

# Harnessing

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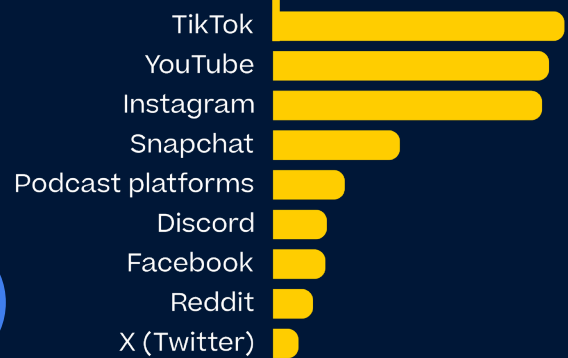
## Supporting youth mental health in the digital age.



We heard from **2,056** young people living in **Australia, aged 16-25.**

### Top social platforms

When asked, “What platforms do you use when feeling worried, stressed or down?”, young people selected TikTok most frequently, followed by YouTube and Instagram. Females were significantly more likely to select TikTok, while males preferred YouTube. Non-binary participants were more likely to select Discord.



### Motivations



When we asked young people why they used social platforms when feeling worried, stressed or down, they most commonly said it was for entertainment (**77%**), passing the time (**72%**) or for distraction (**66%**).

Other reasons for using social platforms when stressed included to feel calmer/relaxation (**54%**), to learn about things they're interested in (**53%**) and to find inspiring or motivating content (**48%**).



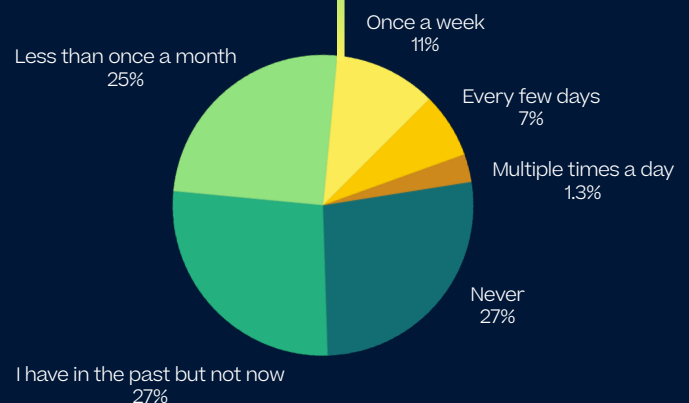
“Even though I use [it] to to distract myself from unhappy moments, I then find myself feeling worse after social media and I struggle to find a different habit to replace it.” (Female, 23)

### Mental health info online



**3 in 4** young people regularly look for mental health information online, or have looked for it in the past. **22%** say they look for mental health information on social platforms once a week or more. Young people living outside of major cities were more likely to be searching for mental health information online at least once a week.

### How often do you look for mental health information online?



### Types of mental health information

When looking for mental health information on social platforms, young people say they are looking for practical advice about how to cope with challenges (**72%**), information that makes them feel like they're going to be okay (**70%**) and information about specific mental health conditions like anxiety or depression (**70%**).

## Access to help



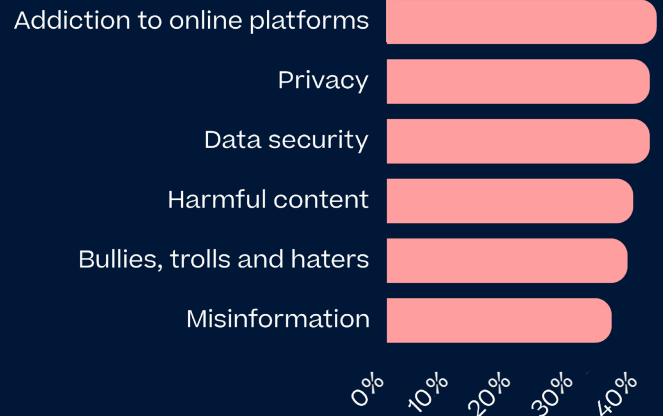
Survey responses show that social platforms can fill a gap for people with mental health challenges not getting professional help. Of those who are facing mental health challenges or have a diagnosed condition but are not getting professional help, 51% don't have access to professional support.

**66%** of young people said that viewing information about mental health online increased their awareness of the issue

**40%** sought professional help after viewing mental health content online

## Digital risks

When asked what concerned them about accessing mental health information on social platforms, young people highlighted a range of issues. **43%** are worried about addiction to online platforms, **41%** said privacy, and **39%** said harmful content. Responses from the survey group highlighted specific concerns, such as content that glorifies having depression or anxiety, or toxic online communities where people share graphic content related to mental health.



## Digital benefits



Young people also wrote about the benefits they see when it comes to sharing mental health information online:

1. Normalising mental health challenges, reducing stigma.
2. Increasing awareness and knowledge about mental health.
3. Uplifting and motivating content that makes people feel good.
4. The accessibility of information and advice in the online space.
5. The potential to find and connect with communities that can provide support.

## Trust

When it comes to deciding whether to trust mental health content on social platforms, young people value information from professionals (such as psychologists, counselors and doctors), as well as advice from people who have personally experienced mental health challenges.

**58%** of young people say they take everything posted on social platforms with a "grain of salt" when it comes to mental health.

## How can platforms do better?



Young people say they want platforms to improve systems that filter out, monitor and flag harmful content and misinformation about mental health. They want to be able to check the source of the information, and whether it is coming from a mental health professional or "just a random person". Young people say they want to see more content about mental health on social platforms, including positive and normalising content, as well as stories and advice from people with lived experience of mental health challenges.

"Being able to read or watch about people in my situation sometimes reassures me, being able to gain more information about how I'm feeling just enables me to be calmer" (Male, 21)

## Why did we conduct the research?

In 2023, ReachOut conducted a survey of young people to understand their experiences of accessing mental health content on social platforms. This research has helped us to understand how young people are using these platforms and how ReachOut can better support young people in accessing quality information and support.

## Respondent profile

Total participants: **2,056**

Ages: **16-25**

Gender: **50%** female, **48%** male, non-binary **1%**

Location: major city **49%**, Regional **48%**

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander: **6%**