

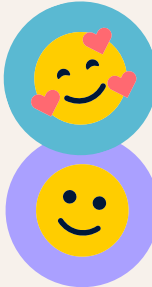
Snapshot from ReachOut's research:
*Understanding the Issues Impacting
Young People's Mental Health*

Loneliness: Key findings

1/2

One in two of the young people surveyed were worried or stressed about their feelings of loneliness.

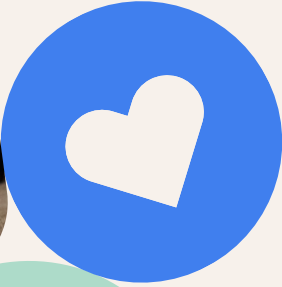
For the majority of young people, feeling lonely impacts on their mental health, often leading to changes in mood and disrupted sleep.



Young people most commonly identified that supportive relationships would help them to cope better. A majority described a desire to find new people to support them, rather than improving their existing relationships to get this support.

50%

Half the young people surveyed reported experiencing challenges with relationships, while many described loneliness as a consequence of being unable to manage other issues they were experiencing.



About ReachOut

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.

About the study

These findings are a snapshot from ReachOut's *Understanding the Issues Impacting Young People's Mental Health* study, a national survey of 667 young people aged 16–25 years conducted in 2022. The research aimed to explore young people's worries, concerns or stresses and the impact of these on their mental health and wellbeing. Nearly half (42 per cent) of the young people surveyed reported levels of psychological distress that could indicate serious mental health concerns.

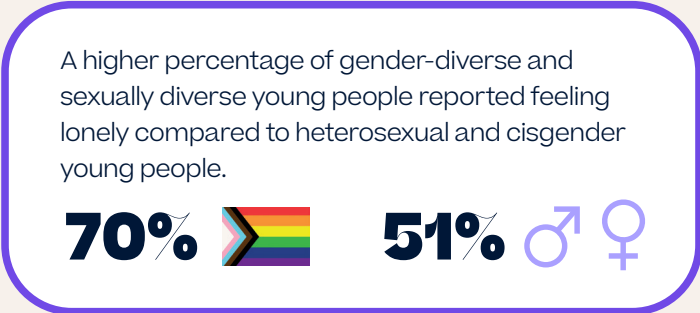
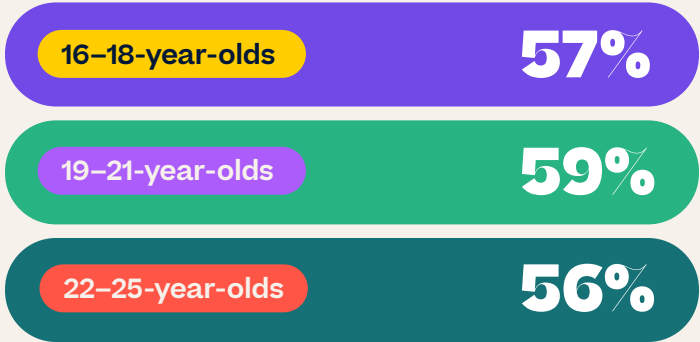
Suggested citation: ReachOut (2023), *Craving Connection: How Loneliness is Impacting Young People's Mental Health*, Research Brief: Issue 01, ReachOut Australia, Sydney

Copyright © ReachOut Australia 2023



What we found

Feelings of loneliness didn't seem to change depending on age:

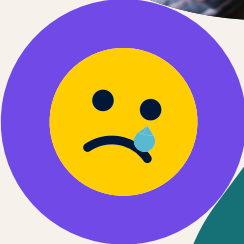


'I struggle to deal with study stress because I'm anxious or just feel like I have no energy. It leaves me fatigued, which leads to low motivation to do things and I accept loneliness as a natural consequence.'

Female, 22, Major city

'More money [would help me to] get support, not be left out and would enable me to find more friends through [doing] the things that I enjoy.'

Female, 17, Major city



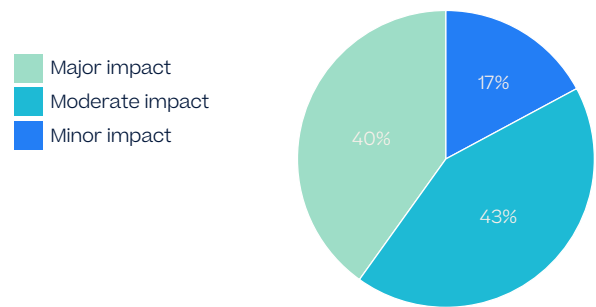
Loneliness impacts young people's mental health and wellbeing

Of the young people who reported loneliness as a top concern,

82%

said it had a moderate to major impact on their mental health and wellbeing, as shown in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: Self-reported impact of loneliness on mental health (percentage)



The stress related to feeling lonely can manifest in different ways that can have a significant impact on young people's lives and wellbeing:

Young people used their own words to describe their experiences of loneliness. Their choice of words indicated that many were struggling with difficult feelings, leaving them depleted and disconnected, as shown in **Figure 2**.

75%

experienced changes to their mood



64%

reported having trouble sleeping or sleeping too much or too little



30%

said they experienced changes in appetite



50%

reported that loneliness caused challenges with relationships



Figure 2: Words young people used to describe their feelings of loneliness





Young people crave meaningful connection and supportive relationships

When describing their needs, many young people indicated a lack of support from their friends and family and a desire for closer relationships.

The top five things young people told us would help them were:

1. finding new, supportive relationships
2. deepening or improving their existing relationships
3. accessing professional support
4. receiving financial aid
5. having someone to talk to.

Interestingly, more young people said they wanted to have new people in their lives who would support them, rather than having more support from people who were already in their lives.

Some just wanted to find people more 'like them' who would understand what they are going through. Many seemed to overlook their existing relationships as a source of support, due to:

- dismissing them as being unsupportive
- believing that those people would be unlikely to change
- feeling unable to manage their existing relationships
- Many young people who did express the desire to strengthen their existing relationships described being unable to open up and struggling to have conversations that could lead to deeper, meaningful connections.

'When I was having friendship troubles at school, I would hide in the library during lunch and recess and pretend I wasn't at school so I wouldn't have to see my friendship group. It made me feel really lonely and I felt kind of depressed and trapped.'

Female, 16, Major city

'I wish I could talk to friends about mental health without being judged, as there's still stigma.'

Female, 24, Major city

'[I would like to be able to] speak to my closest friends about how I feel, to get their opinion and support.'

Male, 16, Major city

'Having someone in my life that I feel safe and comfortable to talk to- someone that is genuinely interested and open to listening. Just having someone else understand and know about what going on will help, as it might make me feel less crazy and alone.'

Female, 17, Inner regional

Young people need support to establish and maintain healthy relationships

Having the skills and confidence to engage in honest, difficult conversations is vital to establishing meaningful connections and maintaining healthy relationships throughout life. Many young people wish they had someone to talk to and hope to find new friends and groups to support them. This suggests a real need to assist young people to develop and maintain meaningful relationships.