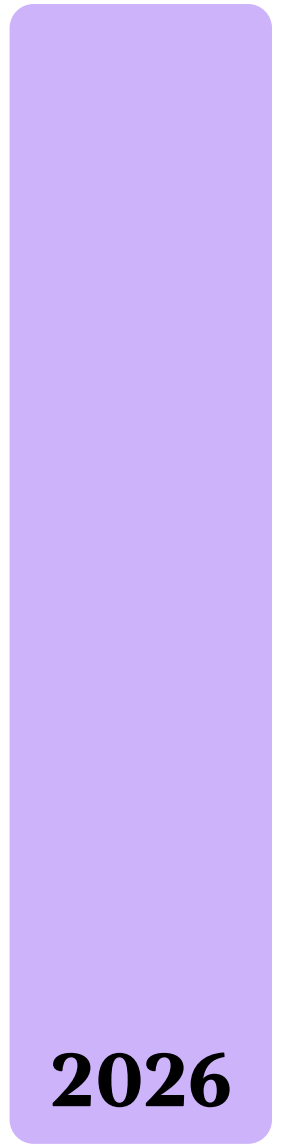
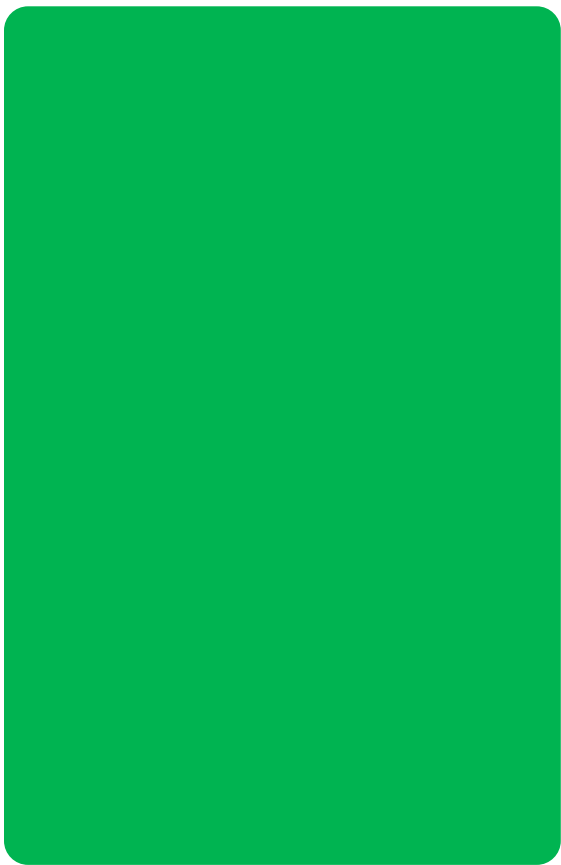


state *of the* girl



2026



Introduction and Executive Summary

What is the future of girlhood?

Followers. Deepfakes. Filters. Thinspiration.

You may not be familiar with all of these terms, but a 12-year-old girl likely is.

These specific terms may be outdated in six months, or a year, replaced by words we haven't heard yet, but the cultural conditions and pressures that they reflect will not be.

Girls today grow up in a fast-paced, age-compressed cultural landscape that consistently frames girlhood as a problem to be diagnosed and managed rather than a stage of becoming.

She is often cast as the object of someone else's story, not the subject of her own.

Just look around at the headlines:

Girls are anxious.

Girls are struggling.

Girls are falling behind.

Their well-being, mental health, and safety are at the center of national conversation.

We have questions about all of this.

And after 114 years standing alongside girls, we also have answers.

In this report, we are centering girls' voices and asking you to join us in creating a world built for her, with her, always.

The world is asking who speaks for girls.

We believe in letting girls speak for themselves.



Part II

What's happening around her?

We've organized this report around three big questions:

What is being built for her?



The spaces girls move through—her schools, her digital environments, her communities, the rooms where decisions about her get made—were largely not designed around how girls actually grow. Body image concerns now reach girls as young as age five.

Among girls 8–10, 52% hear the women in their lives speak negatively about their own appearance.¹ Among ninth-grade girls, 58% do not believe they are smart enough for their dream job.² The ambition did not go anywhere. Her confidence in it did. The environments around her are what need to be redesigned.

Girl Scouts is building for and with her. We design environments where her perspective leads, where girls test what they are capable of in real conditions, and where adults are equipped to shift the conversation from how she looks to how she grows. 114 years in, and we get sharper with every generation of girls who tells us what she needs.

Who is on her side?

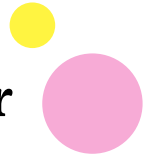


The adults closest to a girl help shape her trajectory more than any program, policy, or platform, but our data shows that the consistent adult presence she needs is too often missing.

Nearly half of girls ages 12–17 do not reliably get the social and emotional support they need. Within this age group, 29% show symptoms of anxiety, and 25% show symptoms of depression.³ Cyberbullying climbs from 41% at ages 13–14 to 54% by ages 15–17,⁴ often at the very moment adult attention pulls back rather than leans in.

Girl Scouts is always on her side. We train, equip, and stand with the adults already in her life, and we create new relationships where they are missing. A single consistent adult who chooses to show up can shift a girl's path in life, and our Movement is built around making sure she has this support.

Is there joy in her journey?



The dominant cultural narrative about girls today is one of decline and crisis.

Yet, girls themselves tell a different story.

They choose to describe themselves as smart, funny, and creative over pretty.

Given the choice, 65% would rather be creative than engage with screens, 59% would rather go outside and play, and 59% would rather spend time with family.⁵ The infrastructure for joy, friendship, and unhurried girlhood is what has thinned, not her appetite for it.

Girl Scouts protects her joy. We create the space for friendship, play, time outside, creative risk-taking, and the kind of low-pressure community that lets a girl actually experience her girlhood rather than perform it.

Joy is not the reward at the end of the work. It is what everything she experiences is built upon.

A Word About the Funding Reality

2.18% of U.S. philanthropic giving goes to women and girls.⁶ This number sits underneath every finding in this report. Girls feel unheard in part because the system around them has not invested in actually hearing them. At the same time, we know more than ever about what works. The gap is the opportunity.

Our Call to Action

Fund what works.

The conditions that help girls grow are knowable, designable, and measurable. Fund the design elements the full report identifies. Fund the organizations doing the work at scale. Fund the data that lets us measure her future.

Tell the real story.

The dominant cultural narrative around girls is one of risk and decline. Both the data and girls themselves tell a different story. Girls are clearer about what they want, more ambitious about what they can become, and more articulate about what they need than the cultural conversation has acknowledged. Center the girls who are already showing us how to meet this moment, in the coverage, the funding, and the rooms where her future gets decided.

Lead from where you are.

You are closer to girls, and to the families raising them, than almost anyone making decisions about their lives. The work this report calls for is the work you have been building for years: Steady adult presence, structured environments, the kind of belonging that holds a community together. Lead with what you already have. Build with what we know works.

Align with what she is asking for.

Girls are telling you what they want: Room to grow, take risks, and figure out who she is. The brands, organizations, and platforms that listen are the ones that will be relevant to her now and as she grows up. Listen first. Then, build with her in mind.

Show up while she is becoming.

Show up while she is figuring out who she is. Show up before she has found her footing, named her ambition, or asked for help. Show up consistently. And support her in the joy of her journey. The future of girlhood is shaped through millions of girls receiving exactly this kind of support, from exactly the people in a position to provide it.

That is you.



In Closing

The world is changing fast and constantly asking her to produce and perform. What if she didn't have to? What if she learned that the most important thing she will ever build is not an audience but a relationship with herself? What if we helped her maximize her growing-up years with joy, curiosity, confidence, and courage?

That is the world we are building. Alongside the adults, institutions, and partners ready to do the same.

Built for her. With her. Always.





Sources

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We are Girl Scouts.

Girl Scouts discover who they are, tap into the power inside them, and build the confidence to let it shine.

Through programs from coast to coast and overseas, girls of all backgrounds and abilities come as they are and create their own paths. Each step becomes a part of the journey, and along the way, they explore their passions, develop hands-on skills, and discover the tools they need to lead with joy, on their own terms.

Challenges don't stop Girl Scouts. They discover their strengths in science labs and on hiking trails, at cookie booths and in front of city councils. Backed by volunteers, mentors, and millions of alums, they are part of a lifelong sisterhood of powerful change-makers who are always on their side.

Girl Scouts. Because the world deserves to see their full potential—and they deserve to experience it.



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