



AIM Ideas Lab Youth Survey 2023

Marin County

Research Design Collaborators

AIM Youth Mental Health

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Report Created by Ideas Lab Participants March 20-27, 2023

Introduction

AIM Youth Mental Health invited high school student volunteers in Marin County to take part in AIM Ideas Lab: a virtual, Youth Participatory Action Research project focused on mental health advocacy. This program ran from January 9 - March 27, 2023.

Six AIM Ideas Lab youth researchers from throughout the county worked together to conduct youth mental health research and make recommendations to policy makers, researchers, and their community about how to address the growing youth mental health crisis. Over 100 hours of community service was invested by the youth participants in this program.

AIM Ideas Lab Program Objectives:

1. Discuss youth mental health, emerging issues, and brainstorm ways to address the crisis with teens from other high schools.
2. Learn about qualitative and quantitative scientific research
3. Conduct peer-to-peer research mentored by youth mental health researchers and professionals
4. Collect, compare, and analyze research with the findings of AIM Ideas Labs across multiple counties
5. Bring the youth voice to the table by presenting ideas, research, and recommendations via identified channels.
6. Drive the next phase of investments in youth mental health research by making recommendations to the AIM Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) for the most impactful youth mental health research for the future

Research Design: Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR):

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is an approach to research and social change that encourages young people to utilize their own perspectives and strengths to identify, study, and address issues that impact them.

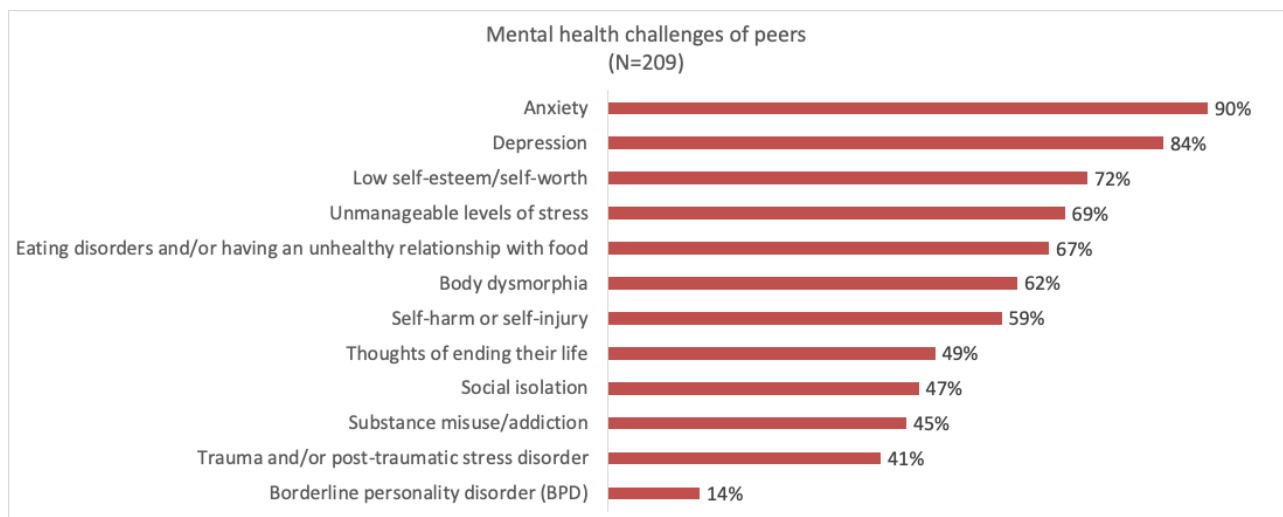
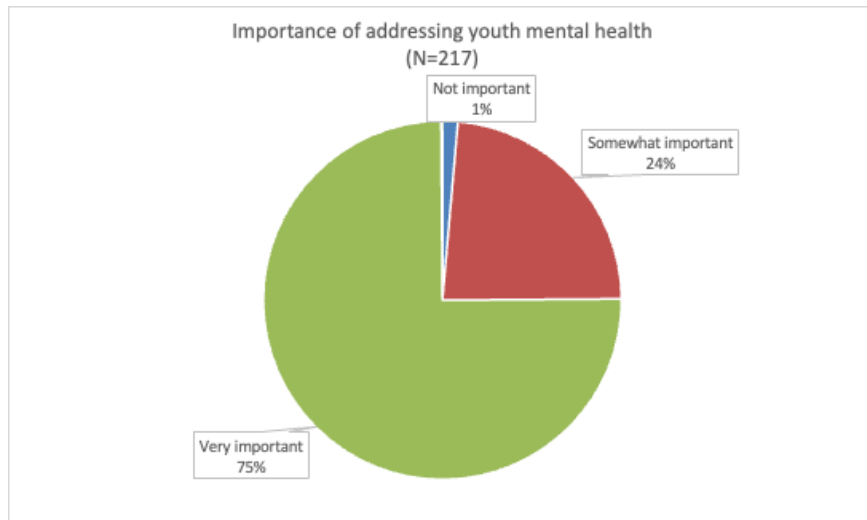
Research Question: Survey teens in Marin County to discover the mental health challenges youth are facing and potential ways to address them.

Survey Distribution: The survey took around 5-10 minutes to complete. Questions included demographic information like gender identity, race, and age, as well as questions about youth mental health and support services. The survey was distributed February 17 - March 13, 2023, via word-of-mouth, text message, social media, and in select schools. 234 youth in Marin County completed the survey.

Mixed-Methods Approach: The survey consisted of 15 quantitative (frequencies, percentages) and 2 qualitative (open ended response) questions and were analyzed by the youth researchers to form conclusions and recommendations for next steps.

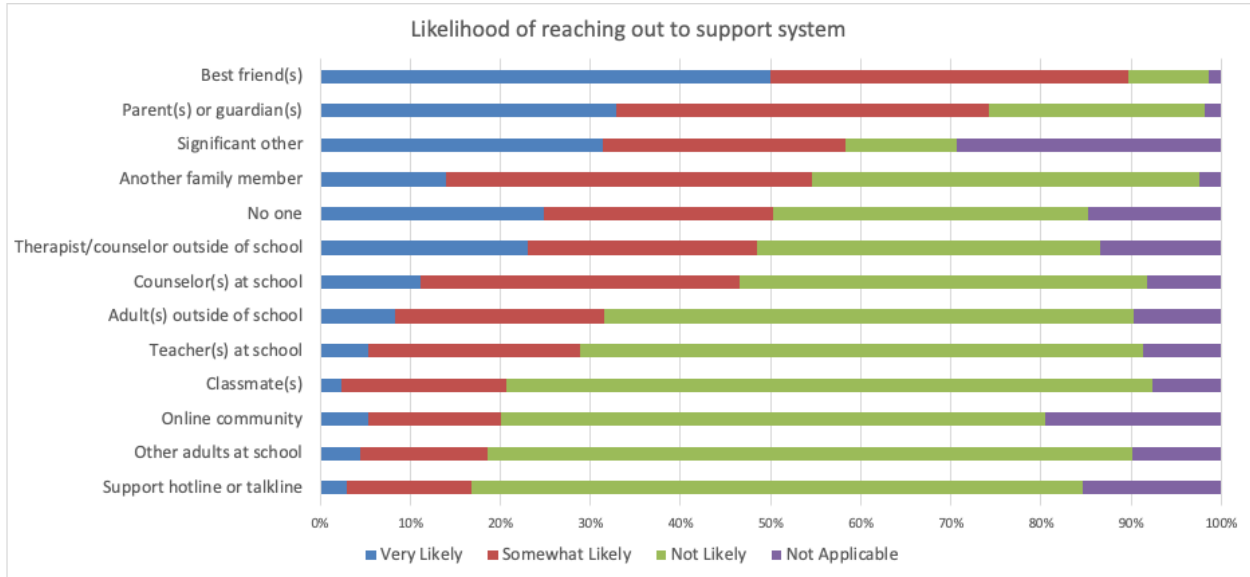
Executive Summary

1. The majority of respondents believe it is important to address youth mental health, especially since the majority of teens in Marin County have heard of their peers facing a variety of mental health challenges.

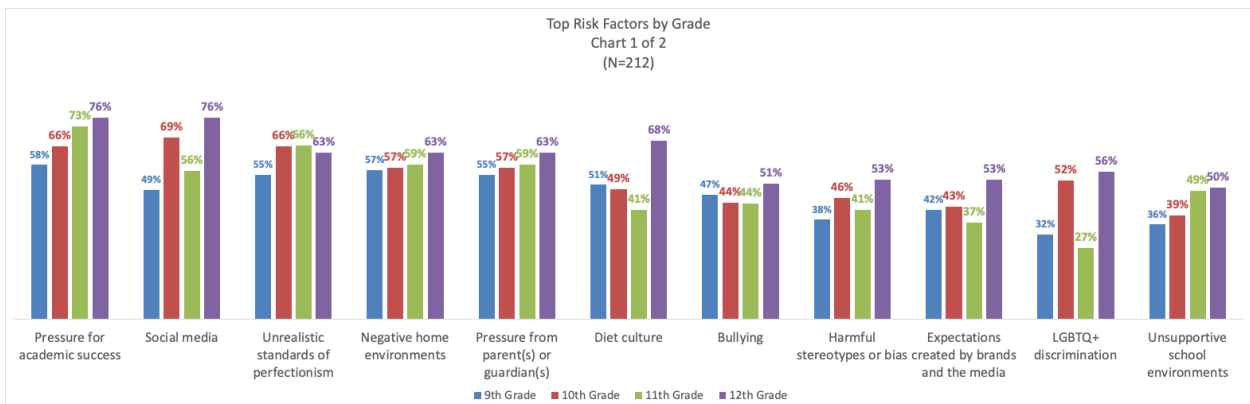


2. Pressure for academic success was the #1 factor that respondents said worsens youth mental health, suggesting that students are sacrificing their health for schools.
 - a. **Recommendation:** Schools must find a way to provide academic relief either through reducing the amount of schoolwork, adapting the school schedule to fit students' needs, and/or creating alternative options to deadlines and tests

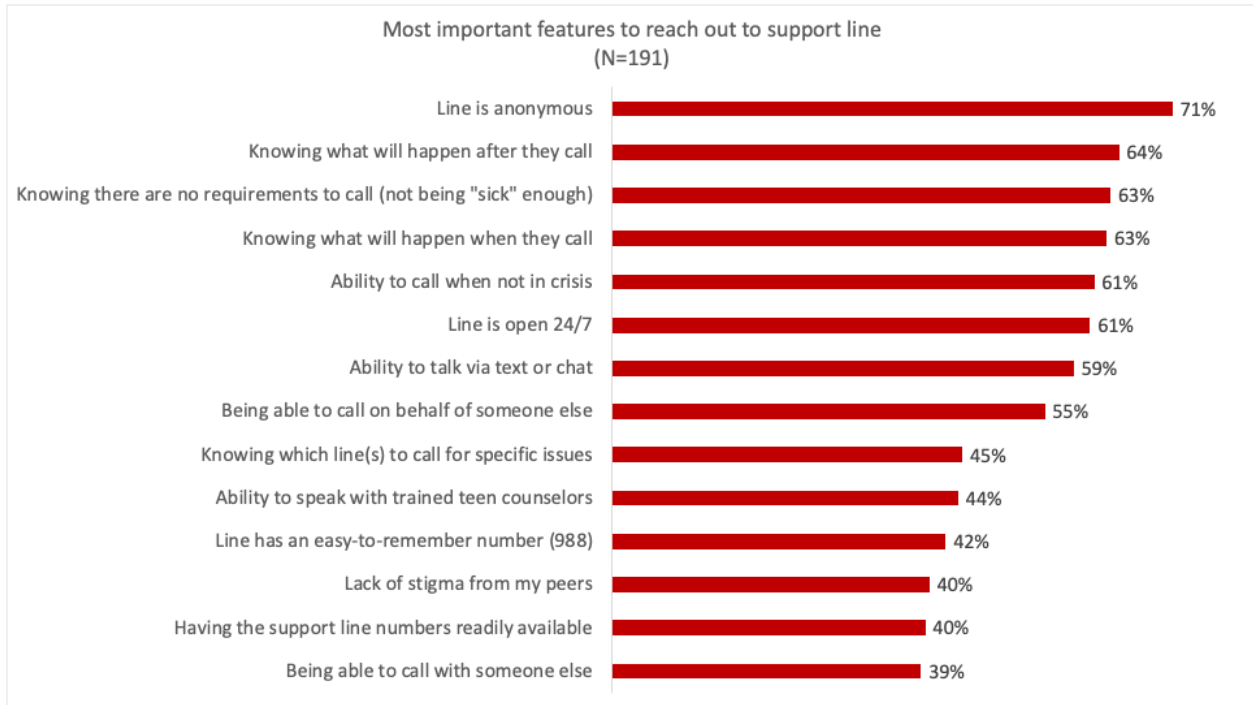
3. Schools in Marin County must do more to provide their students with mental health resources including having enough counselors, ensuring that students are developing relationships with their counselors, having a wellness center and/or safe spaces, creating resource lists, and making youth more aware of the available mental health resources. Currently, youth are not likely to reach out to adults at school, classmates, or support hotlines/talklines when they need mental health support.



4. Social media is negatively impacting youth mental health and potentially exacerbating some of the other risk factors including diet culture and having unrealistic expectations of perfectionism.
 - a. Seniors seem particularly impacted by social media, possibly since the Covid-19 pandemic happened during their 9th grade and they had to spend greater amounts of time online, on their phones, and on social media to connect with others
 - b. **Recommendation:** Youth should strive to create healthier relationships with social media to use it less
 - c. **Recommendation:** Conduct more research to understand the types of content teens consume on social media and if there are any differences by gender identity.



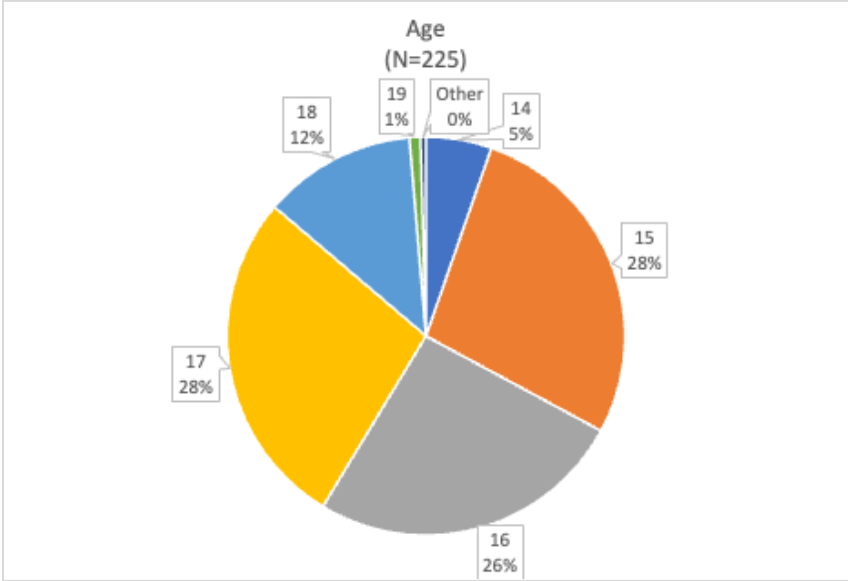
5. Anonymity is of high importance for youth when seeking out mental health support. This can be an issue if youth don't know when certain mental health supports are anonymous or not. When it comes to reaching out to a mental health talkline, knowing (or not knowing) seems to be a prevalent factor in several of the top responses to encourage youth to seek out support. This may be because there are a lot of feelings of uncertainty or anxiety when someone decides to call, or wondering if their issues are "bad enough" to call.
 - a. **Recommendation:** Youth should be educated about what will happen when they reach out to a mental health support line, and be provided with assurance that the support line is an appropriate resource for them.



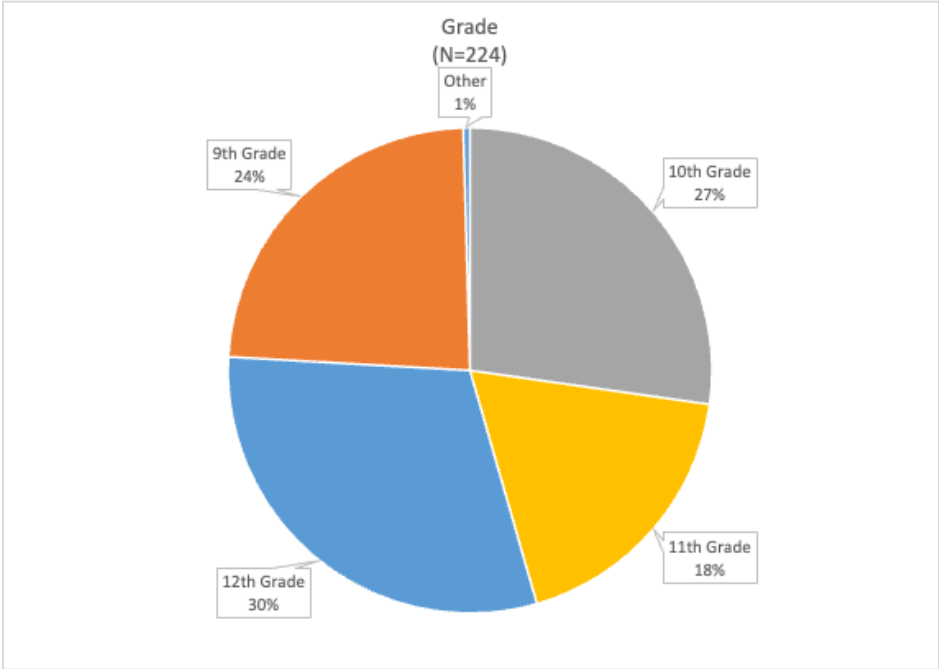
6. It was a successful pilot Ideas Lab in Marin County, driven by the Ideas Lab participants and the support from select schools. We were able to field the survey in two private schools during school hours and 1 public school where a psychology teacher showed the recruiting video from an Ideas Lab participant. As a result, the majority of survey respondents attend private schools, which is not reflective of all Marin County teens.
 - a. **Recommendation:** Continue to build relationships with all Marin County high schools in order to create a more representative Ideas Lab participant group and survey sample in future Ideas Labs in Marin County.

Respondent Demographics

What is your age?

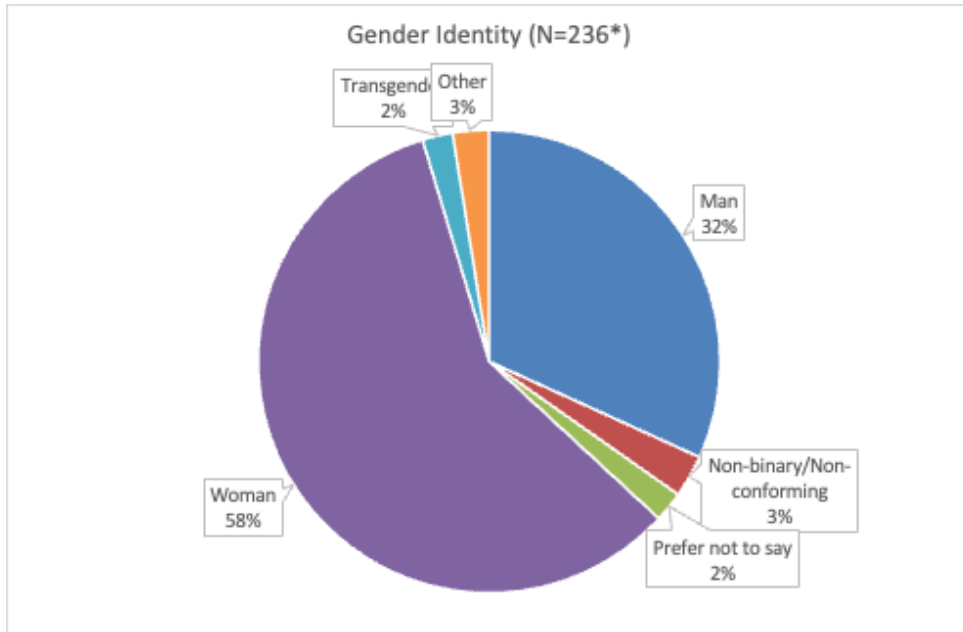


What grade are you in school?



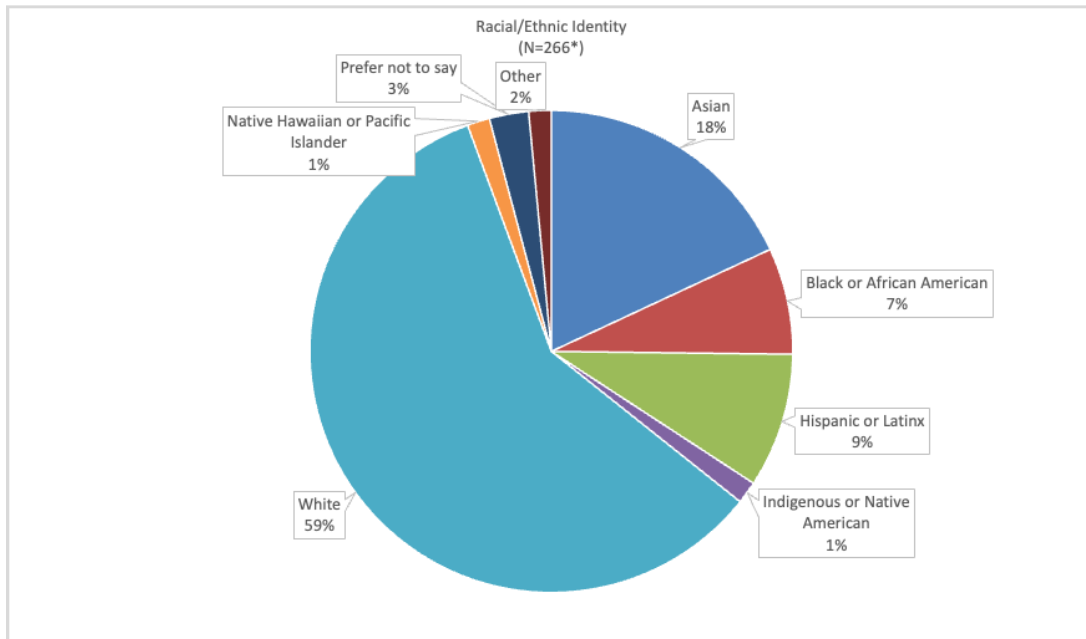
- There is a good representation of respondents from each grade

What is your gender identity?



*Includes 9 respondents who selected more than 1 gender identity

What racial/ethnic group do you belong to?

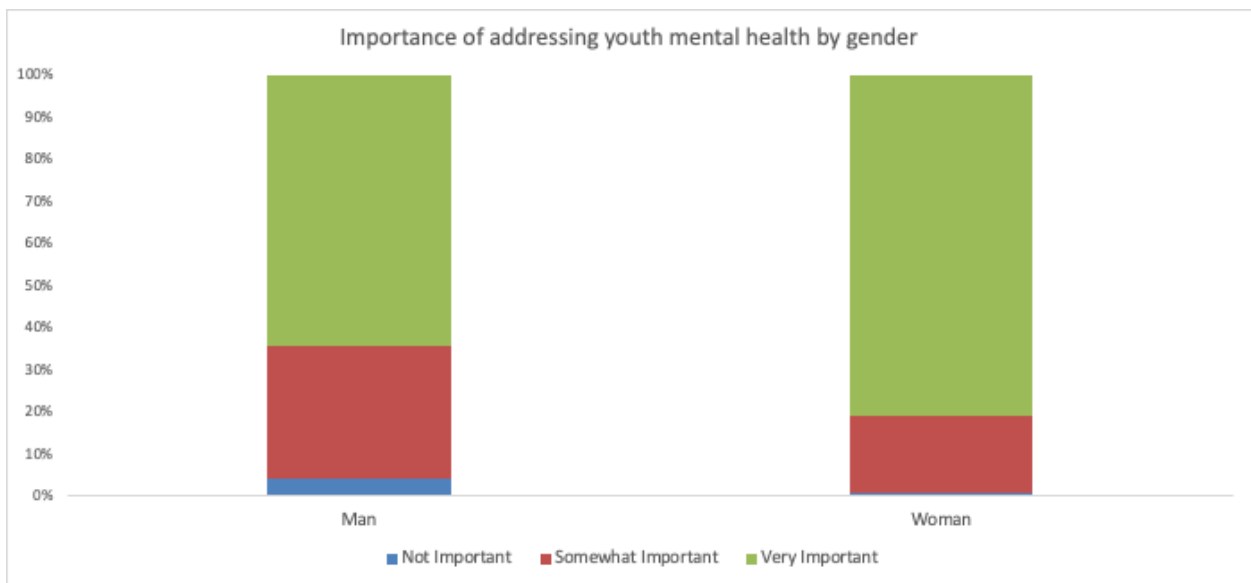
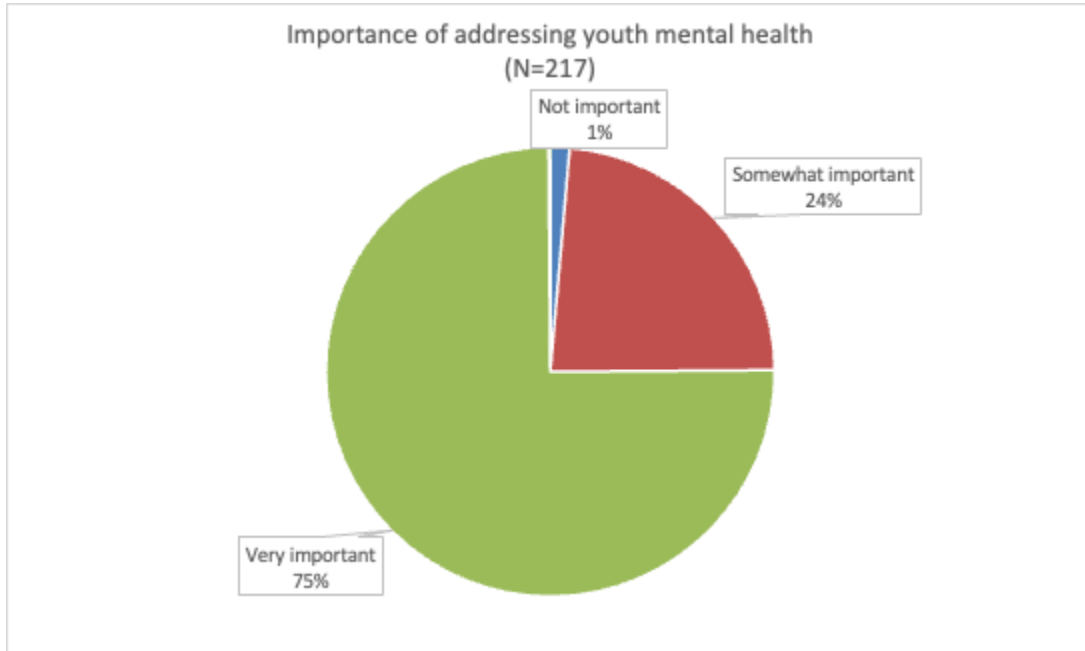


*Includes 33 respondents who selected more than 1 racial/ethnic identity

- When compared to the racial/ethnic make-up of teens in Marin County, our sample is representative of the proportion of White respondents in Marin County, overrepresentation of Asian and Black or African American respondents, and underrepresentation of Hispanic or Latinx respondents

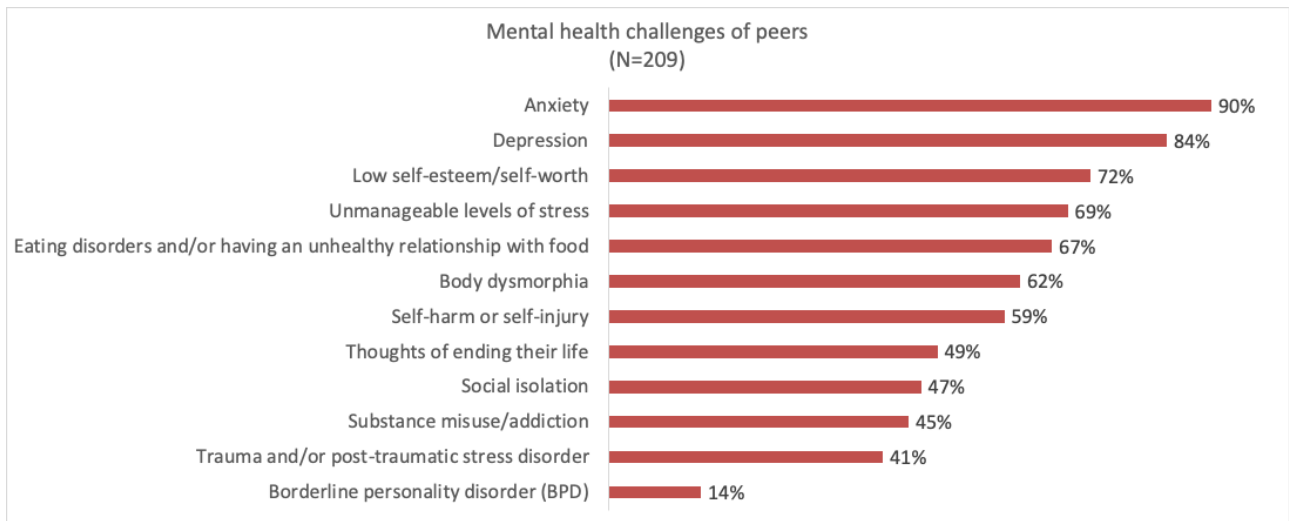
Survey Results

Q1: How important do you think it is to address the mental health of teens in Marin County?

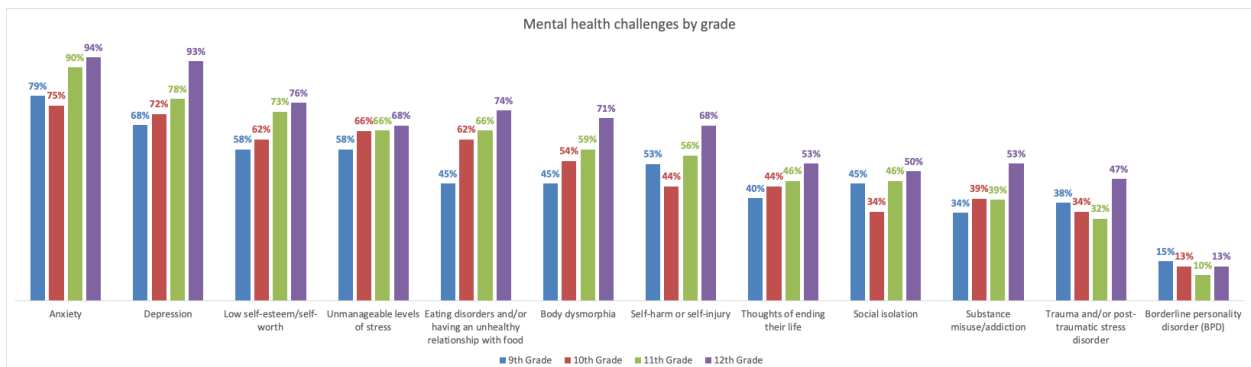


- While youth mental health is considered “important” or “very important” by nearly all respondents (99%), women are more likely than men to rate it as very important
 - **Recommendation:** Conduct further research to understand how mental health impacts different genders. Are women/girls more impacted by mental health issues or are they just more likely to talk about it than men/boys? How does social media impact women vs. men differently?

Q2: Have any of your friends shared with you that they have experienced any of the following?

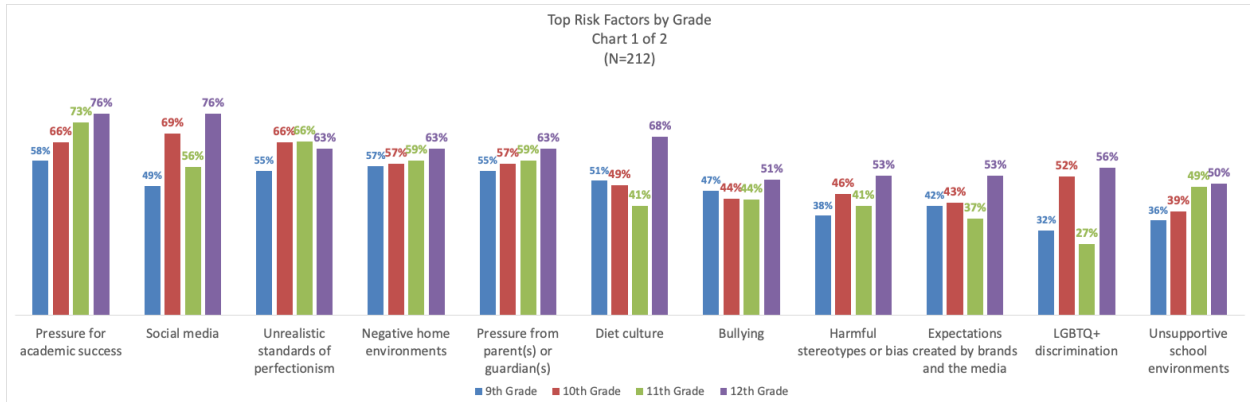


- Nearly all of the respondents have had friends share experiences with anxiety and depression. Because these are such common conditions, it can be easily minimized and stigmatized by others and not seen as an illness. There is still a lack of education about anxiety and depression when people label it as just sadness and/or respond with a “deal with it” attitude (don’t be sad, just smile, just do something that will make you happy, don’t think about it).
 - **Recommendation:** More psychoeducation is needed to understand the severity of depression and anxiety and how they can become illnesses.

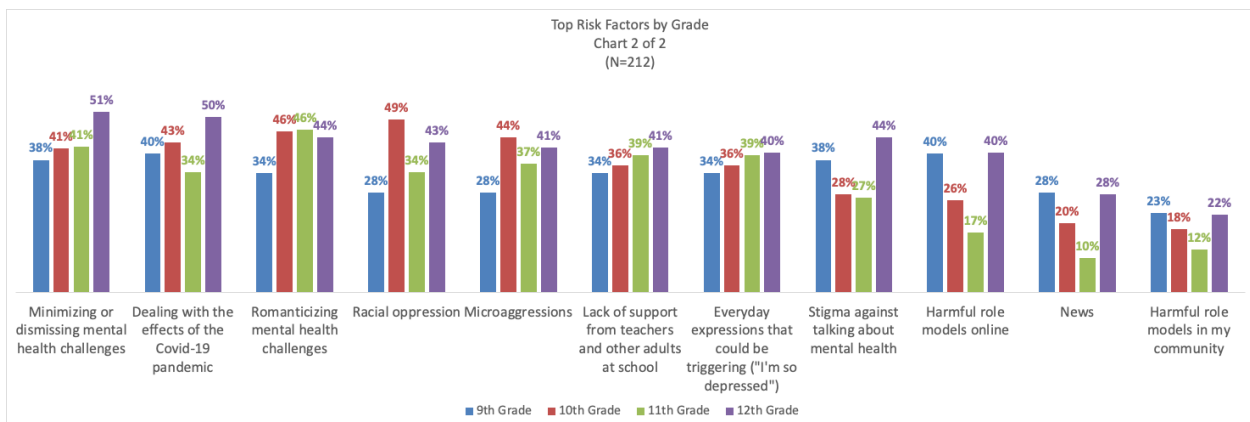


- Seniors seem most impacted by every mental health challenge than the other grades

Q3: Which of the following do you think worsens mental health for teenagers in Marin County?

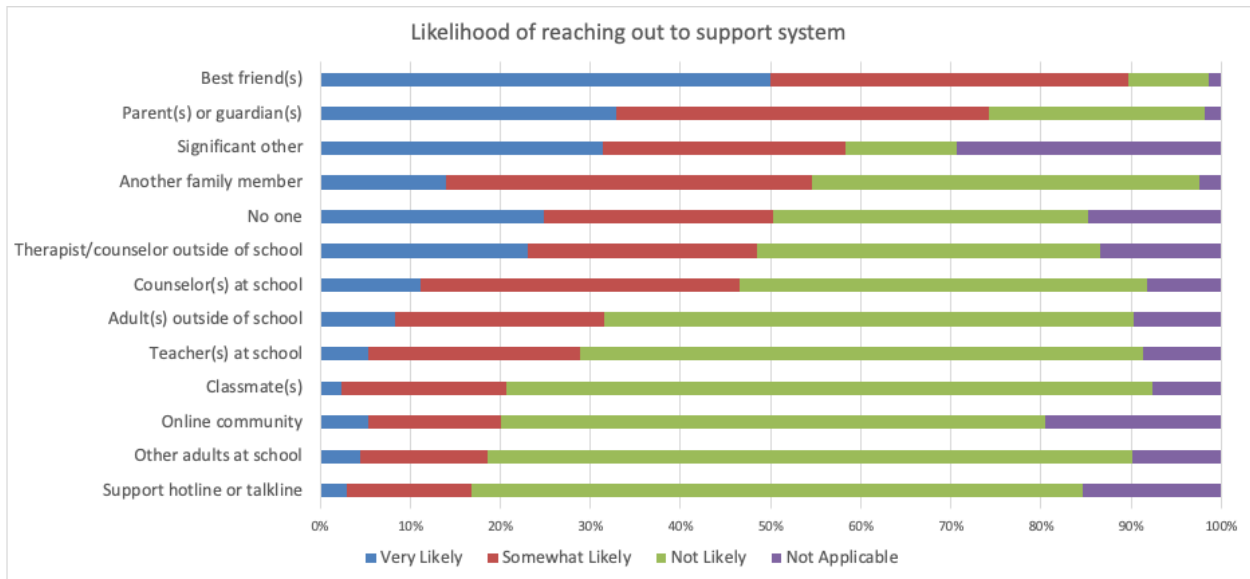


- Top rated risk factors for all respondents: Pressure for academic success, Social media, Unrealistic standards of perfectionism, Negative home environments, Pressure from parent(s) or guardian(s), Diet culture, Bullying
- Seniors seem to be most impacted by most of the risk factors but particularly so by Social media, Diet culture, and LGBTQ+ discrimination.
 - Social media could be a bigger issue for Seniors due to Covid-19 occurring during their 9th grade and being forced to spend greater amounts of time online, on their phones, and on social media to connect with others
- Juniors find Social media and Diet culture to be less of an issue than the other grades
- Freshmen find Pressure for academic success, Social media, and Unrealistic standards of perfection less of an issue than the other grades



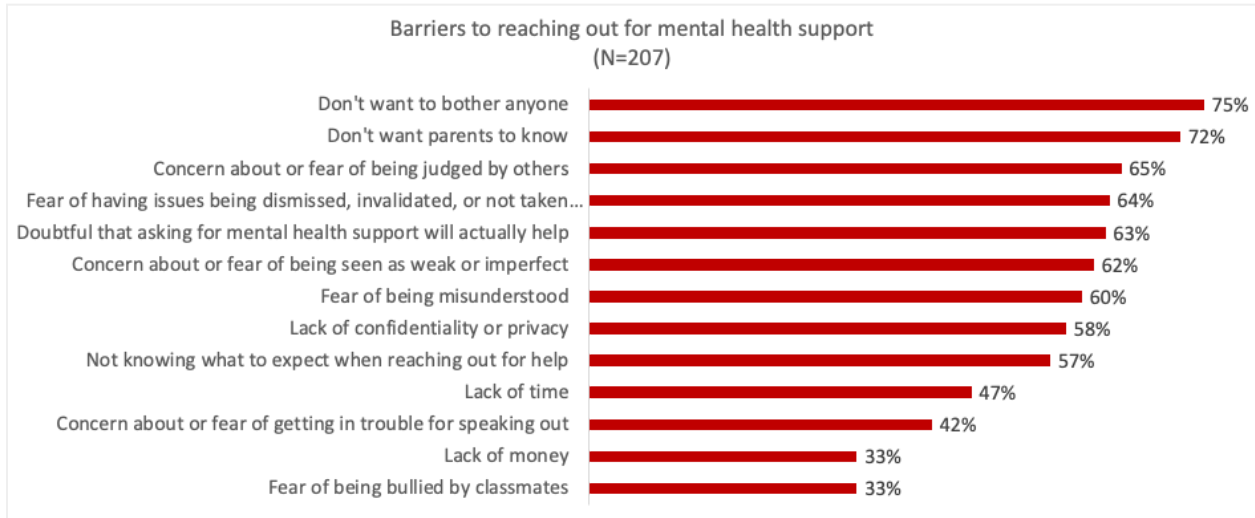
- The Covid-19 pandemic is still having an impact on youth mental health since it affected youth so dramatically by changing their entire way of interacting and schooling
- Minimizing and romanticizing mental health challenges are also risk factors for a portion of the respondents
 - **Recommendation:** Adults and youth should be more mindful of how they talk about mental health and validate the experiences of others

Q4: If you were going through a challenging time, how likely are you to ask the following people for mental health support?

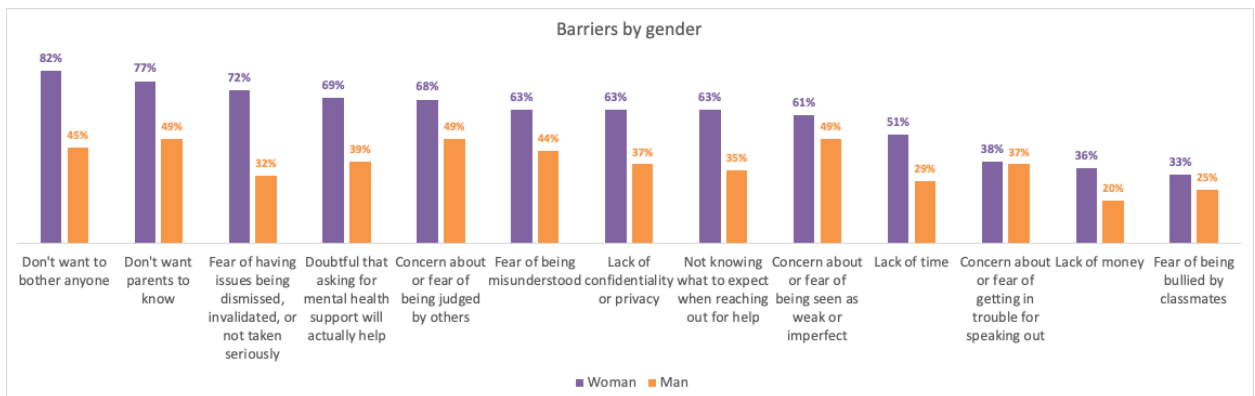


- Best friends and parents/guardians are the top sources of support, which makes sense since those relationships are well-established, easily accessible, and generally trustworthy.
 - **Recommendation:** Friends and parents/guardians should be taught how to provide mental health support through listening, validating, and not being judgemental. It is difficult for youth who need support to take the lead so their friends and parents/guardians should learn what to say and ask.
- 50% of respondents are likely to not turn to anyone for support, which could be related to the high levels of anxiety and depression. Since those two conditions are so common, it may discourage youth to talk about them and exhibit more symptoms of withdrawal and isolation.
- Counselors at school and outside of school seem to be a good source of support for respondents.
 - The Ideas Lab participants hypothesized that because the majority of respondents attend private schools, those schools may have a better ratio of counselors to students and greater counselor availability.
- Respondents are not likely to reach out to other adults, possibly because it is hard to know who they can trust and they don't know how those adults will react - if they will contact the youth's parents or take other actions that the youth don't want.
- Support hotlines/talklines are the least likely source of support for respondents, possibly out of fear of not knowing what will happen. This topic was further explored in Q9 below.

Q5: Which of the following do you think prevents teens in Marin County from asking for mental health support?

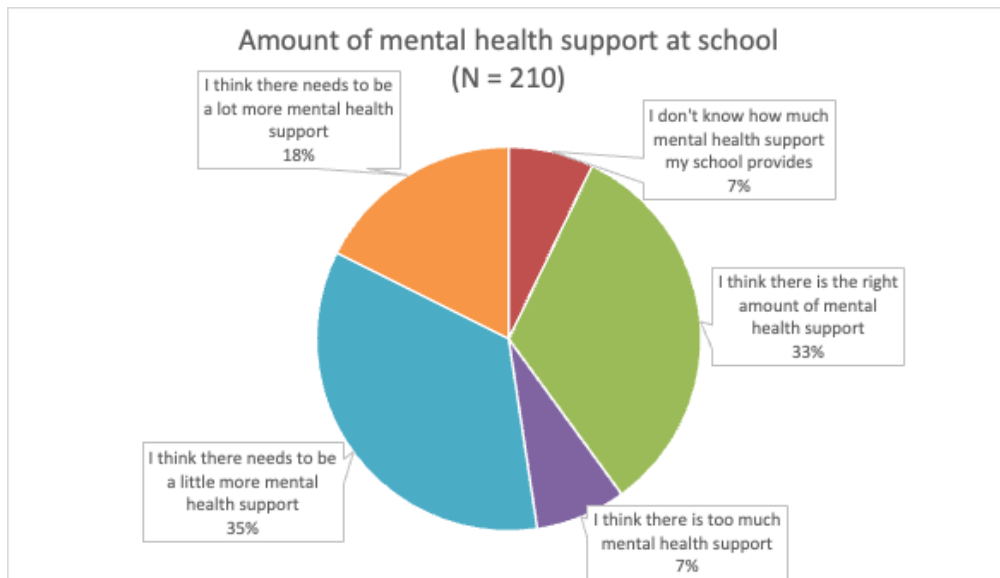


- Not wanting to bother anyone is the top barrier for reaching out for support, which aligns with No One being so high in the previous question
 - **Recommendation:** Create a list of credible resources grouped by topic to help youth find available support and worry less about being misunderstood. Having the right resource can help youth feel more validated about their problems.
- Not wanting parents to know is the second-highest barrier to reaching out for mental health support, which surprised the Ideas Lab participants who thought fears of being judged were going to be greater. But they believe that youth don't want to be judged by their parents.
 - **Recommendation:** Parents must be educated on how to encourage their children to reach out for support without judgment
- Lack of time is lower on the list of barriers, which was surprising to the Ideas Lab participants, who witness their peers prioritizing school work ahead of their mental health



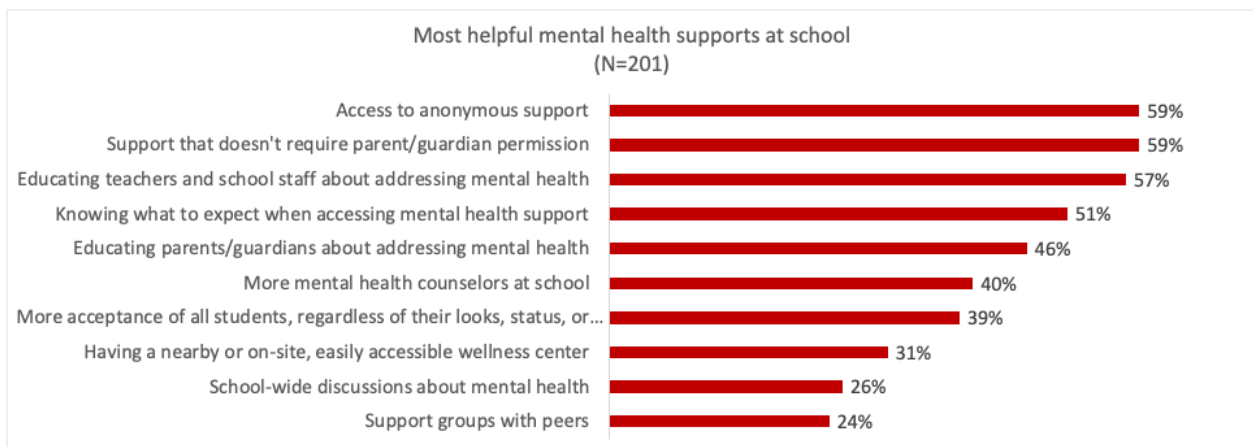
- Male respondents are more likely to be concerned about being seen as weak or imperfect and being judged by others than female respondents. Male teens seem to have greater stigma about reaching out and talking about mental health with their peers.

Q6: How would you describe the amount of mental health support provided by your school?



- The Ideas Lab participants were surprised by how many respondents thought there is the right amount of mental health support at their school, since anecdotally, no one seems to think there is ever enough. But it is important to remember that the sample is overrepresented on private school respondents so this data point does not necessarily reflect Marin County’s public school students.

Q7: What type(s) of mental health support do you think would be most helpful at your school?



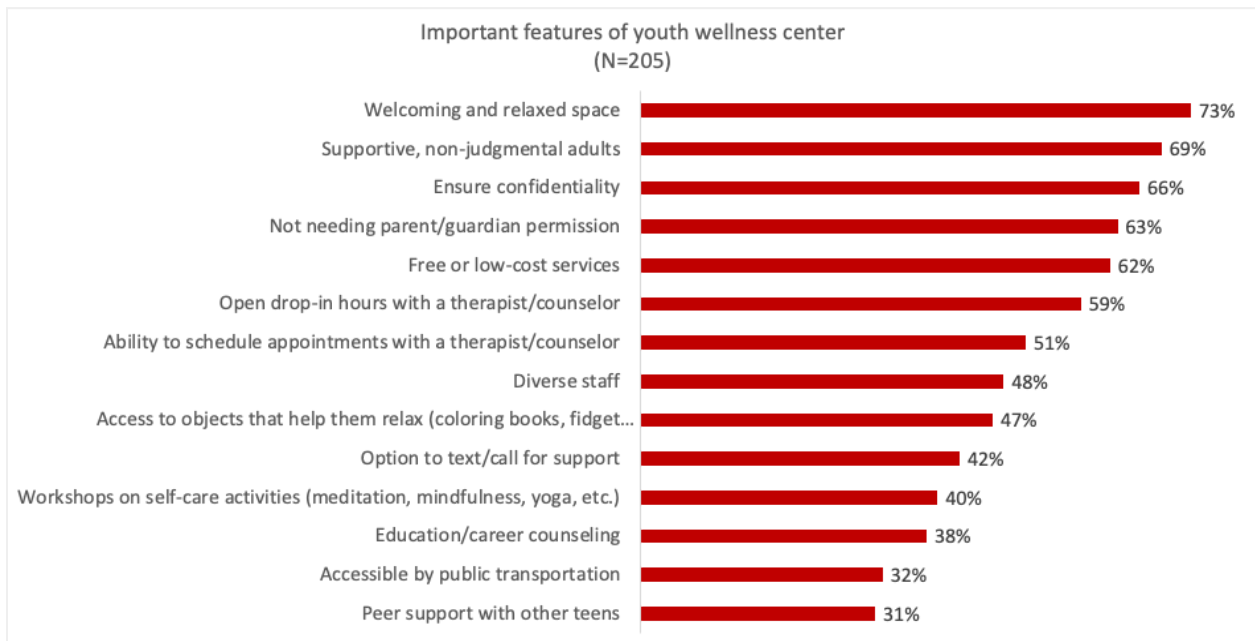
- Anonymity is of high importance for youth when seeking out mental health support. This can be an issue if youth don’t know when certain mental health supports are anonymous or not e.g., the 988 Lifeline
- Support groups with peers ranks low, possibly because there is discomfort sharing personal issues with peers who are not your close friends

Most helpful mental health supports by gender identity:

	Women	Men
1.	Support that doesn't require parent/guardian permission	Educating teachers and school staff about addressing mental health
2.	Access to anonymous support	Access to anonymous support
3.	Educating teachers and school staff about addressing mental health	Support that doesn't require parent/guardian permission
4.	Knowing what to expect when accessing mental health support	Knowing what to expect when accessing mental health support

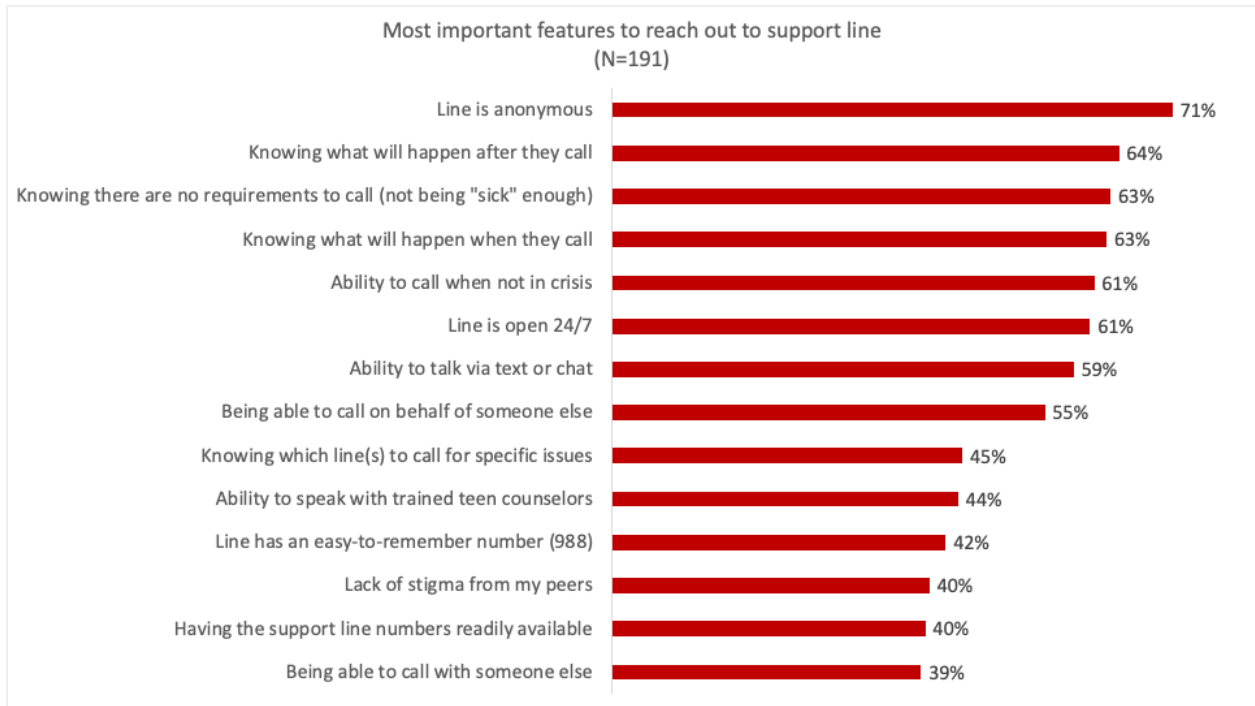
- Male respondents' most desired support at school is educating teachers and school staff on addressing youth mental health

Q8: Which of the following do you think are important to encourage teens to use a youth wellness center?



- Respondents want a youth wellness center that is welcoming and relaxing, where they can take a break from school and people and choose what is best for them in the moment. Having supportive and non-judgmental adults is important so students know they won't be pressured to talk someone if they don't want to.
- Maintaining confidentiality and not needing parental permission is also important since some students may not feel supported by their parents and want to reach out for help without their parents knowing.

Q9: Which of the following do you think are important to encourage teens to reach out to a mental health support line?



- Knowing (or not knowing) seems to be a prevalent factor in several of the top responses to encourage youth to reach out to a mental health support line. This may be because there are a lot of feelings of uncertainty or anxiety when someone decides to call, or wondering if their issues are “bad enough” to call.
 - **Recommendation:** Youth should be educated about what will happen when they reach out to a mental health support line, and be provided with assurance that the support line is an appropriate resource for them.
 - **Recommendation:** Following a conversation between an Ideas Lab participant and a Lifeline counselor, the Ideas Lab participant believes all youth should know the following about reaching out a support line:
 - 90-95% of calls are just talking, often coming up with a safety plan
 - Don’t have to be in a direct crisis when calling, counselors never turn anyone down. Some people become regular callers who use the line to check in on themselves.
 - Calls are usually anonymous. Youths’ parents will not be contacted unless that caller agrees to it.
 - Anonymity will be breached if/when there is immediate danger or if there is suspicion of abuse or neglect for callers under 18.

Q10: If resources weren't an issue, how would you help solve youth mental health in Marin County? (Open-ended) (N = 84)

Common Themes	Direct Quotes
Provide academic relief to reduce stress and pressure	<p>“Create more alternative options that work with students struggling with mental health issues to succeed in school”</p> <p>“address it in schools first, listen to what we have to say, how stressful homework can be and how we always have to sacrifice our health for academic success.”</p>
Need for more supportive and understanding adults	<p>“it can often feel like the adults you talk to think your struggles aren't a big deal”</p> <p>“I would make sure the people close to me are educated and know how to help those who struggle with mental health. “</p> <p>“Help kids understand that more people care about them.”</p>
Students should meet with their counselors regularly	<p>“I would set each individual student with a counselor and require them to set up 1-2 meetings so that they have a trusted, anonymous adult to go to if they ever needed help. Regardless of if the teen thinks they need therapy or help, it's a great idea for everyone to know they have someone in their corner already.”</p> <p>“I would make it much more accessible for all students to have a chance to meet with a counselor or someone to talk to, even if they are not in a crisis.”</p>
Need for a safe, confidential space	<p>“bringing an open space where people can talk with no judgement but anonymously as well”</p> <p>“i would give teens someone to talk to that won't go to your parents. maybe they could go to teachers to better support you in an academic setting, but the fear of parents finding out is real and holds a lot of people back. if people could text or go in person to see someone who won't say anything to your parents. i think more people would reach out if it was like this.”</p>
Create healthier relationships with social media	<p>“In my opinion, one of the biggest contributors to the youth mental health problem in Marin County is social media. From social media, things like body dismorphia, low self-esteem, feeling isolated or left out, and anxious all stem from the variety of platforms. I think by finding a way to reduce the use of it would help tremendously.”</p> <p>“Maybe social media could be fixed”</p>
Reduce stigma to encourage getting mental health support	<p>“provide anyone possible and who needs it with private and de-stigmatized therapy. people often see therapy as a big leap for traumatic events but dismantling this idea could help kids be able to reach out easier.”</p> <p>“Decrease stigma around getting help for mental health (mostly for parents.)”</p>

Q11: What do you wish adults in Marin County knew about youth mental health and/or how to support teens better? (Open-ended) (N = 94)

Common Themes	Direct Quotes
Parents should be more understanding and educate themselves on youth mental health	<p>“I wish adults were educated on mental health, and were taught how to support their kids.”</p> <p>“i wish they knew the power their words had. “</p> <p>“that its not easy to reach out for mental health help. some time people just need someone to talk to just [with]out being judged”</p>
Teens are experts of their mental health, adults should listen more	<p>“Sometimes the best option to help your child's/students mental health is by listening and asking.”</p> <p>“Stop trying to relate, simply listen and support”</p>
The pressure to be perfect is hurting youth mental health	<p>“I think that sometimes adults in Marin put this pressure to be perfect and to not have any flaws and a mental illness can be seen as this so letting teens know that it's ok to have a mental illness is important”</p> <p>“i think that many teens are afraid to ask for help because mental health has such a stigma in Marin because we are supposed to be perfect.”</p>
Schools need to recognize and ease up on the pressure	<p>“Teachers are beyond ignorant about the amount of stress and overwhelm students face. Instead of understanding when an assignment is late or a student missing school, they are often passive aggressive and upset with the student.”</p> <p>“i wish adults (especially teachers) knew how hard home life can be and how it can affect people. as well as unrealistic standards, and if people could decrease the amount of homework given. i know not having any time to process things is very difficult and can be absolutely draining.”</p>
Don't minimize teens' mental health challenges	<p>“we're not faking it for attention, and just because it seems like ‘everyone has anxiety or depression’ doesn't mean it's any less valid.”</p> <p>“I wish adults knew that mental health is something that includes anxiety and that nothing should be invalidated. Everything that someone is feeling is valid and it's hard to seek help when the media and adults often portray it as something that isn't real.”</p>
Understand generational differences play a big role	<p>“I wish they knew more about how mental health is a bigger, more diverse, and different issue then it was when they were young.”</p> <p>“I think they really need to see that the society has changed from when they were little and see the impact everything online has on teenagers.”</p>