

## Building digital solutions with a gender lens

# How to include girls in digital product user testing

**To create digital products that satisfy needs, it is essential to consult users at all design stages. This consultation ensures that a product is relevant to their lives and realities. It includes user testing of a product to validate design decisions, identify pain points, and uncover user experience issues. User testing can and should be done in multiple rounds, both remote and in-person, and at different stages of product development.**

This learning brief supports teams to develop digital products that work for young women and girls as well as male users. Despite best intentions, too often we see teams designing and testing with 'default' users, who are predominantly male. Adolescent girls and young women are often left out of design and user testing, and user testing teams often do not fully consider female users' needs and realities. For example, restrictions on mobility, cultural traditions, consent and venue selection can make it harder or impossible for female users to engage with product design and testing teams. Intentional efforts are needed to include young female users in design and product testing so they attend consultations, feel comfortable and safe, and share true views and experiences. Consultations with adolescent girls and young women helps to create digital products that cater to female user journeys.

There are some best practices to follow for user testing to ensure that that user testing is inclusive of the female user experience as well as the male.

**Before you start any user testing that involves children and adolescents under the age of 18, ensure that you follow all required safeguarding, consent requirements and/or ethical clearances for the specific context.**





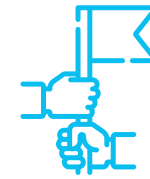
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**07. Conduct user tests individually or in pairs**



**08. Test on devices that female users actually use**



**09. Treat the user test like a conversation**



**10. Combine remote and in-person testing**



**11. Non-verbal communication is as important**



# 01. Work with partners

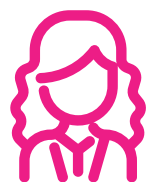
It is crucial to include female users in digital product testing to learn about their needs and then design accordingly. However, interaction with users may be challenging, especially adolescent girls and young women, who may have more parental restrictions and tend to be less visible than their male peers. Partner networks can ensure that female users are included. Partners can include schools or NGOs, which have extensive networks, strong community links, an understanding of adolescent girls and young women, and are trusted by parents and the community. They can broker introductions and set up user tests, including in more remote areas.

## Amader Golpo: partnering with BRAC Bangladesh

Girl Effect created Amader Golpo ('Our Stories'), an IVR (voice) mobile service for rural adolescent girls in Bangladesh. To conduct user testing with girls from all over Bangladesh, the team leveraged their partner BRAC's networks. BRAC has over 8,000 informal after-school clubs for adolescent girls and has worked through these clubs in rural communities for over 30 years. Parents were comfortable with their daughters attending user tests because BRAC was involved. Both girls and parents saw the club venues as safe and trusted locations for user tests, and parents were comfortable not attending the sessions.

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## 02. Work with female facilitators who users can relate to

Female users are often more comfortable talking to other women (or mandated to only engage with females in some contexts), especially when discussing private or sensitive topics. In some contexts, women may engage only with other women. Many adolescent girls and young women find it easier to talk with peers or slightly older girls who represent older 'sister' or 'cousin' figures. A facilitator who users can relate to is crucial. Female facilitators help testers to feel comfortable, and they create a safe and friendly atmosphere in which users are more likely to be honest and not embarrassed to express challenges in navigating a digital product.

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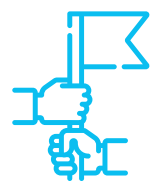
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## 03. Meet girls on their own terms

Female users often face time constraints and mobility restrictions. They often cannot travel as easily as male counterparts. This is particularly true for adolescent girls and young women. To include them, go to places where girls and young women already are. Do not expect them to come to you. Select locations near their homes or at their schools – so that they don't have to travel far and so are more likely to attend.

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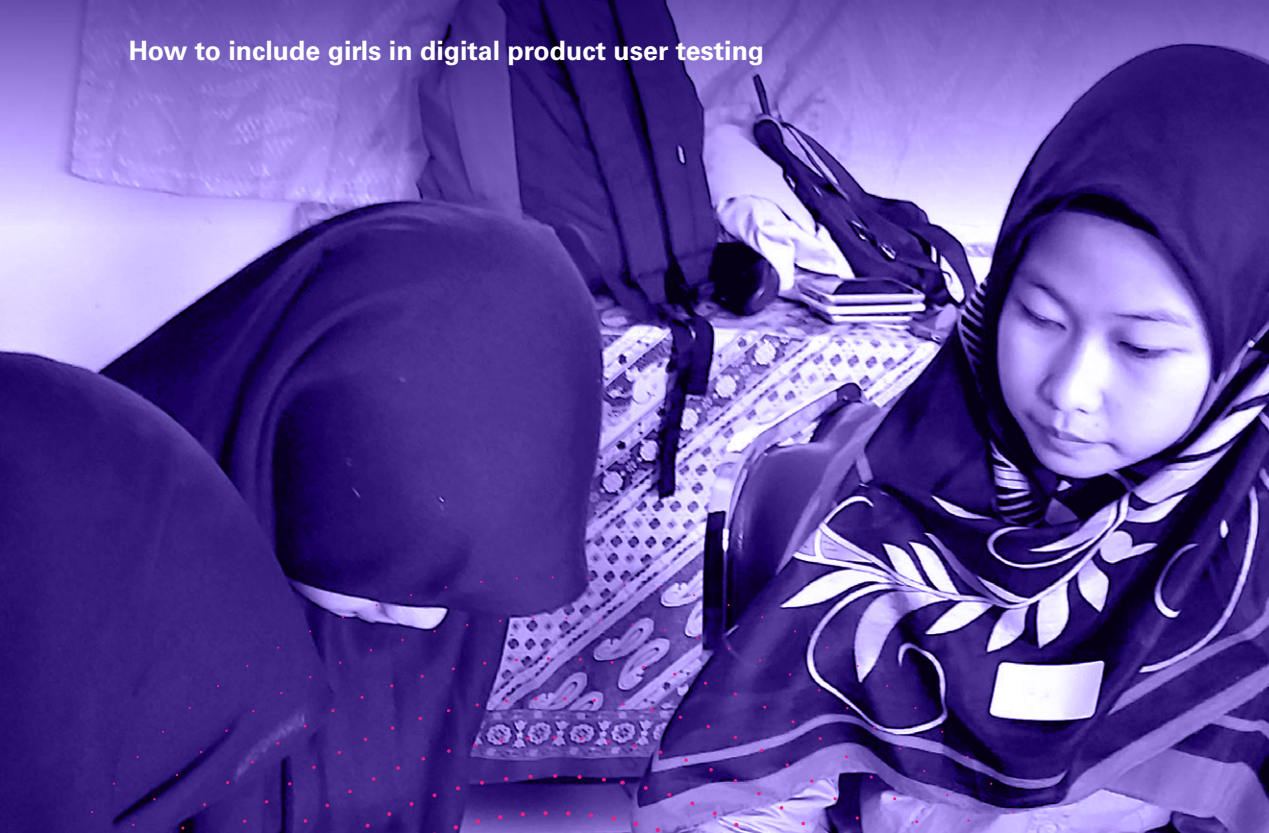
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## 04. Consider who is in the room

Best practice for user testing with adolescent girls and young women usually means only having other females present who users feel relaxed with, and so can speak freely in front of. This is especially important when discussing sensitive topics such as menstruation, reproductive health, mental health or violence. In many contexts, adolescent girls and young women will not speak freely if men or boys are present. Make sure a trusted female adult is in the room at all times for safety and support.

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## 05. Prioritise safety and security

Some venues can be perceived as 'unsafe' by adolescent girls, their parents or guardians. Always conduct user tests in venues that are seen as safe, secure and neutral, and comfortable for female users to speak freely. Involve parents or other trusted adults and young female users when selecting a venue. Provide a place for parents or guardians to wait nearby during user tests.

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## 06. Talk to a diversity of (female) users

Users must come from a range of backgrounds and abilities so that the solution best suits their needs. Marginalised adolescent girls and young women often need digital solutions most. When designing the user sampling criteria, invite (or have partners invite) a varied sample of female users. This can include out-of-school girls, girls with disabilities, girls in school leadership roles, girls with average or lower grades, and girls who borrow but do not own mobile phones.

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## 07. Conduct user tests individually or in pairs

Female technology users are often less confident in their digital skills than male peers. Girls and young women may be embarrassed about difficulties in using the digital product or asking for help. This feeling can be worse if they are part of a group in a test setting. Individual testing in a confidential setting, with one test in the room at a time, often works best for girls and young women. In this context, they can comfortably share responses to the digital product and recommendations for improvements. However, in some contexts, user tests with adolescent girls and young women work better in pairs, especially for digital products that tackle more challenging topics.

### Oky: user testing a period tracker app in pairs

UNICEF East Asia Pacific created [Oky, a period tracker app](#) designed specifically for and by adolescent girls. The Oky team conducted extensive in-person user testing with urban and rural girls in the two pilot markets of Indonesia and Mongolia. In Mongolia, the user tests were conducted individually, with only one girl at a time. However, in Indonesia, user tests were conducted with pairs of girls. In previous user testing sessions for other menstruation products, girls expressed their preference to conduct user tests in pairs. This was because they could give each other confidence in speaking about menstruation (which can be hard to speak about in a context like rural Indonesia), but also help each other with parts of the app they found challenging. This also enabled the Oky user testing team to understand how users would use Oky in reality, and informed marketing and distribution strategies.

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## 08. Test on devices that female users actually use

Adolescent girls and young women often have less access to mobile or the Internet than boys, and often do not own a mobile phone or smartphone. It is important to know the digital landscape for adolescent girls and young women in the context you are testing so you know what devices they will have (or not have). If you provide a testing device, make sure it is a model and operating system that female users are likely to be familiar with in order to give as close a real user experience as possible. Provide phone credit / airtime (if needed) to test the product so that users do not use their own credit; adolescent girls and young women are often much more price-sensitive about airtime than men.

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## 09. Treat the user test like a conversation

Young female users may be more shy than boys, depending on context. Try to get more detail by focusing on the 'how' and the 'why', with open questions. [Prepare a script beforehand](#) with phrases such as 'Tell me about...!' and 'What is your opinion of...!'. This question format encourages users to talk in detail about their opinions of the product, what they liked, and how it can be improved. Consider some conversation about users' lives, both online and offline, to understand female respondents and their (digital) realities compared to boys. The more you know about your female users, the more you can make the digital product work for them.

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## 10. Combine remote and in-person testing

Extensive travel across a country to reach more marginalised adolescent girls and young women is not always feasible for design and user testing teams. You can consider remote user testing to get quick feedback on things that don't need extensive observations, for example through Whatsapp or Facebook groups. These groups can consist of a maximum of ten users, in which a moderator shares content or prototypes, asks specific feedback questions, and analyses the chat history for insights. This approach needs particular consideration for women and girls and their access to technology. Respondents would need regular access to a phone and Whatsapp or Facebook. The moderator must follow best practices in digital safety and security for any users. These may include the [Girl Effect Digital Safeguarding Principles](#) or [Plan's Girls Out Loud approach](#).

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## 11. Non-verbal communication is as important

Adolescent girls and young women are often more reluctant than male users to say negative things, or admit that they faced challenges in navigating a digital product or service. However, a lot of information and nuances can be gleaned from body language and expressions. Appoint a representative to identify pain points that may not have been articulated and observe how female users interact with each other and the facilitator. A screen recorder can be useful. Screen recorders can track a user's navigating of the product, enabling you to see hesitation, or challenges, or features that attract engagement. These may be missed when testing but can be reviewed on playback.

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Want to know more about user testing for and with adolescent girls and young women?

**Check out these other great resources:**

- [the GSMA mHealth Gender Toolkit](#)
- [Girl Effect and UNICEF's blog on co-designing with and for girls](#)
- [IDEO.org's Women and Money insights on design research](#)

**Do you have any additional tips for inclusive user testing?**

**Have you come across any key resources?**

**Are you interested in being part of a community of practitioners working on digital products with and for girls?**

**Get in touch with the UNICEF EAPRO Gender and Innovation team via Gerda Binder ([gbinder@unicef.org](mailto:gbinder@unicef.org)) or Alex Tyers-Chowdhury ([atyers@unicef.org](mailto:atyers@unicef.org))**