

CRISIS TEXT LINE |



How Youth Found Resilience During the Pandemic: Actions Within Reach



SUMMARY REPORT

OCTOBER 2022

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Introduction

The top five main stressors discussed by youth were: depression/sadness, stress/anxiety, relationships, suicide, and isolation.

In 2021, against the backdrop of a burgeoning COVID pandemic, the U.S. Surgeon General sounded the alarm on another crisis; over the last decade, the mental health of America’s youth had become an emergency. From 2009-2019, the number of **high school students** who reported being unable to participate in regular activities because they **felt sad or hopeless increased 40%** (from 26% to 37%)¹. From 2019-2020, overall **mental health-related emergency department visits increased by 25%** for 5-to 11-year-olds and by 31% for 12-to 17-year-olds².

Crisis Text Line is an organization on the frontlines of this emergency, providing people of any age including youth (ages 17 and under) with free, 24/7 mental health support via SMS and WhatsApp since 2013. This report was created with insights from Crisis Text Line conversations with young people, across demographics, who reached out to Crisis Text Line throughout the pandemic (2019-2021). The findings illuminate the most pressing crises on the minds of young texters and the coping mechanisms that helped.

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Youth described their main stressors as depression/sadness, stress/anxiety, relationships, suicide, and isolation. Youth also expressed hope for their situation and described a variety of low-cost or free activities that help improve their wellbeing and overall feelings of resilience. Below is a summary of our key takeaways (see the full report for a detailed description of the results and research methods).

Thanks to our partners, [Hopelab](#), a social innovation lab and impact investor advancing solutions that support, affirm, and empower young people and [Well Being Trust](#), a national foundation supporting the mental, social, and spiritual health of the nation.



¹ [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), October 23, 2020

² [Children’s Hospital Association](#), November 2, 2021

Key Takeaways

In the middle of the night in 2020 – when most mental health resources that provide services during core business hours were closed for the day – youth turned to Crisis Text Line.

Youth reached out to Crisis Text Line more often between 12am – 6am in 2020³.

During 2020, almost one-fourth of youth conversations (24%) with Crisis Text Line began between midnight and 6am (a significant increase from 11% in 2019 and 14% in 2021). This may suggest that youth experienced more sleep disruptions during the first year of the pandemic.

We saw the most significant changes in youth conversations on topics of stress/anxiety, isolation and loneliness, grief and bereavement, and eating disorders and body issues during 2019-2021. These may be particular issues to monitor for growing trends in the coming year.

The top five main stressors discussed by youth were: depression/sadness, stress/anxiety, relationships, suicide, and isolation. These remained the top five stressors before and during the pandemic (from 2019-2021).

Confronted with this growing crisis, many youth demonstrated they already have free, accessible tools at their fingertips to feel better in moments of pain.

The top 12 coping mechanisms identified by youth of all demographics were: music, reading/writing, sleeping or bathing, art, talking with friends, watching TV/videos, connecting with family, accessing therapy, exercising, engaging with school-based supports, meditation, and playing video games.

- Music was the most frequently mentioned coping mechanism across all years.
- Talking with friends and family, engaging in art, and meditation were frequent coping mechanisms in 2020 once COVID-19 emerged, but were mentioned less often in 2021.
- Over time, the percentage of youth conversations mentioning coping mechanisms of sleeping and showering, watching TV/videos, playing video games, and exercising generally increased.
- A smaller percentage of conversations with youth mentioned school-based supports as a coping mechanism from 2019-2020.
- The percentage of youth conversations that discussed reading and writing, and accessing therapy, decreased over time.

³ Analyses adjusted for time zones

Actions Within Reach

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Crisis Text Line Research
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Amid the growing mental health crisis, youth demonstrated that they have the coping skills and resilience to feel better in moments of pain. These results indicate that addressing the youth mental health crisis may start by empowering youth to turn to already-accessible tools and resources to build resilience.

Youth, caregivers/relatives, educators, and policymakers may consider the following ways to support youth mental health:

- **Youth:** Consider simple activities that can be part of your daily life that you may notice help you feel better when you are stressed or sad. For example, finding ways to express yourself, such as writing/reading, doing art, and playing or listening to music were all top coping mechanisms for youth in 2019-2021. Create or keep a list of coping mechanisms that work for you, and ask friends, family, and trusted adults for help in times of need.
- **Caregivers/Relatives:** Listen to the youth in your lives, and try to support them in old and new ways. Consider creating spaces to talk and listen, chances to connect with friends in-person, limited time to go on-line to provide opportunities to bond with others (such as in gaming communities or via TikTok).
- **Educators:** Keep a list of coping mechanisms at the ready to help your students go from a high-stress moment to a sense of calm like meditation or journaling. Youth who reached out to Crisis Text Line suggested a range of relaxation techniques and creative activities that helped them feel better. Work with other school staff to make time for youth to engage in coping mechanisms while in the classroom or common school spaces.
- **Policymakers:** Consider ways that less-traditional resources like music, relaxation, creative expression, connecting with friends and family, and exercise can be elevated and prioritized in mental health supports for young people. Support ways for young people to engage in coping tools like art, meditation, and music through school and community programming.

We hope this report provides practical insights into cost-effective, accessible ways we can support youth through moments of crisis so that young people can thrive. In addition, we believe this study can inform further research to explore coping mechanisms that address youth mental health crisis issues across demographics in ways that advance health equity.

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In a crisis?

Text **HOME** to **741741** to connect with a Crisis Counselor
Free 24/7 support at your fingertips