

What Teen Girls Say...



About Life in Vermont

2006 Executive Summary



Girl Scouts.

Where Girls Grow StrongSM



Since 1964, the Vermont Commission on Women has been the only state agency singularly focused on women's issues, and it continues to evolve and respond to the needs of Vermont women and girls. The Girl Scout Council of Vermont is a leading voice and expert on girl growth and development, and provides activities that promote healthy living and leadership for girls. Both organizations are engaged in bringing the diverse perspectives and voices of girls in our state to the public dialogue on important issues impacting their lives. It is our hope that the concerns, viewpoints, and voices of girls contained in this report will serve to inform the policies and programs that affect their lives.

In collaboration, the Girl Scout Council of Vermont and the Vermont Commission on Women conducted this first-of-its-kind research study of over 200 teen girls in grades 6 through 12 to address their issues and concerns, to empower young women, and to get to know what's on their minds. Teen girls answered questions about body image, teen pregnancy, family and dating violence, and teen use of substances. Advocacy and leadership participation were also included, as well as open-ended questions, such as "What would you like to tell a Vermont Senator or Representative about growing up in Vermont or what would you like to say about being a student in your school or town that your Vermont Senator or Representative might not know?" Participants included Vermont girls in schools across the state, after-school programs, teen centers, and clubs. Survey results were evaluated as a whole, by regions of Vermont, and in age groups (11-13, 13-15, 15-17, and over 17).

Survey Participants

- **Ages:** 11-13 (13%); 13-15 (21%); 15-17 (59%); Over 17 (7%)
- **VT Regions:** Southwest VT (9%); Southeast VT (12%) Central VT (23%); Northwest VT (9%) Northeast VT (16%); Chittenden Metro (31%)

Please note that in the summary of findings, differences among the age groupings are noted when significant. Differences based on regions were negligible and, therefore, were not noted.

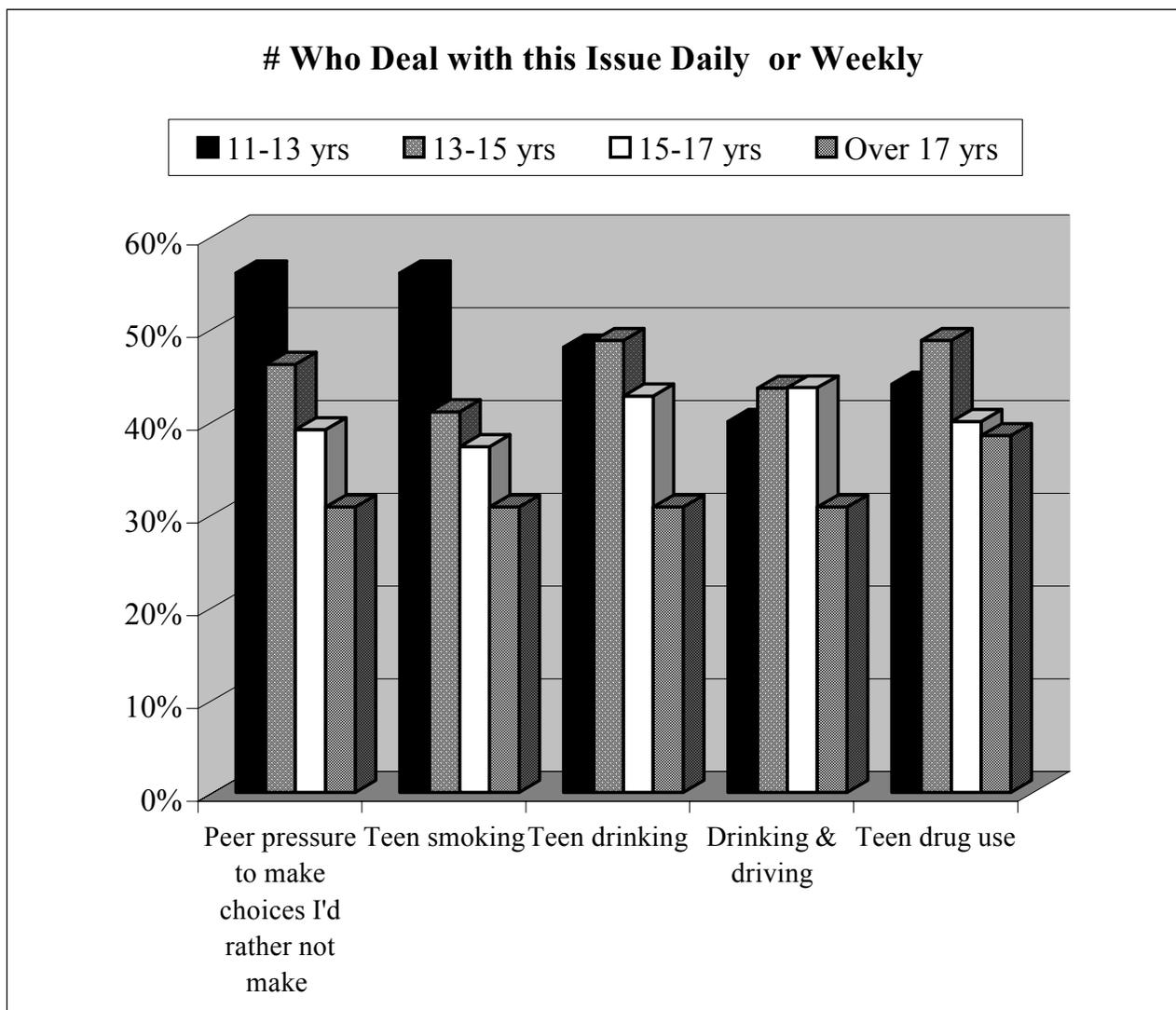
What Girls Say about Life in Vermont

Vermont's rural landscape and small towns are a picturesque environment in which to raise children, but are they risk-free? What do the teens girls who live here think? Are they spared from confronting the issues that teens from big cities face every day? Do they feel safe? Do they feel part of Vermont's future? Over 200 Vermont teen girls helped form answers, and had much to say about living in Vermont.

Small State = Not So Small Issues for Teen Girls

There is a perception among some adults that teens are reckless, feel invincible, and do not seem to consider the consequences of risky behavior (such as smoking, using drugs and alcohol, driving recklessly, and/or engaging in sex).

When asked how important these issues were in their lives, over one-third of Vermont teen girls identified risky behaviors as issues of great concern that they deal with on a daily or weekly basis.



What Teen Girls Say...

“Nothing is impossible. illegal drugs are like candy. if you want something, you just have to ask the right person. that is what is scary. and parents think they know what their children are up to....but they have no idea.”

**Junior,
Mount
Abraham
Union
High
School**

“I think that Vermont being so small no one really understands the seriousness of drugs in our area. I have known new students who have said that drugs are so incredibly easy to get around here, I don't think this is a good image for Vermont to have.”

**15-year-old
Spaulding
High School**

While issues like dealing with peer pressure to make choices they would rather not make diminish as girls move through their teen years, other issues, like teen drug use, are consistent concerns for Vermont teen girls of all ages.

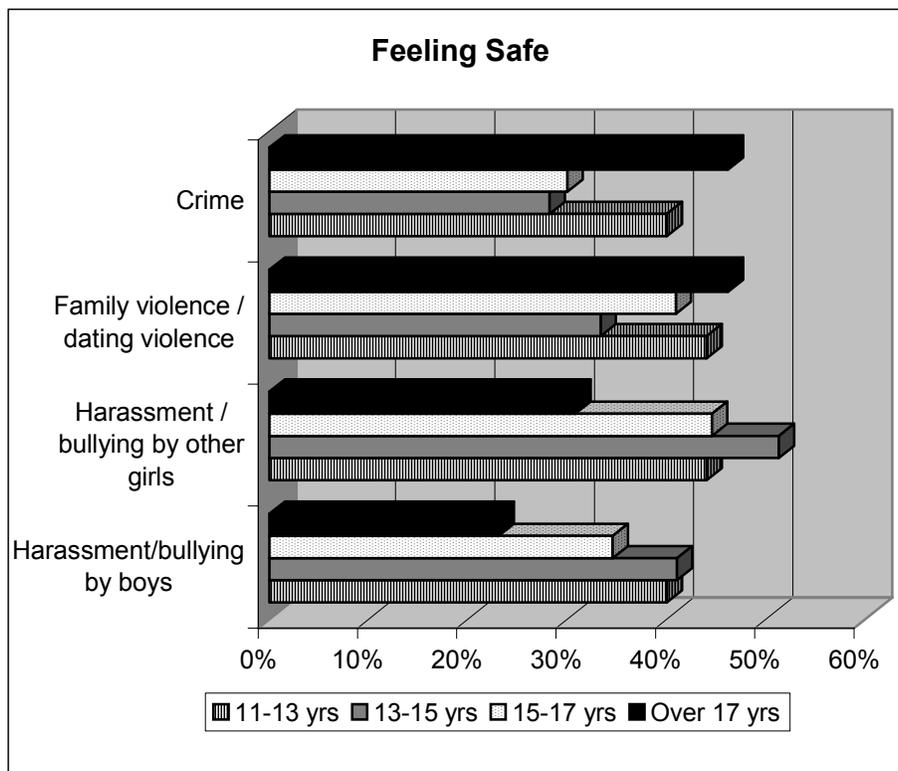
“Many girls i know deal with drug problems almost everyday of their lives, whether it's in school, with friends, with their family or even with themselves. i know people who have thought of or tried many types of drugs. i hear other people talking about drugs, sometimes you can't get away from the topic.”

**Junior
Champlain
Valley Union
High School**

...About Drugs

Vermont Teen Girls Deal with Safety on a Normal Day

When thinking of the safety of teen girls, many adults focus on Internet stalking, abduction, and issues of physical safety. The findings in this survey demonstrate that feeling emotionally safe is as important a concern for girls as physical safety. Concerns about crime and dating/family violence were highest for teens 17 and older. Yet findings reveal that what is of most concern to younger girls is navigating their everyday world – home, school, social settings, and routine activities – where issues of safety center more around emotional safety and bullying. Even though Vermont has focused new legislative efforts on this issue, and Vermont schools have zero-tolerance policies in place for harassment and bullying, 1 in 3 girls under the age of 17 deals with harassment or bullying *by boys* weekly or more. Even more disturbing, when teens 11-17 were asked about harassment and bullying *by other girls*, nearly 1 in 2 girls indicated dealing with this issue on a weekly or daily basis.



What Teen Girls Say...

It's bad, though, that pretty much nothing happens when there's a girl vs. girl fight. Girls are much worse than boys, you know. Boys rough each other up and might really hurt one another, but bodily scars fade. The ones that are branded into your mind through backstabbing, name-calling, rumors... those last forever.

**Freshman
U-32
Junior/Senior
High School**

Because girls often are portrayed as victims of violence in the media, adults are aware of their need to be protected from physical danger. But girls were very vocal in expressing the adverse effects of emotional harm they suffer from being teased and judged

Girls bullying girls is a huge issue everywhere with girls from ages 12-ANY!! Girls can be the meanest beings alive. It is the worst possible thing a girl could go through, and it's not fair, and it DOESN'T have to happen.

**Sophomore,
St Johnsbury
Academy**

Girls my age can be very, very, very mean to each other- we stab each other in the back and then they do it to us and it keeps going and going.

**7th grader
Hunt Middle School**

I think the most important issue with girls/women is the violence we receive at school, in public, or from dating/marriage because women have rights, and they shouldn't be controlled by other people. Some men think women are soft, but we are really not. Women are strong!

**16 year-old
Canaan High
School**

What are the negative effects of girls feeling unsafe?

According to a national survey conducted by the Girl Scout Research Institute in 2003, girls who do not feel safe are more likely to feel sad, have trouble paying attention in school, get grades below A's and B's, and have trouble making decisions. They also are *more* likely to feel that they cannot keep themselves safe, are *less* likely to feel that they can do anything if they try hard enough, and are *more* likely to worry about making new friends and about finding adults and peers they can talk to and trust.

Safety should be a shared goal between adults and girls. Many girls view their own safety as a personal problem – one they believe they have to deal with alone. The more adults know about how girls perceive safety, the better they will be able to help them develop effective strategies for coping with emotionally and/or physically dangerous situations.

...About Bullying and Harassment

What Teen Girls Say...

The War in Iraq is very important to us (me) right now because it's determining all of our fates as well as many other peoples.

**7th Grader
Browns River
Middle School**

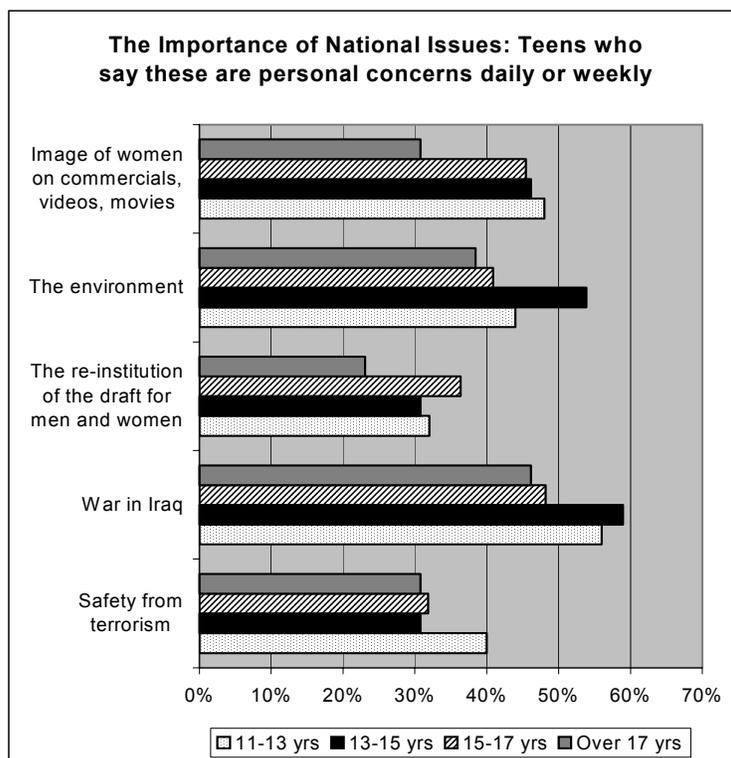
The war in Iraq is probably a big important issue for most because many have family members or people they know there.

**Junior
Center for
Technology
Essex**

National issues can also impact teens' feelings of safety. Teen girls were asked to rate the importance of issues in their lives that they have little control over and that have a national scope. The Iraq War was the issue of greatest concern for teens at every single age category and region. Though realted, girls were much less concerned about their safety from terrorism.

"The war is an important issue to me and my friends right now. We would just like it to all be over."

**11 year-old
Malletts Bay School**



...About National Issues

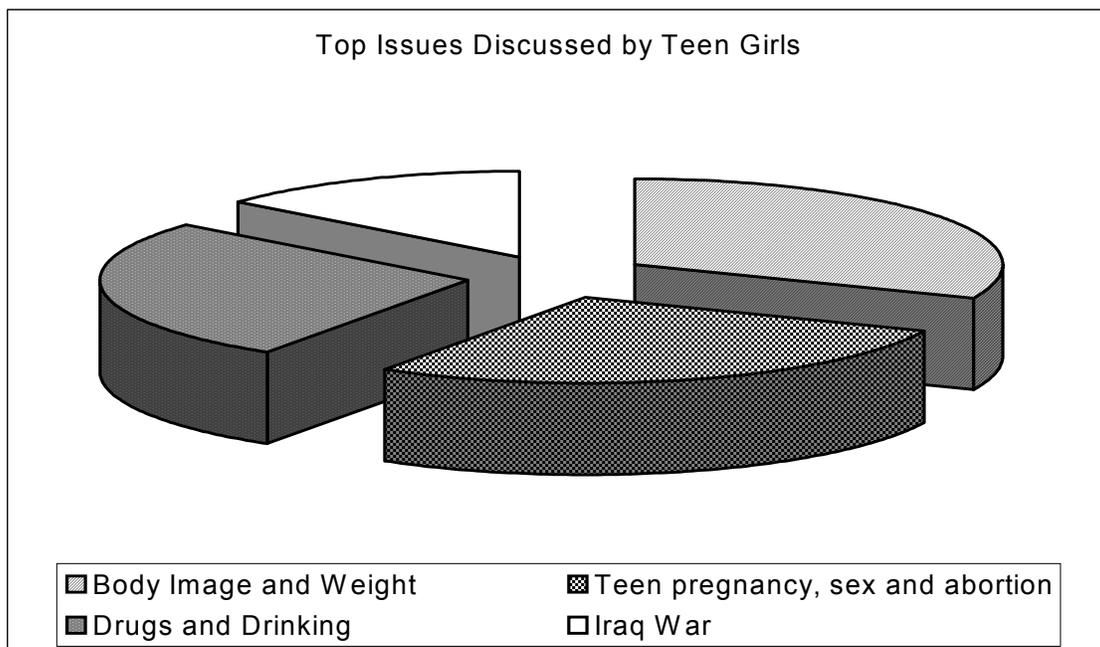
Voicing Teen Concerns

When given the opportunity to give input on what teens see as critical issues, girls had lots on their minds.

“Peer pressure, abortion, jobs, education, college, self-image, eating disorders are all important issues to myself and other girls friends, because they are things we worry about, some we are scared of. What if a friend gets pregnant? Am I going to get into a good school? Should I worry if so-and-so has an eating disorder?”

15 year-old, Lamoille Union High School

Leading their concerns, 36% of girls mentioned “body image” or “weight” in their written open-ended responses. 32% mentioned teen pregnancy, sexual activity or orientation, 31% mentioned teen drug use and drinking, and 16% mentioned worry over the Iraq War. We’ve already mentioned drugs and war in previous pages, so let’s turn our attention to body image, and issues around teen sexuality.



What Teen Girls Say...

"I would like for younger girls who are becoming teenagers to have more confidence in themselves. Today TV, ads and people a lot of the time convince people that there is something wrong with them. That they are either too skinny, ugly or just that there has to be something you need to change about yourself. I would like for younger girls to have the confidence and self-esteem to say that they are fine the way they are and they don't have to try and change themselves to be liked or accepted by others."

**Junior
Center for
Technology Essex**

Teen girls were also focused on and very concerned about the way the media portrays them through commercials, movies and in music videos. This came out in both the areas of the survey where they were asked to rate key issues for them personally, and again when they were asked to comment on issues most affecting them and other girls.

Size is important because models and people on TV are extremely skinny and most girls want to be like them.

**11 year-old
Fredrick H. Tuttle
Middle School**

"IMAGE. it ties right into the media and how, if you're not skinny, you're not pretty. i think the media has a negative effect on body image."

**Senior
Rutland HS**

Girls' self-image is largely dependent on whether their behaviors and attitudes align with their peers. It is also dependent on the adults who influence them, the media, and girls' own sense of self and body image. These messages are often conflicting and contradictory; on one hand girls are told to be happy the way they are, and on the other hand, they are given the message that being overweight is unhealthy and unattractive.

"I think body image is huge to girls my age. There is always pressure to look good, because you are afraid that if you don't people will tease you."

**14 year-old
Essex High School**

The image of girls and women in magazines and on the tv... we are influenced to be perfect on a daily basis.

**16 year-old
Harwood Union
High School**

"I think that girls on a whole are much too concerned with their body images, and that this leads to a great lack in confidence in many girls, which in turn leads to eating disorders and drug abuse."

**16 year-old
St Johnsbury
Academy**

"Judging by the issues I see in my school, I'd say that one of the most important things to girls my age is body image. There are the thin girls, who are considered "cool and popular", and then there's the unthin girls, who aren't shunned, but aren't worshipped, either. I want to be healthy, but I also want to feel pretty, and look good. These days, everyone acts as if it's a crime to care about your body, but it's also a crime not to care. It's the only body I'll ever have, and I'm going to treat it right."

**Freshman
Thetford Academy**

...About the Media and Body Image

What Teen Girls Say...

Teen girls have lots of concerns and conflicting feelings about sexual issues, for themselves and for their friends. When talking about sex and sexuality, other concerns like pressure to drink or do drugs can enter in, making these issues more complicated.

"One of the most important issues I face right now concerns abortion. I am pro-choice, but I feel that this is a personal matter and should be left to the individuals specifically involved. Namely, the woman and the man she was involved with, and the parents if she is under the age of legal consent. It really bothers me that this has become such a huge national issue, especially from the religious view. I thought we separated the Church from the State?"

**17 year-old
Middlebury HS**

"I think that maybe kids should be more informed about sex and drinking and drugs when they enter middle and high school because a lot of things are unknown and that makes it **MUCH** more scary."

**13 year old
Leland and Gray**

"Teen pregnancy and dealing with life in general is important. We are growing up and we are going through a stage in life where we think we know it all and can do it just get up and go out into the world but we really can't."

**Junior
Winooski High
School**

"Teenagers my age think that the teenagers that use drugs, smoke, chew, and have sex are important. my friends and me talk about 13-14 yr olds that have sex at this age and how it's too early and about people in the school who got in trouble by getting caught doing drugs and smoking. we also talk about how we are fat and how we want to b skinnier and how everyone thinks they have to b like one of those super skinny models."

**8th grader
Mount Anthony Union
Middle School**

"Peer pressure is definitely a big issue for me. Whenever i hang around my friends they try to pressure me into so much different stuff, like smoking a cigarette or smoking weed or drinking. It's kinda hard to say "NO!" when all these people are your friends. I feel like if i say "NO!" i'm going to be looked at different or maybe even picked on. There are a lot of sexual comments and sexual references that are made. Sometimes this leads into peer pressure for sex. A lot of girls now feel they need to turn to sex to be "cool" or what not. All of a sudden it's "cool" to go sleep around. I feel like most of this is caused from peer pressure."

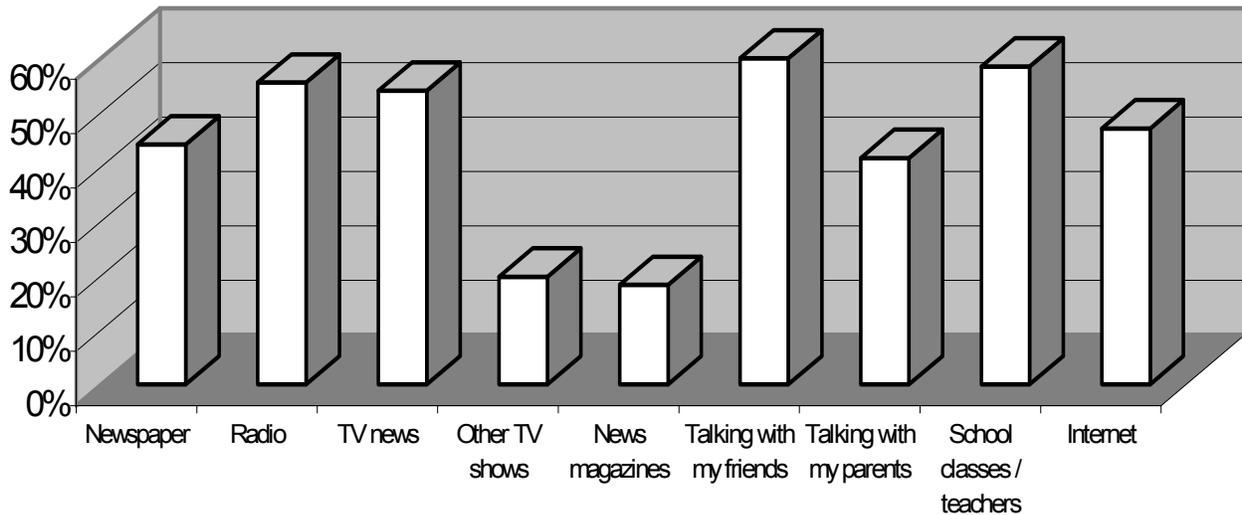
**16 year-old
Center for
Technology Essex**

**...About Sex , Abortion
and Teen Pregnancy,**

The 411: Where Teens Get their Information

Teen issues around body image, sex, substances and even things like war are complex and often interconnected, making them difficult to manage and adding to a teen's daily stress. Their sources for information are varied, and sometimes conflicting, so we looked at where teen girls get information on their issues. Girls were given an opportunity to tell us the top three ways they get "the 411" on current issues and events:

Sources for Teen Info on Issues

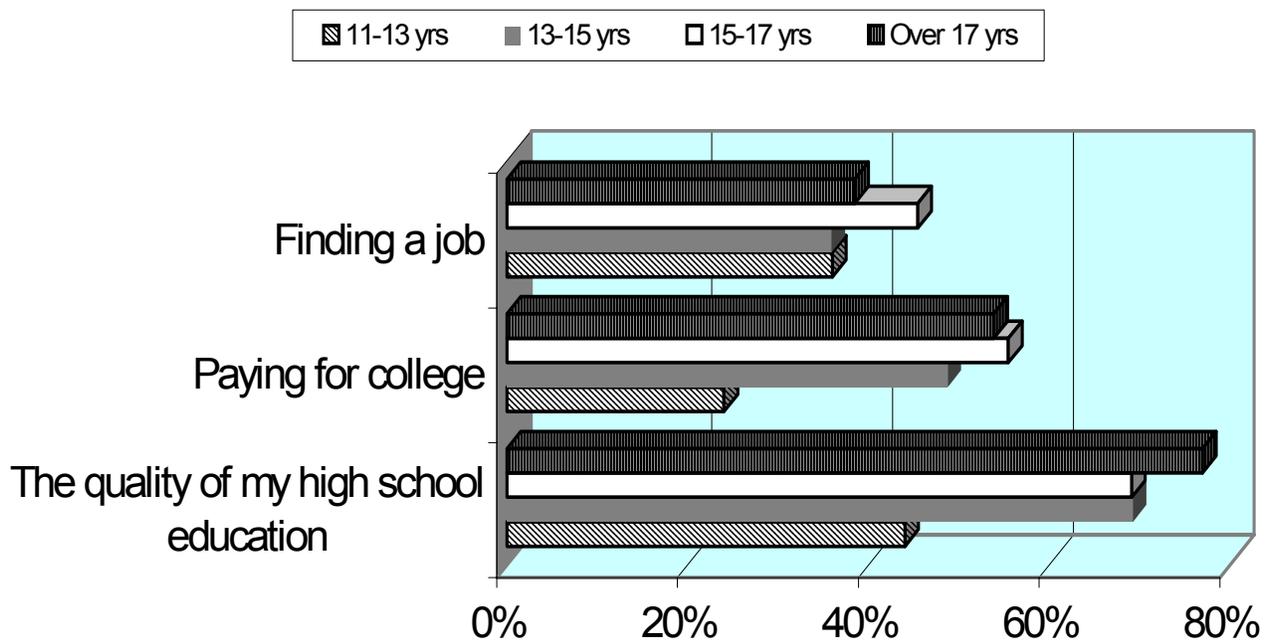


Girls' sources for information were very consistent across all age groups. However, the influence of school and teachers increased as girls ages and grades increased. By age 15-17, 67% of teens identified school classes and teachers as their primary source of information, surpassing friends and media.

Teen Girls Take Education and the Future Seriously

When asked to prioritize their top issues from a list of nineteen issues, girls at every age chose “the quality of my high school education” as their top issue. Their concern was addressed again when they were asked to write freely about their most important issues.

Concern for the Future: Teens who Say this is a Personal Concern Daily or Weekly



In written statements girls expressed feeling the pressure of budget cuts and diminishing school size, and worry about how their school quality will affect their own futures.

What Teen Girls Say...

"I live in a small town so my school is made up of a lot of different towns. It is still a small school and we don't get the opportunities that big schools get. We don't have enough teachers for special classes like honors classes and we don't even have enough classrooms for classes. One teacher has to keep switching classrooms because she doesn't have one of her own. It seems where I live we are also very sheltered. A lot of kids haven't even traveled out of Vermont and they don't know all the possibilities. I think that we need more chances to go places and see things. Most of the time families just don't have the money."

**Sophomore
School Unidentified**

"I love growing up in Vermont, the area is not the issue, I love it here. However, I wish there was better funding for schools. I've seen schools which once had excellent programs decline over the years. My hometown school taught algebra, geometry, trigonometry, etc...when adults were in school. By the time it was my turn to go, there were different levels of "integrated math". I changed schools to one that has good academic structure, but minimal fine arts and extra activities (although it is a private school, but same for public schools as well). I think that having more options at school would make people want to be there. There is a lot of money in the world that is getting put into useless things, so why can't our schools have better funding?"

**17 year-old
Rice Memorial
High School**

"School is fine, but it would be better if we had more money, less budget cuts. The staff at my high school is really great though. Pay teachers more, they deserve it."

**Sophomore
Milton High School**

"Although Vermont is a great state to grow up in; small close communities, many learning opportunities, and a beautiful clean environment; there is something missing. When I leave Vermont and meet other people I realize the sheltered life Vermont students lead. Most of my peers have traveled no farther than Maine or New York. It is essential for all Vermont students to experience a culture other than their own. ... So many schools in Vermont are no more than 500 students and thus do not have the money required for cultural experiences. It is my concern, as well as the concern of many of my peers, that when we apply for college our lacking experience outside of Vermont could be a set back. All in all, more cultural opportunities should be provided for Vermont teens...."

**Sophomore
Missisquoi Valley
Union High School**

Current Vermont statistics show a college-bound population that is leaving Vermont for education, jobs, and residence. This trend was reflected in survey responses as well:

"I won't stick around after college, I can't afford to live here and I won't have a job."

**Sophomore
South Burlington High**

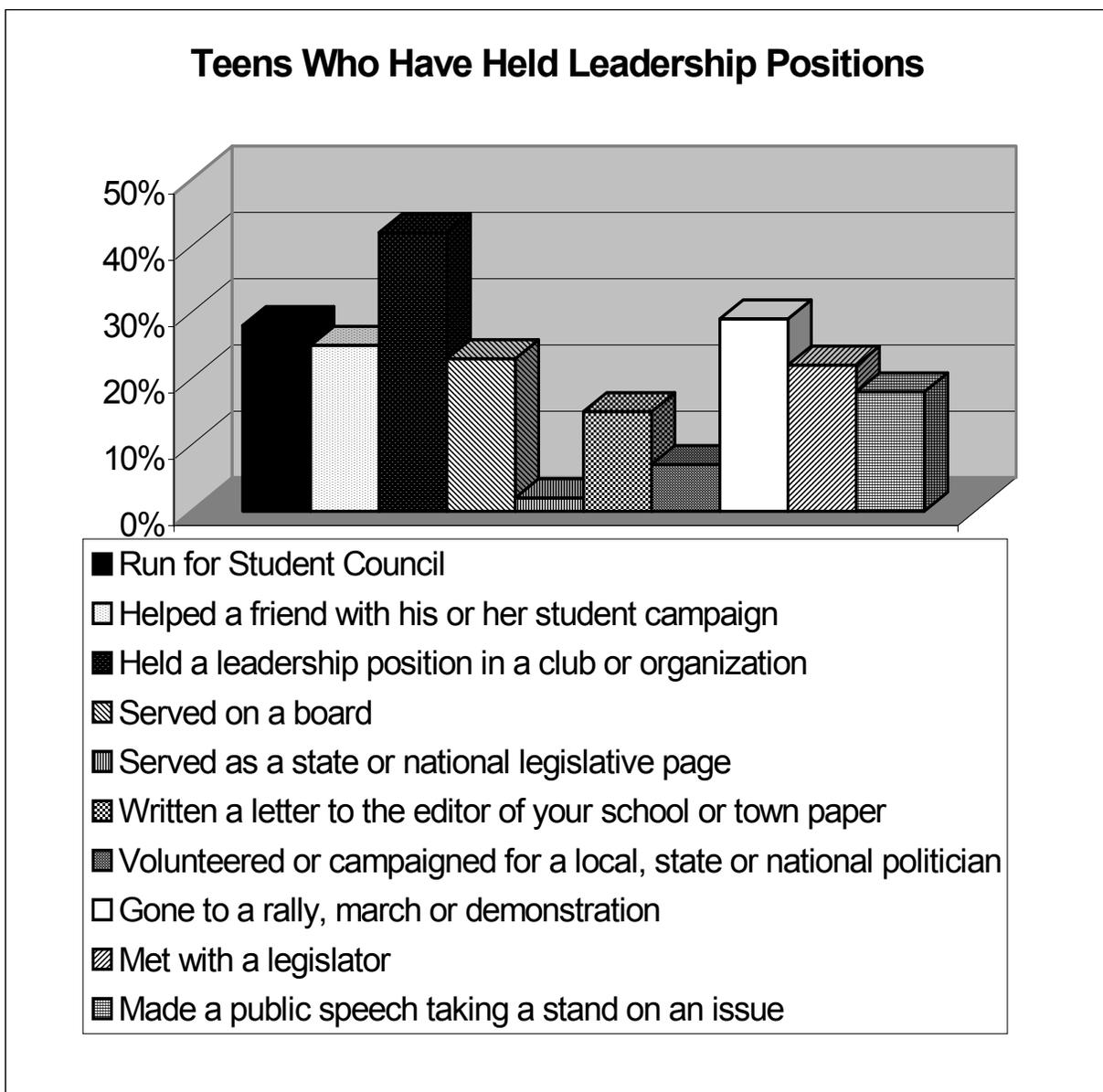
"I want to continue to live in Vermont when I grow up. I might even want to go to college in Vermont. What can be done to make Vermont a good place for me to live as an adult? How can I afford to even live in the same town I grew up in? My family has lived and farmed in Vermont since before it was a state, I don't think we can continue living here."

**11 year-old
Monkton Central School**

**...About Education
and the Future**

Teens as Leaders

One way for teen girls to feel like they have control of their lives is by having an opportunity to experience leadership. So the survey asked girls to share what leadership experiences they'd had.



In addition to actual leadership experiences, many girls expressed leadership traits such as a value of others and their circumstances, a willingness to mentor younger girls or a desire to work for solutions.

"I'd like to let younger girls know they can talk to me anytime for support on any problem they are having."

**16 year-old
Champlain Valley
Union High School**

"I would like there to be more people they (younger girls) can talk to about problems. I want them to feel 100% safe instead of only 90%."

**Junior
Randolph Union
High School**

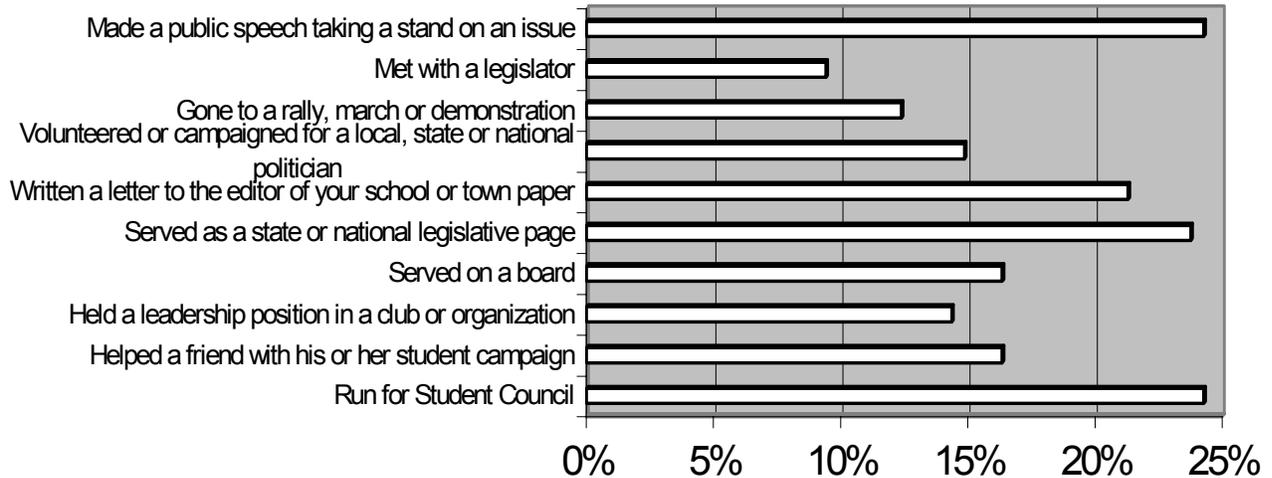
"I feel the most important issues to me are ones that people have had concerns about since the start of time, the less fortunate.

The less fortunate face problems such as starving, freezing, housing. They face issues that most people take for granted.

I want to better programs or create programs that ensure that everyone on this earth has all basic necessities available to them."

**Senior
Brattleboro High
School**

Teens Interested in a Leadership Experience



Leadership experiences give a teen the skills she can use when determining her future, her choices and her own destiny. To get an understanding for the gap between actual experience and the desire for leadership opportunities, teens were also asked if they had a desire for leadership experiences that they simply hadn't "gotten around to" or "were not brave enough" to do. Almost 25% of teens that participated in the survey were part of this group. Their interest provides mentors, schools and organizations with ample opportunity to focus efforts on extending leadership skills and experiences to more teen girls.

Teens Speak Out to their Senators and Representatives

Included in the survey was an opportunity for teens to “*tell a Vermont Senator or Representative about growing up in Vermont or something about being a student in their school or town that a Vermont Senator or Representative might not know.*” Vermont has an open government system and very approachable legislators, yet most teens have not experienced the opportunity to speak directly to them. We included this in the survey, so that girls could share their ideas and concerns in written form...and share they did! Some common concerns emerged in girls’ comments: 19% of the comments included messages about smoking, drinking, and drugs; nearly 10% commented on bullying, harassment, and violence in their lives; and many spoke of the boredom of small town life and issues around their education and future in Vermont.

“Today’s world is a whole lot different than it used to be when people who are Senators and Representatives now were growing up. The increases in technology have made access to a lot of things easier, but in the long run, they have their downfalls too and it’s important to take into account that, contrary to popular belief, kids growing up these days really don’t necessarily have it easier. We face a whole new slew of issues that previous generations never had.”

**16 year-old
Mount Abraham
Union High School**

What Teen Girls Say...

“Education: we’re in school, thinking about our futures, and preparing for college and/or the job market. We witness America’s educational system from the inside, and when we hear that our town’s school budget has failed for the third time, test scores are dropping, etc., we worry about whether or not we’re getting a good education and whether our community supports our right to learn. **Money:** we know it won’t be long before we’re adults. The economy, the job market, and things like taxes, minimum wage, welfare, and Social Security are all in upheaval. We’re worried about what will happen to our money when we grow up - and how people who aren’t as fortunate as we are, are managing to get by. **Civil rights issues:** we’re all affected by sexism and some of us are affected by racism as well. As we become sexually mature, we’re concerned about abortion rights and Roe vs. Wade (the New York Times mentioned on Feb. 27 that 18 states, including Vermont, have no legal protection of abortion rights, which could disappear if Roe v. Wade is overturned). And of course, some of us are lesbian or bisexual - we’re concerned about issues like marriage and adoption, and whether we’ll be accepted by organizations, family, friends, and religious groups. Finally, some of us identify as transgendered or genderqueer, and we’d like awareness so we can feel accepted instead of alone.”

**14 year old
Champlain Valley**

“Many girls have very low self-esteem, most have eating disorders, and many are depressed”.

**Junior
North Country
Union High School**

“Drug use is a problem as is alcohol. There needs to be more done to prevent it at such a young age. Also police officers or “student resource officers” that parole the grounds of schools have not helped. There needs to be a good way of stopping this.”

**Sophomore
Bellows Free Academy
St. Albans, VT**

“My favorite thing about being a Vermont teen is nothing. My least favorite thing about living in Vermont is the snow.”

**8th grader
St. Albans
City School**

“Many of us don’t care about the “outside world”, but those of us who do care, well, we care more than you’ll ever know. You want to know what we think, so make your contact information more accessible to teens, so we can tell you our opinions on certain issues, so we can feel like we’re making a difference, even if it’s a very small difference. It’s the least you could do for us. All you have to do is listen.”

**14-year-old
Thetford Academy**

“i like the fact that Vermont is a very safe place but still deals with issues from the rest of the country such as rape, racism, etc. i do not like the fact that there is not much ethnicity differences and people are only used to dealing with problems and people in one type of way.”

**Junior
Arlington Memorial
High School**

“Vermont is a great place to grow up. Most kids are really informed about world politics and the state of everything right now, we’re allowed to be ourselves. It’s nice to be somewhere where freedom really does mean free.”

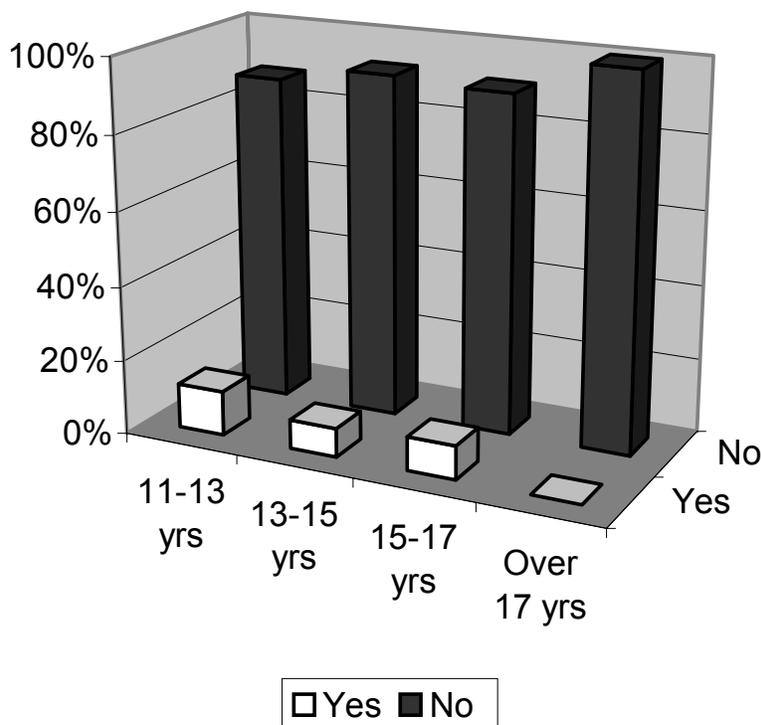
**Freshman
U-32 Junior/Senior
High School**

**...to their Senators
and Representatives**

A Place at the Table: Civic Engagement for Teen Girls

Our town meeting system is a significant political and social event. By organizing in our local circles, we begin to shape creative solutions necessary for change – a true indicator of democracy. The majority of our Vermont residents are female, so to maintain the health of our democracy, we must welcome young women to the table. The great majority of teen girls do not attend their town meeting, regardless of age or region. Yet the survey showed that of girls who do attend, as girls get older they attend town meeting less often. And surprisingly, 100% of teens that could vote did not attend their town meeting.

Did You Attend Town Meeting?



Girls cannot aspire to what they do not see as possible. While women and girls make up 51%, a simple majority, of our state's population, the current balance of women to men in the House is only 33%. The same is true of the Vermont Senate. These are laudable averages when compared to many other states, and the nation at large, but are they good enough by Vermont standards?

I think it would be great talking to someone. I believe that the representatives or ones I know are doing a great job of seeing what is happening in their own town. I also like the idea of seeing more female faces in the government.

**Freshman
Rice Memorial
High School**

“It's hard not having much say in anything going on in my life. I am not taken seriously, i feel, and it sucks.”

**Senior
Rock Point School**

Vermont has a powerful, historic culture of civic voice and engagement. So how do we extend that culture to be welcoming to our youngest citizens?

“We have voices. We aren’t young children anymore. We are Vermont’s future; we are this nation’s future.

Stop telling us we aren’t allowed to do things before you hear us out. Its time to remember, especially in the high schools, that some of us are either legal adults already, or almost.

Treat us as your equals. Guide us, but don’t smash our ideas. Oftentimes, we are the enthusiasm you lack, the rejuvenation for the programs lost which you bemoan. Give us a chance before you destroy us.”

**Senior
Middlebury Union
High School**

The civic community at large – advocates, non-profits, community organizers, educators, religious leaders, state and local representatives – share a responsibility for treating young voters and soon-to-be voters as politically active participants. By the 2000 census, the population under 18 was almost equal in size to the baby boom generation. Vermont’s future depends on diminishing the discord that exists between politics and young people and replacing it with opportunity and engagement.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The voices of Vermont girls in this study can lead a charge for change. By using the information they have provided, schools, government leaders, the Vermont Commission on Women, the Girl Scouts, and other youth development organizations, will be better equipped to address the concerns and opportunities inherent in their responses.

Teen responses confirm that self-esteem is strongly linked to peer comments and body image. Vermont teen girls exist in a no-win world: they identify great concern about media emphasis on appearance, and yet many have a desire to be more thin, more attractive, and more like models they see on TV and in magazines. This indicates that while girls place a premium on self-esteem, body shape and weight are still perceived as more important. Girls need help and support in making the connections that form their attitudes. It's up to adults to partner with teens and challenge local businesses, media outlets, advertisers, and retailers to present girls and their full diversity in positive, teen-savvy ways.

Because emotional health, self-esteem, and body image play a critical role in girls' attitudes about themselves, messages need to acknowledge what is important to them: their friendships, fitting in with peers, feeling good about themselves, and feeling safe (emotionally and physically). In spite of extensive efforts on the part of law-makers and school systems, bullying and harassment are still major obstacles for girls' emotional well-being. They also experience a difference between the way conflicts and harassment between boys are addressed and the way schools address the more subtle harassment used by girls. Approaches that acknowledge, recognize and address both kinds of harassment with equal seriousness will connect with girls and increase their feelings of emotional safety.

It is important to know that most teens see smoking, drug use, and drinking as unhealthy, but girls also view them as a normal part of teen life. Vermont girls reported that peers involved in sexual activity, drug use and drinking surround them, and they are troubled by what they perceive to be an increase in these activities. The majority of teens surveyed also indicated great concern for their friends around these topics, while indicating they, themselves, have made different choices. “Just say no” efforts that merely discourage poor choices without providing positive alternatives are incomplete. We must provide motivation for girls to continue to make sound choices.

Vermont teens are very articulate about the strengths and weaknesses of their schools. The majority spoke highly of their educational experiences. Many teen girls expressed concern for schools continuing to provide quality education in a competitive market, and during difficult budget times. Teens have enough to manage worrying about the quality or cost of their current school education, but teens also should be given an opportunity to be part of the community conversation. By involving them in problem-solving as student “consumers” they may provide new insights or creative solutions, and they will gain a powerful understanding of the costs of a Vermont education.

In the past, leadership roles were male-dominated; women did not have the same access as men. While this has been reduced dramatically, some gender-related gaps prevail. Many teen girls express inherent leadership skills: compassion, drive, the desire to be change agents, and the ability to see where things can be improved. Girls need mentors and increased pathways excel as leaders. Teen girls also feel disconnected from local politics and community action, even though they have expressed clear opinions and ideas around community issues. Government leaders are challenged to be a voice for teen issues, and to include teens in their discussions. These opportunities may even serve as a model for reducing more of the barriers to equality for all girls and women.

Tips for Parents and Mentors

Girls are exposed to messages everyday about fads, sexual activity, war, health, and appearance from family, friends, media, and school. Parents and mentors help teen girls critically examine the often conflicting information and make positive decisions for life.

- **Be a positive role model.** Parents, particularly mothers, are a primary influence in their daughters' lives. The choices you make about substances, clothing, food and physical activity, the comments you make about your looks and the things you value have a strong impact.
- **Don't assume** to know what girls consider important, and don't expect them to automatically share their concerns with parents or other adults. Be proactive about asking how they are getting along with others, even if they are reluctant to talk.
- **Realize that a safe location is not always safe from teasing and harassment.** Take emotional harm seriously. Classrooms, sports fields, or group meetings, and even while home on the computer, often create opportunities for girls to be teased. Alert teachers if you see your daughter being isolated or bullied. Teasing, gossiping and name-calling that is unwanted should never be ignored by adults.
- **Get involved in community efforts.** Work with organizations and your daughter's school to make sure there are a variety of opportunities for teen girls to have a voice. Encourage your daughter to become an advocate, too. Girls have a unique girl perspective about leadership and bring a great deal of compassion to their efforts. When they have a voice and an opportunity to make a difference, their self-esteem soars and they make better decisions in all aspects of their lives.
- **Be relevant.** Frame your conversations in ways that address the topics most relevant to your daughter. Welcome her ideas, concerns, and conversations as part of her decision-making process. Teen girls need to sort out what's on their minds with caring adults frequently, and in a safe, non-judgmental environment.



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