

Care Versus Control: Healthy Relationships

A report from Girlguiding



WE DISCOVER, WE GROW

Girlguiding

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Forewords

Women's Aid is proud to work in partnership with Girlguiding to promote respectful and healthy relationships and girls' right to feel safe, have respect, be free to pursue a happy life and fulfil their potential.

The safe space Girlguiding provides for girls and young women to share their concerns and find solutions together is vitally important. Happy relationships are essential for a happy life, at any age. For girls and young women, an understanding of their right to be treated equally with boys and young men, and receive respect in relationships with family, relatives, friends, partners and professionals can help establish their self-esteem and the skills they need in adulthood. This means feeling safe, having confidence, learning about conflict management and knowing where and how to seek support.

Since 1974 Women's Aid has been working towards ending violence against women and children in their relationships. As part of our work we coordinate and support children's support workers, and produce resources, both for those working with children affected by domestic abuse and for children and young people themselves.

In 2005 we created www.thehideout.org.uk, the first national website on domestic violence for children and young people. In 2008 we worked with teachers to create the Expect Respect Toolkit, a free resource for primary and secondary schools and youth settings to teach all children about healthy relationships, which can be obtained from www.womensaid.org.uk. In 2007 we ran a campaign which gave children and young people a voice on domestic violence with 'Kidspeak'. This year, we are following up with 'Teenspeak' - short films in which teenagers affected by domestic violence question the adults who have the power to make a difference.

The research conducted by Girlguiding clearly shows that inequality and relationships are a huge concern for girls and young women. That's why the steps Girlguiding is taking are crucial. We would urge every organisation working with children and young people to follow the example Girlguiding has set and make education about respectful relationships a core element in children's learning.

Polly Neate

Chief Executive, Women's Aid

AVA (Against Violence and Abuse) was delighted to work with Girlguiding to develop the Change the Story badge for the Girls in Action campaign so girls can be more aware of how to tackle the issues of violence against women. This important report from Girlguiding continues this work, and helps put girls' voices into the arena. It highlights that more work is needed to help girls recognise and deal with relationship abuse, particularly to recognise if they are being controlled or manipulated, which can damage self-esteem and prospects, and be the beginning of further relationship abuse.

We believe it is vital that children and young people are given the opportunity to discuss issues relating to gender equality and healthy relationships. Girlguiding groups offer an excellent safe space for girls to explore these complex issues and to think about safety and help seeking. We want to see a world where all girls and young women are equal, empowered and educated about healthy relationships and equality and this report is an important step on the journey to achieving that.

Jo Sharpen

Children and Young People's Project Coordinator, AVA

Preface

With over half a million members, Girlguiding is the leading charity for girls and young women in the UK. We believe passionately that girls should be given a voice about issues that they care about and have the opportunity to shape the world they want to live in.

Each year, Girlguiding's Girls' Attitudes Survey asks girls across the UK for their opinions on the big issues affecting their lives - body image, equality, sex education, cyber-safety, bullying, glass ceilings and more. Our 2012 survey revealed concerning findings about young people's attitudes towards coercion and control in relationships.

We felt strongly that we should listen to those young people and commission research that examined girls' understanding of healthy and positive relationships in greater depth. We were particularly proud to do this as part of our 2013 partnership with the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) on its Stop the Violence campaign.

Our new report, *Care Versus Control: Healthy Relationships*, finds that too many girls are ready to accept controlling behaviour and see it as a normal part of a 'caring' relationship. The constant checking-in and monitoring via the internet and mobile phones risk spilling over into their lives offline, leading to a culture of insecurity in which young people expect to keep continual tabs on each other.

We know from our daily work with young women across the UK that expectations about relationships are often formed when girls are teenagers. Without the right support to interpret and examine their experiences, it is all too easy for girls to form unhealthy patterns of behaviour in early relationships that they can take with them into adulthood.

The responsibility for forming healthy relationships belongs with girls and boys together. However, we also believe that girls benefit hugely from the opportunity to explore these issues from their own specific perspective.

That is why Girlguiding remains so committed to providing a safe, non-judgemental, girl-only space in which we can support girls with information and expertise. This space enables them to learn from their experiences, to develop their views about the world, and to build the confidence and resilience to be able to make the best possible decisions for themselves.

Putting young people directly in charge of the issues we speak out about is right at the heart of Girlguiding's approach to advocacy. The girls and young women we work with constantly inspire and challenge us with their insights and beliefs. We hope you will find the same.

Julie Bentley

Chief Executive, Girlguiding

Methodology

Ten discussion groups were carried out among girls aged 11 to 17, who were drawn from a cross-section of girls in and outside of guiding. Groups were recruited from, and discussions conducted in, schools across England in Kent, Essex, East Anglia, West Yorkshire and Teesside. Schools were selected to cover different catchment areas in terms of rural and urban areas, ethnicity and levels of deprivation to ensure a diverse mix of backgrounds and experiences. A total of 75 girls took part. Girls were screened to ensure that all had views on the subject of relationships, either by having a girlfriend or boyfriend themselves, or having close friends and/or siblings of similar ages who were in relationships. Groups were moderated by experienced child researchers from ChildWise, and parental consent was obtained. During the discussions we used a number of scenarios to explore girls' understanding of and response to different situations.

Research took place during March and April 2013. Report statistics are from Girls' Attitudes Survey 2012.

Executive summary

It is now a year since the government took the positive step of announcing that the definition of domestic abuse would be widened to include coercive control. But, one year on, are we any closer to helping young people to recognise controlling behaviour in their own relationships?

This new report from Girlguiding specifically explores girls' views on coercion and reveals that their understanding of abusive behaviour is often blurred. The vast majority of the girls we spoke to were clear in their condemnation of violence, threats and sexual coercion. But when asked about so-called 'low-level abuse' - the slow drip-drip of control - their responses were much more uncertain.



23% of girls aged 11 to 21 showed a full understanding of what an abusive relationship is.

Girls' attitudes

Statistics from Girlguiding's 2012 Girls' Attitudes Survey showed that two-fifths of girls believe it is acceptable for a partner to make you tell them where you are all the time. One in ten says it is appropriate for a partner to tell you who you can and can't spend time with.

A fifth say it is acceptable for a partner to shout at you and call you names (21%) or send photos or videos of you to friends without your permission (17%).

One in five said it is okay for a partner to tell you what you can and cannot wear.

It would seem that these examples of controlling behaviour - all covered by the government's new definition of domestic abuse - are an accepted part of relationships for too many girls.

Care versus control

The research found that from a young age too many girls regularly tolerate behaviour rooted in jealousy and lack of trust, and have a tendency to reframe it as genuine care and concern for their welfare.

Many girls interviewed struggled to envisage how they would react if they themselves were in a controlling relationship. Although most felt they could recognise different types of controlling behaviour **in theory**, when presented with specific scenarios that they or their peers might encounter they were quick to make excuses for the controlling behaviour. They readily imagined situations where it might be acceptable or even their fault. Some even found this behaviour endearing.

Social media facilitates a culture of constant 'checking-in', where monitoring a partner's movements can be done at the click of a button. This can further cloud young people's judgements into believing that a certain level of control and surveillance is acceptable. Girls in our focus groups had mixed feelings about the public nature of online interaction, and have experienced how it can lead to accusations of cheating and jealousy.

A tipping point

Experts at organisations such as Women's Aid are clear that becoming a teenager is a crucial stage of development for girls when it comes to developing their expectations of intimate relationships. This is when their ideas of what is and isn't acceptable are formed. Without guidance on relationships, girls can be in danger of believing that some unacceptable behaviour is 'just part of a relationship'.

Too often girls are being left to their own devices to work out what is and isn't acceptable in a relationship. Our research showed that most aren't clear about where their knowledge about relationships comes from, creating their views from a hotchpotch of tidbits from TV talk shows, gossip items and social media. Girls say that any support and education they do receive at school focuses too much on the physical side of relationships - and not enough on the quality of the relationships themselves. There is too much theory and too few practical examples, stories and case studies that they can apply to their own lives.

Girls in our focus groups told us that if they were concerned about their own relationships, most would be very reluctant to involve parents, teachers or other authority figures unless they felt the situation had become extreme. For the majority this means physical violence - leaving huge leeway for harmful controlling behaviour to go unchecked and establishing very damaging expectations for future relationships.

Sadly, the research shows that while there are good organisations trying to help, there is no cohesive UK-wide strategy to help young people reach an understanding of what is a healthy relationship.

It is a positive step that the government has ensured that domestic abuse applies to victims under the age of 18 and includes coercive control as abusive behaviour. Now is the moment to give young people relevant tools and support to ensure they form healthy rather than unhealthy relationships.

Peer education

From our research it would seem that young people are crying out for a space where they can reflect on the complexities of relationships. Girls said they preferred to talk about relationships with others their own age in a girl-only environment.

Through the work of organisations like Women's Aid, ERAW, AVA and others, we are gradually seeing much better awareness and understanding of violence against women and girls. If we can provide the right support, we have an opportunity to help young people recognise unhealthy and controlling behaviour in their early relationships - helping them to establish positive relationship patterns for the future.

In response to this, Girlguiding has released a peer-education pack entitled *Healthy Relationships* for girls and young women. The pack aims to give girls the skills to understand what healthy and unhealthy relationships are, and equip them to recognise and end controlling and coercive relationships in the future. It is part of a series of work that Girlguiding is currently producing to help prevent violence against girls and women in support of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) Stop the Violence campaign.

1: Happily ever after - girls' understanding of relationships

Many of the girls in our focus groups said they felt confident that they understood the concept of healthy and positive relationships.

Most girls in our research could talk very knowledgeably about the theory of relationship issues. There were frequent spontaneous references to behaviour that is controlling, overprotective, or obsessive. In all the groups, there were girls who had seen examples of unhealthy relationships either in their own family, or among friends or older girls at school.

'I lost my best friend because she's with someone a lot older and he's very controlling. Very possessive. I used to see her every day after school and I haven't seen her for three weeks.' (Year 11, East)

However, most girls we spoke to were unsure where this knowledge comes from. They made occasional references to examples that they have seen in the media, such as TV soaps and other series, or tabloid talk shows and gossip items. They also pointed to material that they encounter on social networking sites, for example something a friend had 'liked' on Facebook. When discussing sex-education lessons in schools in this context, most said that there is not enough focus on relationships. Some also said current sex education in schools did not encourage open discussion, particularly with a large mixed group of students. Girls in our focus groups rarely mentioned parents as a source of information.

'I've only ever been in long-term relationships, and when one finished I went into another one quite quickly. I don't have any family ... or friends as such ... because I've always had boyfriends who take the place of friends ... it's a safety zone thing, it's all I know.' (Year 11, East)



18% of girls mentioned psychological or emotional pressures when asked about abuse.



18% of girls aged 11 to 16 showed a full understanding of abuse compared to 27% aged 16 to 21.



12% of girls aged 11 to 21 said that telling you who you can and can't spend time with could sometimes be OK.

'It's complicated'

Girls in our groups were initially confident that they would know what to do if faced with an abusive relationship, but when given time to reflect on example scenarios, they realised that the situation may be more complex and the way forward less clear-cut. It was obvious from these exercises that girls need to be encouraged to think through these issues in depth so they can appreciate the complexities in relationships and learn how to handle them in their own lives.

'I don't think you can predict [what you would do]. I don't think you'd realise as well that you are in that. It's easier to see it from an outside point of view.'
(Year 12, Southeast)

Some girls also pointed out that it is not only boys who abuse their girlfriends, girls can also be the perpetrators. They brought up examples of violence towards boyfriends and partners, and obsessive or controlling behaviour on the part of the girl.

What do they look for in a relationship?

- Someone to talk to, share with
- Love
- Someone who is on your side
- Feeling special
- Commitment, long-term potential

What makes a good relationship?

- Trust, loyalty, honesty, integrity
- Being able to talk to one another, open-minded, share a joke
- Supportive, on your side
- Shared interests, friends
- Feeling happy

What are the signs of a bad relationship?

- Cheating, jealousy, lack of trust
- Lack of understanding for one another, not listening to each other
- Lack of respect, not supporting you or sticking up for you
- Too overprotective, taking over
- Arguing, fighting
- Having secrets from one another
- Violence, physical abuse, mental abuse
- Feeling pressured, forcing you to do things
- Feeling scared, unhappy, isolated
- Imbalance in expectations



21% said that telling you what you can and can't wear was acceptable.

2: 'Just a jealous guy' - care versus control

When it comes to examining elements of control, girls find it hard to draw the line. For some, jealousy can be endearing.

We asked girls about specific examples of controlling behaviours that are included in the government's new definition of domestic abuse. On paper, girls are able to recognise and spontaneously reject as unacceptable the different types of controlling behaviour. However, with relatively little prompting, they quickly feel less certain and start to see instances where they feel things are less clear-cut.

Checking in

In their own lives, girls often have difficulty demarcating control and lack of trust from protectiveness and care. Many girls had experienced relationships in which their partner wanted to know where they were all the time, specified who they could spend time with and talk to, and constantly texted or called.

Most describe this persistent checking as annoying and potentially obsessive or controlling. Yet others point out that it may be a sign that he cares, and has his girlfriend's best interests at heart. Some claimed it can be endearing, or even something of a status symbol, especially in the early stages of a relationship. As a result, although some ignored the constant calls from their boyfriends, and explained afterwards that they were too busy to respond, others were quick to change behaviour and went out of their way to reply and reassure.



21% said that shouting at you or calling you names because of what you may have done could sometimes be OK.

'If you've broken up with someone and then got back together, or say you cheat on someone and they give you another chance, it's like really annoying when they want to keep checking your phone and asking who you're talking to.' (Year 7, North)

Similarly, girls' beliefs about jealousy are confused. Some suggest that a small amount of jealousy shows a partner's fondness and concern about losing her. This ambiguity can make it tricky for girls to recognise when things have gone too far, and gives them an excuse to explain away or ignore potential danger signs.

Dressing down

In the Girls' Attitudes Survey, 21% of girls said it was OK for a partner to tell you what you can and can't wear. In the focus groups most girls strongly objected to the idea of their partner controlling what they wear. They saw this as an attack on their personal identity and self-expression, possibly feeling more passionately about this than about attempts to influence friends and freedom.

One or two girls disagreed because they felt that it was unfair and embarrassing for a boy if his girlfriend dressed too provocatively - she should self-censor. However, when we discussed moderation of behaviour it became clear that girls' ideas about this were blurry. Girls quickly dismissed the idea of a partner making them feel responsible for the partner's controlling or unreasonable behaviour. Further discussion again revealed that it is not so clear in practice.

Girls talked about how their actions can affect and influence boyfriends' behaviour and admitted that they moderate their own actions as a result. For example, some keep quiet about innocent time spent with other boys or avoid clothes that might be seen as provocative, contradicting what they had said about a partner controlling what they wear.

Blurred lines

It is clear that it can be difficult for many girls to draw the line between care and control in their early relationships.

During their teens, patterns and beliefs about relationships are beginning to take shape, yet there is little opportunity for girls to objectively discuss the different scenarios and behaviours they may encounter in their relationships. The concern is that if girls get used to accepting such behaviours it can set a precedent that leads to them tolerating more serious abuses later in life.

3: This is abuse - violence against girls and women

Is there ever room for second chances once a relationship has turned violent?

As our research showed that girls find controlling behaviour hard to demarcate from genuine care, we considered how girls would respond to abuse if it becomes physical.

Recognising coercion and violence

Just a few of the older girls had experienced pressure to have sex - many felt that this was a misleading stereotype of teen behaviour, and that the extent to which this happened in real life was exaggerated. Girls believe that sexual coercion rarely occurred among under-age couples, and some said that pressure may come from the girl as much as from the boy. It should also be noted that teens' understanding of consent is very varying, and both boys and girls can be unaware of when coercion is taking place.

When presented with scenarios involving violence or intimidation, girls are adamant that this is wrong. But as with controlling behaviour, their initial response holds up only in theory. They are less clear about how they would respond if it happened to them.

A second chance

Some argued that everyone deserves a second chance, and that a single violent response, if it is out of character and followed by an immediate apology, could be forgiven. The example of Rihanna and Chris Brown were referenced in relation to this.



22% said that checking up on you and reading your phone could sometimes be OK.

'I think it's the behaviour ... if they're the type of person that is aggressive and you think it could happen again then I'd walk. If it was totally out of character ... this isn't him ... another chance sort of thing.' (Year 11, East)

When questioned further, the girls recognised that giving a boy a second chance could undermine a girl's confidence, with concerns about what might happen in the future, and the impact it could have on the way that she behaved with her partner.

As with controlling behaviour, it is only after the discussions opened up that girls recognised that dealing with a violent relationship is more complicated than it first appears.

4: 'She should leave' - why girls stay and who to turn to for help

When first asked, girls were convinced they would leave an abusive relationship. But when questioned further, their resolve weakened. So why do girls stay and what can be done to help?

Again, when first presented with abuse scenarios, girls were automatic in their response - the girl should leave. But when probed further, girls found that this was not always so easy.

Keep trying?

A major reason, and a revealing one, is that girls believed the victim may not recognise there is a problem, or believe that it is only temporary and may get better. Girls also said that victims may hope the situation can be fixed, reluctant to give up at the first sign of difficulty. Girls are, after all, encouraged to keep trying in other areas of their lives.

For some of the older girls, there was a sense that their own and their partner's lives were so closely linked that it was easier to stay than to consider leaving. Becoming close to their boyfriend's family, visiting and staying over regularly, confiding in his mum, or if their boyfriend is close to the girl's own family, mean that they will lose a lot if they break up.

'They might have told her, "you're not going to find anyone better than me".' (Year 11 East)

Some had concerns about more serious repercussions from the boyfriend, and how he might react. Several mentioned that a boy who had already hit a girl may be liable to further violence if the couple broke up, and some had seen examples of this among older family members.

'My mum left [her ex-boyfriend, because he hit her]. It took a long time to leave him though. She did it but he kept coming back. [He said he wouldn't hit her again] but he did.' (Year 8, Southeast)

Who to talk to?

During the discussions girls showed a preference to talk about relationships with their peers, and said they would turn to adults only when matters got too much for them to handle. Girls talked about being embarrassed to raise the topic with parents, and also worried about overreaction.

Girls in our focus groups told us that they regularly talked to friends about their relationships and compared notes. But this can be harder if they are experiencing problems. Some drift away from their friends as a result of the relationship, others are reluctant to admit to problems, or may be unwilling to trust their friends and the objectivity of any advice they may give. It should also be noted that friends are not experts and may be emotionally ill-equipped to help a friend who is in an abusive relationship.



39% said that making you tell them where you are all the time is acceptable.

5: The online playground - sharing and shaming

Relationships are increasingly played out online. The transparency of interaction can reduce a girl's ability to socialise unchecked.

Young people spend more time than ever online. BlackBerry Messenger (BBM) and chat apps like WhatsApp, which allow partners to see that someone is online or responding to other messages and not theirs, can easily exacerbate potentially controlling behaviour and make it much harder to handle.

'WhatsApp - it causes a lot of problems. You can see when someone's seen your message. And if they ignore you... And it tells you when a person was last on it. So they could have been texting other people but they've been ignoring you.' (Year 9, North)

Lack of private space

Girls in our focus groups bemoaned the public nature of online interaction and their lack of opportunity for a private space to lead their own lives. They are aware this communal communication can have a negative side and can quickly transform the internet into another portal of control. Its environment of constant monitoring can very quickly be normalised and spill into lives offline.

Girls also talked about the problems that could arise when people found out through Facebook about changes in relationships, or about partners who were apparently cheating.

They talked about arguments when a partner discovered via Facebook that the other had been somewhere or done something they hadn't expected: a last-minute change of plan can be interpreted as an attempt to deceive, or partners can feel excluded because they weren't involved. Finding out via Facebook - whether openly, through friends or by hacking - that their partner had been messaging or spending time with a potential rival also caused upsets and disagreements.

Social media - the dark side

Most girls across the age range have experienced the unsavoury side to social media of intimate pictures and videos. Often these images come from others outside of their immediate circle, such as people in other year groups or at different schools. The content does not often involve people they know personally and is more likely to be material found online. Most say they ignore these as much as possible.



96% of girls aged 11 to 21 said that it was never acceptable for a boy to hit, kick or punch his girlfriend for talking to someone else at a party.

Just one or two girls admit to having taken intimate photos of themselves to post online or to send to someone else (eg via BBM). Those who have done this dismiss it as a bit of a laugh. However, the majority of the girls we spoke to disapprove and dissociate themselves from such behaviour. They are clear that this is the sort of thing that other girls do, not girls like them.

'People message you saying send me a picture of you naked. You wouldn't do that but like some people will. It's weird how some boys think that girls find that attractive.' (Year 9, North)

Such attitudes may make it hard for any girl who does find private or embarrassing photos of herself that have been posted online, as their peers may think they have stepped out of line or been naïve, and they could quickly become isolated. Given the stigma associated with this behaviour, girls may be unwilling to speak out about what has happened, leaving them to cope with the aftermath on their own.

A life under surveillance

Given that young people spend so much time online, especially now that most have smartphones, the surveillance of their movements becomes a normal everyday experience. For example, one girl was dumped because she failed to answer her phone when she was asleep. This intensifies the already present ambiguities and makes it much harder for girls to recognise controlling behaviour.

6: A safe space - peer support

Building awareness of relationship issues is crucial for young people entering into their first intimate relationship. And for this to be effective, the girls we spoke to told us they need a safe space where they can explore these issues fully to ensure that they can apply this knowledge to their own lives.

Our focus groups suggested that girls show a reluctance to talk to adults about relationship issues for a variety of reasons. So where can they turn to for support? Friends can offer advice but often, without emotional maturity, it is questionable how useful this can be. Girls in the research also noted that it can be harder to talk to friends if they are experiencing relationship problems. Some drift away from their friends as a result of the relationship and others are reluctant to admit to problems.

We've known our teachers for so long, and we're going to be with them until like Year 11. If we told them something like we've had sex, then every time they look at you... They'd be judging you. (Year 9, North)

Informed girl-only forum

A peer forum can give girls the opportunity to become informed, speak up, explore their attitudes and test their beliefs. It also gives girls the chance to broach with others issues they may feel uncomfortable confronting otherwise.

More importantly, however, the advice and knowledge is passed on in a way that is rooted in girls' experience - purely because it is being delivered by their peers.

When we do sex education, it's kind of awkward if you get like our head of year ... you'd rather have someone come in. Someone not from your school because then you would never see them again. (Year 9, North)

This is so important, particularly when it comes to building girls' understanding of relationship issues. As the research shows, girls understand the issues in theory, but they don't know what these look and feel like in reality, or how they would react. It was only when girls were asked how they would respond that their resolve to 'just leave' fell apart.



95% said threatening a girl with violence for spending too much time with her friends was always wrong.

Girlguiding Peer Educators

At Girlguiding, Peer Educators work with girls aged seven and up to ensure that, from an early age, the girls are building up the confidence to be able to seek advice on issues they are concerned about. Issues covered by Girlguiding Peer Educators include addictions, binge drinking, bullying, eating disorders, media, refugees, poverty and world development, sexual health and stress management. We believe that giving girls a space where they can talk to informed peers gives them the opportunity to really test their beliefs, and build their confidence and their knowledge so that they can make informed decisions and go on to have happy, healthy relationships.

Conclusion

The government's widening of the definition of domestic abuse to ensure it applies to victims under the age of 18 and encompasses coercive control was a welcome step. However, our research suggests that young people need to be given the opportunity to explore what this definition means for them.

While girls showed an awareness of the many issues involved in abusive relationships, their understanding is very black and white. Initially, all abuse is dismissed as unacceptable, yet their ability to spot abusive behaviour and their resolve to leave an unhealthy relationship all floundered when questioned further. Without the opportunity to debate and develop their understanding of controlling and coercive behaviour, young people can be at risk of believing that some unacceptable behaviour is 'just part of a relationship'.

Girls, especially the younger girls or those who had less experience, already showed a willingness to excuse, forgive or accept behaviour that was rooted in jealousy and lack of trust. With no opportunity to contradict this belief, girls and young women are vulnerable to falling into a pattern of accepting abusive behaviour.

There are organisations providing advice and support, but without a cohesive UK-wide strategy designed to help young people explore relationship issues they are left to piece together their own education.

From what girls expressed in the research, schools should not be seen as the only source of support. Girls are reluctant to discuss relationships with parents, teachers or other figures of authority. Instead, they are far more likely to turn to their peers. Girls' open responses during the research indicates that there is a role for a girls-only forum that gives girls the opportunity to explore the issues without embarrassment or fear of repercussions.

Girlguiding, in association with AVA and Women's Aid, has developed a peer-education pack entitled *Healthy Relationships* to help girls and young women develop a deeper understanding of what positive relationships are, and to teach them how to spot unacceptable behaviour.

If we provide girls with the right support we can give them the knowledge and confidence to ensure that their future relationships are positive and healthy.



94% said that putting a girl down in front of friends or embarrassing her in public was always wrong.



94% said that it was never acceptable to pressure a girl to have sex.

About Girlguiding's Peer Educators

Girlguiding is the leading charity for girls and young women in the UK. We are for all girls and young women, whatever their background and circumstances. We give girls a place where they can really be themselves with other girls and share the experience of growing up as a girl in today's world. Through our programme - and initiatives like Peer Education - we give girls the confidence, skills and information to make informed decisions. We passionately believe that girls and young women can be a powerful force for good.

Peer Educators are girls and young women aged 14 to 25 who are involved in guiding and who are trained to run fun and interactive sessions for their peers. They deliver sessions to Brownies, Guides and The Senior Section, as well as anyone outside guiding aged seven and up. Girls who take part in peer-education sessions in guiding can:

- become informed about issues relevant to them in a fun and informal way
- explore and challenge their beliefs and attitudes in a safe, non-judgemental space
- gain the confidence to speak up and learn how to express themselves so they stay true to what they believe.

Peer Educators deliver sessions on issues such as binge drinking, bullying, eating disorders, disability awareness, the media, refugees, self-esteem, sexual health, healthy relationships, stress management and world poverty and development.

'Young women and girls listen more to their peers than they do to authority figures telling them what is right and wrong, and that's where peer education can play an extremely important role.' Pippa, Peer Educator

'Peer Educators are facilitators: by using interactive tasks, games and activities, we allow girls to take the subject as far as they are comfortable, discussing issues at a level which is appropriate and relevant to them.' Jenna, Peer Educator



38% of girls aged 11 to 21 know about This is Abuse, the government-backed website.

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Healthy Relationships peer-education pack developed in association with AVA (Against Violence and Abuse) and Women's Aid.

Research overseen by Women's Aid and conducted by ChildWise.

