

What Vermont Teen Girls Say about relationships



Results from the
6th annual statewide
survey of Vermont
girls in grades 6 - 12

2011

CREATED BY GIRLS FOR GIRLS
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Summary

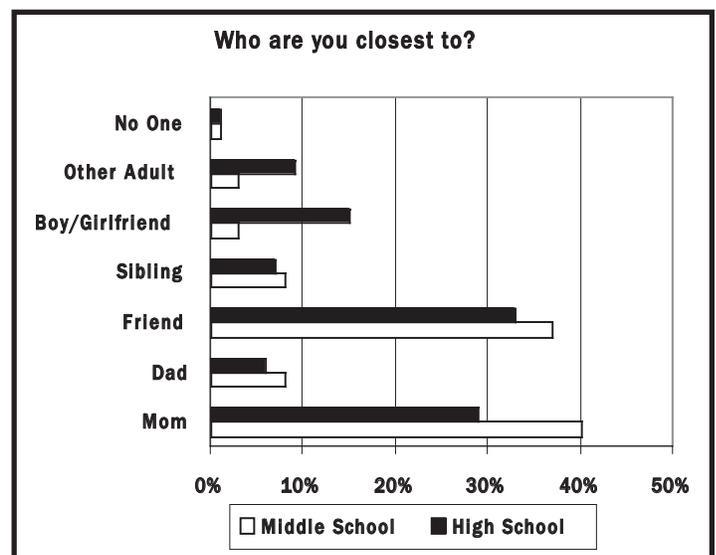
Girl Scouts of the Green and White Mountains and the Vermont Commission on Women worked with a panel of girls to create our 6th annual *What Teen Girls Say* statewide on-line survey. The survey of girls in grades 6 through 12 took place from New Year's Day to March 1st, 2011. 124 high school girls and 74 middle school girls from 10 counties filled out the 12-question survey.

This year the topic girls chose was relationships. Survey results indicated girls' closest relationships are with mothers and friends. Fathers, stepparents, siblings, boy/girlfriends, teachers and other adults figure less prominently.

As is developmentally appropriate, high school girls branch out: they are more likely to be closest to a boy/girlfriend or another adult than middle school girls are. They are slightly less attached to moms and siblings than middle school girls.

"My mom is my best friend. She is always there for me - for advice, a hug, a laugh, or a shoulder to cry on. She is authoritative but very caring and dependable."

***- 11th grade student
Mt. Anthony Union High School, Bennington***

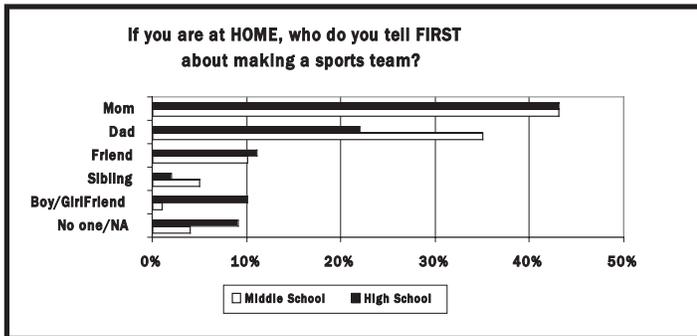


Good News / Bad News

"I know that whatever I do, even if I make a terrible mistake, my mom will still love me, even if what I did was wrong...I'm just saying that if I mess up, my mom will love me for who I am."

*- 7th grade student
U32, Montpelier*

Whether it is good news or bad news, girls still pick moms as the overwhelming choice to talk with; friends come second. However, when it comes to talking about making a sports team, girls were more likely to tell fathers than friends.

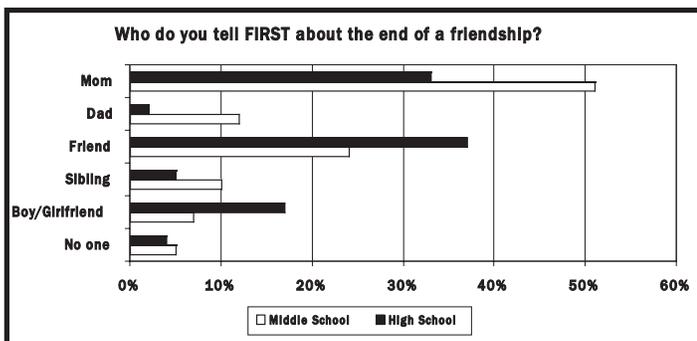


"I am close to my Dad because he plays with me and tries to help me out."

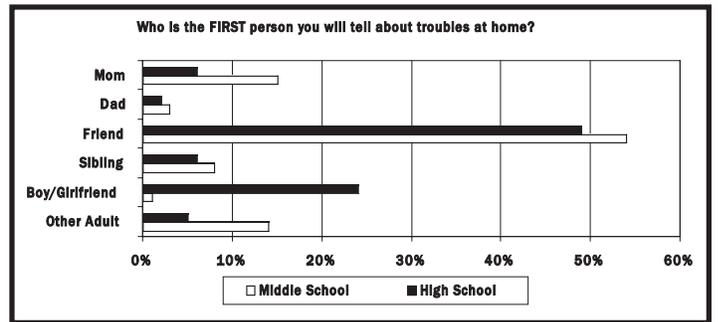
*- 6th grade student
Colchester Middle School*

Middle school girls are still trying to figure out the "friend thing." They are much more likely to go to fathers or siblings to discuss friendships than high school girls.

High school girls go to friends first, moms second and boy/girlfriends third.

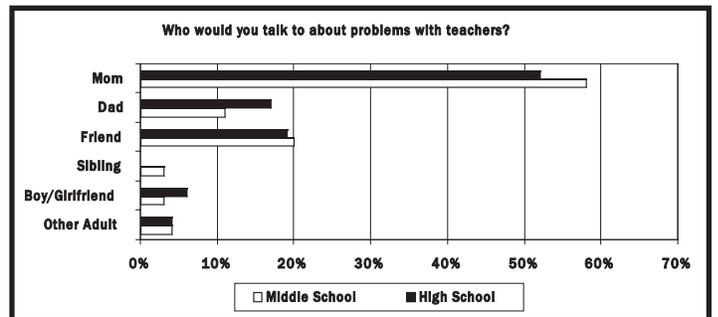


Girls favor mothers when talking about problems with teachers. Friends come in second, but surprisingly almost as many high school girls talk to fathers as friends about problems with teachers.



High school girls look to friends and boy/girlfriends when there are troubles at home.

Although it is not surprising that middle school girls go to friends first, moms and other adults are second and third choices.



"Friends understand more because they are the same age and I don't feel embarrassed to share anything with them."

*- 11th grade student
Rutland High School*

It's Personal

Both middle and high school girls choose mothers to talk to about body changes.

Middle school girls split almost evenly between mothers and friends when the subject was sex, sexual orientation and friendships. For dating advice, they go to their friends.

Middle Schoolers: Sharing personal stuff: Whom do you talk to?			
	Mom	Friends	No One/ NA
Body Changes	72%	10%	11%
Sex	57%	15%	18%
Sexual Orientation	49%	12%	24%
Friendships	49%	30%	0%
Dating Advice	34%	42%	4%



"I feel I can always be myself with my best friend and I can trust her with any secret and she always stands up for me. She is like my sister!"

*- 7th grade student
Middlebury Union Middle School*

High school girls are more than twice as likely to talk with friends as mothers about sexual matters. Surprisingly, they still talk with their mothers about friendships.

High Schoolers: Sharing personal stuff: Whom do you talk to?			
	Mom	Friends	No One/ NA
Body Changes	55%	20%	14%
Sex	22%	52%	8%
Sexual Orientation	26%	42%	17%
Friendships	32%	42%	4%
Dating Advice	23%	57%	7%

When asked whom they would talk to about sexual orientation, 24% of middle schoolers and 17% of high schoolers answered no one/not applicable.

A Friend in Need

Girls were asked with whom they would talk if they had a friend who had a serious problem, such as: an eating disorder; was cutting himself or herself; had an abusive parent; or was drinking, doing drugs, or shoplifting.

Middle school girls overwhelmingly chose mothers, while high school girls were more selective depending on the issue. This is the only question in the survey where both groups were just as likely to tell another adult as they were their friends about another friend in trouble.

It is also the one question in the survey where "no one" was picked quite often, especially if the activity that their friend engaged in was illegal, such as drinking, doing drugs or shoplifting. Fifteen percent of all those surveyed would tell no one if they knew that one of their friends was shoplifting.

Who would you tell if a friend has an abusive parent?		
	Middle Schoolers	High Schoolers
Mom	54%	44%
Dad	5%	8%
Friends	15%	18%
Other Adult	16%	23%
No One	4%	2%

Who would you tell if a friend is shoplifting?		
	Middle Schoolers	High Schoolers
Mom	46%	31%
Dad	8%	6%
Friends	14%	26%
Other Adult	14%	13%
No One	14%	16%

"If my friend had an abusive problem, I think telling an adult to solve the situation helps the most, instead of taking on the challenges yourself..."

*- 11th grade student
South Burlington High School*

Siblings

The survey showed that relationships with siblings were complex. When asked what words best described their relationship with siblings, 50% said "It depends upon the day." Told that they could pick more than one choice, over a third of the respondents picked "pain in the butt" or "very close (with at least one)."

Bullying

“After I talked to a friend for moral support, I would talk to a teacher or one of my parents.”

*- 7th grade student
U32, Montpelier*

Bullying has been identified in previous surveys as more of an issue for middle schoolers than for high schoolers. In this survey, middle schoolers report they were as likely to go to a parent, a guidance counselor or a friend to talk about a problem with a bully. Only 6% would talk directly with the bully.

The pattern changes in high school where girls were more evenly split between parents and friends as the person they would talk with. Guidance counselors and teachers were not seen as resources by high school girls. However, 16% of high school girls would confront the bully directly.

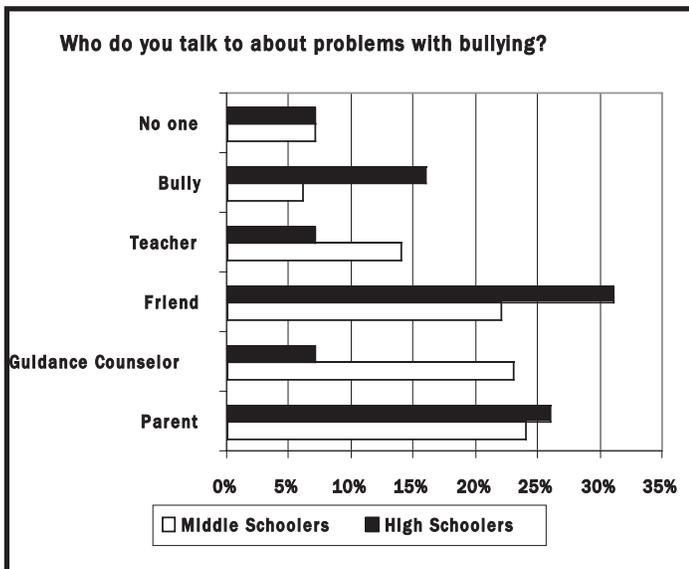
Interestingly, neither group see teachers as a major "go to" person on this issue.

“All of these qualities except for athleticism and style/taste are very important for a friend to possess in my opinion.”

*- 10th grade student
Vergennes Union High School*

It is interesting to note that qualities like style/taste, athletic, hobbies/common interest and popularity all ranked in the single digits.

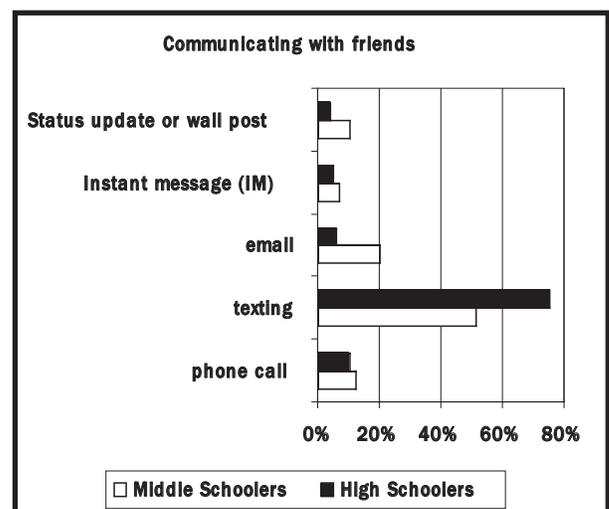
Qualities Valued in a Friend		
	Middle Schoolers	High Schoolers
Loyal	27%	27%
Doesn't gossip about me	39%	23%
Understands me	46%	36%
Is honest with me	51%	57%
Hobbies/common interests	4%	9%
Style/taste	1%	2%
Athletic	7%	2%
Supportive	35%	48%
Fun to be with	58%	57%
Sense of humor	28%	39%
Popular	4%	1%



When not communicating face to face, both middle and high school girls overwhelmingly chose texting as the preferred form of communication. Computer-based methods are more often used by middle school girls, perhaps reflecting that not as many of them may have access to texting.

Friendship

When asked to choose what three qualities were most valued in a friend, both age groups selected "fun to be with" and "is honest with me" as first and second choice. "Understands me" ranked third for middle school girls, while "supportive" ranked third for high school girls.



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Recommendations

Moms are a very important part of a girl's support system. Moms need to make the time to listen, listen and listen to their daughters.

Moms should be careful not to overreact, make assumptions, or jump to conclusions too soon when daughters come to them with issues or concerns.

Dads should let daughters know that they are willing to listen to them, even if it's just "How did your day go?"

Girls depend more and more on friends for advice as they mature. Health classes, especially in freshman or sophomore year, should offer strategies for girls to use when friends come to them about issues like bullying, eating disorders, drinking, drugs or shoplifting.



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The Vermont Commission on Women (VCW) is a non-partisan state agency dedicated to legislative, economic, social, and political fairness. Launched in 1964 by a call to action from President John F. Kennedy, VCW is charged with reducing discrimination and encouraging opportunities for women. Volunteer commissioners and representatives from organizations concerned with women's issues guide VCW's public education, coalition building, and advocacy efforts.