



Springtide  
RESEARCH INSTITUTE®

# NURTURING MENTAL HEALTH FOR GEN Z

A Handbook for *Parents*



**S** THE SPRINGTIDE SERIES  
ON MENTAL HEALTH

2023

# A Springtide Tribute.

## A Promise. A Pledge.



### TO YOU

... who are young, full of wonder and possibility. You who are navigating some of life's most important questions and most tumultuous waters. You who are sometimes flourishing and sometimes floundering and oftentimes both. You who are at once being and becoming.

We dedicate our work to your thriving.

We dedicate ourselves to understanding your inner and outer lives.



### TO YOU

... who are fiercely devoted to young people. You who advocate for and walk alongside young people with steadiness. You who are unwavering amid the waves.

We offer our research as an aid to the role you already play.

We offer ourselves as allies in accompaniment.



### AND TO

... the waves that crash, the currents that bend and beckon, the dark depths, and the effervescent crests. To this all-important period of life: worthy of considered listening and faithful retelling, worthy of companionship, worthy of care.

We situate our work at this intersection of human and religious experience in the lives of young people: a space of ebb and flow, of calm and chaos, of clear and murky moments.

A space we are dedicated to exploring and engaging



### WITH YOU.

# Contents

Introduction .....	4
By the Numbers: What Young People Are Telling Us .....	6
A Word from an Expert: Ensuring Mental Wellness for Transgender and Nonbinary Youth ....	12
Time to Reflect: How Upbringing Affects Parenting .....	15
Build the Foundation: How to Create Mentally Healthy Home Environments .....	18
Appendix: Research Methodology & Promise .....	30
Endnotes .....	33
Acknowledgments .....	34



This report is part of *The Springtide Series on Mental Health*. In this report, we rely on a data set of nearly 10,000 surveys and over 100 interviews with a special focus on mental health. Our other reports and resources in this series focus on how educators, religious communities, and trusted adults can foster young people’s mental and emotional well-being.

The series emphasizes stories young people share in interviews—not just statistics from surveys. Our survey research enables us to reach a nationally representative group of young people and report on national trends. Our interviews enable us to discern nuances embedded in the details of young people’s lives. Taken together, these two types of data illuminate the needs of young people and ways organizational leaders and other adults might be able to help.



**THE SPRINGTIDE SERIES  
ON MENTAL HEALTH**

2023



My parents have personally never really addressed mental health [with] me. So I feel like if I was ever upset, I wouldn't really want to talk to them about it. So I would say to parents [that they should] explain mental health and say, 'If you ever are feeling anything, you can come to us.' Just [give that] one preface to their kids—so they are fully aware that it's totally an open space.

—Misty, 17



## Introduction

Many Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials grew up in households where mental-health concerns went unnoticed at best and stigmatized at worst. So when it comes to holding space in the way Misty describes in the quote on the left, some adults excel while others feel unprepared or even afraid to do so.

Yet, the need for adults to be able to hold space for young people is becoming urgent. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Springtide has surveyed or interviewed nearly 30,000 young people ages 13 to 25 about their relationships, their religious and spiritual beliefs and practices, and their mental health. Our data confirm a mental-health crisis among Gen Z—a generation whose collective struggle with mental health was only exacerbated by the mental and social impacts of COVID-19. In data collected at the two-year mark of the pandemic, nearly half of young people (47%) report that they are moderately or extremely depressed, and over half of young people say they are moderately or extremely anxious (55%) or moderately or extremely stressed (57%). Additionally, nearly half (45%) report being moderately or extremely lonely. A majority of young people (61%) agree with the statement “The adults in my life don’t truly know how much I am struggling with my mental health.”

Meeting immediate mental-health needs is critical, yet Springtide’s work has focused on strengthening environments for young people in ways that can help keep mental-health challenges from reaching crisis levels. *The Springtide Series on Mental Health* addresses how faith leaders and educators can best support young people’s flourishing. This handbook, also part of the series, speaks specifically to how parents can contribute to that effort.

The home environment is one of the most influential spaces when it comes to young people’s mental health. Meaningful relationships with, and support and acceptance by, family is paramount for mental health as young people work to develop their own identities—even if the emotions they express and behaviors they display sometimes suggest otherwise.<sup>1</sup>

Parents can intentionally create home environments that support mental health. Turning to decades of sociological research, Springtide identified three important qualities for creating environments that are mental-health friendly. By focusing on creating connections, aligning expectations with the tools to achieve them, and helping foster a sense of purpose, parents can help their young person thrive at home and in life. To curb the epidemic-level spread of the mental-health crisis among young people, parents are well positioned to act as the first line of prevention. This resource is designed to help you do that.

The first section of this handbook, “By the Numbers,” reviews key data points from our research. The goal is to help you understand what young people feel and think about their home life and mental health. The second section, “Time to Reflect,” invites you to consider your upbringing to see how it may be impacting your parenting today. The third section, “Build the Foundation,” helps you create a home environment that fosters connection, aligns tools with expectations, and helps young people develop a sense of purpose. A series of prompts will lead you through each of the three concepts. The aim is to help you apply them and better equip yourself to help the young people in your life flourish on all fronts.

Most parenting resources focus on the imprint parents leave on the child—and rightfully so, as that imprint shapes the adult the child becomes.<sup>2</sup> Parenting doesn’t impact just the child, however. It fundamentally changes the adults. As your relationship with your young person develops, you’re not only molding them but also reshaping yourself. May this handbook help you establish new foundations for you and the young people closest to you.



As you read and work, please drop us a line [@WeAreSpringtide](#) on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter and use [#MentalHealthandGenZ](#) to start the conversation. Learn more at [springtideresearch.org](https://springtideresearch.org) and let us know how you’re helping create mental-health friendly organizations for young people.



## BY THE NUMBERS

# What Young People Are Telling Us

Primary caregivers have the first and most influential impact on a child’s mental, emotional, and spiritual development. These caregivers, who could be biological or adoptive parents or other family members, often serve as guides and models for how to behave, respond, and interact. Later, as children move into adolescence, any willful, stubborn, or difficult behaviors can easily be read as a desire to split from their parents. Young people may push at and away from their parents, but the idea that they truly wish to be separated from them is a myth.

During the teen years and into young adulthood, most people need their parents and other trusted adults more than ever. As psychologist and Harvard Medical School professor William Pollack says, young people need adults to “form a living wall of love that they can lean on—and bounce off—regularly.”<sup>3</sup> While one wall is great, multiple walls provide even more support. Building a village of trusted adults around young people helps ensure that they develop in healthy ways.

Recent social science research shows that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed interpersonal relationships for young people. The roles of parents and family members have become amplified, and healthy relationships with parents are even more important for preventing and reducing symptoms of depression among young people.<sup>4</sup> If there was ever a time to make meaningful connections with the young people in your life, it’s now.

*Our research with young people ages 13–25 reveals insights about many areas of their lives, including thoughts around home and family.*

## **Young people conceptualize “home” in different ways.**

When asked about the characteristics of “home,” young people shared ideas extending beyond hometowns or physical structures. Forty percent of young people we surveyed say home is a place where their loved ones are, and 47% say it’s a place where they can relax in private. More than half (51%) of young people specifically think of home as a “safe haven.” These responses suggest that for many, home represents both a physical place *and* an emotionally safe social environment. Young people need stable, supportive social environments to enhance all types of development, including cognitive, physical, emotional, and spiritual.<sup>5</sup> A stable home environment helps young people feel secure, even when their behavior seems to suggest otherwise. If young people begin to feel unsafe at home, they will withdraw or simply find other places to be, even if those places may be unsafe for other reasons.<sup>6</sup>

More than 90% of 13-to-17-year-olds and 54% of 18-to-25-year-olds we surveyed live with parents, siblings, or other family members. For mental wellness, it’s critical to have a space that’s safe, calm, and welcoming. Young people living away from family also need safe, welcoming “home” spaces even if those spaces are defined by emotional connections rather than by physical boundaries.

## **Parents play a key role in determining purpose and success.**

Fifty-seven percent of young people surveyed agree that their parents have helped them discover their purpose in life. Social scientists have shown that discovering purpose as a teen or young adult is associated with improved mental and physical health, altruism, and self-esteem, which has been tied to success in a number of other developmental areas.<sup>7</sup>

Young people’s mental health is also impacted positively when parents offer guidance toward academic and/or professional success.<sup>8</sup> Sixty-four percent of young people surveyed agree that their parents have clear expectations for their success. Offering those clear guidelines helps bolster feelings of purpose and belonging in young people, which impacts mental health.<sup>9</sup> Once expectations are set, supporting young people as they embark on these paths is equally crucial for mental wellness. Sixty-eight percent of young people agree that their parents support them with school demands, and 64% agree that their parents are supportive regarding pressures or challenges at work.



Yet, young people tell us that while expectations for success can be positive, they can also feel burdensome. Ansel, 14, says:

**I think often expectations can serve as a helpful guideline. When my parents talk about expectations they have for me, and they align with the expectations I have for myself, they become really motivating—like goalposts that I can hit. And when I do hit them, it’s a positive experience for not only me but also my family. It makes me happy to know that I’m fulfilling their expectations. But when [their expectations] don’t especially align with what I want to do, it alienates me from what I feel is my purpose or what I want to do. It’s kind of like a double-edged sword because when they do align with my expectations, I find them to be really positive. But then when they’re not exactly what I would see for myself, it’s really detrimental. So, you can either choose to fulfill the expectations you have for yourself and be happy with what you’re doing and what you want to achieve, or you can make your family happy and get happiness from achieving those expectations.**

As a parent, you may not know if your young person has the perception of expectations that Ansel describes. You can help foster mental wellness by keeping lines of communication about expectations open, which offers a way to ensure that your young person isn’t burdened by expectations they can’t or don’t want to meet.

## Feeling disconnected from family negatively impacts young people's mental health.

Springtide data show that a number of young people are struggling to create and/or maintain family connections:





Connections with family are a chief component of health and wellness for young people. Family connections encourage positive feelings and behaviors. They also help reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes like emotional distress, depression, and suicidality.<sup>10</sup> Parental acceptance, in particular, is key to how a young person experiences emotion. If a young person feels like their parents don't accept them for who they are or outright reject them, they are more likely to develop problems with anger and regulating emotions or to become unresponsive to emotions.<sup>11</sup> These outcomes could have significant implications for their mental health.

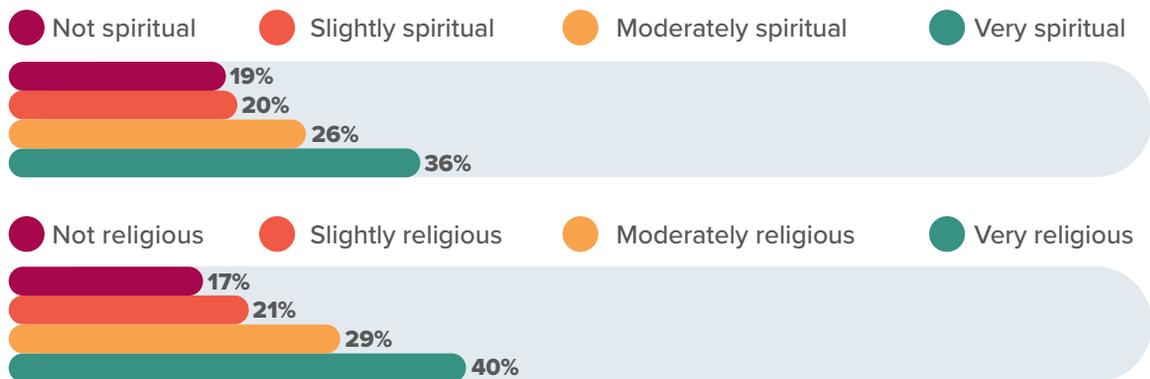
Strong family connections enhance mental health in many ways, including when family members serve as informal supports (which decreases the need for mental-health services) and when they act as guides when the support of professionals is needed.<sup>12</sup> The general stigma around mental health presents challenges for all, but parents of a young person who has already experienced mental-health issues may need to be even more proactive about having these conversations. Keeping lines of communication open and encouraging the young person to share how they're feeling can help parents gauge when minor issues may be escalating into major problems.

## Religious and spiritual beliefs and practices bolster mental wellness for Gen Z.

Springtide data show that having a religious or spiritual identity and engaging in religious or spiritual practices correlates with greater mental and emotional flourishing.

*The more religious or spiritual a young person is, the more likely they are to say they are “flourishing a lot.”*

*“I am flourishing in my emotional or mental well-being.”*



The data also show that many young people say they recognize this correlation in their experience:



Our data show that 68% of young people identify as religious and 77% identify as spiritual, and that parents have a significant impact on how a young person engages in religion and/or spirituality. Parents can support their young person’s mental health by paying attention to, and supporting the development of, their religious and spiritual identity. Such attention creates a greater sense of belonging and acceptance in a family unit and is supportive of mental wellness.



## A WORD FROM AN EXPERT

# Ensuring Mental Wellness for Transgender and Nonbinary Youth

by Jean-Marie Navetta (she/ella), Director of Learning & Inclusion,  
PFLAG National

**Let's start with this fact: Parenting isn't easy.**

A strong argument can be made that parenting in the current social landscape is tougher than ever. The immediacy and power of social media are overwhelming. The challenges youth face today are far different from when their parents were young. And, regardless of identity or politics, the hostile climate created by political strife has been more invasive and divisive than ever before. Often, it feels like it will take far more than love (or even a village) to raise a thriving child.

**For parents and caregivers of transgender and nonbinary youth, this is especially true.**

Witnessing attacks on the transgender and nonbinary community, observing biases against trans and nonbinary people, and grappling with one's own learning and acceptance curve often make parenting healthy trans and nonbinary youth feel like an unwinnable battle.

But it is a battle we cannot afford to ignore. Springtide found that 60% of nonbinary youth and 62% of transgender youth do not identify their homes as “safe havens.” Worse, many nonbinary and transgender youth do not feel a sense of belonging in their own family, with 50% of nonbinary youth and 51% of transgender youth disagreeing with the statement “I feel like I belong in my family.”

To change these sentiments and associated negative outcomes, parents need to lean into “giving grace”—acknowledging that we all want to do what is best for one another, but in the process, we don't always get it right. Grace comes in when we talk about these mistakes and use what we learn to inform what happens next. This must be part of the framework for parents and youth that's actively used in this journey—an agreement that the effort won't be perfect, but finding solutions together is how we create safety and belonging.

## Parents can do this in three key ways: creating safe spaces at home, protecting kids at school, and making mental health a family priority.

### Create safe spaces at home.

The fact that roughly half of transgender and nonbinary youth say they don't feel like they belong in their families is a call to action. If youth don't feel safe at home, there are reasons why, and they might be hard for parents to hear. Nonetheless, parents should initiate these discussions and talk about why young people may not feel safe addressing issues with them. Ask questions of young people to demonstrate your need to understand (e.g., "What was it that I said or did that made you feel that way? How could that have been different?"). It needs to be a family discussion, where parents or caregivers and siblings are part of the ongoing conversation. Family members should be empowered to interrupt the moment when things aren't going well and collectively work to center around respect and belonging. And if some family members choose not to provide support and acceptance, it becomes the responsibility of those who are affirming to boost their efforts to create safe spaces and address remarks and behaviors that are unacceptable.

### Protect kids at school.

Springtide data show that school can be a challenging place for transgender and nonbinary youth. Navigating school dynamics and interpersonal relationships, as well as witnessing attempts to restrict their school experience based on how they identify, takes an emotional toll. Parents can't fix everything, but they can affect important changes in the school experience. Find out what's available to ensure equity in schools (e.g., Gender and Sexuality Alliances, inclusive bullying and harassment policies, procedures for addressing complaints). If programming or support isn't available, ask why and how you can help change things. Show up for school board meetings and offer input into the decisions being made. Ask youth what is happening, and don't write bullying off as a harmless rite of passage. When a solution needs to be developed to address an issue, work with youth to develop a plan of action. Springtide's research demonstrates that youth feel like the help they get is what *caregivers* think is best, not what *they* think is most effective. Empowering young people to be partners in responding to challenges moves them from being powerless victims to strong and supported advocates. →

## Make mental health a family priority.

Finally, talk about mental health and make it a priority for the whole family. While efforts to destigmatize mental-health challenges are progressing for the general population, shame around mental health for transgender and nonbinary people still persists. Do not write off the anxiety and depression that transgender and nonbinary youth face as the typical teenage experience. Find mental-health providers together, and ensure that they are inclusive of LGBTQ+ youth and have training in addressing the challenges they face. Just as important, as parents, recognize that you may need professional support during this process. Find those sources and have discussions. Conceding that we all struggle in diverse ways but can get help breaks the culture of silence and shame around mental health.

Just because something isn't easy doesn't mean we can ignore it. The work it takes to raise strong and thriving youth who identify as transgender and/or nonbinary is more than some parents expected. But on the other side of the work, young people will have the power to change the very culture that too often rejects them. That makes this work essential.



**Jean-Marie Navetta is the Director of Learning & Inclusion at PFLAG National. She has led an educational effort to train more than 75,000 people in allyship and LGBTQ+ inclusion at work, in schools, at home, and in faith communities. She is the author of three books on allyship and the host of PFLAG's weekly Something to Talk About Live broadcast. To learn more about her work, visit [pflag.org](http://pflag.org) and [straightforequality.org](http://straightforequality.org).**



## TIME TO REFLECT

# How Upbringing Affects Parenting

While you are working to create a healthy home environment for your young person, it's important to remember that *you are a result of a family system*. Whether you had two parents, one parent, adoptive parents, or were raised by other adults, how you were parented affects your identity formation, self-perception, and interactions with others. Perhaps more important, your interactions with those who raised you color the relationship you have with your young person. This section offers a structured way for you to examine how your own upbringing and the dynamics within the family who raised you may inform how you parent.

**1 Describe your relationship with your parents or the adults who raised you at the time you were the age of your young person.**

a. What was their parenting style?

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b. What did they do well, and where did the challenges or friction lie?

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c. How do you feel about the way they raised you?

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**2** What religious and spiritual influences did you have as a young person?  
How did your parents or those who raised you provide those influences?

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**3** What expectations did your family have for you (either expectations specific to you or ones all children in the family were expected to meet)?

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a. Did you feel like those expectations were healthy and reasonable?

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b. Did you have the “tools” to meet them (e.g., resources, adequate support)?

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**4** What age were you when you began to discover your sense of purpose?  
What role did those who raised you have in that process?

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**5 List three ways your childhood experiences may be affecting the way you parent.**

Consider both points of friction and points of harmony you had with your parents, and think through how those experiences may inform the choices you make, the communication style you use, etc.

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**6 Consider how your parents fostered your connections with family members and/or other trusted adults. List ways you do this for your young person.**

Do some ways stand out as being more successful than others? Note the behaviors you should continue to repeat and any potential shifts you need to make.

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**7 Sometimes our perception of how we show up is different from what others experience. Have a conversation with your young person to get their impression of how you parent. Ask the following questions and record any reflections below: Do you feel like you're supported in this family? Do you feel like you're able to talk to us about anything? Is there anything we could do differently that would be helpful to you?**

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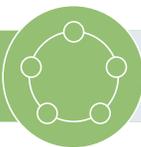
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## BUILD THE FOUNDATION

# How to Create Mentally Healthy Home Environments

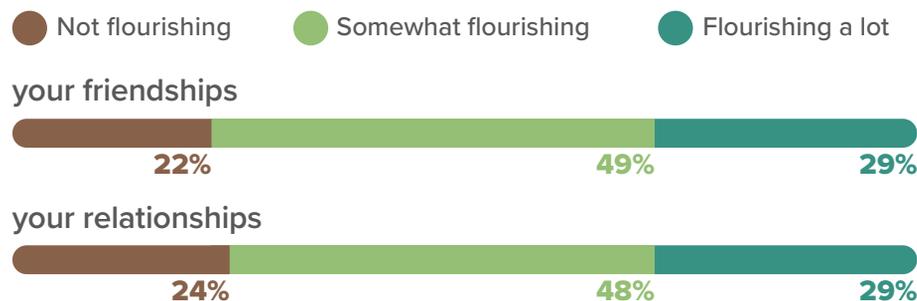
Sociological research shows that organizations can embody three qualities to support mental health: they can enable social connections, they can align tools with expectations, and they can help young people develop a sense of purpose. In many ways, families also function like an organization, and embedding those same dynamics in your family structure helps ensure that each member of your family feels valued and supported.



## CONNECTION

Our research shows that a sense of belonging is crucial to young people's mental health and that quality relationships are integral to creating that feeling.

### How much are you flourishing in...



Percentages are approximate due to rounding.

Young people who say they are "flourishing a lot" in their mental or emotional well-being report having meaningful friendships (54%) and strong family relationships (61%).

Springtide data reveal three distinct experiences that help young people feel a sense of belonging: being noticed, being named, and being known by others without judgment. Some relationships may never get past being noticed or knowing someone by name, but the relationship between a parent and a young person can become one of the deepest and bonded relationships a person can experience—if both people are committed to that. Our data show that some young people don't feel like they belong in their own families and that they can't be their authentic selves with them. No matter how tight-knit your family is, consider taking additional steps to ensure that your young people feel seen and included.

**Noticed:** Full schedules, other commitments, and, for some, living in different places can make it challenging to connect with your young person in the most basic ways. Ensuring that young people feel noticed requires spending time together without distractions or interruptions. It also means observing what your young person does and how they feel and then reflecting back what you see. Paying attention to your young person in this way helps create a sense of belonging.

**Named:** Using desired names and pronouns is an excellent first step to ensuring that your young person feels named. Take it a step further by expressing what you're seeing on a deeper level. For example, ask, "You seem sad today; can you tell me what you're feeling?" Naming includes helping your young person name what is affecting their mood or what is motivating a specific behavior.

**Known:** Being known by another happens through deep curiosity, listening, and receiving without judgment. To be known is the deepest level of belonging. This occurs when parents and young people have arrived at a level of trust that creates security, safety, and vulnerability—and it has to be maintained. Continuing to combine attention, observation, and conversation helps retain a bond that makes young people truly feel known.

- 1 List the schedules for each member of the family, and look for mutual time that is free of interruptions. Brainstorm ways to maximize those pockets of time. How can you use that time to give attention and actively listen to your young person? *If your young person doesn't live with you, use technology to coordinate family meetings. Text or email a few dates that might work for a quick catch-up over the phone or via Zoom or FaceTime. Set a time that works over a series of weeks or months so that regular check-ins are already on the calendar.*

- 2** Use the list below to chart the details you know about your young person’s life. (This includes teachers, friends, activities, teammates, favorites, likes and dislikes, etc.) Then ask your young person to fill out the same list for you. See where there might be overlap or details that neither of you know about each other. Use the exchange as a way to become more curious about your child, inviting them to tell you more about the details of their life, including their sense of purpose, identity, and meaning-making. *If your child is a young adult, relearning these things can be a great way to connect with them, because it’s likely that their friend circles and activities have changed (and maybe so have yours!). Fill out the list, and use a family meeting to compare notes.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Name of school or workplace \_\_\_\_\_

Name of teacher or supervisor \_\_\_\_\_

Top 5 closest friends

**FAVORITES**

① \_\_\_\_\_

Color \_\_\_\_\_

② \_\_\_\_\_

Holiday \_\_\_\_\_

③ \_\_\_\_\_

Sports Team \_\_\_\_\_

④ \_\_\_\_\_

Animal \_\_\_\_\_

⑤ \_\_\_\_\_

Food \_\_\_\_\_

Top activities that fill your schedule

Song \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Movie \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Book \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



## EXPECTATIONS

Young people struggle to engage with organizations that communicate unclear, unachievable, or unfair expectations. It's even more challenging when such expectations are coming from those closest to them. In interviews, young people often say that they can be burdened by family expectations, both real and perceived, and their mental health can suffer as a result—unless they feel they can talk openly about them. Rose, 16, expresses this in the quote on the right.

Young people flourish when they understand the expectations set for them *and* have the tools to meet them. Parents can aid in this process in two ways: by ensuring adult presence and by understanding why young people are choosing to participate in certain activities in certain ways.

Young people need trusted adults to talk to, so one of the most impactful actions a parent can take is simply being present and available. Adults who listen, care, live with integrity, are transparent, and use their expertise are able to build trust with young people. This enables young people to have meaningful exchanges in which they can express doubts and ask the big questions of life.



**“As I got older and more extroverted, I wanted to spend more time with my friends, and then I could focus less on my studies. I had less time to balance those. So I thought that I had to be perfect in both of those aspects. Growing up, I never really had any serious problems with my parents, so I felt like I kind of owed it to them to succeed and do really good. And then telling my parents that and confiding in them (about this struggle I was having), my mom said, ‘You don’t have to be perfect in every aspect and we’ll love you anyway.’”**

**—Rose, 16**

Our research shows that when young people have more trusted adults in their lives, they are more likely to report mental well-being.

### Percentage of 13-to-25-year-olds who **AGREE** with each statement

● 0 trusted adults    ● 5+ trusted adults

I feel completely alone.



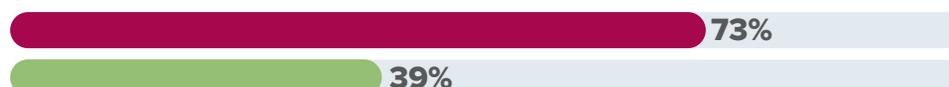
I feel as if no one understands me.



I feel left out.



I feel stressed and overwhelmed.



- 3 Ask the young person in your life to name the adults they trust the most. These adults could be in your extended family, at their school, within a faith community, coaching their sports, etc. Ask your young person to consider these questions:

What makes those adults trustworthy in your eyes?

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How do they go about communicating their expectations of you?

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How do they go about making the expectations they have of you reasonable and attainable?

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### ***Tide-Turning Tip***

The onus is not on you to provide all the adult support for your young person. This is a team effort! Use this conversation to assess who those trusted adults are and if the way they talk about expectations promotes mental health.

Our research shows that young people need to feel guided—not forced—to participate in a faith community. However, despite the group, team, or community, participation generally comes with certain expectations. Young people may feel they can or can't meet these expectations—or worse, they may not be completely clear on what the expectations actually are. As a parent, you may say which activities are optional and which are required. Yet, for those activities where young people are able to opt in, where they have some say in how they participate, and where they feel like they know the associated expectations and can meet them, they're more likely to continue participating. That kind of participation helps deliver the type of fulfillment that supports mental health.

- 4 Ask your young person to write out their schedule, including all the activities they participate in, any volunteer work or paid work, etc. Then ask them to list the expectations associated with each. Do they feel like those expectations are reasonable? Do they have the tools to meet them?
- 5 Ask your young person how they feel about each activity on their schedule. Do they enjoy those activities? Are they learning or growing as a result of participating, or do they do them out of obligation? Make any adjustments where they may be taking on activities out of what they perceive as an obligation.



### ***Tide-Turning Tip***

Many young people we've interviewed share struggles with perfectionism, even if their parents never mandated top grades or standout performance. Especially when young people have good relationships with their parents, they can feel like they "owe" their parents success and achievement. For optimal mental health, it's important that young people know they are loved for who they are, not for what they do. Missteps, failures, or simply the process of choosing their own path are not reasons to withdraw love and care. Show your young people unconditional love whenever possible.



## PURPOSE

A sense of purpose can manifest for young people in a variety of ways—a hobby they're passionate about, a community they're involved with, a spiritual practice that grounds them, a belief in a divine source, or something else.

Discovering their purpose can boost young people's mental health, but sometimes the search for that purpose can be disorienting and frustrating. To sidestep any negative impacts on mental health during such times, it's important for parents to encourage the search and help them weather the stress by offering trusting and nonjudgmental support.<sup>13</sup>

Our data indicate that young people can discover their purpose through a number of experiences. Nearly 50% of the young people we surveyed say they find purpose in asking questions and gathering information on things that matter to them, and 41% say experiencing an illness, trauma, or hardship (or seeing someone else go through it) has helped them discover purpose. See other examples in the chart on the next page.

- 6 In looking at the chart on the next page, which examples might serve as ways for your young person to discover purpose? List them below and note how your young person might derive a sense of purpose from that experience, person, place, etc.

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### *Tide-Turning Tip*

If your young person is struggling to discover a sense of purpose, note their likes and interests. Consider that young people often find a sense of purpose in helping others, making meaningful connections, and creating things. Look for activities and opportunities they can engage in that might lead to these outcomes. The discovery of purpose does not happen by force, but you can support the process by creating an environment where the possibility of discovery can exist.

## **What experiences have helped you discover your purpose?**

*Young people could select more than one response.*

*Asking questions and seeking information about things that matter to me*



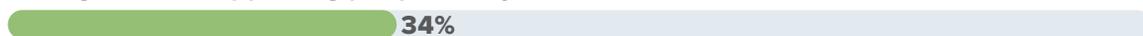
*Experiencing trauma, hardship, or illness, either of my own or of someone I care about*



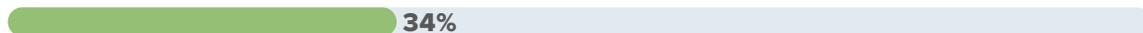
*Following beliefs I was taught about how to treat others*



*Caring for and supporting people in my life*



*Making music or art*



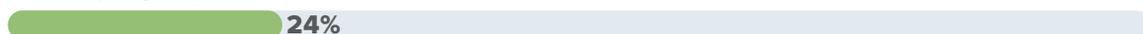
*Being inspired by what someone I look up to is doing with their life*



*Using my knowledge, skills, and abilities to contribute to society*



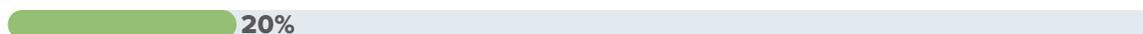
*Developing expertise or skills*



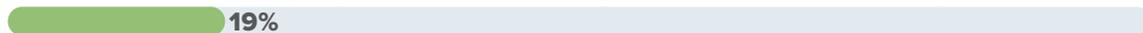
*Traveling, camping, or hiking in nature or in places with different cultures than my own*



*Developing my interests and talents by trying things and receiving encouragement from others*



*Being part of a community that values treating others with care and respect*



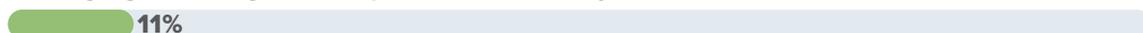
*Learning about a religion's understanding of God (or a higher power)*



*Experiencing God's presence in my life*



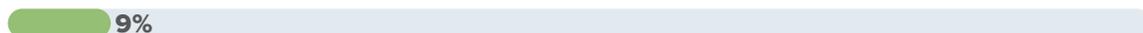
*Belonging to a religious or spiritual community*



*Nothing has helped or is helping me discover my purpose*



*Participating in religious or spiritual practices*





Season 7 of *The Voices of Young People Podcast* coincides with *The Springtide Series on Mental Health*. It features 16 young people discussing where they get messages about mental health, the people they turn to for support, how a sense of purpose plays a role in their overall mental well-being, and more. Episode 6 features two Springtide ambassadors, Chris (20) and Zineb (24), reflecting on how understanding their connection to something bigger impacts their mental health.

- 7 Listen to episode 6 of the podcast with your young person, and note Chris’s and Zineb’s responses. Then share the list you made in step 1, and ask your young person the following questions:

Have any of the items on this list given you a sense of purpose?

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What would you add or subtract from this list?

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If you haven’t found a sense of purpose, what do you think you need in order to start that process?

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How can I be helpful to you as you start to discover your purpose?

---

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**YOU  
CARE  
ABOUT  
YOUNG  
PEOPLE.**

**SO DO WE.**

We invite you to subscribe to *The Tide Report*, our free biweekly email newsletter, for fresh insights and research on the inner lives of the young people you care deeply about. Together, we'll turn the tide.



[springtideresearch.org/subscribe](https://springtideresearch.org/subscribe)

## ONGOING GEN Z DIVERSITY RESEARCH

# Capturing the Full Expression of Being Gen Z

We are committed to listening and understanding the incredible diversity of young people of all racial, gender, and cultural expressions and lived experiences, by amplifying their voices in our ongoing research projects.



### READ

#### ***The Cultural Bounds of Belonging: A Closer Look at Latine Young People***

In connection with Dominican University, this report offers data-driven insights on how to support the flourishing of Latino young people.



### LISTEN

#### **Season 6: Latinx Voices**

Listen to our special season of *The Voices of Young People Podcast*, featuring Latino young people.

 **The Voices of Young People**  
**PODCAST: SEASON 6—LATINX VOICES**

The banner features five circular portraits of young people: a man with glasses, a woman with glasses, a woman with long red hair, a man in a suit, and a woman with long dark hair.



### WATCH

#### **“Navigating Injustice: Race, Faith & Mental Health”**

Watch this conversation with Dr. Kameelah Mu’Min Rashad, a 2022–2023 Research Advisory Board member who was joined by members of Springtide’s Gen Z & Diversity Research Team, including Senior Research Associate Nabil Tueme, 2022–2023 BIPOC Fellow Cassandra Ogbevire, and 2022 Summer Research Interns Hannah Turner and Anna Hartshorne.



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Email us at [development@springtideresearch.org](mailto:development@springtideresearch.org) to discuss how you can become a partner and help extend the reach of Springtide’s mission.

## APPENDIX

# Research Methodology & Promise

## Quantitative Data

Springtide Research Institute collects quantitative data through surveys and qualitative data through interviews. The quantitative data tell us what is happening. The qualitative data tell us why and how it is happening.

For the quantitative data in this report, we conducted several studies about mental health in various settings beginning in the fall of 2021. We surveyed a nationally representative sample of young people ages 13 to 25 in the United States, totaling 9,837 participants. Survey questions about parents/guardians were asked to a smaller subset of the sample, totaling 4,003 participants. The sample was weighted for age, gender, race, and region to match the demographics of the country, and it produces a margin of error of +/- 3%. The age, gender, and racial demographics of this sample are indicated in the tables below.

Age	Valid Percent
13 to 17	30%
18 to 25	70%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

Gender	Valid Percent
Girl/Woman or Transgender Girl/Woman	55%
Boy/Man or Transgender Boy/Man	40%
Nonbinary	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

Race	Valid Percent
White	53%
Hispanic or Latino	22%
Black or African American	17%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1%
Asian	5%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	<1%
Other	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Tables may not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding.*

## Qualitative Research

For the qualitative research in this report, we conducted 105 in-depth interviews, either in person, via telephone, or via video. Interviews focused on understanding how young people regard and experience mental health in their lives. Conversations were guided but open-ended, allowing for as much direction as possible from the interviewee. Interviews were transcribed, lightly cleaned, and then analyzed thematically. The use of brackets in the qualitative quotes indicates that a word was replaced. All replacements come directly from the context of the quote to ensure accuracy. The use of bold in the qualitative quotes indicates emphasis added rather than emphasis in the original.

Interviews and survey responses are confidential, and all names of research participants in this report are pseudonyms. For more information, please contact us at [research@springtideresearch.org](mailto:research@springtideresearch.org).

**At Springtide, we are committed to using the terms that reflect young people's values or that they themselves prefer. This means that while Springtide uses standardized terms when it comes to collecting demographic information, we defer to young people's self-identified naming preferences when relaying their experiences.**

# Our Research Promise

At Springtide Research Institute, we are committed to a Data with Heart™ approach. Our approach is rooted in deep systematic listening to young people and the things they care about. It is founded on values, commitments, and beliefs that ground why we do our research, in addition to employing a variety of rigorous qualitative and quantitative methods. Our philosophy and approach are dynamic—informed by varying ways of listening to young people through our Springtide Ambassadors Program (SAP), Writer in Residence, *The Voices of Young People Podcast*, interns, and BIPOC fellows.



This series of commitments is ever-evolving, just like the diversity and context of the young people we are committed to. We commit to reassessing this philosophy in an ongoing capacity to reflect and embody our promise to be culturally informed and inclusive.

- 1** We are committed to listening to young people.
- 2** We believe that the voices of young people should shape what we study.
- 3** We bring our whole selves into our conversations with young people to build trust by owning our biases, being vulnerable about our own lives, and demonstrating that we are accountable for what we do and do not know.
- 4** We strive to deepen our understanding of young people, rather than impose our expectations on them.
- 5** We encourage young people to share their stories and creative expressions because we recognize that knowledge and truth are culturally bound and that young people actively shape our world.
- 6** We understand the value of numbers and that they are enriched by the words shared with us by young people.
- 7** We know that the questions are just as important as the answers and that our inquiry itself is a statement of our values.
- 8** We seek to break down the boxes that research often puts people into by exploring and understanding the highly variable lived experiences of young people.
- 9** We foster diverse ways of understanding the nuance and complexity of young people and social phenomena and are constantly expanding our methodologies to reflect what we have learned.
- 10** We resolve to produce knowledge that is actionable, useful, and valuable to the communities and organizations we serve.

*Note: Numerals above are for reference only and not an indication of priority.*

# Endnotes

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## OUR MISSION

Compelled by the urgent desire to listen and attend to the lives of young people (ages 13 to 25), Springtide Research Institute® is committed to understanding the distinct ways new generations experience and express community, identity, and meaning.

We exist at the intersection of religious and human experience in the lives of young people. And we're here to listen.

We combine quantitative and qualitative research to reflect and amplify the lived realities of young people as they navigate shifting social, cultural, and religious landscapes. Delivering fresh data and actionable insights, we equip those who care about young people to care better.

### ***Nurturing Mental Health for Gen Z: A Handbook for Parents***

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