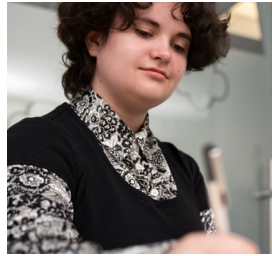




Alabama Girl Report





Dear Friends of Girl Scouting:

Welcome to the Alabama State of Girls Report presented by Girl Scouts of North-Central Alabama and Girl Scouts of Southern Alabama. This report details harsh realities for many girls in our state. In Alabama, 22% of girls live below the poverty level, 80% are not getting enough sleep or physical activity, and one in three has seriously considered attempting suicide.

Despite these bleak statistics, we believe in the power of girls in Alabama to change the world, and the power of Girl Scouts to help them do this. With programming across the state, GSSA and GSNCA offer every girl a chance to practice a lifetime of leadership, adventure, and success. As you will see in this report, girls involved in Girl Scouting enjoy a brighter future.

Girl Scouts know the importance of leadership, community service, and patriotism. They live the Girl Scout Law and Promise, which reminds them to be courageous and strong. Our members make the Girl Scout mission of making the world a better place come alive. Rooted in the Girl Scout Leadership Experience, we offer exciting STEM, outdoor, entrepreneurship, and life-skills programming opportunities to thousands of girls across Alabama. We help all girls take the lead early and often, and we're backed by more than 100 years of experience and expertise in the field.

Thank you for taking the time to learn about the State of Girls in Alabama. Now is the time to join us in creating effective change on their behalf through the infinite power of Girl Scouting. When girls succeed, so does society.

Yours in Girl Scouting,

Karen M. Peterlin
Chief Executive Officer
Girl Scouts of North-Central Alabama

Karlyn B. Edmonds
Chief Executive Officer
Girl Scouts of Southern Alabama

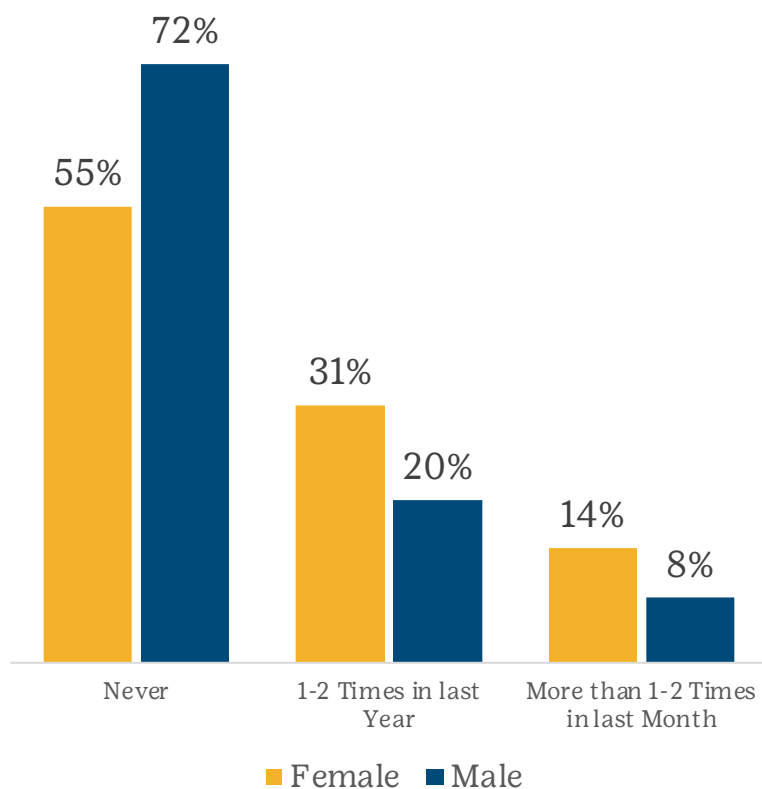


Bullying Among Girls in Alabama

Commissioned by the Girl Scout Councils Serving Alabama

Girls are nearly **2x more likely** to experience bullying at least monthly compared to boys.

Youth in Alabama
Experiencing Bullying



45% of girls in Alabama experienced some form of bullying in the last year, **doubling since 2016 when only 28% of girls reported experiencing bullying**, according to the National Survey on Children's Health. Compared to the 28% of boys being bullied, girls are also more likely to experience persistent bullying, including cyberbullying, which is found to create long-lasting negative effects on its victims:

- Compared to physical bullying, the enduring nature and pervasiveness of electronic bullying has a particularly devastating emotional impact.
- Students experiencing bullying are more likely to report challenges with poor self-esteem, eating disorders, depression, and suicidal ideation.

Source: National Survey on Children's Health, Alabama, 2022

A Safe Space for Girls in Alabama

Being girl-led is part of the DNA of Girl Scouts. That's why girls often find a safe space to try new things, express themselves, and be authentic with a group of peers. In 2024, 88% of girl members reported they have close friends because of Girl Scouts. That's awesome. But what's better is an overall community: 91% of Girl Scouts reported feeling like Girl Scouts is a place where they belong and 10/10 would recommend Girl Scouting to others.

1 in 4
high school girls
report being bullied
on school property
compared to 1 in 6
high school boys.



Girls' Mental Health in Alabama

Commissioned by the Girl Scout Councils Serving Alabama

One in three high school girls in Alabama has seriously considered attempting suicide.



Nearly half (46%) of high school girls felt sad or hopeless in the last year.

Source: Youth Risk Behavior Survey, CDC, 2021, Alabama

The U.S. Surgeon General declared youth mental health a national crisis in 2023. But girls and boys are experiencing this crisis differently: high school girls were **3x more likely** to have seriously considered attempting suicide (32%) compared to boys (10.5%). Most concerning is the worsening trend: in the last 10 years, the percentage of high school girls who made a plan to carry out suicide nearly doubled from 14% to 26%.

- Research shows that girls-only environments can help reduce feelings of hopelessness in adolescent girls compared to co-ed environments.
- Training, such as Youth Mental Health First Aid, can support adults in understanding the signs and symptoms of a mental health crisis and offer support.

50%
increase among girls in Alabama showing signs of depression compared to 10 years ago.

Supportive Adults for Positive Mental Health

The role of a supportive adult is critical for positive youth mental health. Schools in Alabama are not equipped to provide appropriate interventions: as an example, the American Counseling Association recommends a ratio of 250 students per one counselor in a school setting. In Alabama, the ratio is 389:1. Organizations like Girl Scouts have a critical role to play in fostering adult role models for girls.

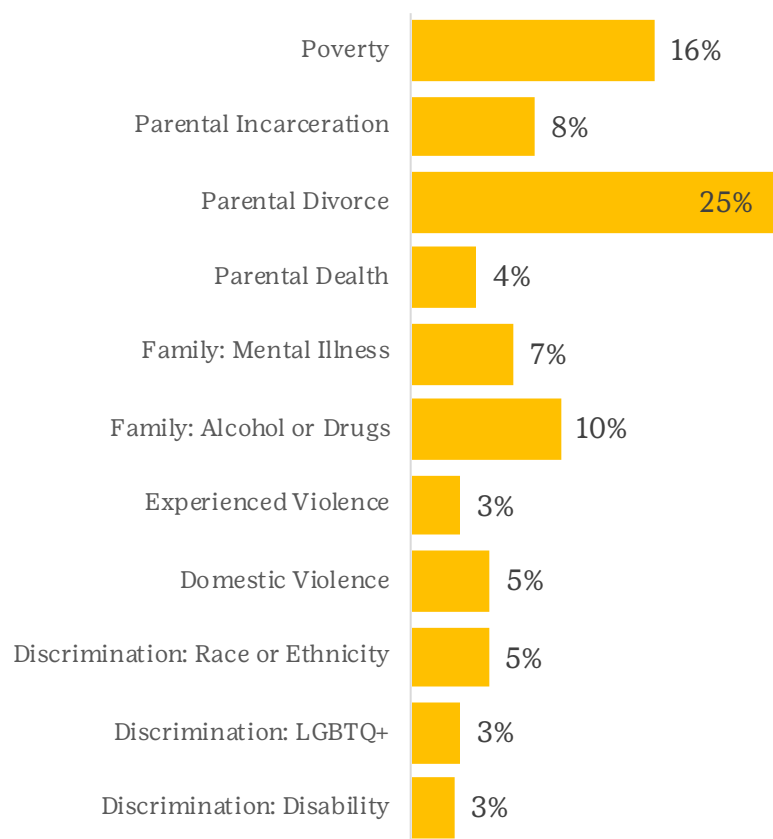


Adverse Childhood Experiences

Commissioned by the Girl Scout Councils Serving Alabama

44% of girls in Alabama have encountered at least one adverse childhood experience.

ACEs among Girls in Alabama



Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood. Studies show that children exposed to multiple ACEs are more likely to suffer long-term health consequences later in life like heart disease and depression.

ACEs include abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction. In Alabama:

- 25% of girls have parents who are separated or divorced;
- 16% of girls live in households that struggle to cover basic living expenses like food and water;
- 10% of girls live with someone who has a problem with alcohol or substance abuse;
- 8% of girls have a parent or guardian who served time in jail.

Source: National Survey on Children's Health, Alabama 2021-2022

Preventing ACEs: Girl Scout Promise and Law

The Centers for Disease Control points to several factors that decrease the prevalence of ACEs among youth. While some involve large societal shifts, like household financial security, many are social norms and community values that we teach at the beginning of every Girl Scout troop meeting. Promoting social norms that protect against violence and nurture positive relationships are a big part of creating a positive environment for youth in our communities.

77%
of girls agree that their troop leader creates a safe space in Girl Scouts and fosters positive mental health.

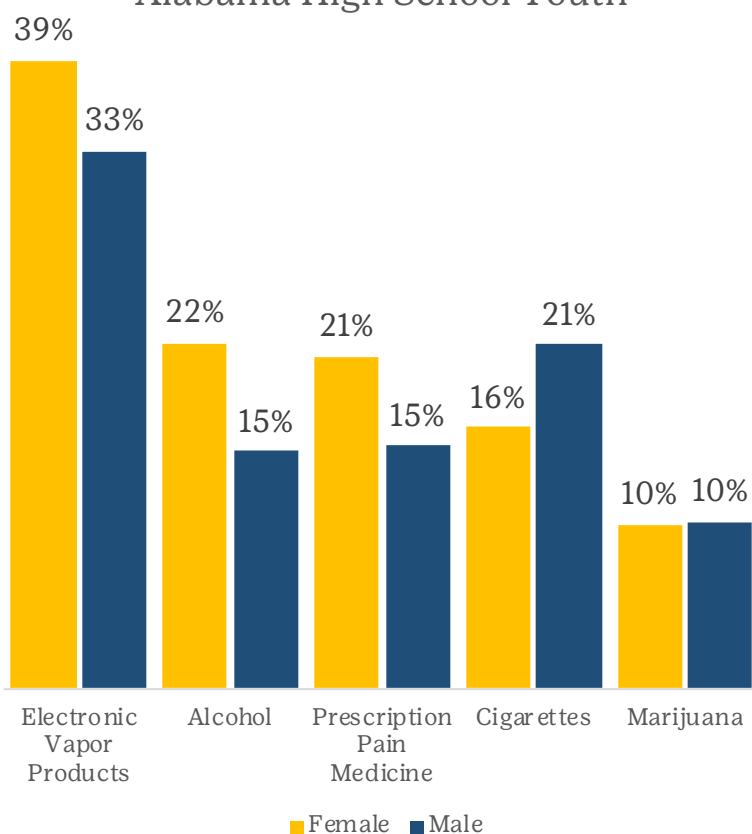


Substance Abuse Among Girls

Commissioned by the Girl Scout Councils Serving Alabama

More girls are engaging in substance abuse in high school than boys.

Substance Abuse among Alabama High School Youth



Substance abuse among high school youth decreased during the pandemic as quarantine limited access to drugs and alcohol. However, more high school girls report abusing substances like alcohol, tobacco products, and prescription pain medicine compared to boys:

- 40% of high school girls have tried electronic vaping products;
- 1 in 5 high school girls currently drink alcohol;
- 1 in 5 high school girls are abusing prescription pain medicine.

Studies show that substance abuse during adolescence is particularly dangerous as it interferes with brain development. Girls also face a greater risk of substance use disorders later in life.

The immediate threat to girls lies in the substances themselves: drug overdoses are on the rise, driven by the use of fentanyl in high-risk drugs.

Source: Youth Risk Behavior Survey, CDC, Alabama, 2021

Substance Abuse Prevention = Role Models

One of the most consistent findings in preventing substance abuse among youth is the role of social influences. These powerful factors can either promote the use of drugs and alcohol by positively portraying substance use or achieve the opposite. In Girl Scouts, girls learn to become responsible members of their community, take care of their bodies, and build positive relationships with role models who lift girls up.

60%
fewer high school girls are drinking alcohol compared to 10 years ago (from 35% to 22%).

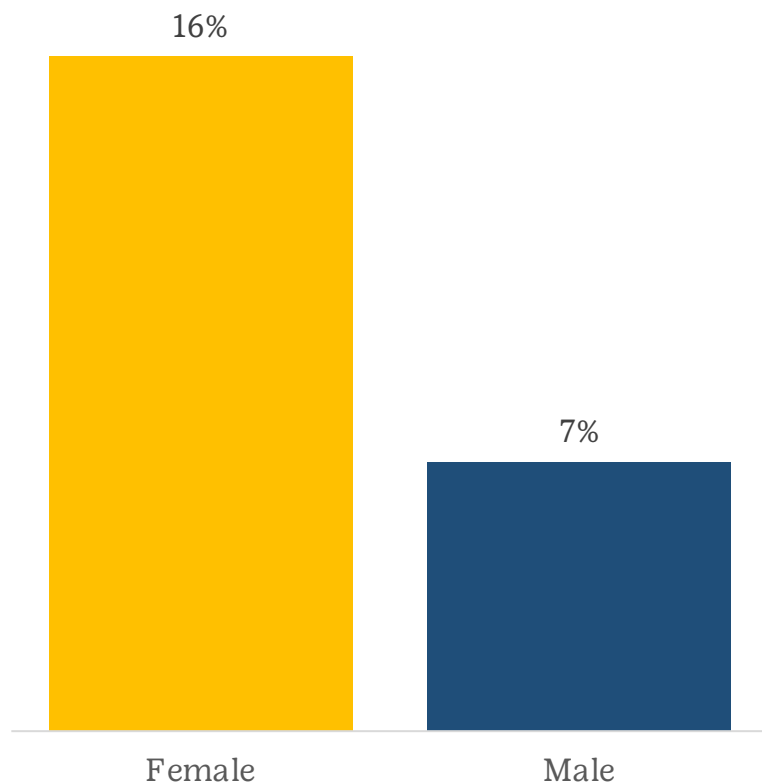


Physical & Psychological Safety

Commissioned by the Girl Scout Councils Serving Alabama

One in six high school girls in Alabama will experience sexual violence this year.

Experienced Sexual Violence
in the Last Year



Source: Youth Risk Behavior Survey, CDC, Alabama, 2021

High school girls in Alabama are twice as likely to experience sexual violence compared to boys. In a survey among high school youth across the state, 1 in 10 also reported experiencing sexual dating violence - a trend that is especially concerning considering that multiple studies find that acts of sexual violence are often under-reported by survivors.

Girls who experience sexual violence are at risk of long-term health consequences:

- 90% presented with post-traumatic stress symptoms shortly after the assault and 72% continued to show symptoms a year later.
- 47% of survivors report experiencing long absences from school and 25% report starting self-harm behaviors after the assault.

77%

of girls agree that their troop leader creates a safe space in Girl Scouts and fosters positive mental health.

Finding a Supportive Community

Research shows that a supportive, caring adult is one of the most important factors in working through a traumatic childhood event. In 2020, the Girl Scout Research Institute found that girls hesitate to reach out for support in a mental health crisis based on perceived stigma. When asked what aspect of their life has a positive view of mental health, the #1 answer was Girl Scouts.

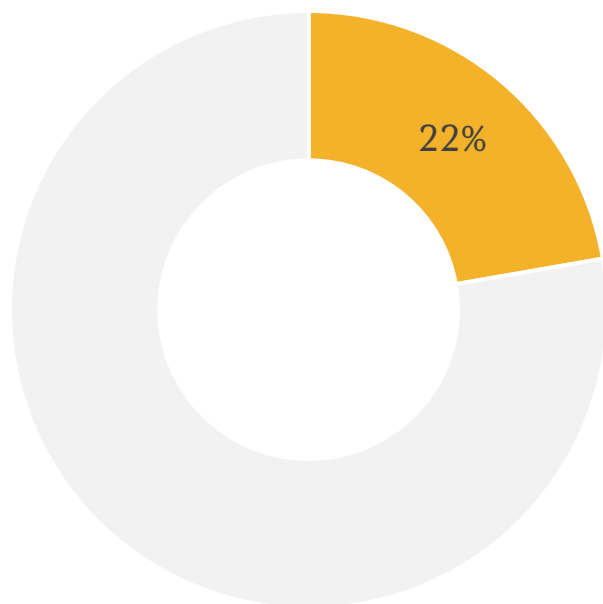


Girls Experiencing Poverty

Commissioned by the Girl Scout Councils Serving Alabama

One in five girls lives in a household experiencing poverty – over 120,000 girls in Alabama.

Girls Living in Households Experiencing Poverty



- Income Below Poverty Level
- Income At or Above Poverty Level

The effects of poverty on children are often significant and long-lasting. When a girl lives in a household experiencing poverty, she is more likely to experience housing and food insecurity, inadequate childcare, and under-resourced schools. The American Psychological Association specifically finds:

- Poverty creates barriers to learning. Research shows that children living in poverty have structural differences in brain development in areas critical for learning and communication.
- Poverty and hunger lead to higher rates of physical and emotional problems, such as inadequate nutrition, higher rates of asthma, and behavioral challenges.

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, B17001, 2022, Alabama

Transportation = Access

Girls often report challenges accessing out-of-school activities like Girl Scouts by citing a lack of transportation. The Census reported that 17% of families in Alabama have one or fewer vehicles. When a parent's job requires reliable transportation, one in six youth are left without means to access opportunities like appointments or out-of-school activities.

17%
of households
with 3+ people
lack reliable
transportation,
with 0 or 1
vehicles.

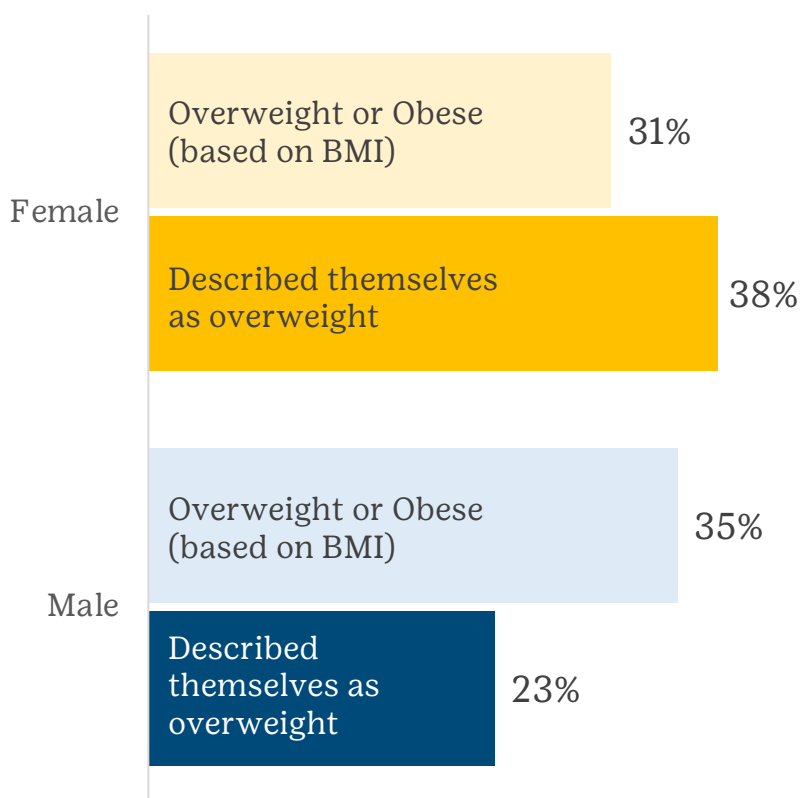


Body Image & Eating Disorders

Commissioned by the Girl Scout Councils Serving Alabama

Twice as many girls are restricting food to lose weight compared to boys. Yet, more boys are actually overweight.

Perceived vs Actual Weight
among Alabama High School Youth



Girls are more likely than boys to have a distorted view of their own body. As expected, this distortion also leads to more girls having a diagnosed eating disorder. In a survey of high school youth in Alabama, 38% of girls described themselves as overweight; yet, only 31% were medically classified as being overweight or obese based on BMI. More boys were actually overweight (35%) compared to girls, but only 23% described themselves as overweight.

- On average, eating disorders begin at the age of 14. Since eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of all mental illness, the higher prevalence among girls is of significant concern.
- Studies show distorted body image impacts self-esteem, social functioning, and academic performance.

Source: Youth Risk Behavior Survey, CDC, 2021, Alabama.

Healthy Living *and* Healthy Attitudes

Adults must strike a delicate balance of encouraging girls to lead a healthy lifestyle while also ensuring a positive self-image. Two important aspects of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience are a road map for achieving this balance: our program allows girls to fall in love with aspects of healthy living while adults offer encouragement through the ups and downs of their adolescence.

15%
of girls restrict
food to control
their weight
according to
Alabama
parents.

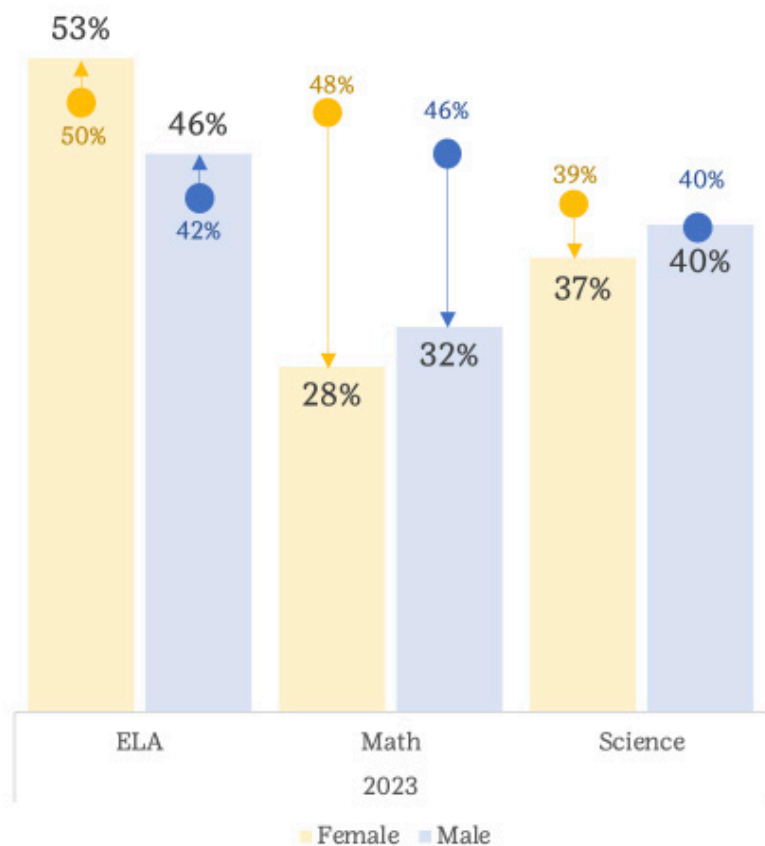


Academic Performance

Commissioned by the Girl Scout Councils Serving Alabama

Girls are falling behind in math and science. Only 28% of girls are proficient in math, **a decline of 20% in 5 years.**

Academic Proficiency: 2023 vs 2018



According to the Alabama State Department of Education, only 28% of girls achieved math proficiency in 2023, a decrease of 20% in 5 years. While boys also saw a decline in the same time period, boys test slightly ahead of girls, with 32% achieving proficiency in 2023.

Outdated research previously assumed that girls test lower in math and science due to developmental differences; however, more recent research suggests that social pressures are a large contributor of girls under-performance.

- Girls are more critical of their math performance even when scoring higher than boys. Zander (2020) found that “girls feel less worthy after taking a math test.”
- Fewer girls enter STEM fields in college. Most female students graduating with STEM degrees are in healthcare fields - very few in math and engineering.

Source: Alabama State Department of Education, 2018 and 2023.

Academic Success Outside the Classroom

Scholars agree that influences outside of the classroom play a role in academic success. The Girl Scout Leadership Experience fosters opportunities for girls to practice problem solving and challenge seeking - skills that support success in the classroom. In fact, in 2017, the Girl Scout Research Institute found that Girl Scouts are more likely than non-Girl Scouts to earn excellent grades and were nearly 2x as likely to choose a STEM career in college.

20%
of engineering
degrees were
awarded to
female students
in '21-22.

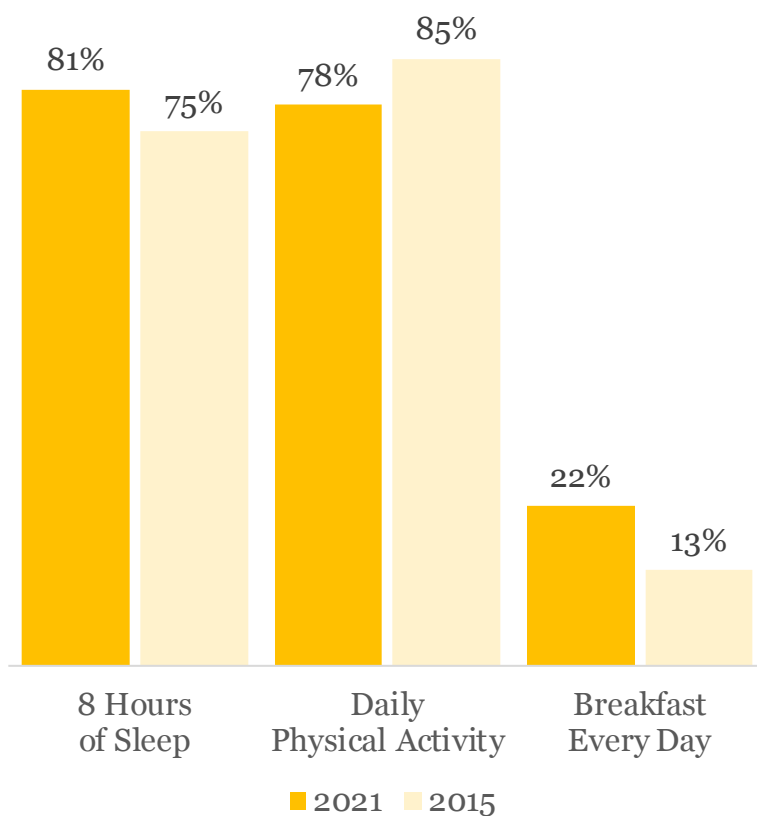


Healthy Habits Among Girls

Commissioned by the Girl Scout Councils Serving Alabama

Girls are struggling to build healthy habits: **80% of girls** are not getting enough sleep or physical activity.

Percent of High School Girls NOT Getting:



As girls enter adolescence, their growing independence impacts healthy decision-making like eating balanced meals, prioritizing enough sleep, and getting daily exercise. In order to ensure proper physical development, the CDC recommends teens get at least 8 hours of sleep, 60 minutes of daily exercise, and start the day with breakfast.

- 81% of high school girls report they are NOT getting enough sleep, an increase since 2015.
- Slightly more girls are getting daily physical activity compared to 2015, but 78% are still not exercising every day.
- The percent of girls not eating a daily breakfast increased by 60% since 2015 - from 13% to 22%.

Short and long-term consequences to these deficits include threats to academic success, increased risk of depression, and obesity.

Source: Youth Risk Behavior Survey, CDC, Alabama, 2021

Healthy Activities. Healthy Behaviors.

Girls not only need access to healthy activities like athletics; girls need fun opportunities that teach overall healthy behaviors. Research from the Girl Scout Research Institute found that, as girls grow older, their participation in healthy activities decreases; but for Girl Scouts, their participation in these activities remains consistent.

82%
of Girl Scouts
participate in
healthy activities
compared to 69% of
non-Girl Scouts.

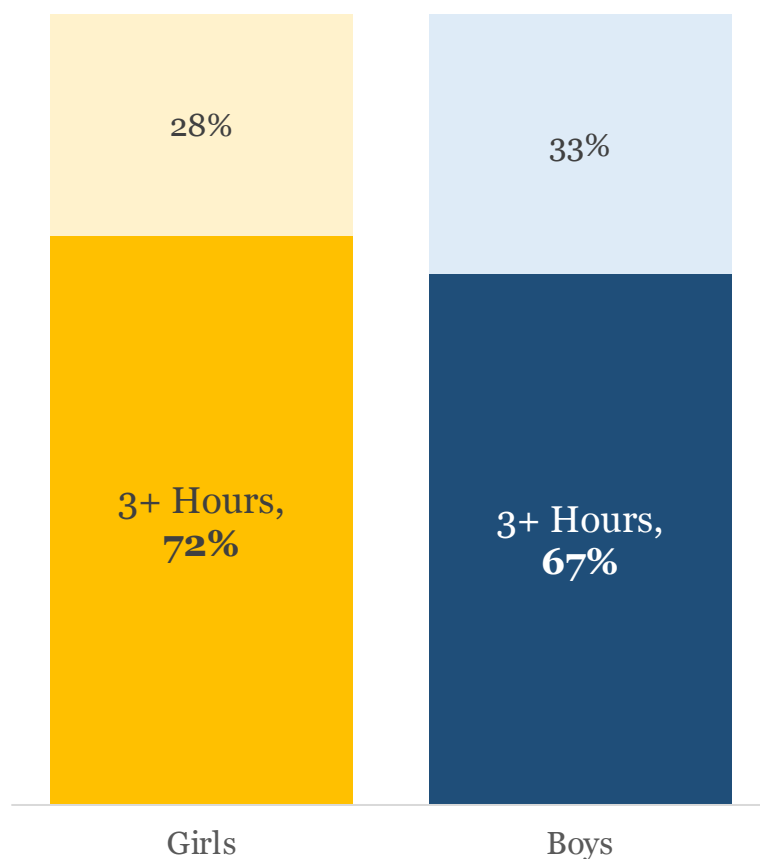


Girls on Screens

Commissioned by the Girl Scout Councils Serving Alabama

72% of girls spend 3 or more hours a day on screens. Experts recommend less than 2 hours.

Alabama Youth Screen Time



The use of screens can serve as an important connection between youth entering adolescence and their peers, their education, and topics they care about. However, multiple studies have confirmed that excessive screen time has a negative impact on girls' development:

- Girls are more likely to struggle with attention problems and ADHD characteristics;
- Girls demonstrate lower academic outcomes compared to peers with low or moderate screen time.
- Girls experience poorer sleep quantity and quality after excessive screen time.

The guidance we offer girls must go beyond managing screen time. During these critical years, girls need our support in learning digital citizenship skills to stay safe online, become digital leaders, and build positive online relationships.

Source: Youth Risk Behavior Survey, CDC, Alabama, 2021

Digital Leadership: More than Limiting Screens

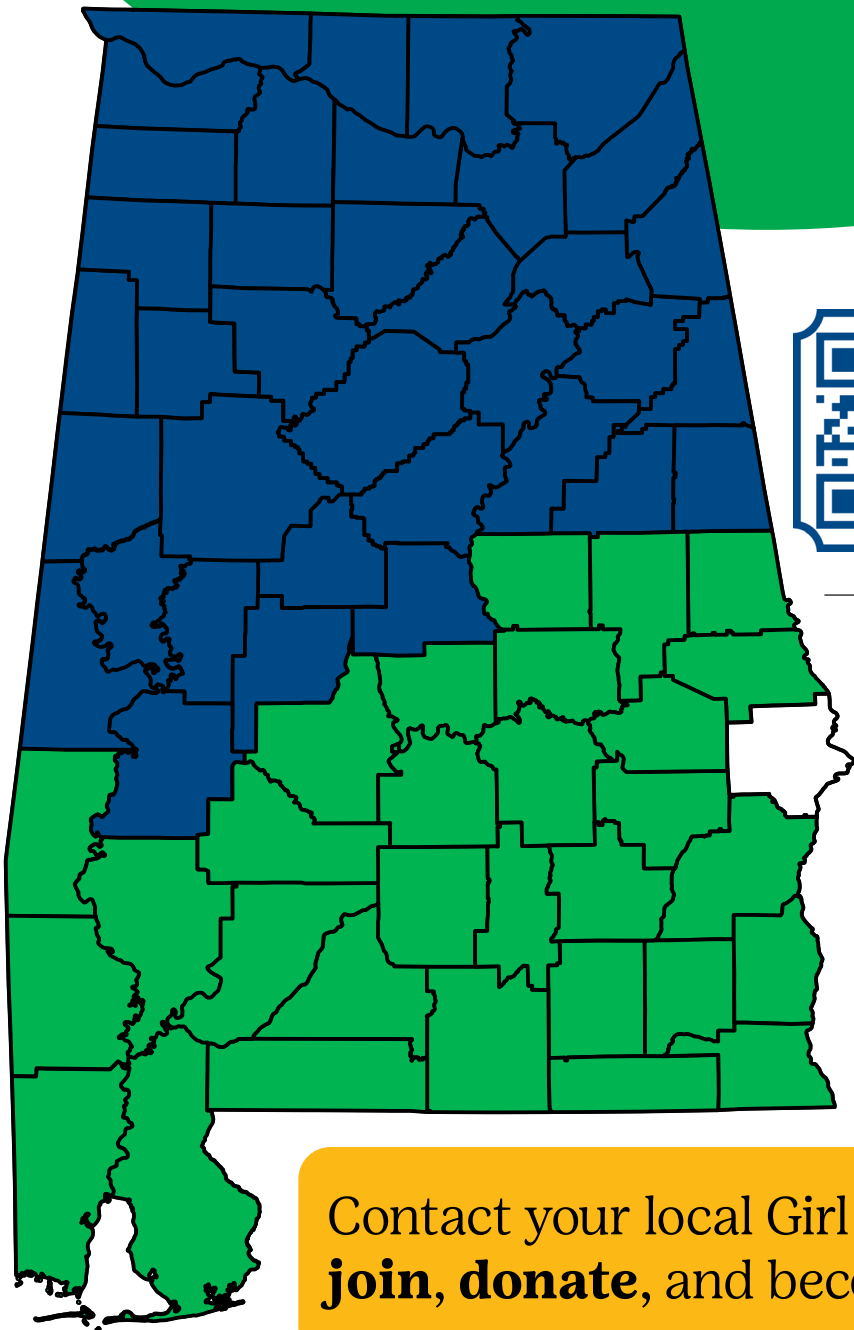
The simple objective of limiting youth screen time ignores the important role technology in our daily lives. A more comprehensive approach includes also supporting girls in becoming digital leaders - leaders who seek to improve their own lives and the world through their digital experiences and use of technology. This means learning new things, looking critically at information viewed online, and getting involved in issues they care about through technology.

64%

of Girl Scouts are digital leaders, compared to 43% of non-Girl Scouts and 50% of boys.

“The work of today is the history of tomorrow, and we are its makers.”

-Juliette Gordon Low
Founder, Girl Scouts of the USA



**Girl Scouts of
North-Central Alabama**

7705 North Lake Drive
Trussville, AL 35173

1-800-734-4541

girlscoutsnca.org



**Girl Scouts of
Southern Alabama**

2501 Bell Road, Suite 1
Montgomery, AL 36117

1-800-239-6636

girlscoutssa.org

Contact your local Girl Scout council to **reconnect**,
join, **donate**, and become a **community partner**.