

Exploring Mental Health Trends Among Boys and Men

Key Challenges and Coping Strategies



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Suicide rates among men remain nearly four times higher than those of women in the United States, and young men in particular are experiencing some of the highest levels of social isolation and loneliness in the Western world. High school boys are reporting unprecedented levels of pessimism about their futures. Yet, fewer than 20% of people who contact Crisis Text Line identify as boys or men.

As a free, 24/7, confidential mental health support service, we have a unique window into this crisis. Between 2022 and 2024, we provided support to boys and men¹ in over 71,000 conversations, offering rare, real-world insight into the challenges they face and the strategies that help them cope. Here is what we found:

1. Anxiety and stress are the defining internal struggle. Anxiety and stress came up in 39% of all conversations with boys and men; the most common issue by far. This challenge intensified with age: among men over 18, anxiety and stress came up in over 40% of conversations.

2. The loneliness crisis is real, and it worsens with age. Struggles with human connection, reflected by relationship stress and loneliness, were the most common external stressors that boys and men discussed. While younger boys struggled most with relationship stress and bullying, loneliness and isolation grew more prominent as men aged — rising from 18% of conversations with boys under 14 to over 27% among men over 65.

3. Young boys face the greatest risk of personal harm. Suicidal ideation and self-harm were most prevalent among the youngest texters. Nearly 1 in 3 boys under 14 discussed thoughts of suicide, and nearly 1 in 6 discussed self-harm — underscoring the urgent need for early intervention and community-based support.

4. Social connection and exercise are the most powerful coping resources. Despite struggling with loneliness, boys and men most commonly turned to friends and social connections to cope; nearly as often as they reported feeling isolated. Exercise emerged as a remarkably consistent source of relief across all age groups, from the youngest boys to men over 65.

These findings make clear that reaching boys and men requires going beyond traditional mental health services. Communities, advocates, policymakers, and funders must invest in the spaces, programs, and relationships that help boys and men build connections and stay active, meeting them where they already are.

¹Throughout this report, we refer to boys and men to mean texters who identified as boys or men in our optional post-conversation survey, and selected no other gender. We refer to boys as texters who were younger than 18, and men who were 18 years old or older.

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, around [one hundred men die by suicide every day](#), at a rate nearly four times more than women. This is a staggering toll that outpaces other wealthy nations. Young men in the U.S. in particular are experiencing some of the highest levels of suicide and loneliness in the Western world. [This crisis has been deepening](#) for several decades. Since 2000, suicide rates among men under 35 have climbed sharply, alongside rising levels of isolation and disconnection; experiences that themselves are linked to [negative mental health effects](#).

Young men are facing a range of pressures: increasingly [academically-rigorous school curricula](#), more exposure to potentially [addictive online content](#) like [gaming](#), [sports betting platforms](#) and [pornography](#), and [increasingly isolated lifestyles](#). Eighteen year-olds are increasingly reporting depressive symptoms at growing rates, and those [symptoms persist into adulthood](#).

Starting in the early 2020s, the mental health crisis among boys and men began to gain traction in the media and in policy circles. Around the same time, mortality statistics signalled a small decrease in the number of male suicides among young people. Even with these incremental positive changes, suicide among young men remains over 30% more common than 20 years ago.

A key aspect of understanding this crisis lies in the norms that shape how boys and men relate to struggle and help-seeking. Conformity to [traditional masculine norms](#), including self-reliance, emotional stoicism, and the belief that seeking help signals weakness, is one of the strongest and most consistent predictors of delayed or absent help-seeking among men, and of elevated suicide risk. These norms shape whether men seek help as well as how they experience and express distress. [Men tend to express distress through behavior or physical symptoms](#) rather than identifying and reporting it as emotional pain, meaning the ways boys and men signal that they are struggling may look quite different from what traditional mental health services are designed to recognize and respond to. This masculinity-informed lens is essential context for interpreting this study's findings and for understanding the kinds of responses most likely to reach boys and men where they are.

What makes this crisis especially challenging to address is that boys and men rarely ask for help or seek mental health support. Nearly two-thirds of young men (aged 18-29) report wishing they had [more people to talk to openly](#). They are [less likely to see a therapist](#); and as we have seen firsthand, less likely to [contact helplines](#) when in crisis. At Crisis Text Line, fewer than 20% of texters identify as boys or men, despite the high rates of mental health concerns and suicide in the U.S.

About this Report

While boys and men represent a relatively smaller proportion of our texters, we have unique insights to add to the conversation on their mental health that can support the work of those who seek to improve this status quo with actionable insights. As a 24/7, free, confidential mental health support service, we talk to hundreds, sometimes thousands, of boys and men over text, webchat, and Whatsapp every day. In this report, we present analyses from over 71,000 anonymized conversations with boys and men between 2022 and 2024.² What we sought to learn were the key concerns, and the key coping strategies of boys and men in recent years, not only in terms of traditional mental health support, but also opportunities for social connection, exercise, and other strategies that policymakers and others can implement for boys and men. Our goal for this report is to inform the work of those who are looking to improve the mental health of boys and men in the U.S., not to distract from the important work on the mental health needs of other populations.

The boys and men represented in this report are a diverse group. These texters were relatively young; almost half (49%) were younger than 25. The largest age group (26%) represented were young men between 18 and 24 years old. In terms of race and ethnicity, the majority of boys and men who contacted us were white (66%), followed by Hispanic/Latinx men (17%) and Black/African American men (12%). Among texters represented in this report, 27% identified as LGBTQ+. While this rate is substantially above U.S. population estimates, it aligns with our service utilization: approximately 50% of all Crisis Text Line's texters identify as LGBTQ+.

It is important to note that the boys and men who reach out to Crisis Text Line and who were included in the analysis are not necessarily representative of all boys and men in the U.S. One key difference is that the group of boys and men we report on are the ones who reached out for support in their moments of need. As noted, many more boys and men do not reach out for support. Nonetheless, we are uniquely positioned to offer insights based on real conversations with those we aim to support. Moreover, throughout this report, we used gender information drawn from the post-conversation texter survey. As noted in the Methodology section, the gender categories in the analysis are mutually exclusive: we define boys and men as texters who identified as boys or men and selected no other gender category. We recognize that people can identify as multiple gender identities and that the mental health challenges experienced are not necessarily the same across these groups. We acknowledge that the many boys and men who also identify with additional gender categories may experience distinct stressors that deserve dedicated attention that is beyond the scope of the current study.

²To learn more, please consult the methodology section at the end.

KEY CHALLENGES FACING BOYS AND MEN

Following a conversation, our volunteer Crisis Counselors tag key issues discussed with the texter. They can select from a range of issue tags, which we group into three categories for analysis and interpretation: how people experience feelings of distress (internal states); the types of externally-oriented relational and contextual issues that may drive their distress (relational stressors); and unsafe thoughts and behaviors associated with distress (safety concerns). In terms of these categories of conversation issues, three key insights stood out.

Anxiety and stress were by far the most common internal states raised in conversations with boys and men. Over 39% percent of conversations included discussions of anxiety and stress, and an even greater percent among adult men. In fact, over 40% of conversations with men between 18 and 44 discussed anxiety or stress.

Struggles with human connection dominated the list of relational stressors. Relationships were discussed in nearly 1 in 3 conversations with boys and men. This is key, especially in light of the fact that [over 1 in 5 male suicides occur in the context of separation, divorce, and other relationship breakdowns](#). This was followed by isolation and loneliness coming up in over 1 in 6 conversations. This was more common among boys and men than other texters; showing up in 22% of conversations with texters who identified as boys/men only versus 20% of conversations with girls/women and 19% of texters who identified as another gender selection.

Suicide (or suicidal ideation) came up in more than 1 in 5 conversations. Conversations about suicide and self harm were most common among younger men, while conversations about substance use were more common among older men. Boys under 14 were nearly twice as likely to bring up suicide and self harm compared to men over 55 (31% versus 17% of conversations, respectively). And, while substance use was less common in conversations overall, boys and men mentioned them nearly twice as much as other texters (4% versus 2.2%).



Issues in Crisis Text Line Conversations with Boys and Men

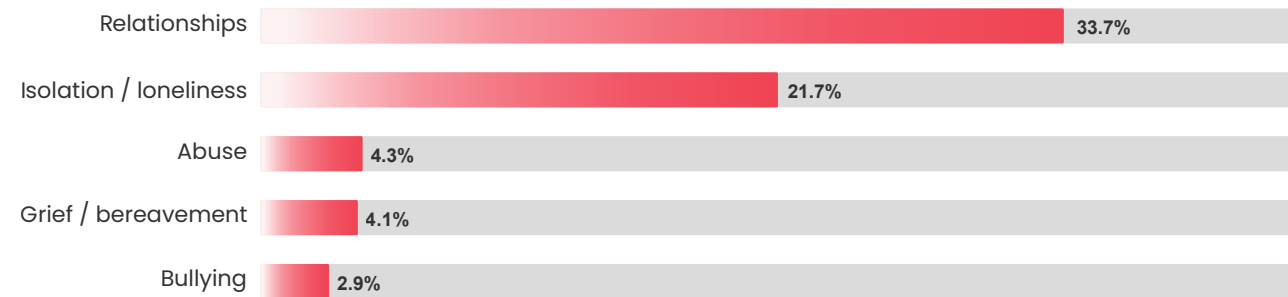
The top issues in conversations with boys and men were anxiety or stress, depression or sadness, relationships, isolation or loneliness, and suicide.

2022-2024 - Percent of conversations mentioning each issue (N=71,869)

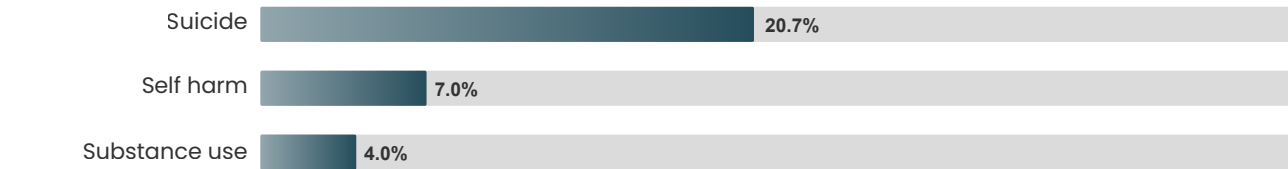
INTERNAL STATES



RELATIONAL STRESSORS



SAFETY CONCERNS



Conversations may involve multiple issues. Percentages sum beyond 100%. Abuse includes emotional, physical, sexual, and unspecified abuse.



From Boys to Men: Issues Over the Life Course

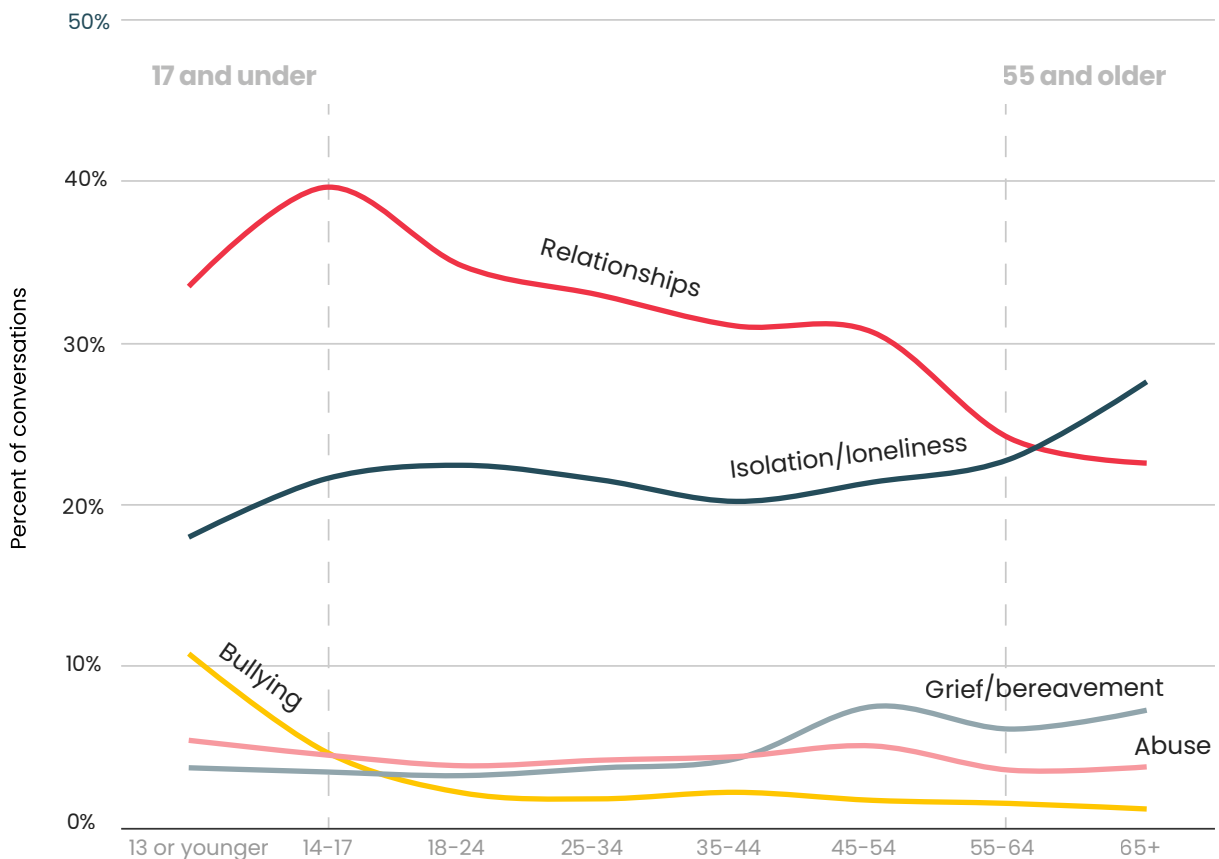
Boys and men experience different types of mental health challenges as they age. Examining key issues experienced by boys and men across age groups, we found that the order and prominence of topics discussed by texters shifted considerably with age.

Externally-oriented relational stressors that were more typical among boys included relationship stress and bullying. Relationship stress went from 34% among the youngest boys to 22% among the oldest. Bullying decreased by nearly five times: from over 10% in conversations with young men under 14 to less than 2% among older age groups. **Relational stressors that surfaced more in conversations with older men included isolation and loneliness, and grief and bereavement.** Isolation and loneliness increased from 18% of conversations with boys under 14 to over 27% among men over 65.

Relational Stressors Over the Life Course in Conversations with Boys and Men

Relationship stress and bullying were most common among younger age groups; isolation or loneliness, and grief or bereavement, were most common among older texters.

2022-2024 (N=71,869 conversations)

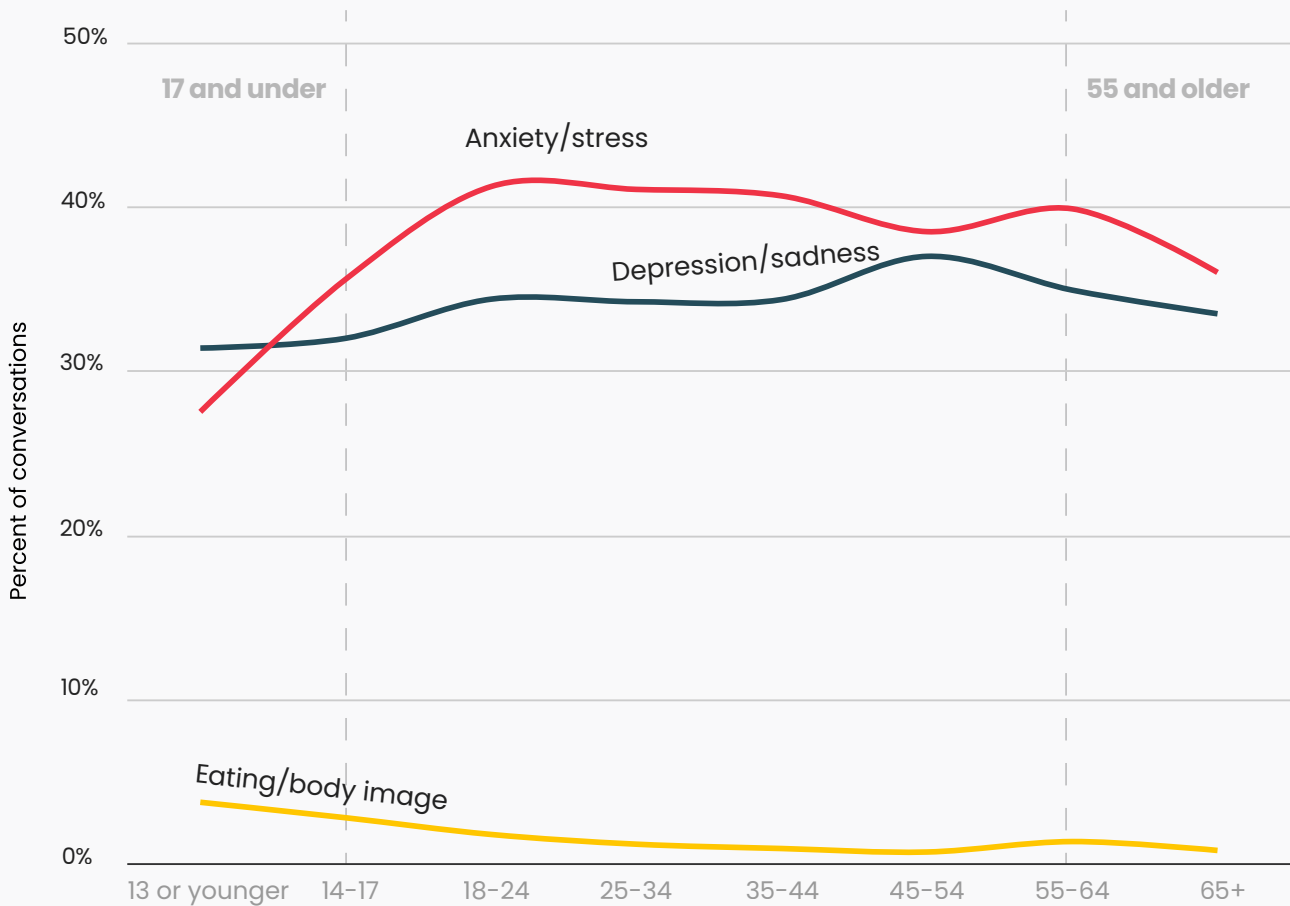


Internal states and individual feelings of distress also shifted over time. Anxiety and stress increased the most over the life cycle: from under 30% of conversations among boys under 14 to over 40% for several age groups over 18. Eating and body image issues dropped from nearly 4% of conversations among young boys to less than 1% among men over 35.

Internal States Over the Life Course in Conversations with Boys and Men

Eating and body image issues were most common among young boys; anxiety or stress, and depression or sadness, were most common among adult men.

2022-2024 (N=71,869 conversations)

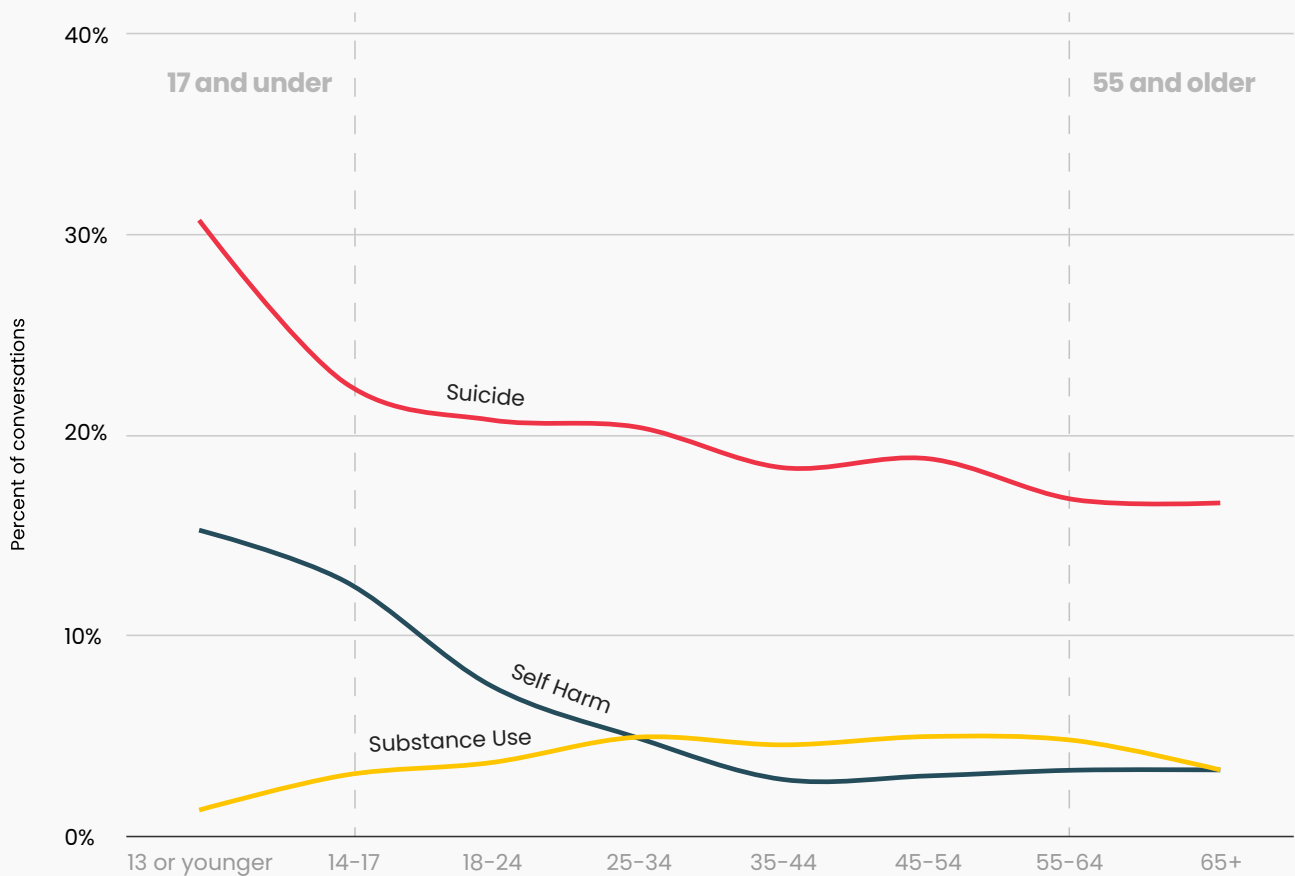


Conversations about suicide and self harm were far more common with younger texters, while conversations about substance use were more common for older texters. The frequency of conversations about suicide moved from over 30% of conversations with the youngest boys to 17% of conversations with men over 55. Similarly, we saw self-harm conversations decrease at a rate of five times; dropping more sharply from 15% to 3% of conversations over the life course. In contrast, conversations about substance use nearly tripled over the lifecourse, moving gradually from 1.3% among boys under 14 to 3.3% of conversations among men over 65.

Safety Concerns Over the Life Course in Conversations with Boys and Men

Mentions of suicide and self harm decreased, but mentions of substance use increased, with age.

2022-2024 (N=71,869 conversations)



COPING STRATEGIES AMONG BOYS AND MEN

To address the mental health crisis among boys and men in the U.S., it is crucial to find ways to reach them with the resources they need to cope; resources that communities are uniquely positioned to provide. Since it is well documented that men are hard to reach by traditional mental health services, we found it important to explore coping resources that go beyond counseling services, but are known to have mental health benefits based on the clinical literature.

Crisis Text Line's volunteer Crisis Counselors aim to help texters find their way to support and relief so they always ask about past coping strategies and any resources that texters are open to exploring. These discussions have enabled us to explore how texters have coped over the years, and in a [previous study](#), we developed a framework where we examined coping strategies in our conversations that are linked to improved mental health outcomes and are also actionable for policymakers and communities. These were:

- Opportunities for social connection
- Music, writing, visual, and performing arts
- Mental health services
- Exercise and sport programs
- Outdoor spaces and nature



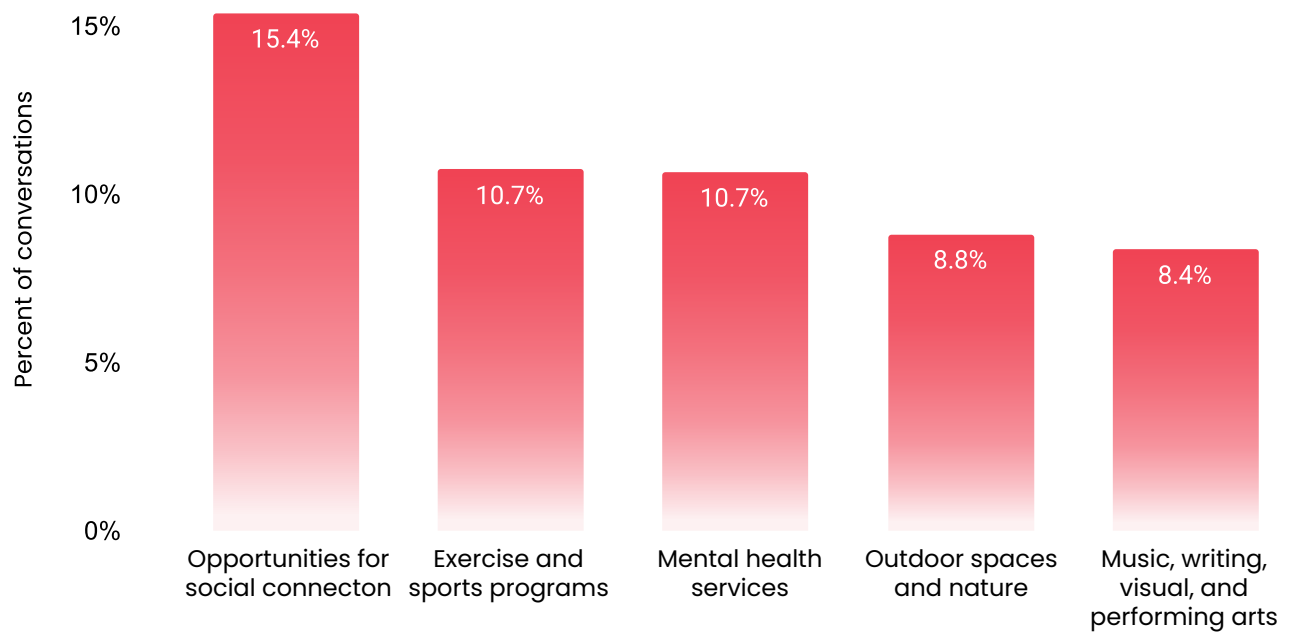
Once we applied this framework to our conversations with boys and men, we found that the most commonly discussed resources that they rely on are opportunities for social connection. As the chart below indicates, boys and men discussed such opportunities in 15% of conversations when they discussed a coping strategy; nearly as much as they noted experiences with isolation and loneliness overall (22%).

The most prominent coping strategy was relying on friends and other social connections, followed by exercise and mental health services.

Coping Resources in Conversations With Boys and Men

Social connection, sports participation, and mental health services were key coping strategies reported by boys and men.

2022–2024 (N=49,031 conversations)



Coping needs varied over the life course

Like conversation issues, coping strategies varied with age. Boys mostly relied on opportunities for social connection, exercise, and making art as a way to cope. As men age, they increasingly relied on mental health services and spending time outdoors. One reason may be that activities like music or visual arts are often accessible to young people at school, while accessing mental health services often requires independence or financial resources.

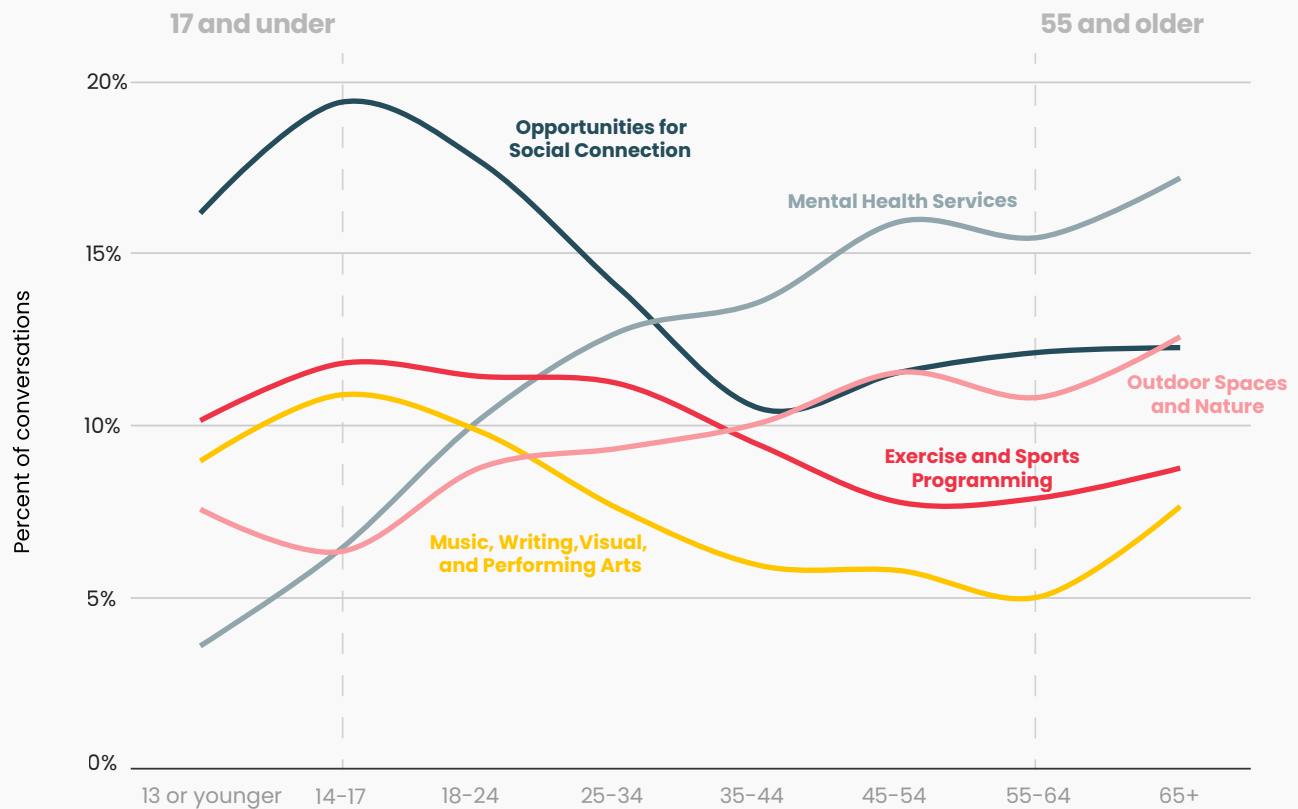
The below chart summarizes some key trends in mentions of coping resources over the life course.

- Mentions of social connection and making art decreased as men aged.
- Mentions of mental health services increased considerably over the lifecourse, as did mentions of spending time outdoors and in nature.
- Exercise and sports remained a fairly steady source of support across age groups.

Coping Resources Over the Life Course in Conversations with Boys and Men

The coping strategies that boys and men reported shifted considerably with age.

2022-2024 (N=71,869 conversations)



Opportunities for social connection: It has been widely reported in recent years that men in the U.S. are facing a loneliness crisis. Men spend [more time alone](#) than 20 years ago (similar to women) and 18% of men [almost always feel alone](#). Looking at Crisis Text Line conversations with men over age groups, it is remarkable that just as we see conversations about loneliness increase by age, we see mentions of relying on friends and other social connections decrease across the lifespan.

Exercise and sports programs: There was one coping strategy that was nearly as popular among young boys as older men: exercise. They consistently brought up exercise and moving as an important way to find relief from mental health stressors. Even in conversations with older men, approximately 9% discussed coping through various types of physical activity. The most frequently mentioned sports were working out and going to the gym followed by running, basketball, football, yoga, and skateboarding.

Top Mentions of Sports as Coping Among Boys and Men

Working out, running, basketball, going to the gym, and doing yoga were the most mentioned sports that boys and men discussed as coping strategies.

2022-2024 (N=49,031 conversations)



Coping needs varied by background

Across subgroups, opportunities for social connection remain the most commonly mentioned coping strategy regardless of age or other background characteristics. The next preferred coping strategies varied by other background characteristics including LGBTQ+ identity, race and ethnicity, and other characteristics.

Sexual identity. Following social connection, LGBTQ+ boys and men talked about access to mental health services and creative endeavors, including making music, writing, visual, and performing arts. Sports programs and exercise were mentioned least frequently as a coping resource. In contrast, for straight boys and men, this was the second most commonly mentioned coping resource.

Race and ethnicity. Similarly boys and men of color and white boys and men most commonly mentioned social connection as a coping resource. For boys and men of color, sports and exercise was the second most commonly mentioned coping resource; whereas white boys and men talked about access to mental health services.

The variation in coping resources across demographic groups highlights a few important points. First and foremost, boys and men across all backgrounds are telling us they desire more social connection to cope with their challenges. This is especially significant given the growing [loneliness epidemic](#), which puts all individuals, including boys and men, at risk of poor outcomes across the life span. Second, variation in additional coping resources, including access to sports and exercise programs, the arts, and mental health services, likely reflects differences in access as much as differences in preference. This points to the value of offering a broad range of coping resources, recognizing that creative endeavors like writing, drawing, and playing music matter as much to boys and men as sports and exercise programs.



FROM INSIGHT TO ACTION

Every minute, a man attempts suicide in the U.S., and more than 1 in 10 adolescent boys seriously consider it. While there have been small improvements since 2021, this crisis demands urgent, sustained attention. Yet, as Crisis Text Line has observed, fewer than 20% of texters identify as boys or men.

The findings in this report offer a rare, real-world window into the mental health challenges boys and men face and the strategies that help them cope. Our analysis revealed insights about the unique issues and coping resource needs of boys and men, and how much they vary over the lifespan and by other background characteristics. Topics raised in conversations with our texters most often involved experiences of anxiety and stress, relationships, and suicidal thoughts. These texters also revealed a desire for social connection, and opportunities to engage in sports, exercise, and the arts as ways to cope with stressors.



Translating such evidence into action requires many stakeholders to think creatively and increase investments in the spaces, relationships, and resources that boys and men already turn to. Mental health providers must find a way to expand their reach among boys and men, who are far less likely to seek help in a crisis. Communities need to find tailored ways to meet boys and men where they are, and provide coping resources beyond traditional mental health services. Policymakers and funders should invest in systems change that drives meaningful, lasting improvements in the mental health and wellbeing of boys and men. There is an opportunity to take action to support the mental health and wellbeing of boys and men across the lifespan:

1. Close the gap: make it easier for boys and men to ask for help. Fewer than 20% of Crisis Text Line texters identified as boys or men; a striking underrepresentation given that men die by suicide at nearly four times the rate of women. This gap, in part, may reflect deeply held beliefs that seeking help is incompatible with masculinity. Communities should cultivate trusted, credible voices among coaches, mentors, employers, peers, and public figures, who model help-seeking authentically and in the settings boys and men already inhabit. Funders can support campaigns and peer-led programs designed specifically for male audiences. Policymakers can ensure that accessible, confidential, and low-barrier options exist in schools, workplaces, and community settings so that reaching out feels routine rather than exceptional. Such efforts can help shift the narrative so that help-seeking is viewed as a sign of strength, not weakness.

2. Foster relational and social skills in boys and young men early on. Relationship stress and bullying were the dominant relational stressors among younger texters, and our data show that the isolation and loneliness that emerged from early challenges can intensify across the life course. Intervening early, before patterns become entrenched, offers the highest return on investment. Schools, youth programs, and families should equip boys with the competencies to recognize and manage their emotions, navigate conflict, and support their peers – skills that are foundational to healthy relationships throughout life. Emotional literacy programs, peer mentoring, and coach-led conversations within sports settings are among the most accessible and scalable delivery channels. Policymakers and funders should prioritize such investment in schools and youth programs, and communities should look for opportunities to extend this work into informal spaces such as sports clubs, faith-based settings, and community groups where many boys spend significant time.

3. Invest in opportunities for social connection, especially as men age. Conversations about loneliness and isolation increased steadily with age, rising from 18% of conversations with boys under 14 to over 27% among men over 65, as reliance on friends and social networks declined across the same lifespan. Meaningful social connection, especially for older men, requires deliberate and sustained infrastructure. Communities, funders, and local governments should invest in settings and programs purpose-built for adult male connection: community centers, sport leagues, neighborhood and faith groups, and workplace social initiatives. The goal is the kind of ongoing, low-barrier contact, built

around shared activity rather than explicitly therapeutic goals, that builds trust and belonging over time. These investments are especially important in communities where existing social infrastructure is thin or where men have few natural points of regular contact with others.

4. Invest in the coping resources boys and men already rely on. When asked how they coped, boys and men in our conversations pointed to concrete, everyday activities: working out, running, playing basketball, writing, playing guitar, and making music. Social connection, physical activity, and creative expression are among the most consistently cited coping strategies across every age group, and all are backed by strong evidence for improving mental health outcomes. Access to these resources is unequal, and communities, policymakers, and funders have an important role to play. Investments in accessible, low-cost infrastructure, including recreational facilities and community sport leagues, drop-in community spaces, and school- and community-based arts and music programs, can make a meaningful difference. For many boys and men, these are the primary mental health resource they rely on, and resourcing them accordingly is a public health priority.

5. Recognize that boys and men are not a monolith; tailor supports accordingly. Among texters identifying as boys and men, 27% identified as LGBTQ+, substantially above population estimates. This likely reflects both the elevated mental health burden in this population and the particular value of anonymous, text-based access for those who may face additional barriers to in-person help-seeking. We also found that the issues and coping strategies of boys and men varied by age, race and ethnicity, and LGBTQ+ identity, among other characteristics. Community leaders, service providers, and funders should design resources that are explicitly responsive to these variations, including dedicated and affirming pathways for LGBTQ+ boys and men, age-differentiated programming that reflects the distinct pressures of boyhood versus older adulthood, and culturally-grounded outreach that meets the wide-ranging needs of the communities they aim to serve.

6. Design services and systems that work with how boys and men actually seek help. Our analysis shows that boys and men turned to social connection, exercise, and creative outlets when younger, and increasingly to mental health services as they aged. However, across all age groups, they remained far less likely to seek formal help than others. The format and framing of support matters enormously and crisis services and referral pathways should be designed with attention to how boys and men tend to communicate distress – often indirectly and through action rather than words. Crisis Text Line and other text and chat based lines are important innovations for those who want more privacy or anonymity. The people best positioned to reach them should be trained to work effectively with masculinity rather than against it, supporting boys and men to seek help in ways that feel authentic rather than at odds with their sense of self.

Building Support That Meets Boys and Men Where They Are

Each of the 71,000+ conversations we analyzed represents a boy or man reaching out at a moment when they needed support, understanding, or someone to listen. Behind those numbers are countless others who never reached out. Their silence underscores the urgency of making support more visible, accessible, and easier to turn to when it's needed most.

Every finding in this report points in the same direction: boys and men are best supported not by waiting for them to seek help, but by building the connections, spaces, and services that make help feel natural. This means cultivating trusted voices; supporting skills development early on; investing in social connection and the activities that sustain it; and designing systems, services, and supports that recognize the diversity of boys and men, reaching them where they are and in ways that align with their preferences. It is imperative that we pay close attention to what boys and men are already telling us about what truly helps and use those insights to shape what comes next.



SUMMARY OF METHODOLOGY

Scope

In total, we analyzed 71,869 de-identified U.S.-based Crisis Text Line conversations between 2022 and 2024. The sample includes conversations in English that reached us directly via Crisis Text Line's channels in text message, WhatsApp, or webchat. We excluded the following: conversations received in our capacity as a national 988 provider; conversations in Spanish; conversations that were pranks or tests; and conversations where the texter dropped off before being connected with a volunteer Crisis Counselor.

Identifying Issues and Coping

Conversation Issues: At the end of each conversation, volunteer Crisis Counselors identify the core issues that were discussed, selecting categories from a list. Because volunteers can tag multiple issues in a single conversation, percentages add up to more than a 100%. In this report, the analysis of mental health issues texters discuss with us was based on this subjective assessment of the volunteer Crisis Counselor who took the conversation. We have dropped issue tags that were selected in less than 1.5% of conversations.

Coping Resources: Following our previously published framework, we applied a pre-developed model to identify discussions of coping within the conversations, locating the point at which volunteers asked texters about their coping strategies. We then analyzed the subsequent texter responses to extract mentions of the six coping strategies in our framework, excluding strategies outside the scope of community and policy action (such as taking a shower, talking to parents, or going to sleep). Analyses related to texter coping resources were limited to the period between 2022 and 2024.

Texter Characteristics

Demographic information is based on responses to our optional post-conversation texter survey, which was completed by approximately 13% of texters.

Gender Categories: Throughout this report, we used aggregated gender categories selected in the post-conversation texter survey. Gender categories are mutually exclusive as follows:

- **Girl/Woman Only:** Texters who identified as girls or women and selected no other gender category.
- **Boy/Man Only:** Texters who identified as boys or men and selected no other gender category.
- **Another Gender Selection:** Texters who selected a category other than boy/man or girl/women, or who selected more than one gender category.

Boys and Men: Throughout this document, we used the terms “boys and men” to mean texters who identified as boys and men only (per above) with boys representing texters who were 17 or younger and men representing texters who were 18 or older.

Race and Ethnicity: Note that the total percentages in race & ethnicity insights will not add up to 100% because survey respondents can identify with multiple options. We defined BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) texters as texters who identified with any of the following demographics: Asian, Asian American; Black, African American; Latino, Latina, Latinx, Latine, Hispanic; Middle Eastern, North African, Arab; Native American, Native Alaskan, Indigenous; Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander; or Other. We defined White texters as texters who identified as White alone in the same question.

Consent, Data Protection, and Research Ethics at Crisis Text Line

Texter Consent: To use our service, individuals who reach out to Crisis Text Line agree at the start of the conversation to our privacy policy and terms of service, which detail what information we collect and how we may use it, including for research such as this report. We also seek consent from texters at the end of the conversation when we request more information and feedback.

Research Ethics: We believe it is our duty to conduct meaningful research to inform practice and policy solutions that will help with the mental health emergency in the U.S. And, we are committed to doing so in an ethical manner. This means (a) seeking consent from those who reach out to us, (b) asking for certain information necessary to engage in continuous quality improvement and share meaningful, actionable insights, and (c) committing to data privacy and protection. Crisis Text Line’s research is also overseen by an Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Data Privacy: 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 de-identified crisis conversations to ethically help the world address mental health issues.

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