



The New Normal: 8 Ways to Care for Gen Z in a Post- Pandemic World

In February 2021, about a year into the spread of COVID-19 in the United States, Springtide conducted a national survey of 2,500 young people ages 13 to 25 (Gen Z) about their experiences navigating the pandemic. Major insights from the study are gathered in a new guide entitled *The New Normal*, which offers eight ways that trusted adults can care for young people during this complex and delicate time in their lives.

Though the pandemic certainly has not been easy for anyone, the pandemic experience of young people is unique because of the opportunities lost. Unlike an adult returning to a well-known office at a steady job, in many instances, young people have missed out on developmental markers and moments that are both incredibly formative as well as singular—once missed, they’re gone.

A core component of Springtide’s mission is to help adults caring for young people to care better. Caring for young people after a year of grief, trauma, upheaval, and uncertainty is a crucial calling, requiring adults to be informed about how young people have experienced the past year and how they are feeling at the current moment. To that end, in addition to the findings published in our guide, on the following are major findings derived from *The New Normal* study.

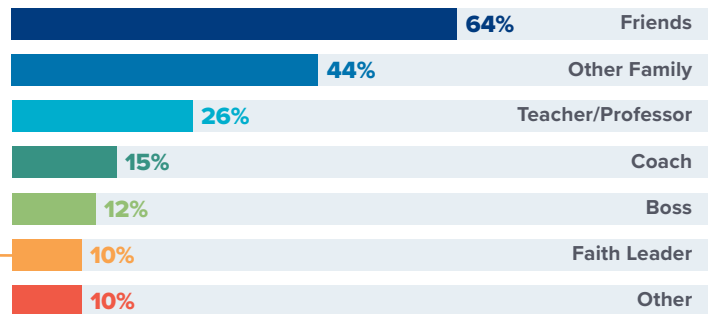


An already lonely generation got lonelier, and few are hearing from faith leaders

A perplexing proportion of young people (42%) say no one outside their home has reached out to see if they are alright, leaving nearly half feeling isolated (47%) and without anyone to talk to about how they are feeling or what they are going through (47%). Though they've spent lots of time at home around family members and roommates, 59% agree that even while living with others, they still feel alone.

If anyone outside of your home has reached out to you personally, who was it?

Participants were allowed to select more than one option.



Percentages are rounded

Just 10% say a faith leader has reached out to them personally since the pandemic began.

Young people lack confidence in the government and feel less safe in church

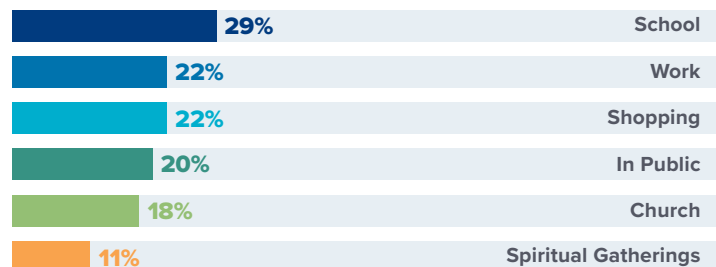
A majority of young people (65%) do not feel the government did their best to protect us during the pandemic.

It appears young people also lack confidence that religious institutions can keep them safe.

Notably, 50% of young people agree that their faith community has done a great job navigating the pandemic—a higher approval rating than either government or schools. This may suggest that young people, fearing that their church or temple are not able to provide safety, are satisfied with their decision to remain closed and offer virtual services instead.

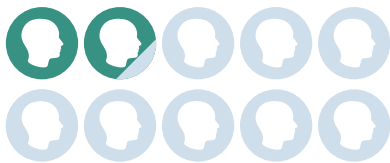
Spaces where young people say they feel safe during the pandemic.

Participants were allowed to select more than one option.



Percentages are rounded

1 in 5 of young people lost contact with religious gatherings and few find virtual services meaningful



Nearly 1 in 5 young people (18%) told Springtide they **lost contact with attending religious/spiritual services during the pandemic**, and about the same percentage of respondents said **they were happy that this connection was lost (20%)**.

Though nearly half of young people say they watched at least one religious/spiritual service online (44%), very few young people say they found joy (13%) or hope (14%) in these services. Just 12% say they hope virtual services continue after the pandemic.

Despite lackluster engagement with faith communities, the faith of young people is holding steady

A plurality of young people say their faith remained steady during the pandemic (47%). While 27% say they are doubting their faith more or lost their faith completely, nearly the same percentage (26%) say their faith has gotten stronger during the pandemic.

Young people are seeing the divisive effect of the pandemic on the country

Nearly 7 in 10 (67%) young people agree that the pandemic has really torn people apart, while only 38% say they found hope in people being kind to each other during the pandemic.

Young people have seen the limits of technology and desire more substantive relationships

Nearly half of young people (47%) reported losing connection with friends because of the pandemic. Though Gen Zers have been called digital natives, 40% disagree that connecting with people, even virtually, makes them feel better. Just 29% say that virtual school is a practice they would want to keep. The majority (66%) agree that “For the most part, I won’t take for granted relationships and opportunities the way I did before.”

What young people need are trustworthy, understanding adults who appreciate the important yet delicate task of caring for them right now.

Nearly a third of young people say they aren't flourishing when it comes to their mental health and wellness. Six in ten say they feel unsettled, uncomfortable, or stressed not knowing what their lives will be like next year.

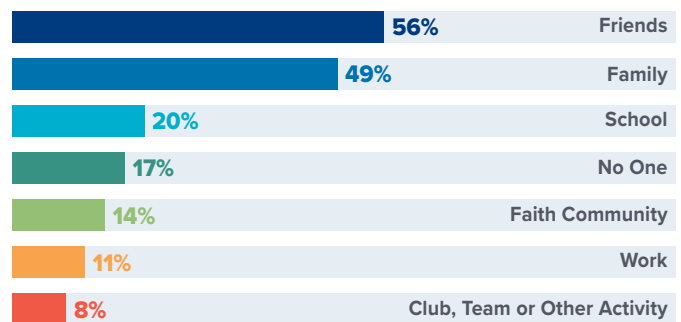
In last year's *State of Religion & Young People 2020*, Springtide discovered that the presence of trusted adults—whether parents, teachers, coaches, or faith leaders—can have a significant effect on a young person's sense of meaning and purpose. However, mere presence usually isn't enough to gain the trust needed to influence a young person. Adults must also be thoughtful and discerning about their approach.

Those who participated in *The New Normal* study told us that when they are going through a challenging time, they gravitate toward people who "just let me talk to them" (55%) and who "help me see the positive side" of difficult circumstances (40%).

Notably, just 14% say they have turned to their faith community when feeling overwhelmed and unsure of what to do, while just 18% say they connected with their faith community to help them cope during a challenging or difficult time. Faith leaders in particular have an opportunity in the coming months to show young people that they care.

When you have felt overwhelmed and didn't know what to do about something, who did you turn to for help?

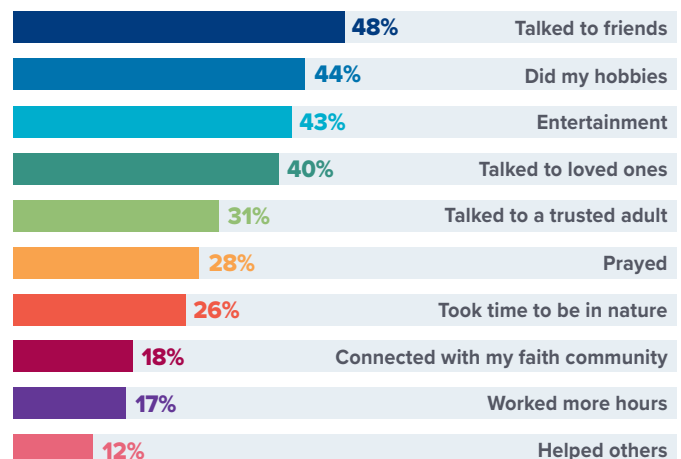
Participants were allowed to select more than one option.



Percentages are rounded

What were some things you did that helped you cope during your challenging or difficult time?

Participants were allowed to select more than one option.



Percentages are rounded

The New Normal guide suggests eight, research-informed ways that all adults caring for young people can ensure they are meeting young people where they're really at. These include:

- 1. CREATE SAFETY** *to help young people regain their footing*
- 2. GRIEVE WHAT'S BEEN LOST** *without dwelling on the negatives*
- 3. CELEBRATE WHAT'S BEEN GAINED** *without insisting on optimism*
- 4. RESIST COMPARISON** *by making space for a range of emotions*
- 5. GET TOGETHER** *to combat isolation with intentional gatherings*
- 6. TAKE CARE OF THE BODY** *to help the body and mind process stress*
- 7. TURN TO THE ARTS** *to find new modes of expression*
- 8. FOCUS ON THE PRACTICAL** *by offering young people concrete help*

The guide also offers concrete, scientifically backed, *Exercises in Empathy* that can help equip trusted adults to guide young people as we emerge into this new normal.

The digital edition of *The New Normal* is available now, for free on our website (www.springtideresearch.org/the-new-normal). If you would like more information about the study or to schedule an interview with Dr. Josh Packard, Executive Director of Springtide, please contact Kevin Singer, Head of Media and Public Relations for Springtide Research Institute: Kevin@springtideresearch.org.