

CONNECTING YOUNG AUSTRALIANS

Research by YouthInsight for R U OK? 2022

RUOK?TM

A conversation could change a life.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In mid 2022, R U OK? commissioned research agency YouthInsight to conduct research to inform our work to support young Australians aged from 12 to 25 years. This document is a summary of the findings and insights from the research.

R U OK? have primarily focused on reaching young people in educational settings, with our school resources being widely utilised. This research will help us better understand the needs and experiences of young people as we work to build the capacity of all Australians to support each other.

Young people spoke to us about:



Attitudes toward
mental health



Connection
and sense of
belonging



Support giving
and support
seeking



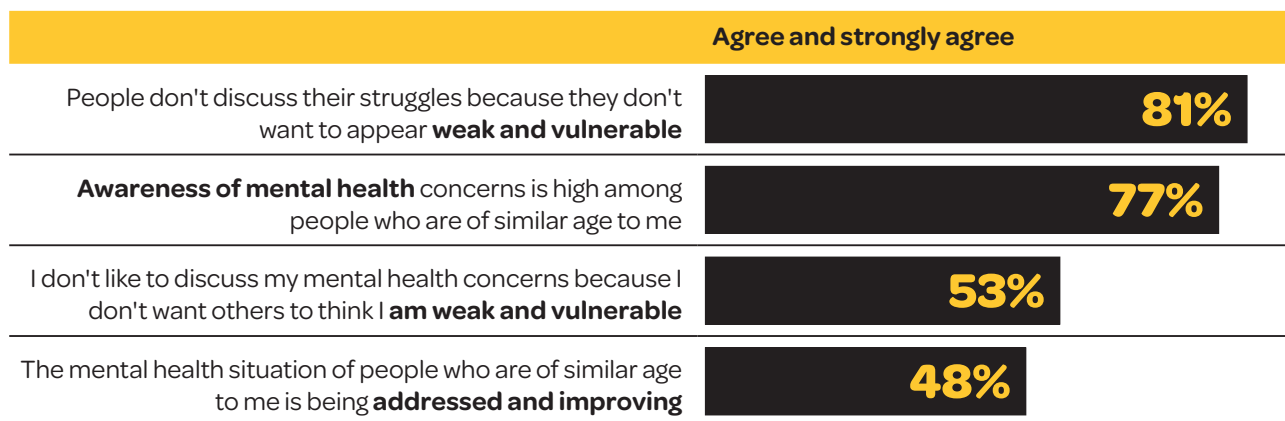
Communications
preferences

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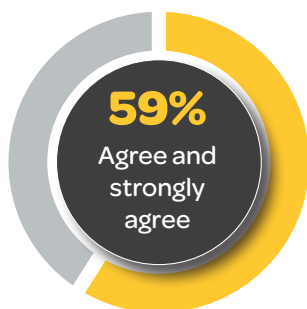
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FINDINGS: ATTITUDES TO MENTAL HEALTH

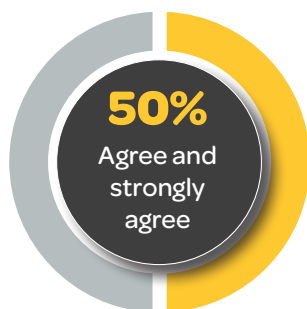
While awareness of mental health concerns is high, the stigma of appearing 'weak and vulnerable' when discussing mental health resonates with a lot of young people.



When thinking or talking about mental health a lack of trust and authenticity are major concerns for young people.



There are people supporting mental health who are **not genuine** and are doing it to **promote themselves**



I'm afraid that if I told certain friends about a problem I was having, they would **tell other people**



Many of my friends **joke about mental health** concerns and do not take it seriously. Males were significantly more likely to agree (43%) than females (35%)



Stressors for young people

54% Procrastination and their lack of motivation is the top cause of stress for one in two young people.

Failing at school is a major concern for females and students in Years 10, 11 and 12. After leaving secondary school, young people feel more uncertain about the future and finances becomes an issue.

Stressors by life stage

	High school (Y7-9) Base: High School (Y7-9) (n=93)	High school (Y10-12) Base: High School (Y10-12) (n=243)	University / TAFE Base: University / TAFE (n=518)	Non-students Base: Not enrolled in study (n=166)
1	Lack of motivation / procrastination			Not having enough money
2	Exams and pressure to get good grades		Not having enough money	Feeling uncertain about the future
3	Comparing myself to other people	Having a high workload / having to study hard	Feeling uncertain about the future	Not knowing what to do with my life
4	Having a high workload / having to study hard	Feeling uncertain about the future	Exams and pressure to get good grades	Lack of motivation / procrastination
5	Feeling uncertain about the future	Not knowing what to do with my life	Having a high workload / having to study hard	Too busy / not having enough time



FINDINGS: CONNECTION AND SENSE OF BELONGING

Young people define a deep and meaningful relationship by a number of measures including the extent to which they are willing to share personal life details, how long they have been friends, and the level of trust and acceptance between each other.

The definition of 'social connection' varies greatly depending on the relationships that a young person had or has in their life.



"Anyone I would talk to without being forced to talk to them." - Male, 16

"Someone that you trust with some kind of information that you wouldn't show everyone." - Male, 16

"Basically, it's just having any sort of ties to anyone, just any sort of like social ties that you spend time with. It doesn't have to a parent or sister or a friend, it can be anyone." - Male, 19

"A social connection is more like an acquaintance, I wouldn't really go into detail of what's going on with my life, I would probably keep it a bit more surface." - Female, 21

"I see social connection more as like two people on the same wavelength. Not necessarily just always connecting." - Female, 21

Qualities of a deep & meaningful relationship

Known each other for a long time

“ We've known each other since high school since year 7. We've always been in the same class, always had the same interests. She's just always there for advice. ”

- Female, 21

Extent of sharing personal life

“ It depends how personable I get when I share things. Sometimes there's some things in my life that I really do not want to share but have grown comfortable enough with someone where I can. ”

- Female, 21

Trusting relationship

“ You can still tell them anything, but you also trust them. You trust them with more deeper conversations. ”

- Male, 22

Non-judgemental

“ I can share stuff about that with her because I know it's going to be met with positivity and acceptance. So a lot of it for me is about how would the other person react. ”

Female, 20

Exclusivity

“ I prefer to spend time with them separately than everyone else. Yeah, because we can't really talk about the things we talked about with everyone else. ”

- Male, 16

Prefer face-to-face

“ Face to face. I like being face to face and enjoying the company. ”

Female, 14

What gives young people a sense of belonging?

School

- Sense of belonging varies by school.
- Some students do not have a strong sense of belonging to their school.
- Most rely on their connection with a small group of close friends.



Family

- Being able to go to siblings or parents if they have any problems.
- Spending quality time together with core and extended family.
- Family relationships can be influenced by their cultural background.



Sport

- It is common for young people to participate in sport outside of school.
- Good friendships are formed through sport.
- However, once they no longer participate in the sport it is difficult to stay in touch with those friends.



Interest

- Interest groups can form around an artist, a band, or a video game.
- It tends to be online in nature.
- It has the ability to connect with a global fanbase.



Church

- Church youth group is a tight-knit community with a strong sense of belonging.
- Young people feel they're a part of something bigger than themselves at church.



Work

- It is difficult to develop a sense of belonging at work.
- Some young people do not speak to colleagues outside of work.

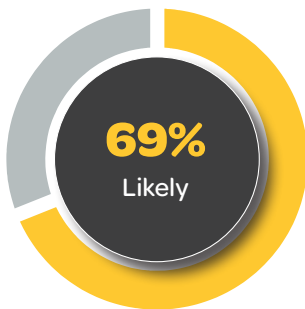


FINDINGS: SEEKING SUPPORT

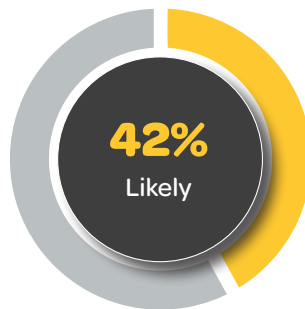
23% One in four young people do not feel supported when they are going through a difficult time and for a third of those it is because they don't feel they have close friends or a support network.

70% of young people did not ask for help when they were experiencing a difficult time. Reasons given for this include not wanting to burden others with their problems (56%), preferring to handle problems by themselves (52%), feeling some problems are too personal to share (44%), and not wanting to be judged (42%).

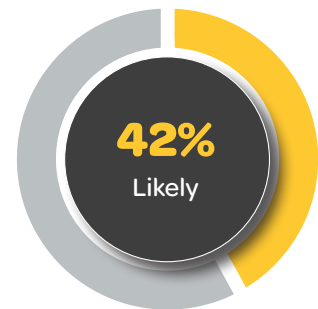
69% of young people are much more likely to discuss mental health concerns privately with a close friend, than with family or in a group setting with friends.



Private 1-on-1 with a friend



Group setting with friends



Family members

Base: All young people (n=1027)

Insights

- There was a notable variation in post secondary school respondents with 51% of males likely to discuss mental health concerns with family members compared with 39% of females.
- Secondary school male respondents are less likely (58%) to discuss mental health concerns with a friend one-on-one than the average (69%)
- Young people in Years 7-9 are the least likely to discuss mental health concerns in any setting.

70% 7 in 10 young people are unlikely to talk about mental health in a group setting with friends because they don't want to bring down the atmosphere and are worried about how others will look at or judge them.

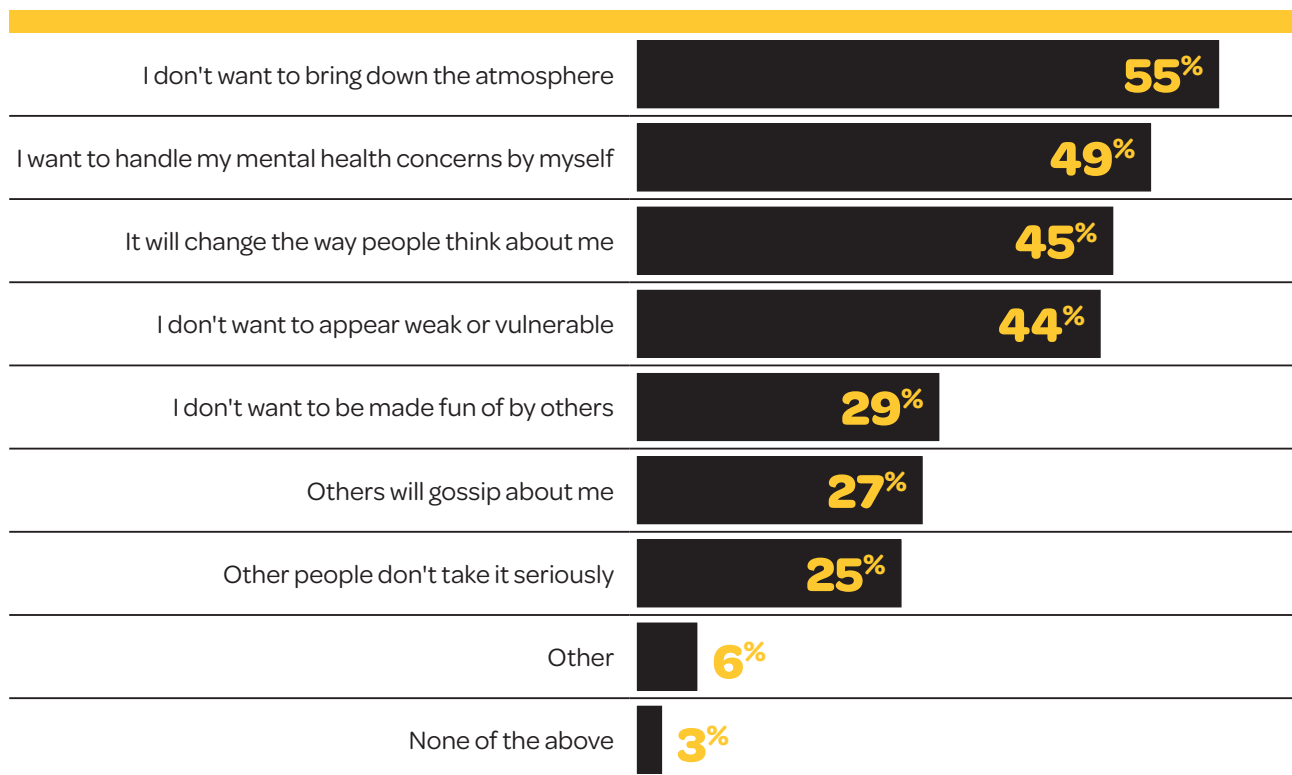
60% 6 in 10 young people are unlikely to talk about mental health with their family because they feel that they lack a good understanding of mental health and don't understand issues that affect today's youth.

Interestingly, the likelihood of discussing mental health concerns in all settings improves as young people move through life stages.

Young people identified social pressure about how they are perceived or should behave when they are around other people as the main barrier to discussing mental health concerns in a group setting.

Barriers – group setting with friends

Base: Unlikely to discuss in group setting with friends (n=364)

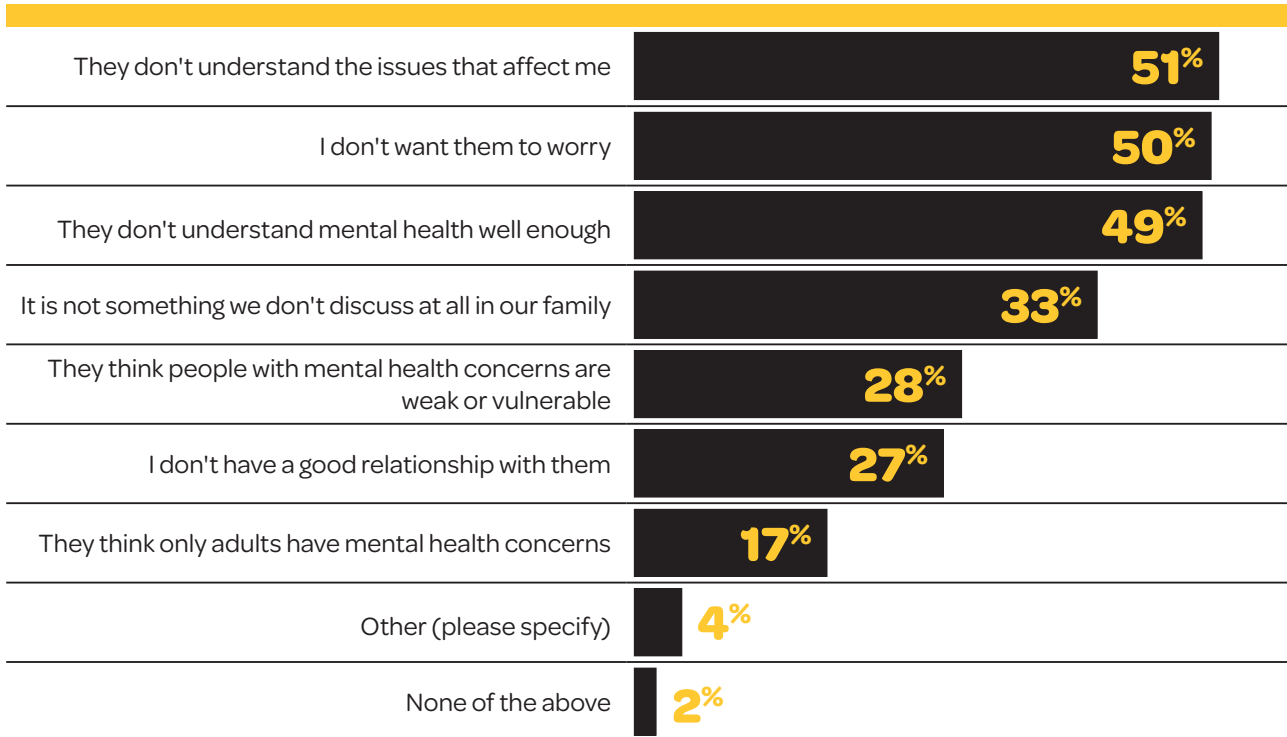


“ I don't really want to put the mood down. I don't think it is the place to talk about mental health during recess. I think it's a private thing. So, then you don't really get the opportunity to talk about these things. ”

– Female, 17

Barriers – with family members

Base: Unlikely to discuss with family members (n=409)



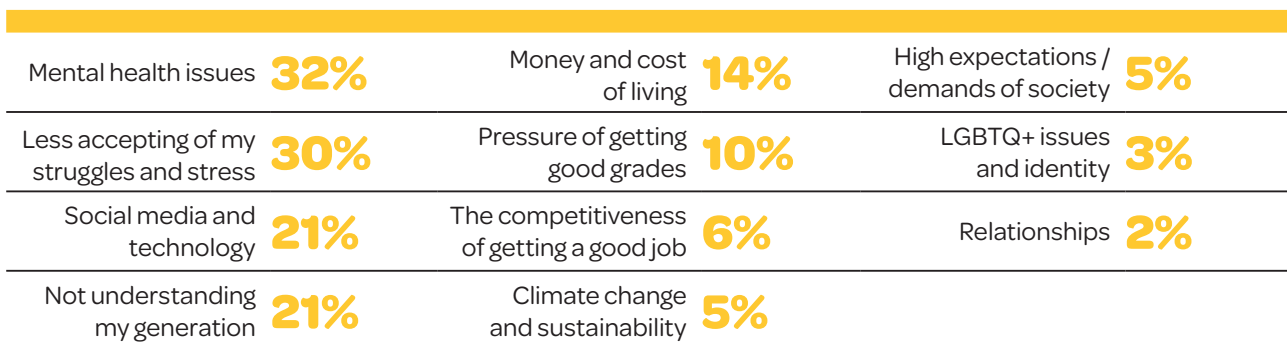
I think because we come from ... background, there's a very masculine mentality that can suppress mental health, which is very problematic.

– Male, 22

More than half of young people (three in five) are unlikely to ask for help. They are afraid that they will burden others with their problems and tend to keep it to themselves.

Feeling misunderstood

Some young people surveyed felt misunderstood by older people and listed lack of understanding of mental health issues (32%) and being less accepting of my struggles and stress (30%) as the top reasons they are reluctant to seek help from older people.



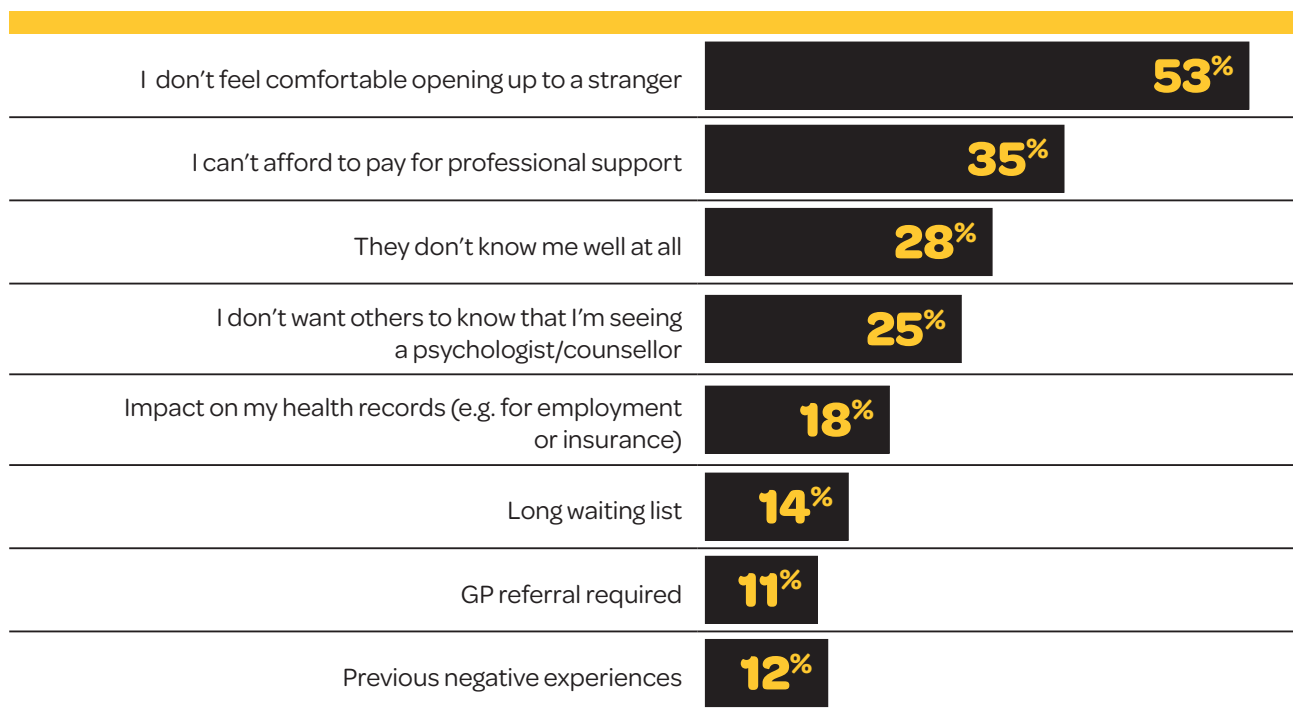
FINDINGS: SEEKING PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

16% of those surveyed are currently seeing a doctor, psychologist or counsellor for mental health support while, two in five (41%) have sought support in the past.

Secondary school students are much less open to seeking professional mental health support. The key barrier is not feeling comfortable opening up about or sharing personal information with a stranger.

Barriers to seeking professional help

Base: Not open to seeking professional support (n=563)



I think it's just opening to a stranger, as well as getting that referral, I have to talk to my doctor first. I haven't really talked about my mental health with anyone else except for really close friends.

– Female, 17

FINDINGS: GIVING SUPPORT

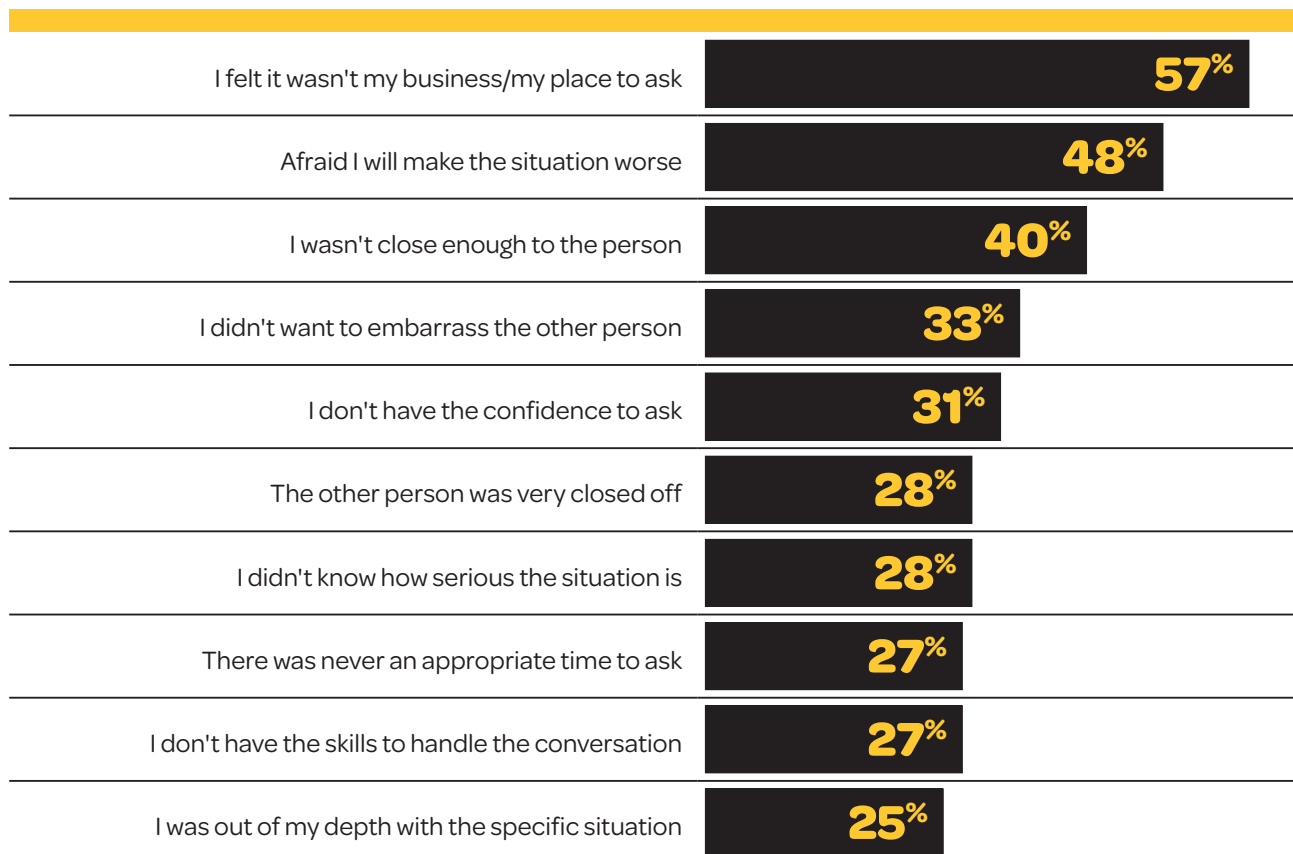
53% If worried about someone close to them, more than half of young people would definitely ask that person what's troubling them. However, this drops to 40% if they don't believe they have a close relationship with the person.

"I've seen people who were potentially going through something, but I hesitated because I just didn't feel like I knew them well enough to check in on them. I usually just back off.

- Male, 22

Reasons young people didn't ask

When they thought someone was struggling there are various reasons young people did not ask that person what was troubling them. The top ten reasons given are:



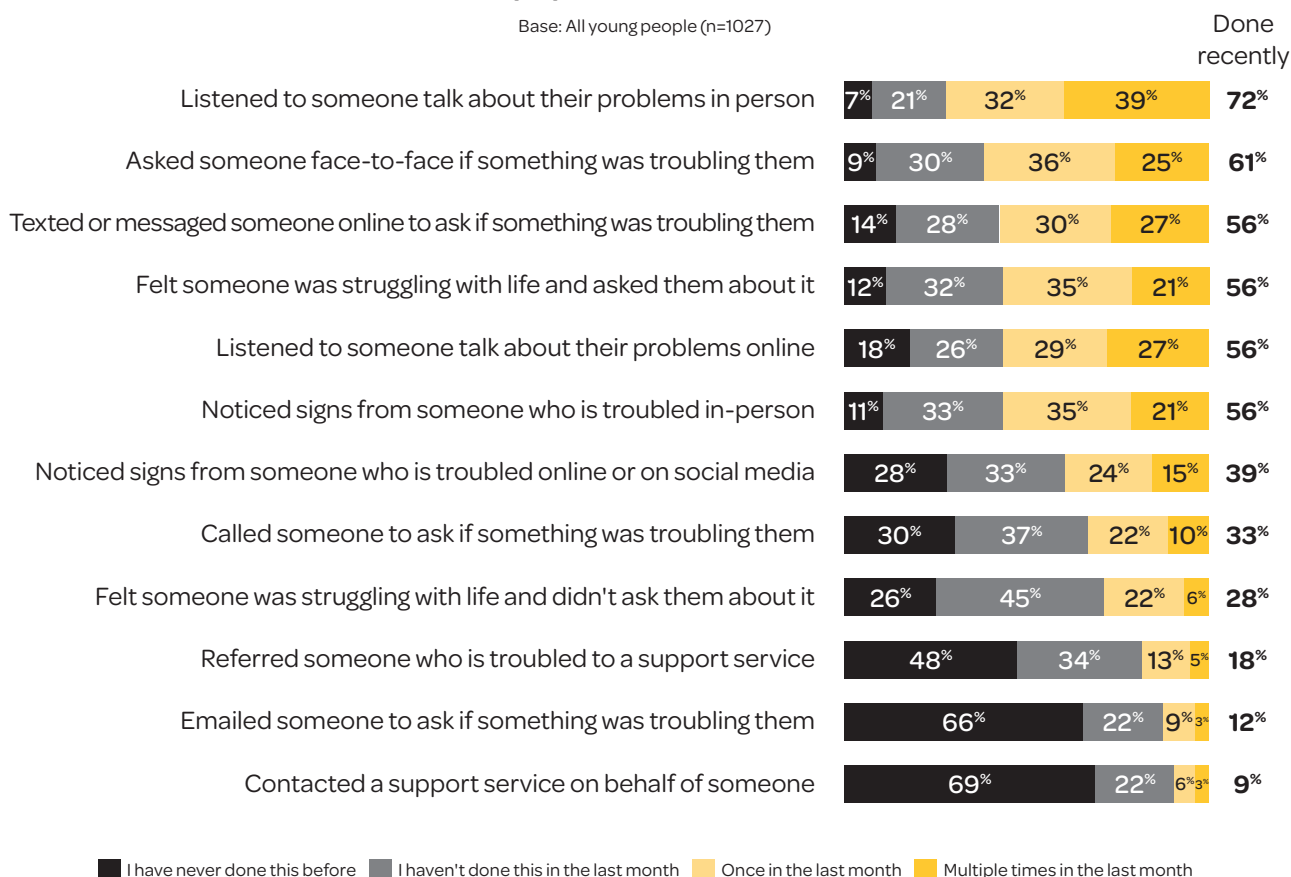


71% of young people prefer to be in person when asking a close friend, 'are you OK?' and listening to someone talk about their problems.

This is reinforced by data showing that of those who have supported someone in the past month 80% of female respondents and 62% of male respondents have listened to someone talk about their problems in person.

Recent supportive behaviour

Base: All young people (n=1027)

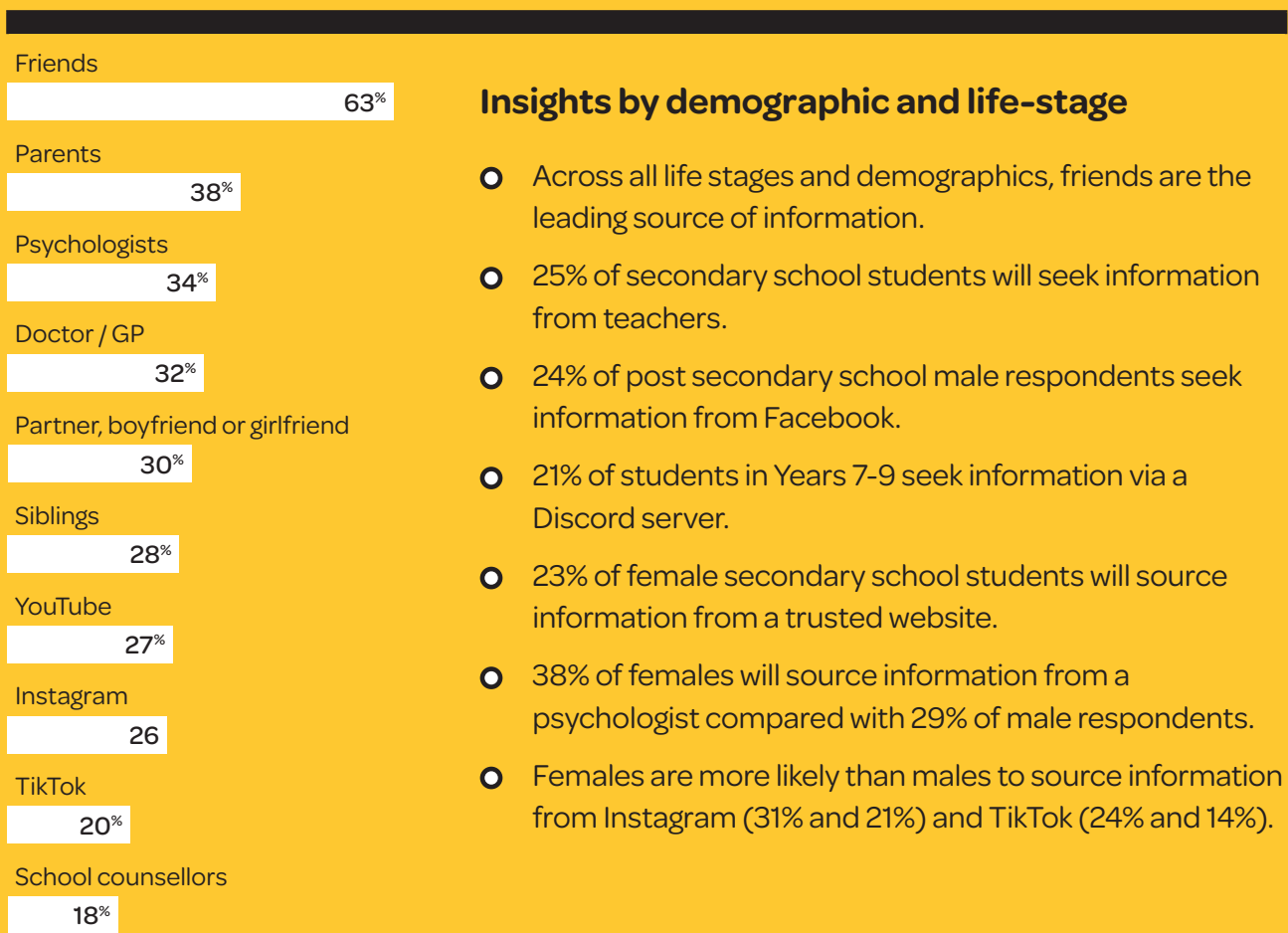


FINDINGS: MENTAL HEALTH INFORMATION

When looking for information related to the mental health and wellbeing of themselves and others, young people indicated they are likely to use a number of sources, however their preference is to ask people they know for information including friends and parents.

Where young people look for information

Base: All young people (n=1027)



Insights by demographic and life-stage

- Across all life stages and demographics, friends are the leading source of information.
- 25% of secondary school students will seek information from teachers.
- 24% of post secondary school male respondents seek information from Facebook.
- 21% of students in Years 7-9 seek information via a Discord server.
- 23% of female secondary school students will source information from a trusted website.
- 38% of females will source information from a psychologist compared with 29% of male respondents.
- Females are more likely than males to source information from Instagram (31% and 21%) and TikTok (24% and 14%).

I would help them out by kind of just being there for them and trying to help them and, like, validate their feelings. Like, if you're feeling like sad or angry, I'd say that's very fair to feel that here are some ways you can kind of cope with that, if you want to take that...I learned this through books and stuff and posts I read about validating feelings

- Female, 14

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

YouthInsight used a mixed research method combining a qualitative phase with quantitative survey. Twenty four paired respondents representing a range of relationships were interviewed in depth. We surveyed a total of n=1,027 young people aged from 12 to 25 years.

At an overall level, quotas were set by gender, key age groups and state to ensure a balanced distribution. Where exact quotas were not met, the data was weighted in order to ensure the data is representative of the population.

We asked people to self-identify gender. Only in instances where there is a significant difference statistically have we highlighted data related to specific demographic groups.



The demographics of respondents included:

- 48% male, 48% female and 3% non-binary
- 17% living in regional or remote areas
- from each state and territory across Australia
- 83% were students.
- 3% Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

R U OK? will use the data and insights from this research to develop resources and communications that empower and build the confidence of young Australians to pro-actively look out for one another and support the people in their world through life's ups and downs.

ABOUT R U OK?

R U OK? is a harm prevention charity that encourages people to stay connected and have conversations that can help others through difficult times in their lives.

Our work focuses on building the motivation, confidence and skills of the help-giver – the person who can have a meaningful conversation with someone who is struggling with life.

R U OK? contributes to suicide prevention efforts by encouraging people to invest more time in their personal relationships and building the capacity of informal support networks – friends, family and colleagues - to be alert to those around them, have a conversation if they identify signs of distress or difficulty and connect someone to appropriate support, long before they're in crisis.

R U OK? acknowledges Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities as the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging. We are an inclusive organisation and respect people of all backgrounds, genders, sexualities, cultures, bodies and abilities.

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