

**For Immediate Release**

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## **Over Half of Girls in Canada Say They Face Unrealistic Expectations That Negatively Impact Their Self-Esteem**

*Nationwide Survey Highlights Major Challenges Faced by Teenage Girls*

In advance of *International Day of the Girl* on Wednesday, October 11 – a day when the global community focuses on the realities facing girls and young women around the world – **Girl Guides of Canada (GGC)** has released the results of a nationwide Ipsos survey that identifies key challenges confronting teenage girls in Canada. Primary concerns include unrealistic expectations, harmful social norms and stereotypes, mixed messages, and how society continues to perpetuate unattainable ideals. As a result, many girls in Canada say this has negatively impacted their self-esteem. In fact, the GGC survey reveals:

- 59% of girls feel pressure from society – through the media, social media, friends, parents or teachers – to conform to unrealistic standards about what it means to be “a girl”
- 56% of girls agree that they get mixed messages about how they’re supposed to act and behave, and look and dress
- 55% report that trying to meet social expectations about how they should look or act has negatively impacted their self-esteem
  - This is strongest among heavy users of social media at 71%

“Through this process of really listening to girls, we’ve heard some difficult stories that reinforce the struggles they continue to face,” says Jill Zelmanovits, CEO of **Girl Guides of Canada**. “We commissioned this survey because the issues facing girls are integral to our organization, and understanding the state of their world today is more important than ever. We need to continue to understand what girls in Canada are facing so we can support them to become everything they want to be.”

### **Listening To Girls**

This nationwide GGC survey of more than 500 girls between the ages of 15 and 17 builds on feedback from a recent event, where GGC listened to what participants had to say about the biggest issues impacting girls in Canada today. National survey respondents included a broad spectrum of ethnicities, household incomes, and geographic regions and communities to reflect the diverse demographics of Canada as well as different perspectives and lived experiences. The survey confirmed that the

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challenges identified by GGC girl members are widespread across the country and are negatively impacting the self-esteem of teenage girls.

### **Balancing Conflicting Expectations**

The GGC survey turns a lens onto girls in Canada, and how they are challenged every day with balancing conflicting expectations of what it means to be a girl. Some additional highlights from the survey include:

- 59% of girls surveyed believe that the societal pressure to conform extends to expectations of how they should look, dress or speak, or the interests they should pursue. This is impacting their behaviour:
  - 30% of girls have avoided or considered stopping an activity or sport they like because not many girls participate
  - 24% of girls don't feel motivated to pursue their dream career because they're concerned they will be compensated less than male counterparts
  - Nearly two in ten girls (16%) hide the fact they like Science Technology Engineering Math (STEM) for fear of being rejected by their peers
- Despite seeing beauty standards for girls in the media or social media as unrealistic, a majority of girls (60%) say they feel pressure to conform to them
- Mixed messages are often confusing:
  - Nearly one in five of those surveyed feel peer pressure to both be thin or lose weight AND have a "curvy" body type.

### **Need for Girl Empowerment**

As *International Day of the Girl* approaches, GGC is highlighting what girls themselves are saying about the challenges they face and the need for more programs to empower them. "Today's reality is that girls face a daunting and confusing challenge to thrive and be the best they can be," concludes Ms. Zelmanovits. "The survey results reinforce the need for girl-focused programs to help girls continue to develop the resiliency and skills that will empower them to be confident, courageous and tackle any challenge that comes their way."

For more in-depth information about the **Girl Guides of Canada** and Ipsos survey, please visit [www.girlguides.ca/girlsurvey](http://www.girlguides.ca/girlsurvey). Join the conversation online using **#dayofthegirl** and **#girlempoweredGGC**.

**About Girl Guides of Canada-Guides du Canada (GGC)**

**Girl Guides of Canada** provides a safe environment that invites girls and young women to challenge themselves, to find their voice, meet new friends, have fun and make a difference in the world. **Girl Guides of Canada** strives to ensure that girls and women from all walks of life, identities and lived experiences feel a sense of belonging and can fully participate. Girl Guides is an organization with more than 105 years of history and a strong and growing future. [www.girlguides.ca](http://www.girlguides.ca)

**About the Ipsos Poll**

The survey was commissioned by Girl Guides of Canada through Ipsos as an online poll of 523 girls in Canada aged 15-17 between August 31 and September 14, 2017. Weighting was employed to ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the population of girls aged 15-17 according to Census data. The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll is accurate to within  $\pm 4.9$  percentage points, 19 times out of 20, had all girls in Canada aged 15-17 been polled.

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