

Navigating the unknown:

How

stress

about

the

future


is

impacting

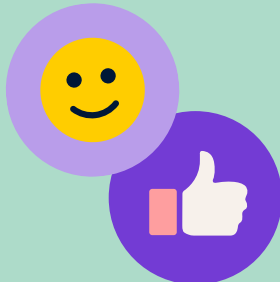
young people's mental health

Snapshot from ReachOut's research:
*Understanding the Issues Impacting
Young People's Mental Health*

Key findings



3 in 4 young people reported they were stressed about the future.



Only **1 in 6** young people reported they often felt optimistic about the future.

Worry and stress about the future impacted young people's **mental health, sleep and mood.**



Young people reported that **guidance about their futures and taking a break** from school or work **would help them to cope** with stress about the future.



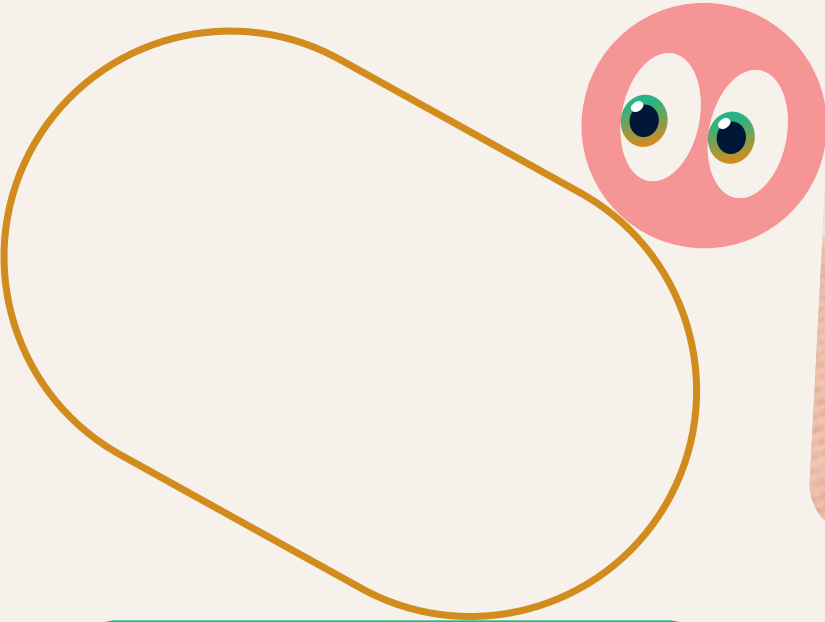
About the study

These findings are a snapshot from ReachOut's 2022 study *Understanding the Issues Impacting Young People's Mental Health*, a national survey of 667 young people aged 16–25. The primary aim of the research was to identify what issues young people are concerned, stressed or worried about, and to understand how these worries are impacting their mental health and wellbeing. The full report can be found [here](#).

Our findings suggest that, following a number of challenging years, young people face a high burden of stress in relation to their futures. As they grapple with issues such as climate change and economic uncertainty, in addition to their concerns about finding employment and the pressures of academic success, many young people feel a great deal of uncertainty and anxiety about what lies ahead. In fact, our survey results indicated that stress about the future was the most common issue that young people were concerned about.



Young people worry about their future



Three-quarters (75%) of young people reported that they were worried or stressed about the future.



For **44%** of the young people surveyed, stress about the future was one of the issues they were most concerned about.



Only **1 in 6** of the young people surveyed reported often feeling optimistic about their future.

'It's super hard to be excited about the future, when getting through the present is hard'

F, 25, major city

- Young women and non-binary people were much more likely to report **being stressed or concerned about the future**, compared to young men (87% women and 90% of non-binary young people, compared to 58% of men).
- Young women and non-binary people were also more likely to select it as one of their **most concerning issues** (49% of women and 54% of non-binary people, compared to 36% of men).

Issues that impact concern about the future



Young people identified a number of current issues that escalated their worries about the future: these included money and housing, climate change, and trying to reach their goals. The uncertainty and insecurity arising from these worries made many young people lose hope in their future:

'I feel like the rising cost of living, lack of affordable housing, lack of wage growth makes it really difficult to live a good life and have hope for the future – especially with all the events going in the world.'

(Gender not specified, 25, major city)

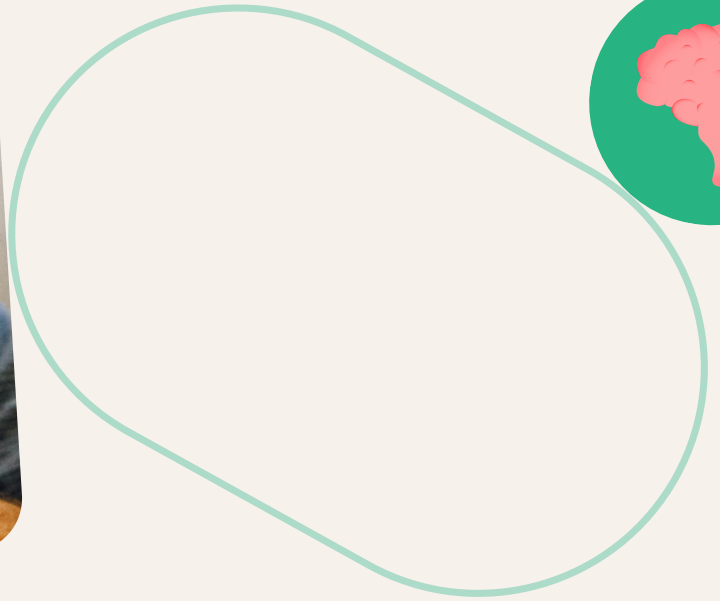
'The potential future being real bleak due to the housing crisis, climate change and changing dynamics as a high schooler transitioning to uni or life outside of extremely structured days.'

(F, 19, location not specified)

'Burnout from working through the pandemic and not being able to take a real break owing to cost-of-living pressures. Not wanting to take a holiday because of uncertainty of the future and insecure work.'

(F, 25, inner regional area)

The impact on mental health and wellbeing



83%

reported that their concerns had a moderate to major effect on their mental health.

Of the young people who indicated they worried about the future:



66% reported they had experienced changes in their mood



65% said they had trouble sleeping



59% said they lacked motivation



54% said they had trouble focusing.

What young people did to cope

Young people who selected stress about the future as one of their top concerns reported using a number of things to help them cope. The most frequent behaviours were watching TV or listening to music (75%), spending time on digital platforms or social media (65%), and increased snacking or eating (66%) **(Figure 1)**.

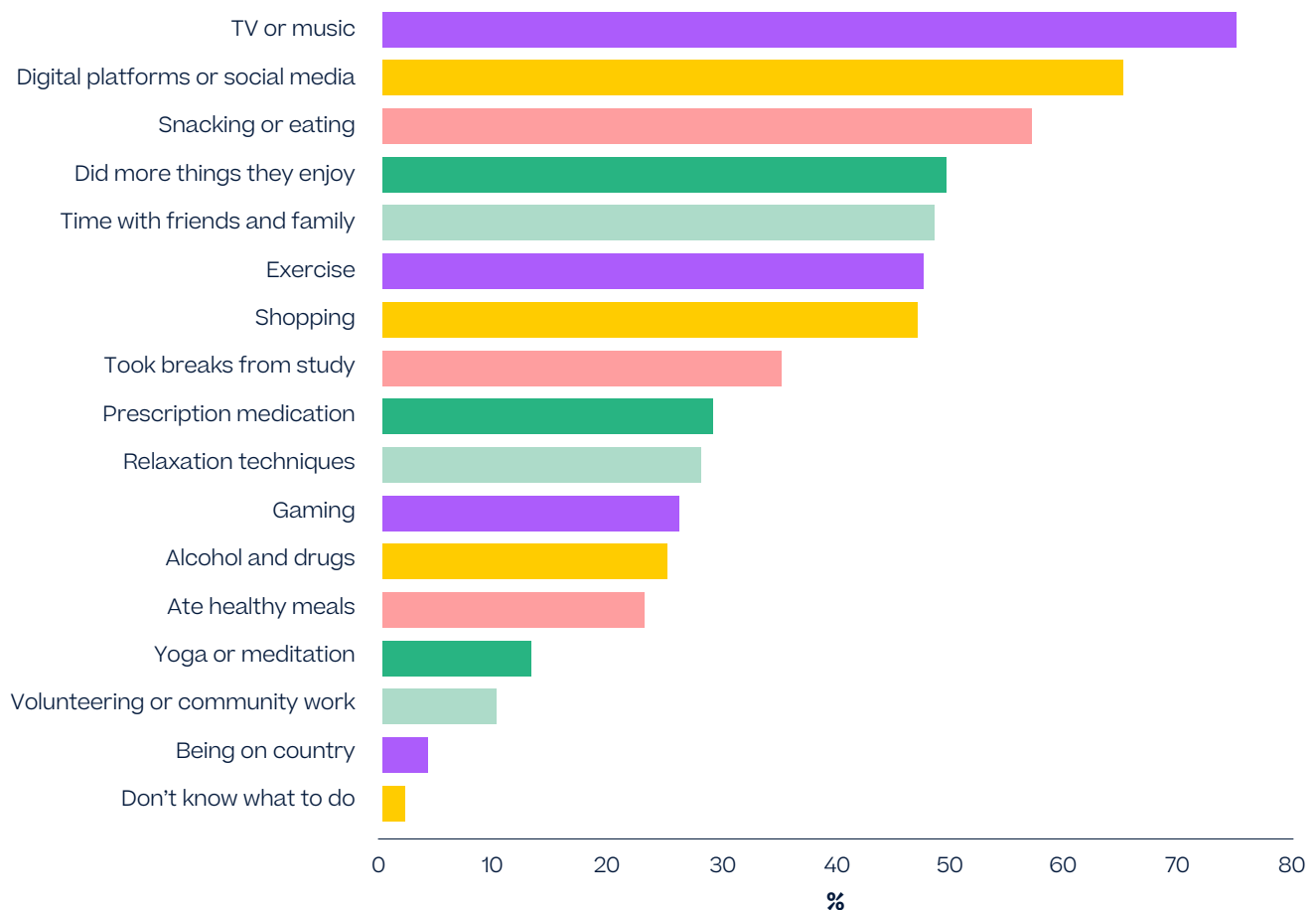
Younger study participants (aged 19 and below) reported using these coping strategies more than the older age group:

- spending time on digital platforms or social media
- spending time gaming.

Older study participants (aged 20 or older) reported using these coping strategies more than younger participants:

- alcohol and drugs
- increased physical activity or exercise
- relaxation techniques
- meditation or yoga.

Figure 1: Percentage of young people who selected future stress as a top issue who used these strategies to cope



What young people need to help them tackle the future

We asked young people what supports they had needed over the past 12 months to help them deal with their worries. Young people who indicated that stress about the future was a top issue for them told us they had needed:

- access to someone to talk to that they could trust (96%)
- knowledge of where to get support (88%)
- access to quality/trusted information (88%)
- access to a mental health professional (77%)
- connection with other people going through similar experiences (67%)
- financial support to get access to help (65%).

Despite young people experiencing high levels of stress about their future, they were clear about what might help them. We asked study participants an open-ended question about what else they needed to help them cope with their stress.

Young people told us they want:



affordable support from professionals



emotional support from people they know



practical assistance in planning their future



a break from study.

Perhaps assistance [with] planning my future or just knowing options for the future, e.g. career opportunities.'

(F, 20, major city)

'Support. I just want someone to help me or at least support me in my interests/plans for the future.'

(F, 17, major city)

'Just to take a break and relax with no responsibilities and no effect on my future.'

(F, 16, major city)



How ReachOut can help?



[ReachOut](#) is the leading online mental health service supporting young people during tough times.

We help young people feel better about today and the future, no matter what challenge they're facing. ReachOut provides a safe online place where young people can openly express themselves, explore what's happening in their lives, connect with people who understand their situation, and find the resources to help them manage their challenges now and in the future. Anonymous, free and 100 per cent online, ReachOut has been designed specifically for – and with – young people.

From one-to-one support from experienced peer workers, to online forums, as well as tips, stories and resources, ReachOut offers a wide range of support options that allow young people to engage in the ways they want to, when they want to. We also have a range of resources that can help young people who experience [stress about the future](#).