

“No. I feel very lucky to be in a generation where women are encouraged to do whatever they want. Even more lucky that I work in an industry where straight males are the minority. However, sometimes I look at friends in other industries and it feels like we have been told so much that women can do anything that they then feel pressured to ‘break the mould’ and be an exceptional and powerful person. And the adverse affects are that they then look down on people who choose not to do that, those who choose to value family over career or those who choose traditionally female professions. It sometimes feels like we are fighting ourselves instead of respecting all women.”

24 year-old, female

“

I don’t think being female really limited me. In my context, I was almost given more opportunities on stem because of all the ‘women in engineering’ programs.”

22 year-old, female



Recommendations

Female children and young people's self-esteem is shaped by a range of internal and external factors, which operate in their everyday lives, particularly in their interactions with others, both on and offline.

The responses of young people in this survey complement other research, including the SOS21, on girls' wellbeing and highlight a range of practises or activities that help girls feel safe, supported, good about themselves and that they belong.



Recommendations

For young people

Be patient finding yourself, your friends and other support people

A high proportion of respondents said that having good friends and support people to turn to is critical for their self-esteem. However, many participants also said it was not always easy to find or keep friends, especially when they were still discovering who they are and what is important to them.

One of the key pieces of advice that older female participants in this survey consistently offered their younger selves was to be patient when figuring out who they are, and to give themselves time to find friends and support people. Many older respondents also gave words of reassurance, saying it is okay if you don't find "your people" in high school, because real life starts when high school ends.

Find and do things you enjoy

Female respondents in this survey commonly said that one of the best ways for them to feel good about themselves is to engage in activities they love and enjoy.

Participants reported that finding and doing enjoyable activities made them feel happy, confident and connected, and was a way to express or discover things about themselves or share experiences with others. These benefits are consistent with research showing that young people experience good mental health outcomes when they engage in interesting and meaningful activities that they enjoy, particularly when the activity enables them to build healthy relationships and connections.⁵⁵

Be kind to others and to yourself

Many of the young people in this survey talked about feeling left out, excluded or bullied by other young people, including those who are supposed to be friends. Participants also said that small acts of kindness, such as giving/receiving compliments, and being accepted and included by others can make a big difference to how good they feel about themselves.

Given many respondents said they find it hard to 'live up to' others' standards and expectations, it is important that young people are kind, not only to others, but to themselves. Having self-compassion includes taking time to appreciate one's own unique attributes and abilities, and recognising and accepting that negative feelings and experiences are temporary and part of being human.⁵⁶

“

It also would've helped if teens are just not so judgmental and mean, being brought up to be kind and understanding of people and their differences. It would be nice if people could be whatever they want to be with being free of judgement.”

Recommendations



Set and work towards your own goals

It was common for female respondents to report that setting and achieving their own goals was an important and effective way to boost their self-esteem. The goals participants set themselves included things like finishing a book, a task, a project or training session, getting good grades, or simply making progress towards a goal. For participants, working hard to achieve a goal was just as important as the final outcome.

Get active

One of the key findings in this survey is that being active helps female young people feel connected, healthy, and happy with themselves. Going for a walk or bike ride, being in nature, or playing sport were some of the ways female participants said they get active and feel good.

While playing sport provides many physical benefits, including cardiometabolic fitness and the release of endorphins, the social aspects of sport were reported by many female participants as equally, if not more important for their sense of belonging and self-esteem. Focusing on and appreciating what the body can do, rather than what the body looks like when playing sport or being physically active also helps girls to feel good about themselves.

For families and other supporting adults

Listen

Young people, particularly girls, consistently say that they feel like they are not being heard. Research shows that girls are more likely than boys to be experiencing anxiety, low self-esteem and high stress. This can have a significant impact on their lives over the longer term. The love and support young people receive in their teenage years provides a sense of safety and stability that helps them explore and form their own identity, develop healthy relationships, and become independent.

A key finding from this survey is that female young people feel and perform their best when they have supportive people in their lives. The support participants most wanted was having someone to listen to them, without judgement or criticism.

Recommendations

Support their passions and interests

Ask the young people in your life what they enjoy doing and support them to do that. Female participants in this survey consistently said they felt they were discouraged from pursuing their passions and interests, often because of gender stereotypes or sexism that limited how others saw them. Conversely, female participants who were encouraged and supported to do things they love or are interested in, made a strong positive impact on their self-esteem. Girls who were encouraged or given opportunities to try different things, particularly male-oriented/dominated activities, were more likely to feel good about themselves and their future prospects than those whose said they were discouraged from entering these fields.

Encourage girls to be active irrespective of ability

Support the girls in your life to be physically active during their teenage years. International research shows that girls are much more likely than boys to stop playing organised sport and being physically active in adolescence, often compromising their physical and mental health throughout high school and into adulthood.⁵⁷

Research suggests there can be pressure from parents and schools on female young people to be strongly competitive, which can make them feel excluded and not supported.

“Encouraging girls to [partake] in activities that are not focused around beauty or physical appearance. Encourage girls that they can continue doing sports in yr 11/12 and their studies. Exercise is very important for mental health. More girls drop out of sport than boys cos there’s less support or encouragement at home for it and that comes from a generational issue.”

22 year-old, female

Given the many benefits of being physically active and playing sport, it is critical that regardless of ability, female young people are encouraged to continue or take up sport or another past time that involves being physically active.

“

Lots of girls either don't do sport or drop out of sports unless they're really good. This is the whole being part of a team and being part of something... It is too competitive and when you see and hear coaches of a kids under 14 basketball team telling the kids to cheat and hurt other teams players then I'm out.”

12 year-old, female

Recommendations

For schools

Give young people more time and opportunities to adapt to high school

The most commonly reported strategy that helped participants move from primary to high school was school-based transition programs. The most effective programs were those that started in Year 6 or early in Year 7, and those which provided time and multiple or ongoing opportunities to make friends, meet teachers, find classes, and get used to new workload and social expectations.

Many participants also said that hearing tips from older student ‘mentors’ or ‘buddies’ would have helped them feel more supported and able to manage the range of new experiences that high school entailed.

“I think it was all done well. My parents were supportive and helped me with the travel (I have to take multiple buses and a train) and the school did a good job settling us in. We had the year 7 transition day... and on the first 4 days we got shown to our classes and helped.”

12 year-old, female

Support students by listening to and following up on their concerns

Bullying and being ‘left out’ in high school were reported as issues for many participants. The negative impacts of being bullied, excluded or not ‘fitting in’ were often exacerbated when students felt there were no adults to listen or act on their concerns. While parents and other supporting adults are instrumental in helping young people manage these difficult experiences, participants consistently identified teachers and school staff as their first point of call for assistance and support in these situations.

“What would have helped is teachers and/or staff keeping their word. Every school says come talk to us if you need a chat but never around when you need them. I and others have been in and out of student services to talk to someone to get help or to vent to someone about something bothering them and they just tell you to go back to class. It took someone to take their life at my school to start caring and listening to people and talking to students but 2 years later we are back where we started.”

17 year-old, female



If teachers can actually help or give better alternative solutions instead of “we’ll do something about” but they don’t do it at ALL.”

17 year-old, selected ‘prefer not to say’

Recommendations

Build a culture of respect, equal opportunity and inclusivity

Many respondents in this survey said that high school would be a more safe and positive environment if there was a culture of respect and inclusivity. Some participants suggested it would be helpful for teachers and schools to cultivate this culture through targeted education, better policies, and clear consequences for disrespectful or discriminatory behaviour. Girls also talked about the need to provide them with equal opportunities as their male peers, to participate in various activities, especially activities that are traditionally male-oriented/dominated.

“Inclusion and programs talking about diversity, and normalising differences. Raising the standard of respect.”

15 year-old, non-binary

Help students manage expectations and stress from school

Many girls in this survey reported they feel more pressure than is apparent for boys, to simultaneously do well in sport, get good grades, be physically attractive, and undertake caring roles.

“During my time at high school, I think girls felt a lot of pressure to be exceptional. Not just with appearances but to be smart, excel at sports, good at arts. There was quite a few development sessions on learning to love your body and appearances but nothing to combat the other pressures of needing to ‘be’ everything to everyone (i.e. needing high grades for school, to be cool to peers, to be pretty for boys, to be fashionable etc.).”

24 year-old, female

Young people consistently identify ‘stress from school’ as a stressor that regularly impacts their mental health. Participants in this survey commonly reported that they would benefit from being taught a range of coping skills in high school, to better deal with the various academic and social pressures they face. Many girls said they would like more support and strategies to navigate peer relationships, while young people more broadly said they want reassurance that mistakes are a normal part of growing up and that there are multiple pathways to a successful and happy future.

Conclusion

All children and young people have the right to be safe, supported, and included in the decisions that affect their lives. Responses from the Girls' Wellbeing Survey have highlighted girls' perspectives and experiences of transitioning from primary to high school, gender inequality, the extent they feel they belong to a community, and the impact these and other experiences have on their self-esteem and wellbeing.

Consistent with previous research, girls experience a decline in their wellbeing as they mature through adolescence, which is characterised by low life satisfaction and poor self-esteem.

This decline is not as apparent for male young people.

While it was common for girls in this survey to report various challenges in their lives, they also suggested a range of strategies for building their resilience and self-esteem.

The views and ideas of all participants in this survey provide important insights into how families, schools, communities and other young people can do things better or differently, to help girls feel respected, understood, included and valued.



Endnotes

- 1 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2020, [Speaking Out Survey 2019: The views of WA children and young people on their wellbeing – a summary report](#), Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, p 24.
- 2 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2021, [Exploring the decline in wellbeing for Australian girls](#), Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, p 7.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 The thematic analysis was performed coding the raw data in inductively determined codes (i.e. the codes were created based on the participants' descriptions not pre-determined theory).
- 5 Moksnes U et al 2010, [The association between stress and emotional states in adolescents: The role of gender and self-esteem](#), Personality and Individual Differences, Vol 49, No 5.
- 6 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2021, [Exploring the decline in wellbeing for Australian girls](#), Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, p 20.
- 7 Ibid, pp 23-24.
- 8 Harter S 1993, [Causes and Consequences of Low Self-Esteem in Children and Adolescents](#), in Baumeister RF (ed), *Self-Esteem: The Puzzle of Low Self-Regard*, Springer US, p. 95.
- 9 Baudson TG 2016, [More Than Only Skin Deep: Appearance Self-Concept Predicts Most of Secondary School Students' Self-Esteem](#), *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol 7.
- 10 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2021, [Exploring the decline in wellbeing for Australian girls](#), Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, p 76.
- 11 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2022, [Girls' wellbeing: Insights from the 2021 Speaking Out Survey](#), Commissioner for Children and Young People WA Perth, p 30.
- 12 Yau JC & Reich SM 2019, "It's just a lot of work": Adolescents' self-presentation norms and practices on Facebook and Instagram, *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, Vol 29, No 1.
- 13 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2022, [Girls' wellbeing: Insights from the 2021 Speaking Out Survey](#), Commissioner for Children and Young People WA Perth, p 36.
- 14 Grabe S et al 2007, [Body Objectification and Depression in Adolescents: The role of gender, shame and rumination](#), *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, Vol 31, No 2.
- 15 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2022, [Data snapshot: Students' views on mental health](#), Commissioner for Children and Young People WA Perth, p 4.
- 16 Cribb VL & Haase AM 2016, [Girls feeling good at school: School gender environment, internalization and awareness of socio-cultural attitudes associations with self-esteem in adolescent girls](#), *Journal of Adolescence*, Vol 46.
- 17 Prinstein M 2023, Protecting our children online. *Testimony to the US Senate Committee on Judiciary*, 14 February 2023. Available from www.apaservices.org/advocacy/news/testimony-prinstein-protecting-children-online.pdf
- 18 Twenge JM et al. 2022, [Specification curve analysis shows that social media use is linked to poor mental health, especially among girls](#), *Acta Psychologica*, Vol 224.
- 19 Scully M, Swords L & Nixon E 2023, [Social comparisons on social media: online appearance-related activity and body dissatisfaction in adolescent girls](#), *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine*, Vol 40, No 1.
- 20 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2021, [Exploring the decline in wellbeing for Australian girls](#), Commissioner for Children and Young People WA. pp. 108-115.
- 21 Thompson R 2018, Cultivating social media awareness in middle school girls. *Australian Journal of Middle Schooling*, Vol 18, No 2.
- 22 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2021, [Exploring the decline in wellbeing for Australian girls](#), Commissioner for Children and Young People WA. p. 113.
- 23 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2021, [Exploring the decline in wellbeing for Australian girls](#), Commissioner for Children and Young People WA. pp. 27.
- 24 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2021, [Exploring the decline in wellbeing for Australian girls](#), Commissioner for Children and Young People WA. pp. 56-57.

Endnotes

- 25 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2022, *Girls' wellbeing: Insights from the 2021 Speaking Out Survey*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, pp. 19-22.
- 26 Chu P et al 2010, Meta-analysis of the relationships between social support and well-being in children and adolescents, *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, Vol 29, No 6.
- 27 Beneson J & Christakos A 2003, The greater fragility of females' versus males' closest same-sex friendships, *Child Development*, Vol 74, No 4.
- 28 Yu M & Baxter J 2018, Relationships between parents and young teens in *LSAC Annual Statistical Report 2017*, Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Gray S & Daraganova G 2017, Adolescent help-seeking in *LSAC Annual Statistical Report 2017*, Australian Institute of Family Services.
- 31 Abbott B & Barber B 2011, Differences in functional and aesthetic body image between sedentary girls and girls involved in sports and physical activity: Does sport type make a difference?, *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, Vol 12, No 3.
- 32 McMahon EM et al 2017, Physical activity in European adolescents and associations with anxiety, depression and well-being, *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, Vol 26, No 1.
- 33 Marsh I et al 2017, Self-compassion and psychological distress in adolescents – a meta-analysis, *Mindfulness*, Vol 9.
- 34 Cross D et al. 2015. *A longitudinal study of the social and emotional predictors and consequences of cyber and traditional bullying victimisation*, *International Journal of Public Health*, Vole 60, No. 2. (Exploring the decline in wellbeing for Australian girls, page 113).
- 35 Hoang DTN & Johnson NF on behalf of the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA. 2022, Students' wellbeing during the primary-secondary school transition and transition practices – a literature review. Edith Cowan University.
- 36 Ibid, p. 6.
- 37 Gray S et al 2018, Adolescents relationships with their peers, in *LSAC Annual Statistical Report 2017*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, p. 47.
- 38 Bayer J et al 2018, Bullying, mental health and friendship in Australian primary school children, *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, Vol 23, No 4.
- 39 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2021, Exploring the decline in wellbeing for Australian girls, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.
- 40 Hoang DTN & Johnson NF on behalf of the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA. 2022, Students' wellbeing during the primary-secondary school transition and transition practices – a literature review. Edith Cowan University.
- 41 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2021, Exploring the decline in wellbeing for Australian girls, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, pp. 78-79
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Lenzi M et al 2013, Neighbourhood social connectedness and adolescent civic engagement: An integrative model, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, Vol 34.
- 44 Cicognani E et al 2012, Gender differences in youths' political engagement and participation. The role of parents and of adolescents/ social and civic participation, *Journal of Adolescence*, Vol 35, No 3.
- 45 Chu P t al 2010, Meta-Analysis of the Relationships Between Social Support and Well-Being in Children and Adolescents, *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 29, No 6.
- 46 Yu M & Baxter J 2018, Relationships between parents and young teens, in *LSAC Annual Statistical Report 2017*, Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- 47 Rose A & Rudolph K 2006, A Review of Sex Differences in Peer Relationship Processes: Potential Trade-Offs for the Emotional and Behavioural Development of Girls and Boys, *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol 132, No 1.
- 48 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2022, *Girls' wellbeing: Insights from the 2021 Speaking Out Survey*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA Perth, p.31.

Endnotes

- 49 Rose A & Rudolph K 2006, A review of sex differences in peer relationship processes: potential trade-offs for the emotional and behavioural development of girls and boys, *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol 132, No 1.
- 50 Poulin F & Chan A 2010, Friendship stability and change in children and adolescence, *Developmental Review*, Vol 30, No 3.
- 51 Beneson J & Chistakos A 2003, The Greater Fragility of Females' Versus Males' Closest Same-Sex Friendships, *Child Development*, Vol 74, No 4.
- 52 Connolly H 2022, Commissioner for Children and Young People, South Australia, [Stereotypes and Sexism: the views and experiences of SA school students.](#)
- 53 Bordini G & Sperb T 2013, Secual Double Standard: A Review of the Literature Between 2001 and 2010, *Sexuality & Culture*, Vol 17, No 4.
- 54 Farvid P et al 2017, "No girl wants to be called a slut!": Woman, heterosexual casual sex and the sexual double standard, *Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol 26, No 5.
- 55 World Health Organization 2020, Guidelines on mental health promotive and preventive interventions for adolescents: helping adolescents thrive. Geneva, World Health Organization.
- 56 Neff K 2003, Self-Compassion: An Alternative Conceptualization of a Health Attitude Toward Oneself, *Self and Identity*, Vol 9, No 2.
- 57 Guthold R, Stevens GA, Riley LM, Bull FC. 2020, Global trends in insufficient physical activity among adolescents: a pooled analysis of 298 population-based surveys with 1.6 million participants. *Lancet Child Adolesc Health*, Vol 4, No 1, pp. 23-35.





Commissioner for Children and Young People WA

Level 1, Albert Facey House
469 Wellington Street
PERTH WA 6000

Telephone: 08 6213 2297

Freecall: 1800 072 444

Email: info@ccyp.wa.gov.au

ccyp.wa.gov.au

Connect with the Commissioner

 twitter.com/ccypwa

 facebook.com/ccypwa

 instagram.com/ccypwa

 [ccypwa](https://in.linkedin.com/company/ccypwa)



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia