



New Findings on Young Americans Two Years Into The Covid-19 Pandemic

On March 30th, Springtide Research Institute will release *The New Normal, Updated & Expanded: 10 Ways to Care for Gen Z in a Post-Pandemic World*, the second installment of our investigation into the perspectives and experiences of young people during this COVID-19 pandemic. The report highlights survey findings from 1,796 young people ages 13-25.

Consonant with our mission, this report gives special attention to the religious and spiritual lives of young people, which leaves us with a complex picture in 2022. While more young people say they grew in their faith during the pandemic, this wasn't accompanied by increased confidence in faith communities -- their virtual services had little appeal.

Without qualification, mental health is the story to pay attention to in young people's lives heading into the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Staggering numbers say they're depressed, stressed, and lonely -- though for young people of faith, religion and spirituality provide healing and hope.

Finally, Gen Z's trust in institutions continues to erode. Despite the efforts of two different presidential administrations, young people trusted the government very little to keep them safe during the pandemic. More young people now trust the government less. Faith communities, by comparison, are now more trustworthy according to young people.

The New Normal provides adults in the lives of young people with a view into what they're thinking and experiencing, as well as practical guidance for how to best care for and walk alongside of young people as the pandemic enters a new stage.


For interview requests, more information and story ideas contact Kevin Singer, Head of Media and Public Relations, (630) 220-2566 or Kevin@springtideresearch.org.



More young people grew in their faith

More young people told Springtide that their faith became stronger during the pandemic (30%) than weaker (18%) or lost completely (8%). This includes a growing number who agree, “I know a higher power exists and I have no doubts about it,” from 22% in 2021 to 28% in 2022, and a higher percentage who say they feel “highly connected” to a higher power, from 13% in 2021 to 18% in 2022. Conversely, the percentage of those who say they “don’t feel connected at all” to a higher power dropped from 36% in 2021 to 27% in 2022.



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Even so, Gen Z’s trend away from faith communities continues

The pandemic wasn’t the impetus for young people’s lack of enthusiasm about religious services, but it did accelerate trends already at work. Young people attend religious services *less frequently* now than during the first year of the pandemic. The percentage of those attending religious services daily, weekly, monthly, or less than monthly each dropped 1-5% from 2021 to 2022, while the percentage who say they never attend religious services rose somewhat dramatically from 30% in 2021 to 44% in 2022.

In 2021, just 10% of young people say a faith leader reached out to them personally during the first year of the pandemic. Now, 26% of young people say their relationship with faith leaders has become weaker during the pandemic—though nearly the same percentage, 23% of young people, say these relationships have become stronger.



A QUARTER of young people (26%) say their relationship with faith leaders has become weaker since the pandemic.

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Virtual religious gatherings aren't appealing to young people

The most popular pandemic practice that young people want to keep is cooking more (39%), while virtual religious gatherings are what young people least want to keep (6%). Only 10% of young people say they found joy in virtual religious gatherings during the pandemic.

During the pandemic, which of the following have you found joy in?

(Young people could select more than one answer.)

Getting more time to myself



Getting more family time



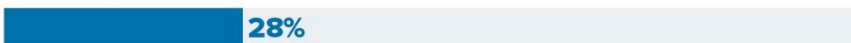
Starting a new hobby or habit



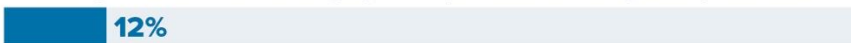
Getting more time for self-care/health practices



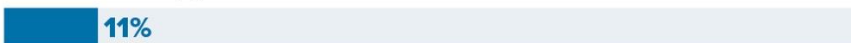
Online classes



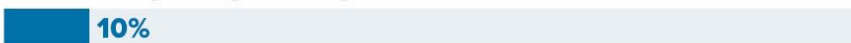
Getting more time to engage in spiritual or religious practices



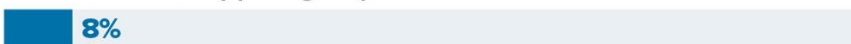
Virtual therapy




Virtual religious gatherings



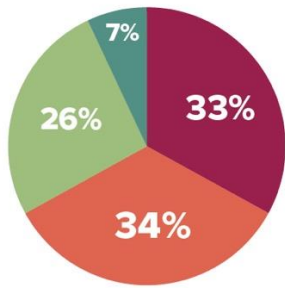
Virtual social support groups



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The growing hypothesis that digital faith is the silver bullet for reaching young people does not find support in Springtide's data. Though social media continues to dominate the attention of Gen Z -- nearly four in ten (38%) say they use social media for 5-6 hours a day or more -- only about a third say they would consider joining a totally online religious or spiritual community (35%) or that a totally online religious community is preferable (34%). Even fewer young people are confident that such a community could meet all of their religious and spiritual needs (32%).





A totally online religious/spiritual community could meet all my spiritual needs.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree



NEARLY FOUR IN TEN

young people (38%) told Springtide that they **use social media for a duration of 5 hours a day or more.**

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When we asked young people to share their level of interest in a totally online religious/community on a 1-5 scale, only 26% selected a 4 or a 5. When asked if an app/site would draw their participation in a totally online religious community, this percentage of 4's and 5's dropped to 16%.

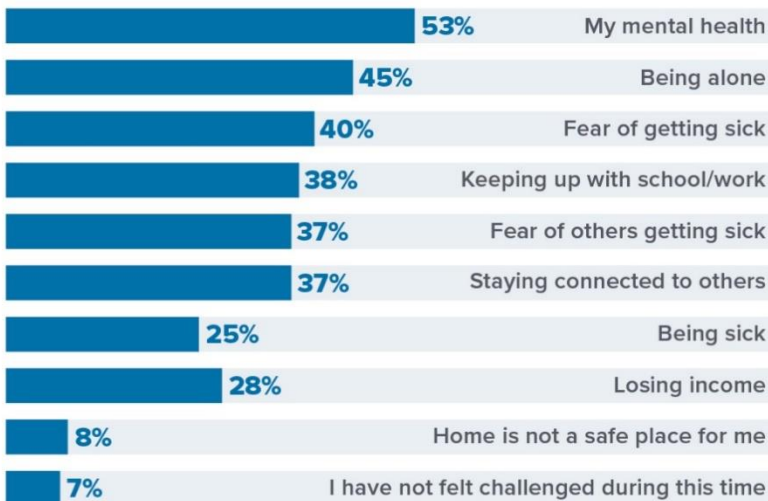
Mental health is what young people are struggling with most, but religion helps

Over half of young people (53%) told Springtide that one of the biggest challenges during the pandemic has been their mental health, the most popular response in a list of ten options.

Alarmingly, *nearly half of young people (48%) told Springtide that they are moderately or extremely depressed*, while about a quarter of young people say they are “extremely” stressed (25%), extremely anxious (26%), or extremely lonely (21%). Sadly, most young people (61%) agree, “The adults in my life don't truly know how much I am struggling with my mental health.”

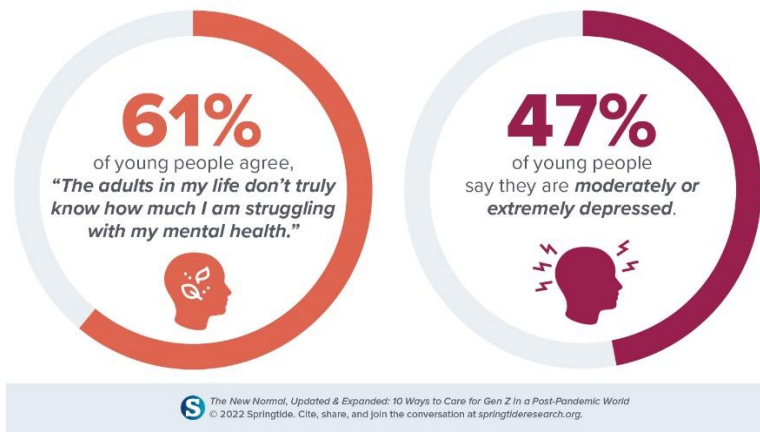
During the pandemic, which of the following have been the biggest challenges for you?

(Young people could select more than one answer.)



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For young people of faith, a majority agree that their religious/spiritual life matters for their mental health (67%). Nearly three quarters (73%) agree, “My religious/spiritual practices positively impact my mental health.”

This isn’t totally surprising. Data from our *State of Religion & Young People 2021* report demonstrates a clear correlation between religiosity and mental healthiness. Young people who tell us they are “very religious” are more likely to tell us they are flourishing in their mental health. The inversion is true for those who say they are “not religious at all”—they are more likely to say they are not flourishing in their mental health.

Young people are now less trusting of the government and more trusting of faith communities

In their evaluation of how they think institutions handled the pandemic, only 17% of young people now trust the government more or completely, while *a whopping 47% now trust the government less or not at all*. A similar trend was found in their perception of schools: More say they trust their school less or not at all because of their handling of the pandemic (34%) than trust them more or completely (28%).

By comparison, more young people say they now trust their place of worship more or completely because of their handling of the pandemic (37%) than trust them less or not at all (20%). *Seven in ten young people (71%) agree that their place of worship did a good job keeping them safe from the coronavirus*, compared to 63% who agreed about their school and 43% who agreed about the government doing a good job keeping them safe.

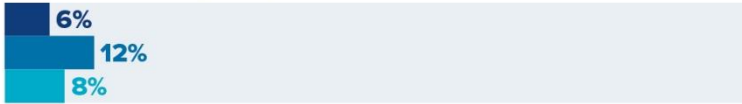


The way [government, schools, place of worship] handled the pandemic made me . . .

(Young people could select more than one answer.)

● Government ● Place of worship ● School

Trust them completely



Trust them more



Neither trust them more or less




Trust them less



Lose trust completely



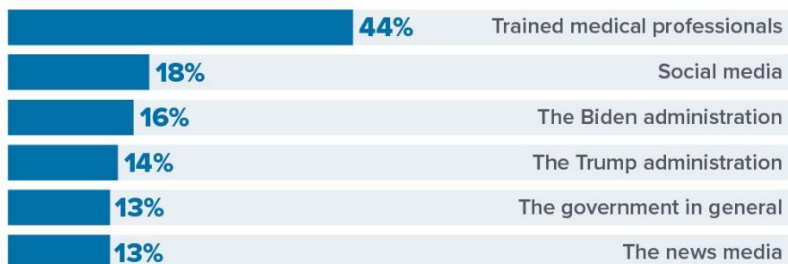
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When young people were asked, “Which of the following do you trust to give you guidance on how to handle the pandemic?”, only 13% selected “the government in general,” with *little variation between the Trump administration (14%) and the Biden administration (16%)*. Low marks were also given to social media (18%) and the news media (13%). Overwhelmingly, young people said they trusted trained medical professionals (44%) to give them guidance on how to handle the pandemic.



Which of the following do you trust to give you guidance on how to handle the pandemic?

(Young people could select more than one answer.)



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Walking alongside the young people in your life

Given the upheaval that young people have experienced over the last two years, we asked them what “home” means to them. The most popular response was “a safe haven,” (61%), a markedly higher percentage than those who say it’s “the place where I keep my belongings” (46%) or “the place where my loved ones are” (40%).

How can you be a safe haven for the young people in your life as they face an uncertain future and process a tumultuous few years?

Though the most prevalent feeling among young people in 2022 is hope (34%), numerous young people also say they’re feeling uncertain (33%), isolated (21%), and trapped (21%). Trusted adults and leaders have an opportunity to rebuild trust and help stoke the small glimmer of hope young people admit having at this point. Young people don’t necessarily feel they have been safely guided through this unprecedented time. The tips we offer in *The New Normal, Updated & Expanded* are rooted in ways to secure those foundations of trust, while focusing on the care and empathy needed required for meeting their mental health needs.

About Springtide

Springtide Research Institute is a non-profit sociological research institute maintaining the largest dataset on young people and spirituality in America. Amplifying young people’s lived experiences through unbiased research and evidence-based actionable insights, we seek to help those who care about young people, care better.

For more information, a copy of the report, or to schedule an interview with Executive Director [Dr. Josh Packard](#), please contact Kevin Singer, (630) 220-2566 or Kevin@springtideresearch.org.

