

What does being a girl or being Aboriginal mean?

"Being a girl" impacts girls' daily lives and what they have to deal with:

- 42% of girls feel that boys "have it easier" than girls.
- Girls feel pressured to be pretty.
- Many girls have to cook, clean, and take care of brothers and sisters.

Knowledge of culture seems to matter:

- 62% of girls who smoke or have smoked did not know a lot about their Aboriginal cultural backgrounds and traditions, compared to 38% of non smokers.
- Many of the girls have families that move on and off reserve, or come from Aboriginal backgrounds that are not represented in their community.
- Many of the girls are rooted in the community they live in, or have a chance to learn about cultural activities and teachings.

"My dad doesn't do anything, me and my sisters have to cook and clean."

Now What?

The girls had a lot of great ideas for helping other girls not smoke or stop smoking:

- Girls need healthy role models, and real stories from other girls.
- Help for alcohol and drug use needs to be combined with help to stop smoking.
- Girls need help at an earlier age; by grade 4 or 5 at the latest.
- Rewards may help girls not smoke or quit smoking.
- Older girls can help by acting as role models for younger girls.
- Safe spaces are needed where girls can get help with stress and other problems.
- Youth drop-ins are needed that are fun for girls.
- Families need help to not smoke or stop smoking.

Aboriginal Teen Girls & SMOKING Research Results



"Everyone was out at the smoke pit, offering everyone cigarettes. And everyone kept on- smoke one, go ahead, you'll like it fine."

What happened?

**63 girls from
6 communities
in BC talked to
us on their own
or in groups**



British Columbia
Centre of Excellence
for Women's Health

Girls deal with a range of emotions such as anger, grief, sadness, loneliness, moodiness, the pressures of "being a girl," as well as problems with family, friends, and school.

Most girls told us that they start smoking to:

- **fit in**
- **be cool**
- **please others, including friends & family**

Why does it matter?

- Smoking rates among Aboriginal teen girls are the highest of any group in BC.
- Girls who smoke report health problems, such as: yellow teeth & fingers, fast heart beat, getting out of breath very easily, finding it hard to exercise, wrinkles/bad skin, looking older, having a lack of energy, smelling bad.

- Smoking also causes long term health problems like lung cancer, other cancers, and heart problems.

"I'd want to go for a walk, have a cigarette, you know, it was a way out of a lot of things."

Girls use tobacco to:

- Calm emotions such as anger, sadness, and grief
- Cope with stress & triggers
- De-stress when an issue comes up
- Reduce cravings
- Deal with boredom
- Fit in with friends & family

"I always wanted to try it, I've always seen my mom smoking, most of my family smoking. Everyone smokes, I just got hooked on it from them."

Most girls report that involvement in cultural activities and pride in their Aboriginal background improves their sense of self and the choices they make.

