

## Tips for Girls

Turn on your TV any time of the day or night and you'll most likely find a reality TV show somewhere—*American Idol*, *Jersey Shore*, or *The Amazing Race*—the list seems to grow every day! Although reality TV is more popular and entertaining than ever and many teens (and adults) follow their favorite reality TV shows devotedly, some studies argue that reality TV contributes to bad behavior and actually warps a person's sense of reality. A new study by the Girl Scout Research Institute (GSRI)\*, finds that girls who regularly watch reality TV have different views and expectations of relationships and think and feel differently about themselves and how the world works. Here are some tips and questions to consider the next time you tune in to your favorite show.

### TIP 1: Question what's "real."

How real do you think reality TV shows are? The GSRI study finds that many girls think reality TV shows are mostly real and unscripted. The most popular genres of reality TV are competition (*American Idol*, *Project Runway*) and real life (*Jersey Shore*, *Teen Mom*) shows. Many girls think these programs reflect reality. 75% say that competition shows and 50% say that real-life shows are 'mainly real and unscripted.' In fact, girls who watch reality TV shows regularly are even more likely to believe that what they are watching is true to life and unscripted; 85% think competition shows are real, and 79% think real-life based shows are real.

- Where do you stand?
- When watching a reality TV show have you ever thought that the characters may have been faking an emotion or over-acting to get attention or a reaction?

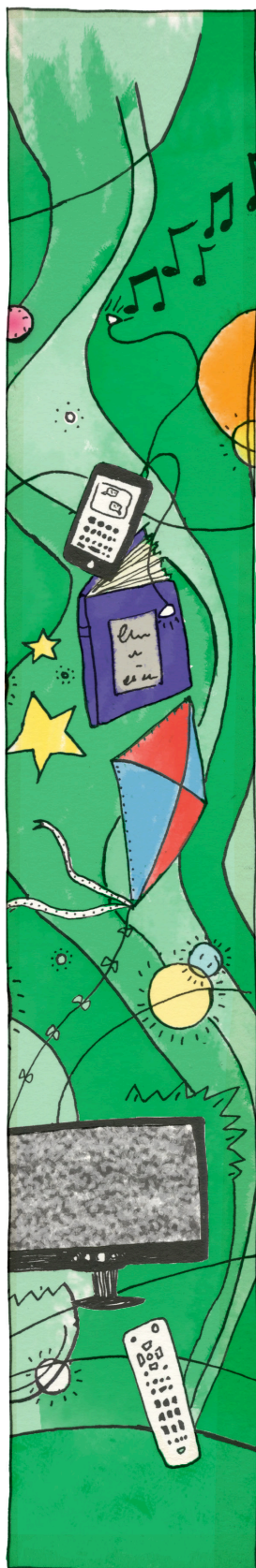
It's important to take a closer look and think critically about what you're watching—what you see is not necessarily the real lives of these characters. Producers and stage directors sometimes encourage characters to act a certain way because it makes for more entertaining TV. In the Girl Scout Leadership Journey *MEdia*, TV producer Melissa Freeman Fuller reveals that crew members routinely feed lines to participants, set up situations, and edit shots to make things seem more dramatic and interesting.\*\* Unfortunately, seeing is not believing, and when it comes to reality TV, entertainment value takes over and reality gets lost. It is important to be critical about what you are watching, rather than just believing what you see on TV.

### TIP 2: Talk with trusted adults and/or close friends about the things you see on reality TV shows. Don't be afraid to watch these shows in good company.

Reality TV watching can open the lines of communication for you and those important to you—friends your own age or important adults in your life. Most (75%) girls in the GSRI study say that reality TV shows have inspired conversation with their parents and/or friends.

Viewing shows together might be a good way to start a conversation with trusted people in your life about things you see and may want to know more about.

- Do you ever talk about what's happening on these shows with your friends, parents, or other adults?



- Do you ever have questions about some of the things you see in these shows?
- Do you talk about whether what you see actually reflects *your* reality?
- Do you talk about the characters like they are your friends?
- What are some things about these characters that you like? What do you dislike?

Parents may be concerned about these shows and yours may even restrict you from watching some of them. A lot (71%) of girls in our study admit that they still watch reality TV shows, even though their parents don't approve. What is it about these shows that your parents may not approve of? Try to understand what your parents think about these shows and tell them why you want to watch them. Having a conversation about these issues will help you and your parents find a middle ground on rules and regulations for reality TV watching.

### TIP 3: Understand and take advantage of the benefits of reality TV.

Girls say that there are some positive benefits to watching reality shows. For example, 75% of girls say that reality TV shows portray people with very different backgrounds and beliefs and 65% of girls say these shows introduced them to new ideas and perspectives. Many (68%) are even inspired by certain reality TV shows, feeling they can “achieve anything in life!” And, a majority of girls (62%) say that reality TV shows raised their awareness of social issues and causes.

- Have you had any of these positive experiences watching reality TV?
- Have you ever been inspired by a reality TV show?

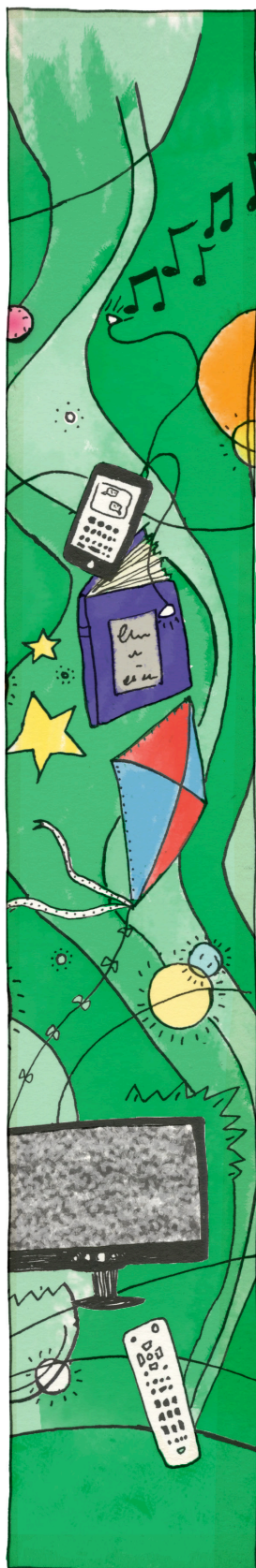
Some reality TV shows help families and individuals improve their lives in different ways. Think about what good you can do for the world. If you made a reality show, what would it be about? What good would your show do for others?

### TIP 4: Steer clear of the drama on-screen and off.

Virtually all girls, whether they watch a lot of reality TV or not, think reality TV promotes bad behavior, such as fighting, bullying, gossiping, and bad-mouthing. For example, 73% think that these shows “make people think that fighting is a normal part of a romantic relationship,” and 70% of girls think that these shows “make people think it’s okay to treat each other badly.” Actually, these girls may be right—regular reality TV viewers are more likely to think that girls are generally out to get each other and cannot be trusted.

- What do you think it is about reality TV that promotes these beliefs?
- Can you think of exceptions in your own life? Do you have girlfriends you can trust now and who you’ve trusted before?
- What are some of the consequences of not trusting other girls?

Although it may seem hard, sometimes it’s best to steer clear of the drama on TV and in your own life. Remember—the things that are happening in reality TV shows are often dramatized to make the shows seem more interesting and to get more viewers to tune in. Try not to dramatize your own life, too. Chances are, the more you feed into this notion of “girl drama,” the more you will become a part of it, and you might regret acting like this later.



## TIP 5: Bring it back down to earth.

TV shows, movies, commercials, and social networking—you name it, messages and images from all forms of media can convince you that you have to look a certain way, act a certain way, and be a certain type of person. And this includes reality TV. In fact, this study shows that girls who regularly watch reality TV care a lot about their physical appearance and say they are happier when they are in a romantic relationship or dating someone. What do you think about this?

- Do you know girls who feel this way? Do you feel this way?
- Do you see characters in reality TV shows that act or seem to feel this way?  
Do these characters seem happier?

The trouble with spending so much energy on appearance and getting attention from others is that you end up spending less time on the *real* you. What is it that makes you happy? What are your hobbies and interests? What kinds of things make you feel good inside, smart, or strong? Girls who spend excessive time on their physical appearance and feel they have to be in a romantic relationship in order to be happy are relying on things outside of themselves to determine their happiness and to shape their identities. These things can backfire over time, when girls find that who they are trying to be doesn't match up with who they really are, or want to be. Take some time to focus on yourself so you can know yourself. Talking to your parents or other trusted adults or friends may help you learn about new and interesting things that you may never have considered trying! When you know yourself, you won't fall under the spell of reality TV and other forms of media.

## TIP 6: Disconnect from TV, but connect to other activities.

Girls say that they would rather do things other than watch reality TV. Ninety percent of girls in this study say that they would rather spend an hour hanging out with friends, and 84% say they would rather do a fun activity than spend an hour watching their favorite reality TV show. Is this true for you, too? If so, do it! It's easy to stay home and turn on every electronic device you have and be sucked in by media without making much of an effort at all. But don't forget to disconnect every once in awhile. Remind yourself of activities or hobbies you enjoy doing that don't require you to be wired up or logged in. The more time you give yourself to do other things during your day, the more you will be able to cultivate your interests, work on what inspires you, understand who you are and what you want out of life, and do things with others that make you happy.

*\*More information on the research cited here can be found at [www.girlscouts.org/research](http://www.girlscouts.org/research).*

*\*\*The Leadership Journey MEdia, designed for middle-school girls, helps girls think critically about the media they consume, particularly reality TV. This Journey experience encourages girls to take a closer look at all media (television, movies, songs, video games, etc.) and to remake what they see, putting their "real me" in media. For more information on Girl Scout programming, please visit [www.girlscouts.org/program/journeys](http://www.girlscouts.org/program/journeys).*