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VOICES

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3 steps to help teen girls battling anxiety and depression

By [Patti Garibay](#)⁽¹⁾, Op-ed Contributor



Patti Garibay is the Founder and Executive Director of American Heritage Girls (AHG) |
Courtesy of Patti Garibay

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, but startling statistics surrounding teens and their mental health help me see that Mental Health needs to be a significant focus for Christian parents and youth leaders — all year long.

According to recent [data](#)⁽¹¹⁾ from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 41% of high school girls reported depression symptoms in 2017.

Generation Z (that's anyone born in the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s) is bombarded by the world's pressures and expectations more than ever before. Girls are held to so many worldly standards of perfection, beauty, and ability even at the youngest of ages. It's no wonder that girls today are experiencing such heightened rates of diagnosed anxiety and depression.

Unless they are taught and guided by the adults in their lives, how will they know what the scripture says about their worth, beauty, and all they are capable of?

To teach today's girls who they are and whose they are in Christ, we have to first reach them.

Here are a few ways I've found that are key to staying connected to what the girls in my life are experiencing daily.

1. Get Into Her Head

The best way to get into the head of today's girls is to learn and stay current on the different components that make up their worldview. What are the current slang terms and social media platforms? Who is leading conversations on religion and marriage? What are their most popular emotional outlets? It's essential to have a handful of go-to sites and resources that keep you informed about the latest trends and

evaluate the many social and cultural influences that impact girls' mental health. You can't expect to understand them if you don't try to understand the world in which they live.

2. Step into Her World

Once you have a good grasp of the mind and makeup of the average Gen-Z girl, you'll have a better understanding of how you can connect and engage with her. How are we to keep a pulse on her mental health if we aren't connected? Find ways for your worlds to intersect on fun and relevant levels. Take an interest in the things that interest her and work to find common ground. It may take some time to identify activities that you both appreciate, but with a little persistence and patience, you may find that you enjoy it just as much as she does.

3. Hear Her Heart

Listening to the conversations and thoughts of today's girls is an excellent window to her heart and her overall mental health. I always encourage parents and youth leaders to take time with girls one-on-one and listen to them. Start with a couple of general questions, "what was your favorite part of your week so far?" "What was your least favorite part of your week?" Then let her talk and listen intently. You may be surprised how what she says provides insight to her mental state. Listening is such a vital tool in the toolbox of being aware of her overall mental health.

Getting into the heads, worlds, and hearts of today's girls allows us as parents and youth leaders to be aware of their mental health so that they don't have to suffer silently. It helps us to more effectively guide girls through prayer, girl-centric programming, and opportunities to build their confidence in Christ.

For more than two decades, Patti Garibay has been at the forefront of countering the culture by leading girls and women to creating lives of integrity. She is the Founder and Executive Director of [American Heritage Girls](#) ⁽¹⁶⁾ (AHG), a national Christ-centered leadership and character-development program. She helps thousands of girls discover their true identity and purpose in Christ through AHG's transformative programming.

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