1.3 million
conversations

in a year of

anxiety and stress

United in Empathy | Fifth Annual Report

CRISIS TEXT LINE

We engaged in over 1.3 million conversations with texters throughout 2023.

We examined these conversations to explore top mental health issues, stressors, and coping strategies.

Executive Summary

Crisis Text Line has a unique understanding of the state of the mental health crisis in the United States.
Each year, we support over a million conversations with texters in need across the country, or more than 3,500 daily. Since we provide mental health support 24/7, we have insight into the timing, language, and key issues across the U.S, almost in real time. Our conversations present a special snapshot of what people in crisis talked about last year.

For our 5th annual United in Empathy Report, we analyzed 1.3 million conversations from 2023 to learn about emerging mental health trends. Here is what we found:

1. **Mondays and evenings** were associated with the heaviest traffic in 2023.
2. **Anxiety and stress were the top issues** that texters brought to us, followed by relationships, depression and sadness, suicide, and isolation and loneliness.
3. **Self-harm and bullying surged** for a third consecutive year and anxiety increased compared to 2022. These trends may be related. For example, involvement in bullying,

whether as a victim or perpetrator, can increase the risk for both self-harm and anxiety.
4. Despite a lot of stressful current events in 2023, **texters reached out first and foremost to discuss issues closer to home:** concerns over personal relationships, finances, and school.
5. **Texters found many creative ways to cope with anxiety and stress,** primarily by talking to loved ones, family, friends, and therapists but also by listening to music and playing video games.

We hope these insights can support those dedicated to improving the lives of people in need of mental health support such as policymakers,

Anxiety and stress were the top issues in our conversations in 2023.

educators, parents, clinicians, volunteers, and others. For questions about Crisis Text Line's research, please contact us at research@crisistextline.org.

About This Report

This report is a summary of Crisis Text Line's trends in our conversation traffic and content across the United States based on anonymized conversations. On our website, you will find a series of fact sheets that accompany this report that highlight:

1. National trends in 2023
2. Insights for each U.S. state
3. Statistics by a set of self-identified demographic groups

Crisis Text Line Data

Crisis Text Line data is unique. It provides a special snapshot of mental health across the United States because:

1. **We are in direct conversation with people in crisis.** What we learn from them is not simply the result of a survey; it is in-the-moment reporting about how people feel, and how they describe these feelings. We don't prompt them to categorize their issues. We ask what their crisis is and listen.

2. **We have a sense of emerging trends almost in real time.** For example, in March 2020, as the world was shutting down, we experienced an unusual spike of conversation volume. We also see the psychological impact of natural disasters, mass shootings, and other events in our data.

3. **We have a long-term perspective based on a large dataset of nearly 10 million conversations** (almost 300 million individual text messages) that we collected over 10 years. A lot has changed in U.S. society over this time, and we can see how events like presidential elections and the COVID-19 pandemic affected people's mental health across the country.

4. **Our insights are derived from a combination of several sources:** anonymized conversations, Crisis Counselor assessments, an optional post-conversation survey on demographics, metadata on timing, and estimated location based on area codes. We also have the privilege of having a clinical team who lend their expertise in interpreting what we see.

Research Ethics at Crisis Text Line

There is a mental health emergency in the United States, and Crisis Text Line has been on the frontlines of this crisis. We believe it is our duty to support research efforts that might contribute solutions to help with this emergency in an ethical manner. Texters who reach out to Crisis Text Line agree at the start of the conversation to our privacy policy and terms of service in order to use our service, which detail what information we collect and how we may use it, including for research such as the United in Empathy report. We care deeply about protecting the privacy and security of our texters, and go to great lengths to protect, store, analyze, and share insights from our anonymized crisis conversations to ethically help the world address mental health issues.

Crisis Text Line's research is overseen by an Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Data Privacy

At Crisis Text Line, we rigorously safeguard texter information through encryption, access control, intrusion detection, and other precautionary methods to ensure texter data is safe and secure. Crisis Text Line's analytic database is anonymized and de-identified. Personally identifiable information including first names, email addresses, URLs, social media handles, geographic locations, and any numbers with 4+ digits are removed and replaced with the word "SCRUBBED". For questions on data privacy and security, please email info@crisistextline.org.

Limitations and Scope

Our texters are not representative of the United States population. For this report, the analysis of mental health issues texters discuss with us is based on the subjective assessment of the Crisis Counselors who took the conversation. Crisis Counselors can tag multiple issues per conversation. Our service is anonymous and confidential. We can only estimate texter location based on the first six digits of their phone numbers. This method allows us to correctly estimate location at the state level 86% of the time. Demographic findings in the fact sheets were based on our optional post-conversation survey, which is completed by approximately 20% of texters.

Diverse, young, and predominantly girls and women

Crisis Text Line serves a young, racially and ethnically diverse texter population, most of whom identify as girls or women. Two out of every three texters who took the post-conversation survey were 24 years old or younger, 8% identify as Asian; 15% as Black or African American; 20% as Hispanic or Latinx; 2% as Middle Eastern, North African, or Arab; 4% as Native American or Alaska Native; 1% as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; 63% as White. Fifty-two percent of texters identified with a gender or sexuality under the LGBTQ+ umbrella. Individuals from varied backgrounds may face different stressors, so awareness of texter demographics is important when considering the issues discussed.

Exclusions

We excluded conversations received in our capacity as a national 988 provider in all analyses of conversation issues and demographics. We also excluded Spanish conversations because of technical constraints. In addition, we excluded pranks, tests, and conversations where the texter dropped off before being connected with a Crisis Counselor. Our goal was to provide relevant analysis to contribute meaningful insights to the mental health discourse in the United States. When we analyzed coping strategies, we limited conversations to those where at least one coping strategy was mentioned.

Mental Health Trends in the United States

Introduction

As a free, confidential, and 24/7 mental health support service, Crisis Text Line offers a unique understanding of mental health trends in the United States. We exchange over 3,500 conversations with texters across the country every day. We see mental health trends like increases in depression or anxiety among our texters almost in real time. A vast dataset of nearly 10 million anonymized and de-identified conversations allows us to examine stressors, coping strategies, and the language our texters use to describe crises in general. Analyzing these conversations enables us to recognize emerging mental health trends across the United States.

In 2023, we exchanged over 1.3 million conversations with people in crisis.[1] We analyzed the timing of conversations to learn if texters were more likely to text at night versus daytime or during the week versus the weekend. We explored the issues that texters brought us as well as the coping strategies they turned to, in order to learn not just about crises but also what helped them.

2023 was a year of anxiety based on Crisis Text Line conversations. In this report, we share a deeper dive into these conversations to identify the stressors that prompted our texters to discuss anxiety and stress, and the coping resources they reached for to find relief and support.

[1] In 2023, Crisis Text Line supported over 1.3 million conversations with people in crisis. However, a portion of these conversations were received in Crisis Text Line's capacity as a service provider of text and chat to 988. For the rest of the report, these 988 conversations are filtered out from any of the insights, and refer to only conversations received through texting 741741.

We sought to answer four key questions:

1. What did Crisis Text Line **conversation traffic** look like?

2. What **mental health issues** emerged?

3. What can we learn about **anxiety** and **stress**– the top issues in 2023?
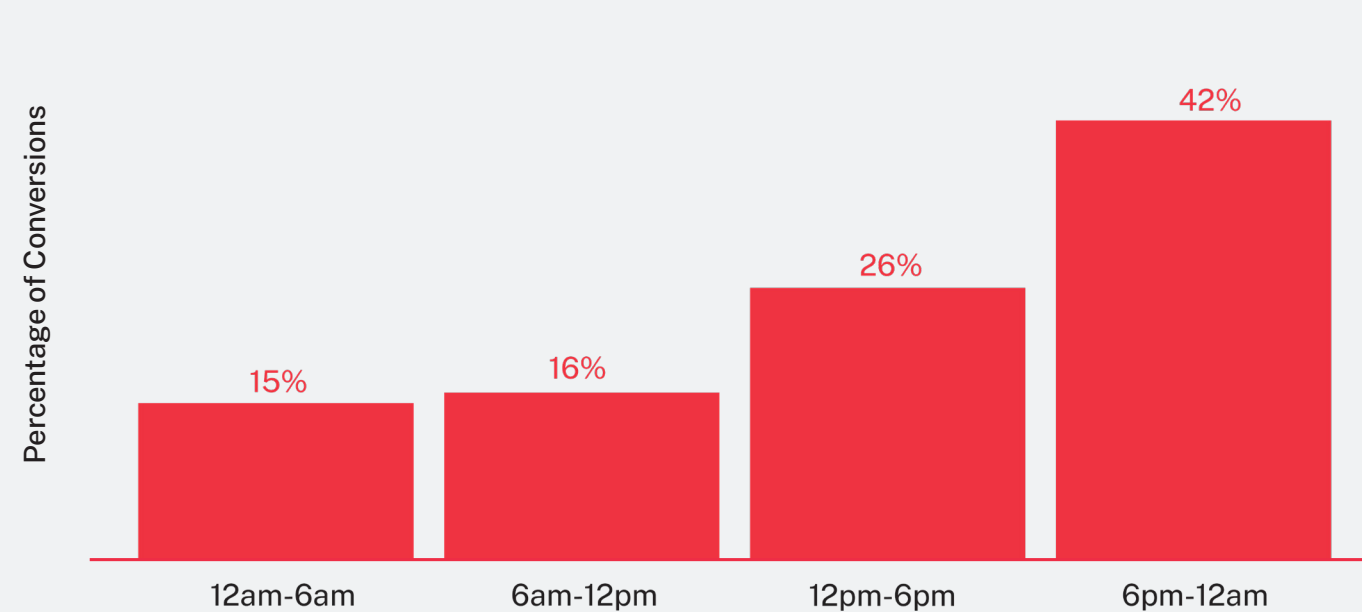
4. What helped texters **cope** with anxiety and stress?

1. What did Crisis Text Line conversation traffic look like?

We experienced higher volume in the evenings and on Mondays.

When do texters contact Crisis Text Line?
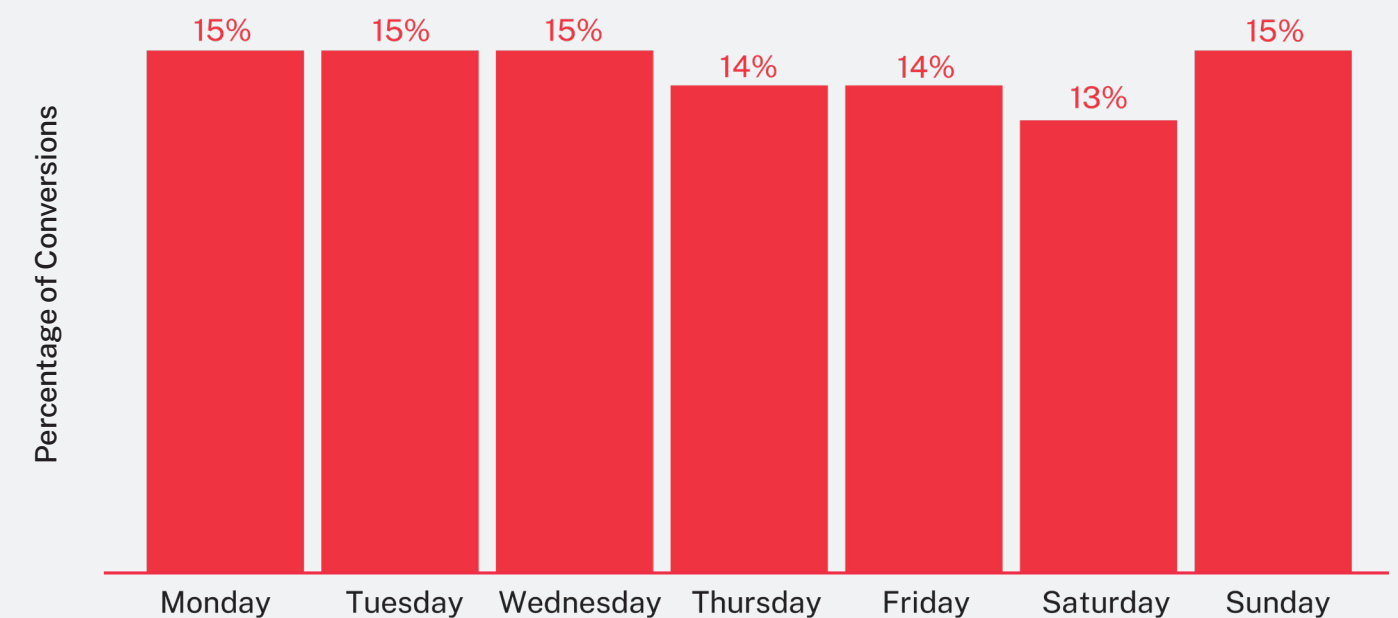We received the most conversation traffic in the evening hours in 2023.

Percentage of Conversions

12am-6am	6am-12pm	12pm-6pm	6pm-12am
15%	16%	26%	42%

Sample size
887,667 anonymized U.S. conversations with estimated texter timezone.

What days do texters contact Crisis Text Line the most?
We receive the most conversation volume on Mondays and the least on Saturdays in 2023.

Percentage of Conversions

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
15%	15%	15%	14%	14%	13%	15%

Sample size
887,667 anonymized U.S. conversations with estimated texter timezone.

Our traffic was heaviest in the evening hours.
Similar to 2022, we experienced by far the highest volume between 6pm and midnight.
We received over 40% of conversations during that period, followed by the afternoon hours between 12pm and 6pm, which was the second busiest time period.

Texters reached out most on Mondays.
The highest volume days were Mondays, with over 15% of conversations, and the lowest were Saturdays with 13%. Fridays and Saturdays tend to be lower volume days, although our traffic overall is quite evenly distributed across the week, as the chart below illustrates. Still, there is a notable dip as texters head into the weekend and an increase in conversations as Monday approaches.
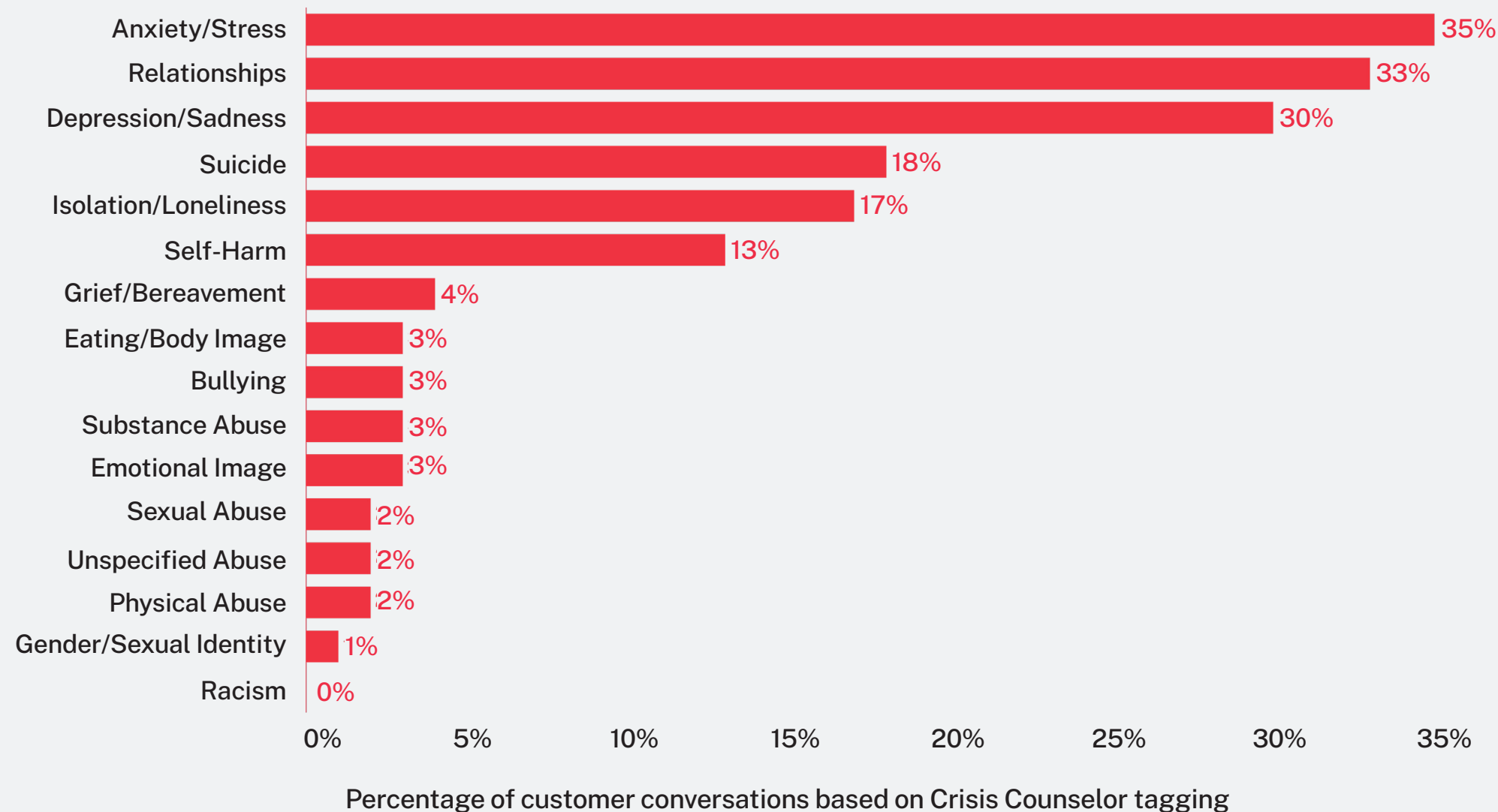
2. What mental health issues emerged?

2023 was a year of anxiety and stress; bullying increased for a third consecutive year since 2020.

What do Crisis Text Line texters talk about?
Over 1 in 3 Crisis Text Line Texters discussed anxiety and stress in 2023.

Issue	Percentage
Anxiety/Stress	35%
Relationships	33%
Depression/Sadness	30%
Suicide	18%
Isolation/Loneliness	17%
Self-Harm	13%
Grief/Bereavement	4%
Eating/Body Image	3%
Bullying	3%
Substance Abuse	3%
Emotional Image	3%
Sexual Abuse	2%
Unspecified Abuse	2%
Physical Abuse	2%
Gender/Sexual Identity	1%
Racism	0%

Percentage of customer conversations based on Crisis Counselor tagging

Sample size
887,667 anonymized Crisis Text Line conversations.

When texters reach out to us, Crisis Counselors log the issues that were discussed over the course of the conversations. Every year, we examine the most prominent issues to learn about emerging mental health trends.

Thirty-five percent of texters discussed stress and anxiety with us in 2023, making these the most prominent topics of conversation on our platform. **Anxiety** and **stress** were followed closely by **relationships** (34%); **depression** and **sadness** (30%); **suicide** (18%); and **isolation** and **loneliness** (17%). [2]

[1] The prominence of anxiety and stress in our data is mirrored by high anxiety and stress in the US population in general: in the Household Pulse Survey, over 32% of U.S. adults reported symptoms of depression and anxiety in 2023.
[2] Based on the Census Household Pulse survey, stress and anxiety have been on an improving trajectory since peaking during the early pandemic months. However, the APA's findings suggest that they topped out higher than before the pandemic.

What Anonymous Texters Say About Anxiety

"People from my school just bully me"

"I keep everything inside and struggle so much"

"I've been having panic attacks"

"Every day is so stressful"

The issues that increased in 2023: anxiety and stress; self-harm; bullying (again)

Each year, we keep an eye on mental health issues that increased in our conversations with texters compared to the prior year. This year, three themes emerged.

Crisis Text Line Conversations About Bullying

Mentions of bullying have been surging for several years.

Sample size
78,661 anonymized Crisis Text Line conversations about bullying between 2020 and 2023.

1. Anxiety and stress: texters felt pressured by personal relationships, school, and finances.

Anxiety and stress increased slightly last year from 34% in 2022 to 35% in 2023. This aligns with observations of experts at the American Psychological Association (APA), who noted that people in the United States are more anxious than before the pandemic. This may be due to Americans experiencing the psychological impacts of a collective trauma, global conflicts, racial injustice, climate disasters, and other stressors.

2. Self-harm reached a new high in 2023.
Self-harm, or harm that a person inflicts on themselves intentionally, is mentioned on average in 12-13% of Crisis Text Line conversations. In January 2023 however, it peaked at 15%. Self-harm has also been steadily rising since 2017 when it was only tagged in about 9-10% of conversations.

3. Bullying has been surging for a third consecutive year.
One of the most notable trends in recent years is that bullying increased for a third consecutive year since schools reopened after the school closures of 2020. This has also been noted by other researchers, who reported a surge in bullying once schools reopened, and high levels of bullying compared to 2019. The dip in 2020 when schools were closed is similar to what we tend to see in summer months when school is out, as the chart to the left indicates.

The increases in bullying, self-harm, and anxiety and stress might be related. For example, research suggests that bullying-related experiences, whether as a victim or a perpetrator, increase the risk for both self-harm and for anxiety.

3. What can we learn about anxiety and stress—the top issues in 2023?

Texters were most concerned about interpersonal relationships.

As we mentioned earlier, anxiety and stress were the most commonly discussed issues in our conversations in 2023. This is why we decided to take a closer look at the related stressors that texters discussed the most. We also looked at the coping strategies that helped them cope when faced with anxiety and stress based on anonymized conversations with us.

We are often asked if current events, climate change, and financial insecurities have impacted conversations about anxiety. In order to know more, we used Machine Learning (ML) to cluster anxiety or stress-related conversation topics based on the language that texters used.

> **College costs a lot of money"**
>
> / Anonymous Texter

What Anonymous Texters Say About Anxiety and Stress

"I failed a course last semester"

"I made a mistake with infidelity"

"My mom yelled at me"

"I've been dealing with my spouse's addiction"

"There's too much on my plate"

Here is what we learned. [1]

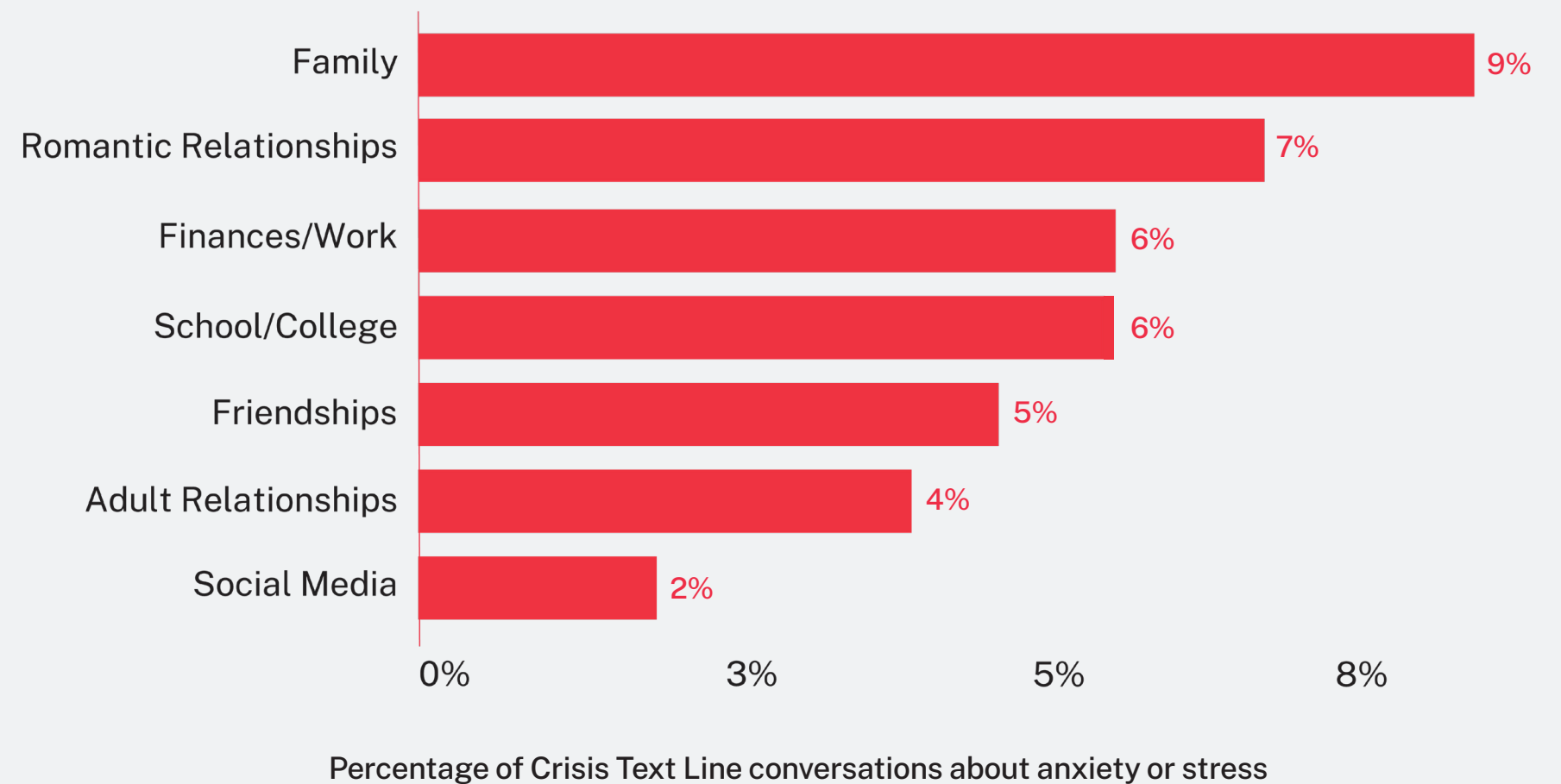## Texters stressed most about interpersonal relationships.

2023 was certainly full of stressful public events in the U.S. and around the world: political turmoil, interest rate hikes, violent racial and religious attacks, international conflict, and an abundance of discussions about AI safety as Generative AI was widely adopted around the world.

We used a Machine Learning (ML) method called topic modeling to identify specific stressors that our texters referred to in conversations about anxiety and stress.

We found that the most common stressors were: **family relationships** (including parents and siblings), **romantic relationships, finances and work, school and college, friendships, adult relationships** (involving spouses, children, and family planning), and **social media.** [2]

What are Crisis Text Line texters stressed about?
Texters stress most about issues closest to home in 2023.

Category	Percentage
Family	9%
Romantic Relationships	7%
Finances/Work	6%
School/College	6%
Friendships	5%
Adult Relationships	4%
Social Media	2%

Percentage of Crisis Text Line conversations about anxiety or stress

Sample size
191,168 Crisis Text Line conversations tagged for anxiety or stress, and assigned to topic clusters.

[1] To do this, we isolated the first few anonymized messages that texters exchanged with us where they explained what prompted them to reach out. We then only kept the ones with a negative emotional charge in order to focus on stressors as opposed to other statements.

[2] We found that many texters talked to us directly about diagnoses or clinical symptoms related to mental health: panic attacks, eating disorders, self-harm, PTSD, and OCD. We set these categories apart for the sake of this analysis, so that we could focus on other environmental stressors that might have prompted texters to reach out.

Based on the prominence of certain words, and a brief qualitative review of anonymized conversations, these were some of the topics that texters mentioned related to these categories:
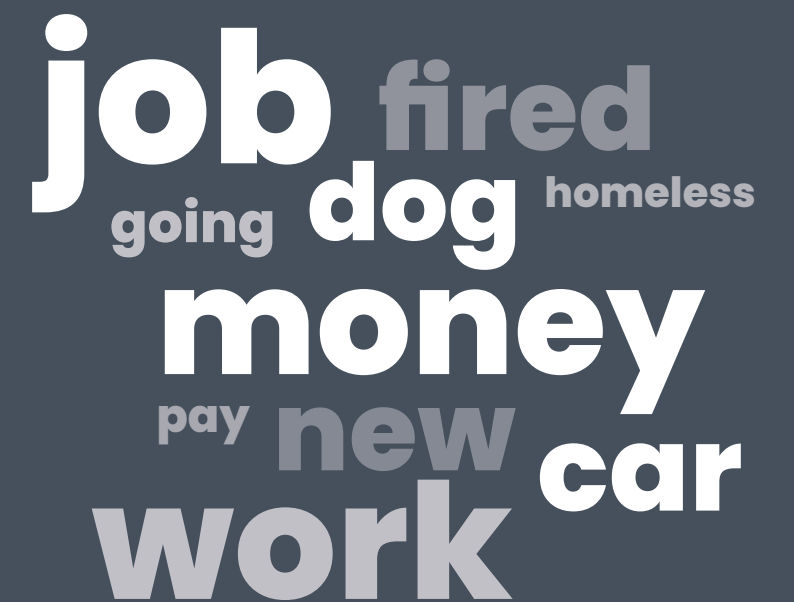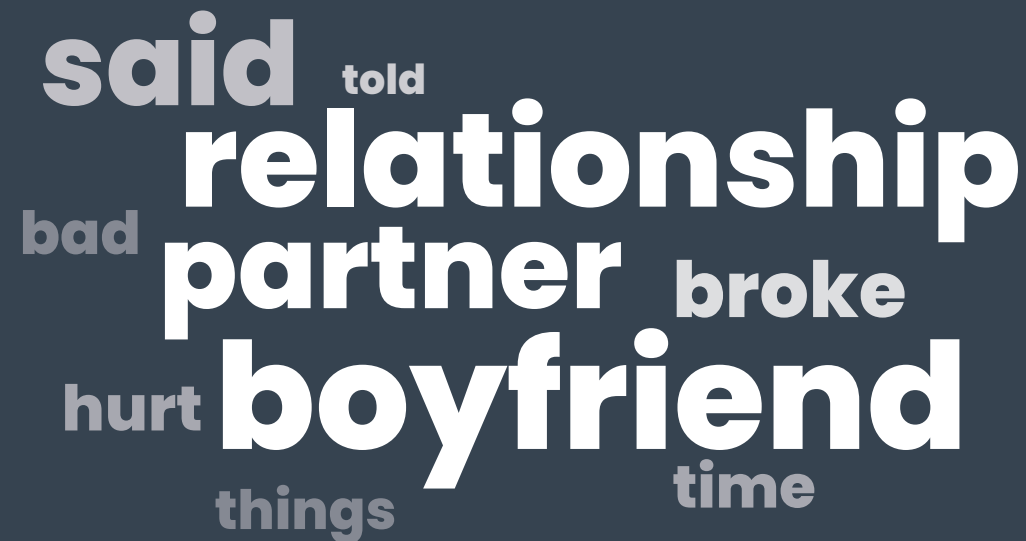
1. Family relationships

Conversations about family relationships often revolved around family arguments with parents, siblings, expectations, or a fear of telling family members how texters really felt.

2. Romantic relationships

Texters often discussed arguments and fights, fear of losing their partner, and grieving over breakups.

3. Financial/work stress

Conversations about financial and work stress were often related to fears of not being able to pay bills, fear of losing a job, or being unemployed. Some texters mentioned losing dogs to eviction, or struggles to pay for dog care like grooming or vet bills.

got mad family
said **dad** told sister
parents **mom**
brother

said told
bad **relationship**
partner broke
hurt **boyfriend**
things time

job fired
going **dog** homeless
pay **money**
new car
work

4. School/college

These conversations about school and college often touched on anxiety over coursework or grades, or fear of losing scholarships or pressure experienced over student loans.
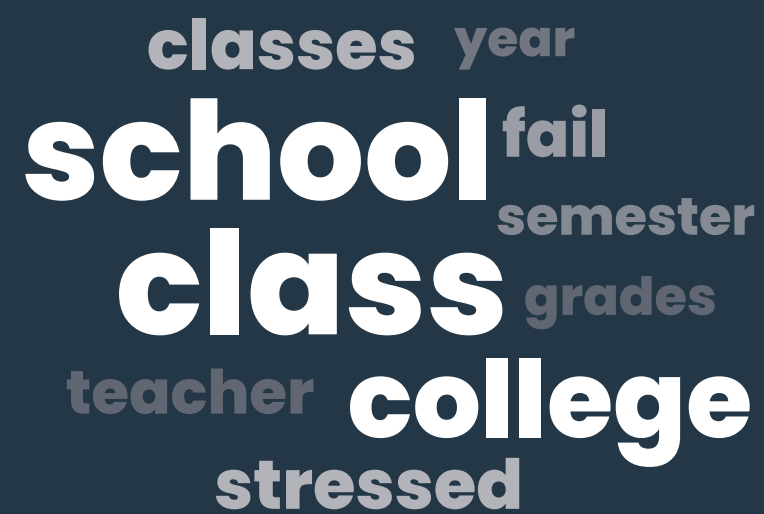
5. Friendship stress

Conversations about friendship stress spanned a wide range, from concerns about losing friends to a conflict, to friends talking behind each others' back, bullying, or being ignored.

6. Adult family stress

Conversations about adult family stress revolved around conflict between spouses and family planning. For example: themes of infidelity, addiction, or divorce, or worries about being pregnant, unplanned pregnancies, making a decision about the pregnancy, financial stress, or the stress of trying to conceive.
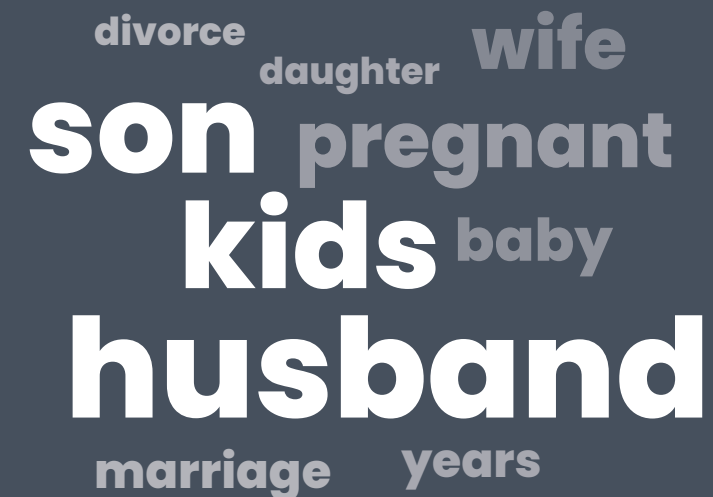
7. Social media

Social media-related conversations about stress often involved the stress of actual or possible negative publicity associated with social media. Being asked for money or the fear of being scammed (or being victims of fraud) also came up.

classes year
school fail
class semester
grades
teacher college
stressed

friend time
relationship
girlfriend
daughter said
things
bad
told mad

divorce wife
daughter
son pregnant
kids baby
husband
marriage years

harassing photos
send Instagram
sent threatening
Facebook
account
pictures blocked

4. What helped texters cope with anxiety and stress?

Talking to parents, friends, and therapists was most common.

Every year, we assess the ways that our texters coped when in crisis. This year, we focused on conversations about stress and anxiety, the top mental health issues discussed in 2023. We were met with a powerful testament to the many creative ways that people sought relief and support when confronted with challenges to their mental health.

If we wish to find solutions to improve mental health for our texters, one of the best places to start is by listening to them. Every day, our Crisis Counselors help texters navigate through their immediate crisis and then make a plan to deal with similar issues in the future — by identifying specific resources that help them cope with mental health distress.

> **I can talk to my mom"**
>
> /Anonymous Texter

To surface a list of coping strategies, we used topic modeling to cluster Crisis Counselor notes.

1. **Talking to someone** – to parents, friends and others

2. Seeking out **therapy** or a conversation with a **school counselor**

3. **Texting people** (or texting Crisis Text Line)

4. Entertainment: listening to **music** and **watching TV**

5. **Meditation**, **mindfulness**, **taking a shower**, or **taking a walk**

6. **Talking to friends** or **playing video games** with friends

7. **Journaling** or writing

8. **Exercise**, yoga, and going to the gym

9. **Going to bed** and taking a **nap**

10. **Breathing** exercises

11. **Reading** books

12. **Drawing** and making art

What Anonymous Texters Say About Coping with Anxiety and Stress

"I talk to my friends to see an outsider perspective"

"I always listen to K-Pop to feel better"

"I play Roblox with my friends"

"I build Legos"

"I FaceTime my best friend"

Often, people feel pressured to get over their stress.

You are not alone.

If you are in need of free mental health support, you can connect with a live volunteer Crisis Counselor by texting *HELLO* or *HOLA* to *741741* or reach us via web chat.

People with anxiety often feel that they are expected to get over their stress. Many wish for more emotional support. Some are carrying this weight alone because they don't want to burden others, or aren't comfortable discussing stressful topics like personal finances.

Carrying this burden alone is hard. We believe that coping strategies are indispensable tools for safeguarding and nurturing mental health in individuals. But beyond individual efforts, communities need to invest in resources that help people cope, such as mental health services, arts classes, exercise programming, parks, and walkable neighborhoods. [1]

Aside from our primary service, our website acts as a resource hub, providing individuals with the tools and knowledge needed to navigate life's challenges, whether it's managing anxiety and stress or coping with loneliness and depression.

We are here for you, 24/7.

Connect for more analytics and info

From the moment we launched our service 10 years ago, an important part of our mission is to share insights in an effort to reduce stigma around mental health. We'd love to connect you with one of our experts.

For more analysis and information: crisistextline.org/empathy or email Press@crisistextline.org for media requests.

[1] We identified six resources that young people need from their communities in order to cope with the stressors in their lives. Learn more about the findings at crisistextline.org/community-resilience