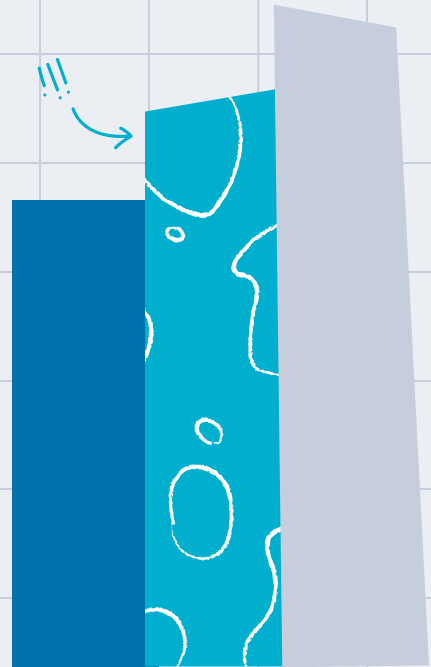
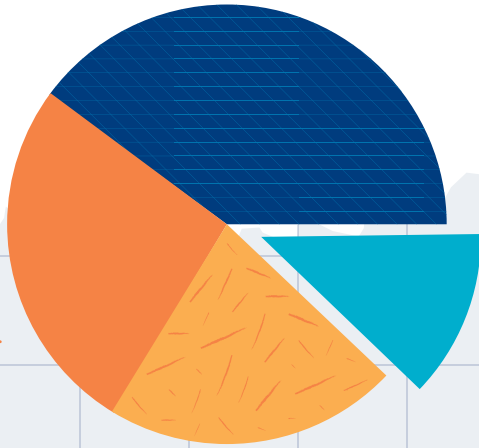




WHAT'S INSIDE

- ◆ Who is Springtide?
- ◆ Young People & Mental Health:
The Importance of Connection
- ◆ Belonging Case Study
- ◆ 5 Trends & Insights on
Generation Alpha



upward

by Springtide Research Institute

**You want what's best
for young people.**

**We do too.
Let's work
together.**



We help schools and organizations achieve their mission using data. From focus groups, to surveys, to data analysis, we'll help you identify successes, roadblocks, and next steps.

“The Belonging Survey keeps us rooted in our mission—to welcome each student with dignity, mercy, hospitality, and a genuine sense of community. The survey provides meaningful data that helps us turn belonging into more than a value. It becomes a reality we measure and continuously strive to strengthen.”

—Sean K,

Principal, Bishop Feehan High School,
Attleboro, Massachusetts



Springtide Research Institute was founded in 2019 under the umbrella of Lasallian Educational and Research Initiatives (LERI). LERI is a nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) member organization in the State of Minnesota. Springtide Research Institute harnesses social-scientific methods to learn from and about young people ages 13 to 25.

Belonging in

SCHOOL

SCHOOL CULTURE

Building Connection & Belonging Helps Young People's Mental Health

When it comes to the challenges of mental health, young people don't share with just anyone. They want to talk to people they trust.

Our 2022 report *Mental Health & Gen Z: What Educators Need to Know* shares our finding that most young people ages 13 to 25 (55%) want someone who will listen—not advise or fix—when they are going through something difficult.

The 80 young people we interviewed linked their sense of trust to a variety of factors, including knowing someone for a long time, having their experiences validated and needs supported, and feeling a sense of mutual exchange and respect.



Adapted from *Mental Health & Gen Z: What Educators Need to Know*, © 2022.
Available at Amazon and springtideresearch.org/shop



What is connection?

Connection describes the depth, number, and type of relationships a person has. Young people can be connected to one another, their families, friends, nonfamily adults, and even larger communities or groups. Schools are hubs of potential belonging, in both the large community of the entire school and the individual subcommunities that make it up. This gives young people the opportunity to forge relationships that can meet a variety of needs: numerous acquaintances with a few close ties, friendships or mentorships based on shared interests, and an overall sense of being linked to a whole “body” of other students, faculty, and staff. Because connection is not just about *gathering*, all these types of relationships are important within the school context.

Why does connection matter for mental health?

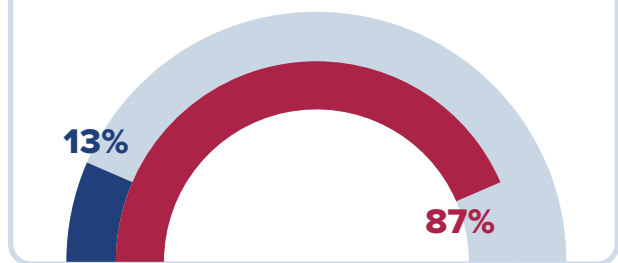
Young people who have more, and more significant, connections are less likely to suffer from mental illness. They are more likely to report mental wellness and flourishing if they have relationships with friends, family members, and others. Sociologists sometimes refer to this sense of connection as social integration. The social sciences have demonstrated, in the words of sociologist Allan V. Horwitz, that “people with more frequent contacts with family, friends, and neighbors and who are involved with voluntary organizations such as churches, civic organizations, and clubs report better mental health than those who are more isolated.”

(The quotation above is from Allan V. Horwitz, “An Overview of Sociological Perspectives on the Definitions, Causes, and Responses to Mental Health and Illness,” *A Handbook for the Study of Mental Health: Social Contexts, Theories, and Systems* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], 10.)

Our data show that teachers have a role in students’ feelings of belonging. Young people who say they have had a meaningful interaction with a teacher or professor in a typical week report lower rates of loneliness compared to those who have not had such an interaction in a typical week. Eighty-seven percent of those who have not had a meaningful interaction with a teacher or professor say they are lonely at school most of the time and do not want to be there, compared to only 13% who have had a meaningful interaction.

“I feel lonely at school most of the time and do not want to be there most days.”

- Have had a meaningful interaction with a teacher or professor
- Have **not** had a meaningful interaction with a teacher or professor



While we don’t underestimate the critical role of administrators and other educational leaders, the touchpoint that teachers have in the lives of students cannot be overstated when it comes to connection. Still, *any* trusted adult at school can make a difference.

Even without reading scientific studies, many people understand the importance of social connections for mental health. Natalia, 22, captured what many of her peers indicate in both surveys and interviews about the importance of deep connection:



“Community gives you the sense of not being so alone [even] in times that it apparently looks alone, like [when] there’s no one around or my parents aren’t here. In that aspect, [my community] reminds me that I belong somewhere with these people who understand me and have seen me grow up.” She describes how feeling that she *belongs* to a group or community, even when she is alone, yields a positive experience of support for her.

A difficulty that many young people articulated in interviews is that isolation is both a cause of mental unwellness and a response to it. While Mason, 21, understands the value of a supportive community, he also notices the urge to retreat into isolation, almost as a defense mechanism. “The part of mental health that can be difficult is that sometimes people kind of *cave in* and corner themselves and isolate themselves from other people. And I think that can be very dangerous because when they do that, they may be in a state where they can’t properly help themselves...but then there’s no one there to tell them like, *Hey, this is not good for you.*”

28% of young people who say **they have at least one trusted adult at school** also say **they feel like they belong at school** and people know who they are.



Only 15% of those who say they **do not** have at least one trusted adult say they feel like they belong at school and people know who they are.

Mason notes the temptation to turn inward when struggling but also why connection is so important for mental health: to have someone notice when something is wrong. Sociologists point to this when confirming that being connected (or “socially integrated”) has positive consequences for mental health: because *being noticed* matters.

Springtide has long had an interest in how young people experience belonging. Our data show that 62% of young people with *no trusted adults* in their lives agree with the statement “I feel completely alone,” and only 9% of young people with five or more trusted adults in their lives agree with the same statement. In other words, trusted adults are a critical piece for helping young people experience belonging.

Facilitating connection for young people is one of the first steps to becoming a school that is mental-health friendly. ♦

SPRINGTIDE CASE STUDY

How the Christian Brothers of the Midwest District Used Custom Research to Examine Belonging in Their Schools

CLIENT

Christian Brothers Midwest District (CBMD) 12 high schools located throughout the Midwest

INDUSTRY

Education, grades 9–12

CHALLENGE

To understand the level of belonging experienced by CBMD students

APPROACH

Design and administer a custom survey for CBMD high school students. The survey:

- Measured the extent to which students feel as though they belong and thrive in CBMD schools
- Identified ways to foster greater student thriving and overall well-being
- Assessed how students perceive and experience the core values of CBMD's mission
- Uncovered influences on students' spiritual and faith development
- Identified links between belonging and academic success

Springtide's custom research team provided active support to each of the 11 CBMD schools that participated, gathering nearly 5,000 survey responses.

RESULT

CBMD leaders pored over their district findings as well as those delivered individually to each school. Six months after the report delivery, CBMD faculty members presented their district's new insights about belonging at an education conference. One principal remarked: "I love these reports. I hope we can continue it each year so I can compare cohort data."

After receiving their findings the first year, CBMD extended the study for another year in order to compare year-over-year results. Springtide administered a follow-up survey almost immediately, gathering a second year's worth of data to identify trends in belonging, flourishing, and faith within the student body.

Read and download the full case study at springtideresearch.org/cbmd

Wondering about young people? We can help.

We offer ready-made survey kits, as well as completely custom solutions. Our researchers can become your in-house experts.

Start a conversation: springtideresearch.org/upward

—
“It’s hard being a teen. Like no matter how hard we try, we get disrespected and looked down on. We aren’t stupid. We’re young and learning.”

—
“I wish adults in my life would ask or be curious about...experiences, past and present, that have and currently shape who I am.”

—
“I feel there is more hate, and it is made worse by social media.”

—
“Recently, I’ve started reciting affirmations, and this helps me feel better about my actions in life. Self-positivity helps me so much, and it makes me feel better even in the darkest hours.”

—
“I think it’s so important for young people’s voices to be heard in the midst of discussions on faith and spirituality, so I really appreciate the idea of Springtide Ambassadors as a way to create a forum for those voices to be heard.”

—
“Many hobbies or activities have sacred elements to them. Even just conversations with your family or day-to-day moments can be sacred. You don’t have to go to a synagogue or church or mosque.”

—
“We need to be more accepting of each other.”

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

We seek to amplify young people’s voices in everything we do.

With a core focus on education, religion, meaning-making, and well-being, we use quantitative and qualitative methods to examine how young people understand their identities and experiences. Our findings inform practices across organizations, schools, and faith communities, helping trusted adults foster environments where young people can flourish.

springtideresearch.org/research

GEN ALPHA

Download the 42-page report for FREE at:
springtideresearch.org/gen-alpha

5 TRENDS & INSIGHTS ON GENERATION ALPHA

Born in 2010 and after, Gen Alpha is the newest generation of young people. We asked its oldest members—13-year-olds—to tell us about themselves.

1 Part of the most racially diverse generation, Gen Alpha 13-year-olds tend to see increased racial and ethnic diversity in the US as a good thing.

Far fewer believe that an increase in racial and ethnic diversity is a bad thing. Many 13-year-olds attend racially diverse schools and befriend racially diverse peers.

How 13-year-olds respond to: “How important is race or ethnicity in describing who you are?”

■ Not at all ■ Slightly ■ Moderately ■ Very

All 13-year-olds



BIPOC 13-year-olds

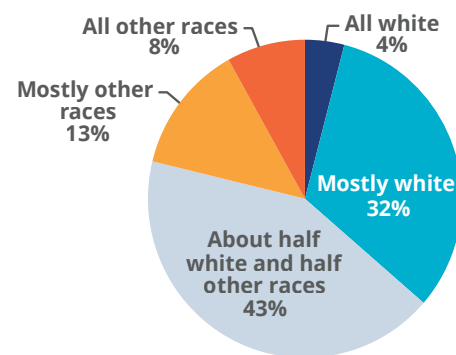


Note: Respondents were considered to be BIPOC if they identified with at least one non-white race or ethnicity. BIPOC respondents comprised 35% (n = 391) of the full sample.
Source: Springtide Research Institute survey of 1,112 young people, age 13, conducted in January 2024.

2 Friendships—often racially diverse—feel central.

A large majority of young teens agree that their friendships feel supportive and rewarding. Most 13-year-olds say that their closest friends include someone whose racial identity differs from theirs. Primarily because “my friends use it,” nearly all 13-year-olds are on social media. Most feel as though COVID-19 did not have a negative impact on their relationships with friends.

How 13-year-olds respond to: “Students at my school are...”



Note: Respondents who indicated that they are not sure (n = 30) or are not in school (n = 10) are excluded from this figure.
Source: Springtide Research Institute survey of 1,112 young people, age 13, conducted in January 2024.

3 COVID-19’s impact wasn’t all negative.

Three-quarters of 13-year-olds say that COVID-19 had a positive, mixed, or neutral overall impact on their lives, compared to one-quarter who evaluate it as having negatively impacted their lives in general. Its impact on family relationships is evaluated especially positively.

How 13-year-olds see the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

■ Positive impact ■ Mixed impact
■ Negative impact ■ No impact

Life in general



Education



Mental health



Physical health



Family relationships



Friendships

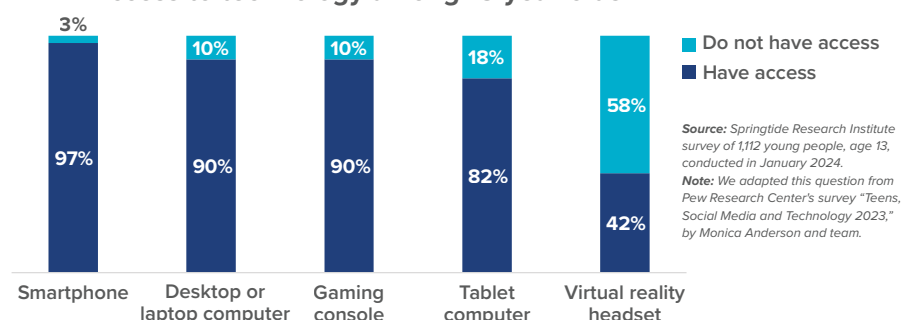


Source: Springtide Research Institute survey of 1,112 young people, age 13, conducted in January 2024.

4 Smartphones feel “addictive,” and parents monitor use.

Nearly all 13-year-olds say that they have a smartphone, and nearly half agree that they are “addicted” to it. Most spend at least a few hours on their phone daily. Teens commonly have access to laptops, tablets, and gaming consoles too. More than half of 13-year-olds say that they have to ask their parents’ permission to use apps or sites. They also report that their parents limit screen time and monitor online activity.

Access to technology among 13-year-olds

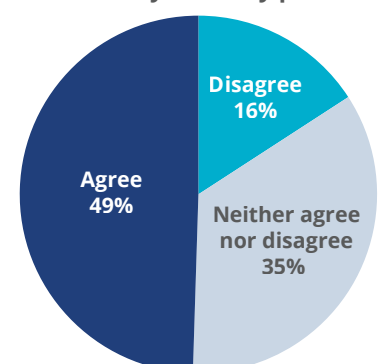


Source: Springtide Research Institute survey of 1,112 young people, age 13, conducted in January 2024.
Note: We adapted this question from Pew Research Center’s survey “Teens, Social Media and Technology 2023,” by Monica Anderson and team.

5 Climate change haunts futures.

Six in ten 13-year-olds worry about the effects of climate change at least sometimes. Nearly half expect that their lives will turn out differently than their parents’ lives because of it. A large majority sees efforts to reduce the negative effects of climate change as good for society.

How 13-year-olds respond to: “Because of climate change, my life will turn out much differently from my parents’ lives.”



Note: For this chart, response options “strongly agree” and “agree” are combined under “agree”; response options “strongly disagree” and “disagree” are combined under “disagree.”
Source: Springtide Research Institute survey of 1,112 young people, age 13, conducted in January 2024.





Research solutions that move you forward

Springtide Custom Research turns our researchers into your in-house experts. Empirical data informs and inspires, guiding your next moves and strengthening your plans. Serving young people starts with knowing who and where they are.

Fully customized. Full service. Full speed ahead.

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
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