



AIM Ideas Lab Youth Survey 2024

Alameda & Santa Clara Counties

Research Design Collaborators

AIM Youth Mental Health

Judy Smythe, CEO

Mariana Jimenez, Program Manager

Micaela Cunningham, Ideas Lab Mentor

Dae Romain, Ideas Lab Mentor

Isabella Villa, Ideas Lab Mentor

AIM Ideas Lab Alameda & Santa Clara County Program Participants

Aleezay Ahmad, Sahasra Boddula, Betty Cao, Kirsten Elloso, Juliana Fiss, Shreyaa Gunasekar, Aditi Gupta, Kamakshi Gupta, Shelby Kim, Edmund Lai, Sumeet Mangat, Jaiden Pascua, Jeffrey Rajkumar, Keerthi Ramakuri, Srinandhan Sankar, Soham Sethi, Toba Shui, Akshatvir Singh, Parker Sun, Thu Rain Ye Yint Tun, Vandana Venkatesh, Angeline Wei, Sreyas Yallapragada

Introduction

AIM Youth Mental Health invited high school student volunteers in Alameda and Santa Clara Counties to take part in the AIM Ideas Lab: A Youth Participatory Action Research project focused on mental health advocacy. This program ran from January 21 - March 12, 2024.

Twenty-two AIM Ideas Lab youth researchers throughout both counties worked together to conduct youth mental health research and make recommendations to policymakers, researchers, and their community about how to address the youth mental health crisis. Over 400 hours of community service was invested by the youth participants in this program.

AIM Ideas Lab Program Objectives:

1. Discuss youth mental health and emerging concerns, and collaborate to devise strategies to address these challenges with teens from various high schools
2. Learn about conducting and analyzing 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 findings with the outcomes of AIM Ideas Labs held across multiple counties
5. Advocate for the youth perspective by presenting ideas, research, and recommendations through identified communication channels.

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 use their own perspectives and strengths to identify, study, and address issues that impact them.

Research Objective: Survey a demographically representative sample of teens in San Diego County to identify the most pressing mental health challenges they are facing and to explore potential strategies for addressing them effectively.

Survey Distribution: The survey took about 10-15 minutes to complete. The survey was distributed February 18 - 29, 2024, via word-of-mouth, text message, social media, and in select schools. 143 youth in San Diego County completed the survey.

Mixed-Methods Approach: The survey consisted of 17 quantitative (frequencies, percentages) and 2 qualitative questions (open ended response) and results were analyzed by the youth researchers to form conclusions and recommendations for youth and adult stakeholders in the community.

Executive Summary

1. Youth in Alameda and Santa Clara counties agree that mental health is a critical issue that needs to be addressed with 79.5% of respondents considering it “Very Important”. However the majority of students are not entirely comfortable seeking mental health support with 36.8% of teens not at all comfortable and 50.2% of teens feeling somewhat comfortable asking for mental health support.
2. The most common factors that would encourage teens from asking for help are:
 - 2.1. Knowing they won't be judged: 79.6% of teens
 - 2.2. Learning how to ask for help: 63.8% of teens
 - 2.3. Knowing their parents/guardians wouldn't find out: 63.4% of teens
 - 2.4. Knowing they won't be rejected or turned away: 58.7%
 - 2.5. Knowing there won't be a stigma about reaching out for help: 54.9%
3. The top factors affecting the mental well-being of Alameda and Santa Clara counties' teens are academic pressure, lack of sleep, lack of school/life balance, peer pressure, and comparisons to other people, impacting teen's overall well-being.
 - 3.1. Academic pressure: 84.9% of teens
 - 3.2. Lack of sleep: 73.1% of teens
 - 3.3. Lack of school/life balance: 71.4% of teens
 - 3.4. Peer pressure: 69.7% of teens
 - 3.5. Comparisons to other people: 66.0% of teens
4. Schools can support student's mental health by reducing academic pressure and shifting the school culture to focus on cultivating a more positive and supportive academic environment.
 - 4.1. Ability to take extensions for schoolwork: 67.7%
 - 4.2. Offering redos on quizzes and schoolwork: 66.0%
 - 4.3. Encouraging students to take mental health days: 65.5%
 - 4.4. Less emphasis on grades: 64.3%
 - 4.5. More resources during stressful times (finals, college applications): 61.3%
5. Teens' self-esteem plays a large role in their mental health. Scrolling on social media, reading comments online, comparing themselves to others, and discussing grades with friends have the most negative impact on teen's self-esteem.
 - 5.1. Comparing themselves to others: 88.1% of teens
 - 5.2. Reading comments online: 70.7% of teens
 - 5.3. Discussing grades with friends: 72.4% of teens
 - 5.4. Scrolling on social media: 67.4% of teens

Respondent Demographics

Age

This survey gathered demographic information, with 241 respondents aged between 14 and 18. The distribution indicates 17-year-olds being the largest group (50.8%), followed by 16-year olds and 18- year olds with 16.4% and 13.5% respectively. Fifteen-year olds comprise 10.2% of the total, while 14-year olds represent 7.0%. Additionally, 2.0% of respondents fell outside the specified range.

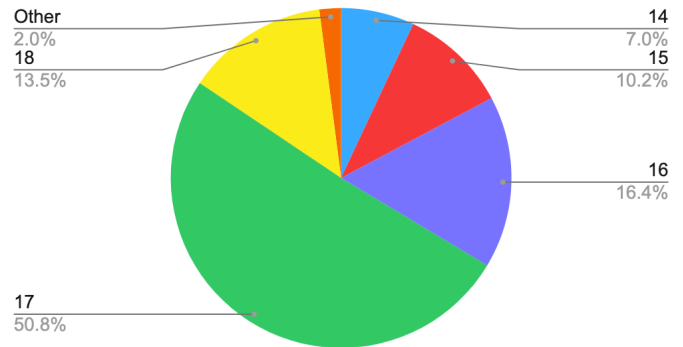


Figure 1. Age distribution of respondents.

Grade

The survey gathered demographic information from 241 participants regarding their grade level in school. Among the respondents, 8.8% were in 9th grade. Meanwhile, 10th graders comprised 14.6% of the sample, followed closely by 11th graders at 19.2%. The greatest proportion of participants, 54.9%, were in 12th grade.

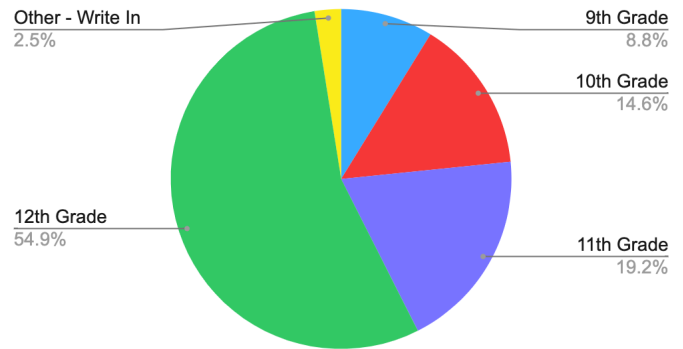


Figure 2. Grade distribution of respondents.

School

The school survey responses indicate that the majority of respondents attend Irvington High School, which accounts for 67.9% of the total. Prospect High School and Lynbrook High School follow, with 15.4% and 8.1%, respectively. John F Kennedy High School represents 1.3% of the respondents, while the remaining schools each have less than 1.0% of the total responses, with 7 schools contributing just one respondent each. Overall, the survey collected responses from 234 students across a diverse range of high schools.

Recommendation: Outreach for the Ideas Lab will be widespread across all high schools to achieve a wider distribution of the survey to obtain data that is representative of Alameda and Santa Clara Counties.

Table 1. School distribution of respondents.

School	Count	%
Irvington HS	159	67.9%
Prospect HS	36	15.4%
Lynbrook HS	19	8.1%
John F Kennedy HS	3	1.3%
American HS	2	0.9%
Leland HS	2	0.9%
Mission HS	2	0.9%
Washington HS	2	0.9%
Westmont HS	2	0.9%
Alameda HS	1	0.4%
Branham HS	1	0.4%
Castro Valley HS	1	0.4%
Foothill HS	1	0.4%
Hayward HS	1	0.4%
The King's Academy	1	0.4%
Newark Memorial HS	1	0.4%

City

The survey gathered demographic information from 241 participants regarding the city they reside in. The survey results show that a significant majority of respondents, 68.5% (165 students), reside in Fremont and San Jose with 17.8% (43 students). Campbell and Saratoga each account for 3.4% (8 students) of the respondents. Smaller proportions come from various other locations each contributing less than 1.3% to the total. The full distribution of respondents can be found below in **Table 2**.

Recommendation: Survey distribution will extend throughout Alameda and Santa Clara Counties to ensure broad coverage and obtain data that accurately represents the demographics and characteristics of the county.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents by city of residence.

City	Count	%
Fremont	165	69.6%
San Jose	43	18.1%
Campbell	8	3.4%
Saratoga	8	3.4%
Alameda	3	1.3%
Cupertino	2	0.8%
Hayward	2	0.8%
Newark	2	0.8%
Berkeley	1	0.4%
Castro Valley	1	0.4%
Santa Clara	1	0.4%
Sunnyvale	1	0.4%

Gender Identity

The survey collected data on gender identity from 248 participants. The school survey results reveal that the majority of respondents identify as women, comprising 54.4%. Men represent 34.3%. Transgender and non-binary individuals account for 2.0% and 4.4% respectively. Additionally, 4.8% prefer not to disclose their gender. There is fair representation of different gender identities, however, the results skew to reflect the demographics of the Ideas Lab participants. These findings provide valuable insights into the gender diversity within the surveyed population, highlighting the need for inclusive approaches in addressing mental health concerns among teens.

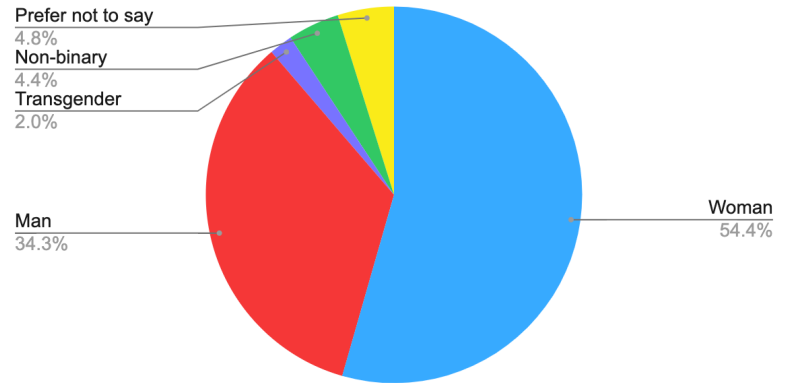


Figure 3. Distribution of respondents' gender identity.

Racial/Ethnic Identity

In terms of racial and ethnic identity, the survey gathered responses from 243 participants, 22 of which selected more than one racial/ethnic identity. The racial and ethnic makeup of the survey respondents is not entirely representative of Alameda and Santa Clara Counties, with the majority identifying as Asian or Asian American (80.2%). White or Caucasian identifying participants accounted for 15.2% of respondents and Latino/a or Hispanic accounted for 4.9%. Additionally, 1.2% identify as Black or African American, 1.2% as Middle Eastern or North African, 0.8% as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 0.4% as Indigenous or Native American.

Table 3. Ethnic and racial distribution of survey respondents.

Race/Ethnicity	%	Count
Asian or Asian American	80.2%	195
White or Caucasian	15.2%	37
Latino/a/x or Hispanic	4.9%	12
Prefer not to say	3.3%	8
Other - Write In	1.6%	4
Black or African American	1.2%	3
Middle Eastern or North African	1.2%	3
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.8%	2
Indigenous or Native American	0.4%	1

Quantitative data

Q.1. How important do you think it is to address the mental health of teens in Alameda and Santa Clara Counties?

The survey data indicates that the vast majority of the 240 respondents for this question, 79.5%, consider addressing the mental health of teens in Alameda and Santa Clara Counties as very important, with 18.4% viewing it as somewhat important, and only 2.1% deeming it not important. The widespread understanding of the importance of mental health is likely due to efforts to create more discussions about mental health. Individuals are aware of how severe of an issue mental health is within their community because it is something that they relate to their peers over.

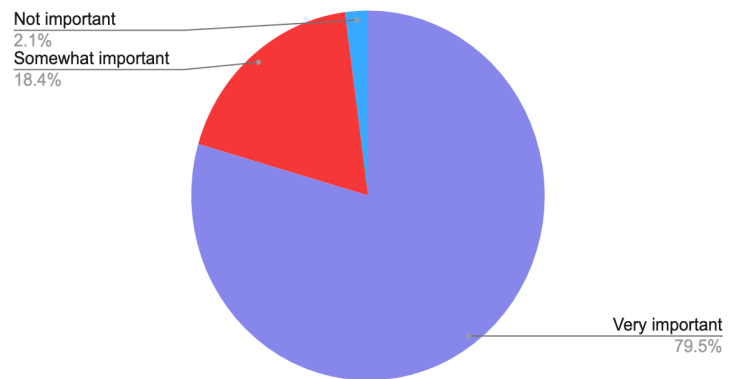
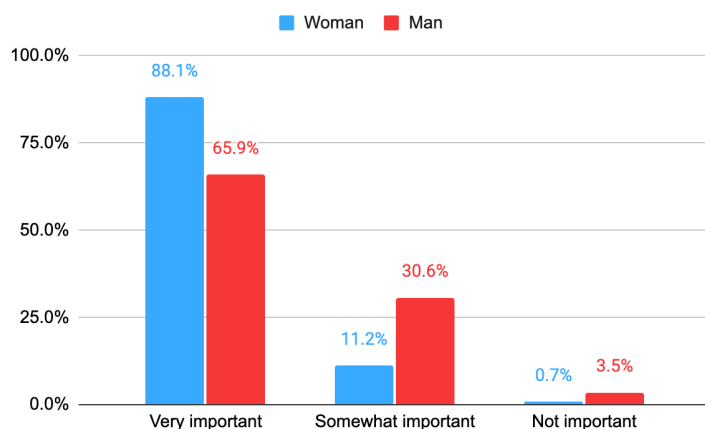


Figure 4. Importance of addressing teen mental health in Alameda and Santa Clara Counties.

The data shows that women are more likely to consider mental health very important (88.1%) compared to men (65.9%). A smaller percentage of women (11.2%) and men (30.6%) view it as somewhat important, and an even smaller percentage find it not important (0.7% of women and 3.5% of men).



To address the gender disparity in the perception of mental health's importance, it is recommended to destigmatize male mental health by framing it as a universal human issue, changing the language around it, and promoting positive male role models who openly discuss mental health. Additionally, introducing Social Emotional Learning (SEL) skills like communication and naming feelings early in education can help build specific mental health skills over time.

Figure 5. Disparities in the perceived importance of addressing teen mental health by gender.

Q.2. Have any of your friends shared with you that they have experienced any of the following?

Among 244 respondents, the most common mental health challenges reported by their peers are high levels of stress or burnout (85.2%), anxiety (83.5%), low self-esteem (73.5%), and depression (69.6%). Other significant challenges include social isolation or loneliness (56.5%), unhealthy relationships with food or eating disorders (51.7%), thoughts of ending their life (46.5%), and self-harm or self-injury (46.1%). Less commonly reported issues include substance misuse or addiction (30.9%), and trauma or PTSD (25.2%).

The main mental health challenges—stress, anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression—are prevalent among youth and often interconnected, where one issue, such as stress, might stem from another, like anxiety. These findings underscore the necessity for increased support and resources in schools, including initiatives to reduce academic stressors and prevent such high levels of stress among teens.

Recommendation: Implement comprehensive mental health education programs in schools to normalize help-seeking behaviors and provide practical guidance on seeking support so that students can learn how to manage stress in a healthy way.

Recommendation: Host a “What I Wish My Teachers Knew” symposium held by students for teachers, with topics and conversations chosen by the students.

Table 4. Mental health challenges respondents peers have experienced.

Mental Health Challenge	Peers' Mental Health Challenges (%)
High levels of stress and/or feeling burnt out	85.2%
Anxiety	83.5%
Low self-esteem	73.5%
Depression	69.6%
Social isolation/loneliness	56.5%
Eating disorders/having an unhealthy relationship with food	51.7%
Thoughts of ending their life	46.5%
Self-harm or self-injury	46.1%
Substance misuse/addiction	30.9%
Trauma and/or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	25.2%
Other - Write In	0.9%

Q.3. Which of the following do you think worsens mental health for teens in Alameda and Santa Clara counties?

The survey results reveal that the top 10 risk factors affecting students' mental health are primarily related to academic and social pressures. Academic stress (84.9%) is the most prevalent issue, closely followed by lack of sleep (73.1%) and challenges in maintaining a school/life balance (71.4%). Peer pressure (69.7%) and comparisons to others (66.0%) also significantly impact students, along with societal expectations (65.1%) and negative home environments (62.2%). These factors often intersect, with academic pressure contributing to sleep issues and a lack of balance, while social pressures and comparisons exacerbate feelings of stress. Addressing these interconnected issues through wellness programs and supportive environments can help mitigate their negative effects on students' mental health. These issues may be compounded by the cultural emphasis on academic achievement, particularly among Asian American students, who comprise the majority of the survey respondents. The focus on academics is not just a school culture issue but may also be influenced by the ethnic culture of the student population. Factors such as "being different from the dominant culture" (30.3%) and "stigma of talking about mental health" (37.4%) are less reported but still significant. This points to the importance of addressing cultural and stigma-related barriers in mental health support efforts.

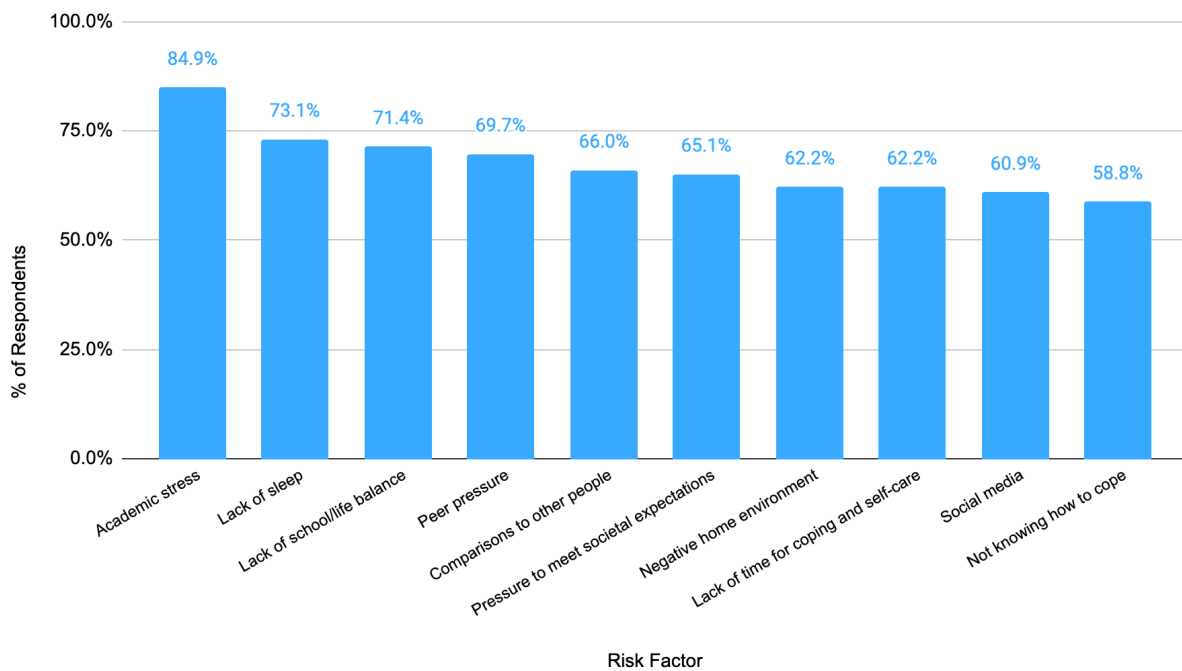


Figure 6. The top 10 most impactful factors on the mental health of teens in Alameda and Santa Clara Counties.

The survey captures a wide range of risk factors, from personal issues like lack of self-care and identity problems to broader issues such as stigma and lack of community. This diversity in risk factors indicates that mental health challenges are multifaceted and require a comprehensive approach to support. Social media is notably less prevalent compared to other stressors (60.9%), suggesting that while it is a factor, it might not be as dominant as academic or interpersonal pressures. This highlights the need to focus on direct academic and social challenges rather than just digital influences. See **Table 5** for the complete distribution of risk factors impacting the mental health of teens in Alameda and Santa Clara counties.

Recommendation: Schools implement wellness programs and promote safe coping methods to help alleviate students' mental health issues.

Recommendation: Conversations about mental health should aim to be culturally informed to holistically address the mental health of teens.

Table 5. Factors impacting the mental health of teens in Alameda and Santa Clara Counties.

Risk Factor	%	Count
Academic stress	84.9%	202
Lack of sleep	73.1%	174
Lack of school/life balance	71.4%	170
Peer pressure	69.7%	166
Comparisons to other people	66.0%	157
Pressure to meet societal expectations	65.1%	155
Negative home environment	62.2%	148
Lack of time for coping and self-care	62.2%	148
Social media	60.9%	145
Not knowing how to cope	58.8%	140
School culture	58.8%	140
Beauty standards	55.9%	133
Lack of trusting relationships	52.9%	126
Bullying	45.0%	107
Identity issues	39.5%	94
Lack of community	39.5%	94
Stigma of talking about mental health	37.4%	89
Negative language towards others	36.6%	87
Lack of access to basic needs	31.9%	76
Being different from the dominant culture	30.3%	72
Extracurriculars/sports	28.2%	67
Supporting other people's mental health	23.5%	56
Other - Write In	1.3%	3

Q.4 How do you think the following activities impact the self-esteem of teens in Alameda and Santa Clara counties?

The survey results reveal that certain activities and interactions have a substantial positive impact on teens' self-esteem. Socializing with classmates stands out with an 85.3% positive impact rate, demonstrating the significant role of supportive peer relationships in enhancing self-worth. Accessing mental health resources follows closely at 81.7%, highlighting the importance of professional support in boosting self-esteem and supporting good mental health in teens. Extracurricular activities and sports, with a 73.6% positive impact, also contribute significantly by providing opportunities for achievement and engagement. Additionally, discussing mental health openly has a 72.0% positive impact, showing that fostering open communication about mental health can promote a sense of support and validation. Activities with the most positive impact on teens' self-esteem are related to social interaction.

Conversely, several factors negatively affect teens' self-esteem. Activities related to social media, such as posting (28.9%) and scrolling (13.0%), are associated with a decline in self-esteem, particularly when they involve comparing oneself to others (9.6%). These behaviors often exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and contribute to negative self-perception. Moreover, discussing grades with friends (13.8%) and reading comments online (10.0%) can also be detrimental, especially if one's academic performance is perceived as subpar compared to peers. These negative impacts highlight the harmful effects of academic and social comparisons on teens' self-esteem.

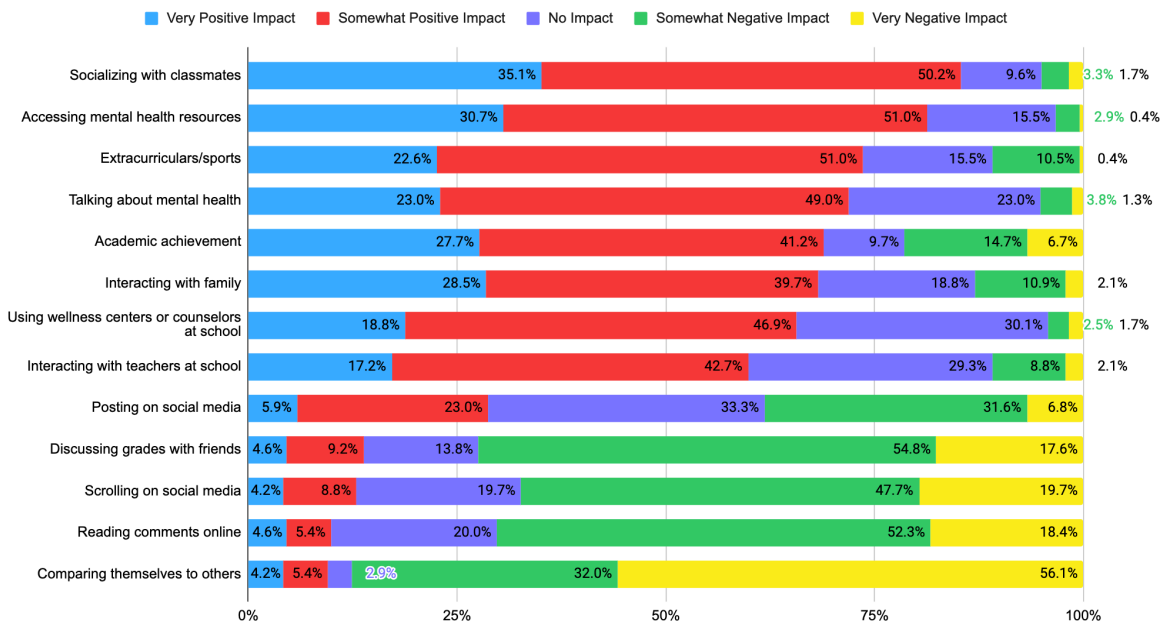


Figure 7. Perceived Impact of Activities on Teen Self-Esteem in Alameda and Santa Clara Counties.

To address these issues, it is recommended that schools and parents shift the conversations they have with teens to emphasize character development and self-appreciation over traditional academic and body image concerns. Creating a school culture that prioritizes personal growth, resilience, and a positive self-image can help mitigate the negative effects associated with academic stress and social media. Schools should foster an environment where students feel valued for their individuality and strengths, rather than solely for their academic performance or appearance.

Recommendation: Adopting programs like the Stanford Body Project could provide practical applications to promote positive body image and self-esteem.

Recommendation: Encourage social atmosphere that would encourage courage amongst teens to make those social interactions even if it may be difficult to do so.

Table 6. Perceived impact of various activities on the self esteem of teens in Alameda and Santa Clara Counties.

	Very Positive Impact	Somewhat Positive Impact	No Impact	Somewhat Negative Impact	Very Negative Impact
Socializing with classmates	35.1%	50.2%	9.6%	3.3%	1.7%
Accessing mental health resources	30.7%	51.0%	15.5%	2.9%	0.4%
Extracurriculars/sports	22.6%	51.0%	15.5%	10.5%	0.4%
Talking about mental health	23.0%	49.0%	23.0%	3.8%	1.3%
Academic achievement	27.7%	41.2%	9.7%	14.7%	6.7%
Interacting with family	28.5%	39.7%	18.8%	10.9%	2.1%
Using wellness centers or counselors at school	18.8%	46.9%	30.1%	2.5%	1.7%
Interacting with teachers at school	17.2%	42.7%	29.3%	8.8%	2.1%
Posting on social media	5.9%	23.0%	33.3%	31.6%	6.8%
Discussing grades with friends	4.6%	9.2%	13.8%	54.8%	17.6%
Scrolling on social media	4.2%	8.8%	19.7%	47.7%	19.7%
Reading comments online	4.6%	5.4%	20.0%	52.3%	18.4%
Comparing themselves to others	4.2%	5.4%	2.9%	32.0%	56.1%

Q.5. If you were going through a challenging time, how comfortable are you asking for support?

The survey results reveal a generally positive trend in teens' comfort levels with seeking support during challenging times. A majority, 63.2%, are at least somewhat comfortable asking for help, indicating a willingness among teens to reach out for support. Of these, 50.2% are somewhat comfortable and 13.0% are very comfortable, suggesting that while most teens are open to seeking help, only a minority feel very confident in doing so. However, 33.6% of respondents express discomfort, which may be attributed to fears of judgment or a lack of a supportive network.

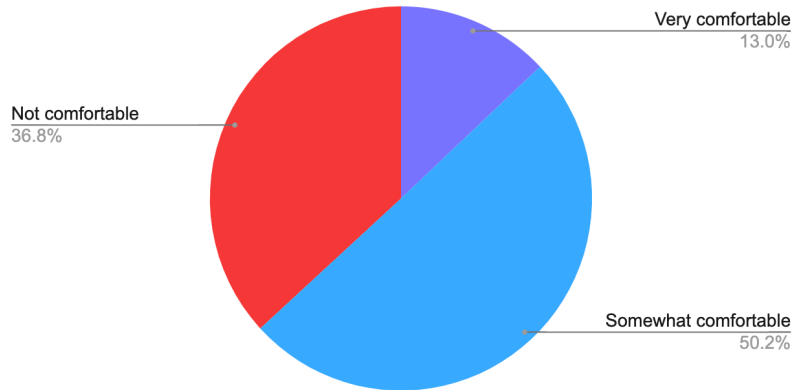


Figure 8. The comfort level of respondents in seeking support during challenging times, Alameda and Santa Clara County.

The data also shows a relatively even distribution of comfort levels across genders, with no significant differences between male and female respondents. This indicates that both genders are similarly inclined to seek support when needed, though a notable portion still feels uneasy about doing so. Overall, while there is a positive inclination towards seeking help, the presence of a significant proportion of teens who feel uncomfortable highlights the need for improved support systems and stigma reduction. Addressing fears and expanding supportive networks could further enhance teens' comfort levels in asking for help.

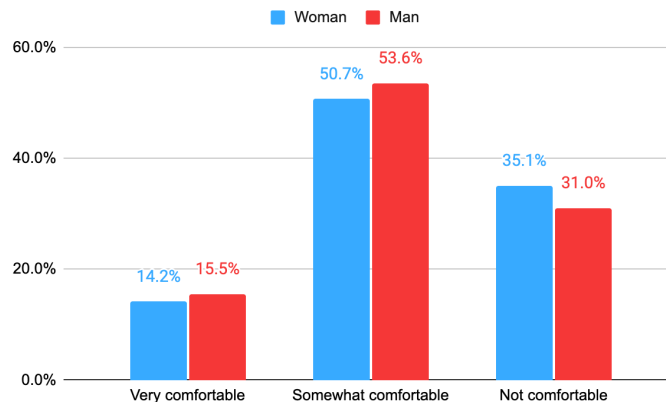


Figure 9. Gender comparison of comfort levels in seeking support during challenging times,

Alameda and Santa Clara county.

Recommendation: Campaigns to ensure mental health becomes part of the conversation early (e.g. DARE, MADD, Truth ad campaigns, which educate around harmful effects) and to check in on your friends and peers (e.g., [R U OK day](#)).

Recommendation: Provide guidance to respond to a friend who does need support, mitigate anxiety responses about saying the “wrong thing”

Recommendation: Create campaigns that happen more than once a year to help integrate the importance of mental health in the school's culture - host wellness weeks once a quarter/semester.

Q.6. If you were going through a challenging time, how likely are you to ask the following people for mental health support?

The survey results highlight varying levels of likelihood among students when seeking mental health support from different sources. Among the respondents, the most frequently chosen options for support are friends and significant others. Specifically, 30.1% of students are very likely to seek support from a significant other, and 24.9% are very likely to turn to friends. This suggests that personal relationships are seen as more accessible and supportive sources of help during challenging times compared to other options. Online communities and anonymous hotlines also show low engagement, with 5.6% and 3.9% of students, respectively, being very likely to use these resources. This reinforces the idea that direct personal interactions are preferred when seeking mental health support. However, a significant portion, 29.9%, indicates they would be unlikely to seek support from anyone, reflecting a tendency to keep mental health issues to themselves.

When considering parents or guardians, 23.0% of students are very likely to seek support from them, and 28.0% are somewhat likely. This indicates that while some students feel comfortable turning to their parents or guardians, a notable portion still feels less inclined to do so. Similarly, another family member is less likely to be a source of support, with only 14.0% of students very likely to reach out to them. This lower likelihood may suggest varying levels of closeness or trust with extended family members.

Therapists or counselors outside of school are another option, but only 12.9% of students are very likely to seek support from them. This low likelihood may be attributed to the stigma surrounding mental health professionals or a lack of familiarity with accessing such services. A similar trend is observed with other adults outside of school, such as coaches or mentors, where only 5.2% are very likely to seek support. This indicates a general preference for seeking support from more personal or familiar sources rather than external adults.

Students' reluctance to reach out to school-based resources is notable. Only 3.4% are very likely to seek support from teachers, and 3.0% from school counselors, while 1.7% would turn to other adults at school. This low likelihood may be due to perceived lack of confidentiality, a lack of trust, or negative attitudes toward the wellness center, which some students report as being mocked by teachers. These findings suggest that improving the perception and accessibility of school-based mental health resources could encourage greater use and support for students

seeking help.

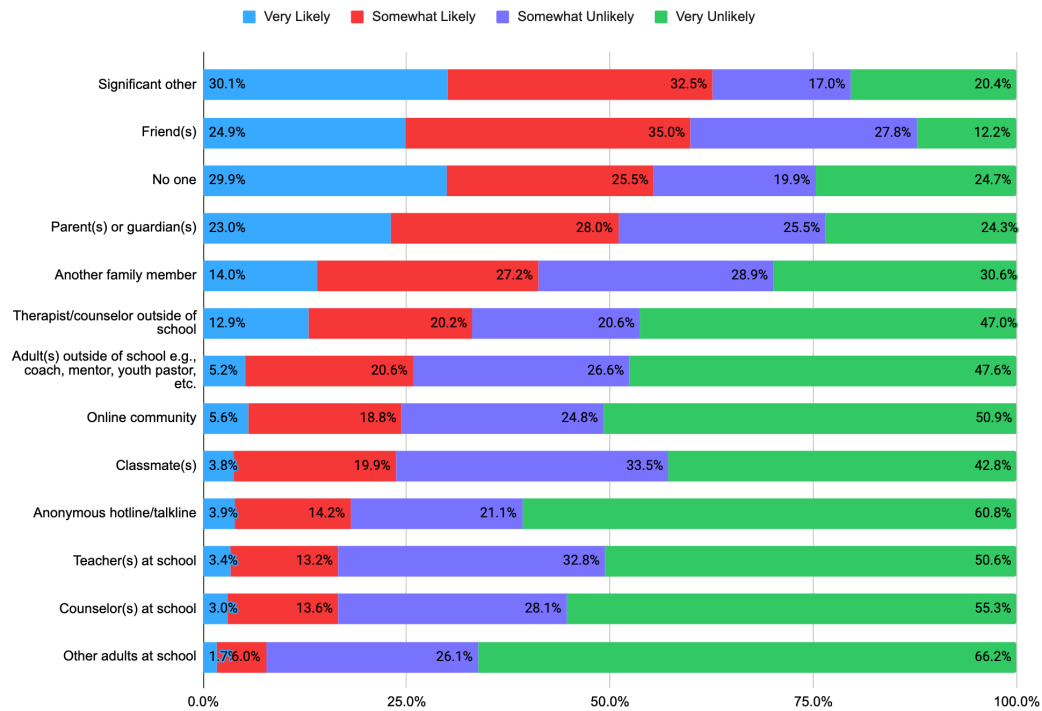


Figure 10. Respondents' likelihood of seeking mental health support from various sources within their support system.

Recommendation: Teachers should be mindful of the language they're using to describe the wellness center and mental health resources to not further stigmatize reaching out for support

Recommendation: Schools should create spaces for wellness that aren't necessarily solutions focused and then inform students about those on-campus wellness centers and teachers who are willing to comfort students facing troubling times. For example: Hold events in the wellness centers for more visibility e.g., mandatory tours with a homeroom teacher at the beginning of the year.

Recommendation: Dedicated counselors who build relationships with their students at the start of the school year and proactively check on students as they progress through high school to build trust.

Recommendation: Have a dedicated team of mental health professionals at the school who are assigned to students and have meetings once a year to build trust

Q.7. What do you think would encourage youth in Alameda and Santa Clara counties to reach out for mental health support?

The survey results highlight key factors that could encourage youth in Alameda and Santa Clara counties to seek mental health support. The most significant factor is the assurance of not being judged, with 79.6% of respondents identifying it as crucial. This indicates that reducing fears of judgment or non-confidentiality is essential for encouraging more students to reach out for help. Additionally, 63.8% of respondents believe that learning how to ask for help is important, and a similar percentage (63.4%) feel that confidentiality from parents or guardians is vital for them to seek support.

Other notable factors include the assurance of not being rejected or turned away (58.7%) and the absence of stigma associated with seeking help (54.9%). These findings suggest that addressing concerns about rejection and stigma is important for improving youth engagement with mental health resources. The ability to access anonymous support and having available resources (54.5% and 49.8%, respectively) are also significant, reflecting a preference for confidentiality and the availability of resources as key motivators.

Furthermore, the availability of resources 24/7 and access to healthy coping mechanisms were identified by 48.1% of respondents as important. This suggests that ensuring around-the-clock support and providing effective coping strategies could enhance the likelihood of seeking help. More education about mental health (42.6%) also emerged as a factor, indicating that increasing awareness and understanding about mental health issues could play a role in encouraging youth to seek support. One AIM Ideas Lab participant added, "Teaching about mental health; things like naming your feelings and habits to support your mental health from a younger age. I think if students learn habits like this when they're young, it'll be really handy when they need those skills and habits in the future," reiterating the positive impact that mental health education would have on the mental health of youth in Alameda and Santa Clara counties.

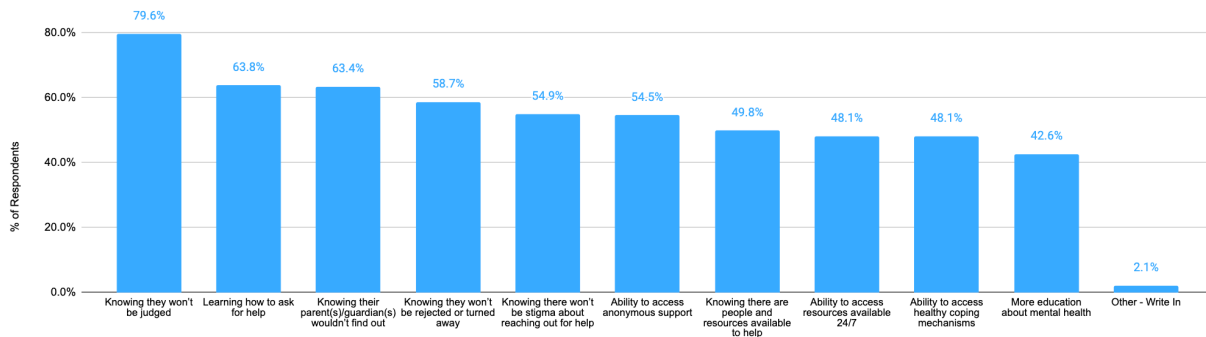


Figure 11. Factors encouraging teens in Alameda and Santa Clara counties to seek mental health support.

Recommendation: Schools should incorporate mental health education into its curriculum - mental health is touched on once in high school curriculum in a health class, it should be built into every year.

Recommendation: Greater awareness around supporting survivors, education around victim blaming and stigma.

Recommendation: To encourage youth to reach out, show significant evidence for tools and support strategies used to help improve mental health and overcome mental health challenges.

Q.8. What are the factors you believe positively influence how youth are perceived by others?

The survey results revealed that for the 244 respondents to this question, personality is the most valued trait, with 77.6% identifying it as important. This finding suggests that personal qualities, such as how one interacts with others, are highly regarded among youth in the sample. Kindness to others follows closely at 66.7%, reinforcing the importance of interpersonal relationships and positive social interactions in the respondents' values.

Interestingly, grades ranked third, with 63.3% of respondents prioritizing academic achievement. This suggests that academic performance is seen as a significant factor in self-worth, potentially reflecting the pressure placed on students to excel academically. In previous questions, respondents reported high levels of stress and burnout likely attributed to academic pressures. It's notable that grades were ranked higher than looks (60.3%) and extracurricular activities (55.3%), which may indicate a social desirability bias where respondents feel compelled to prioritize what is socially accepted as "good" or "right." The emphasis on grades, despite being a potentially socially desirable response, reflects the pressures students face in balancing academic and personal values.

Extracurricular activities and sports/athleticism are equally valued, each with 55.3% of respondents highlighting their importance. This suggests that while academics are crucial, participation in activities outside of the classroom is also seen as essential for personal development.

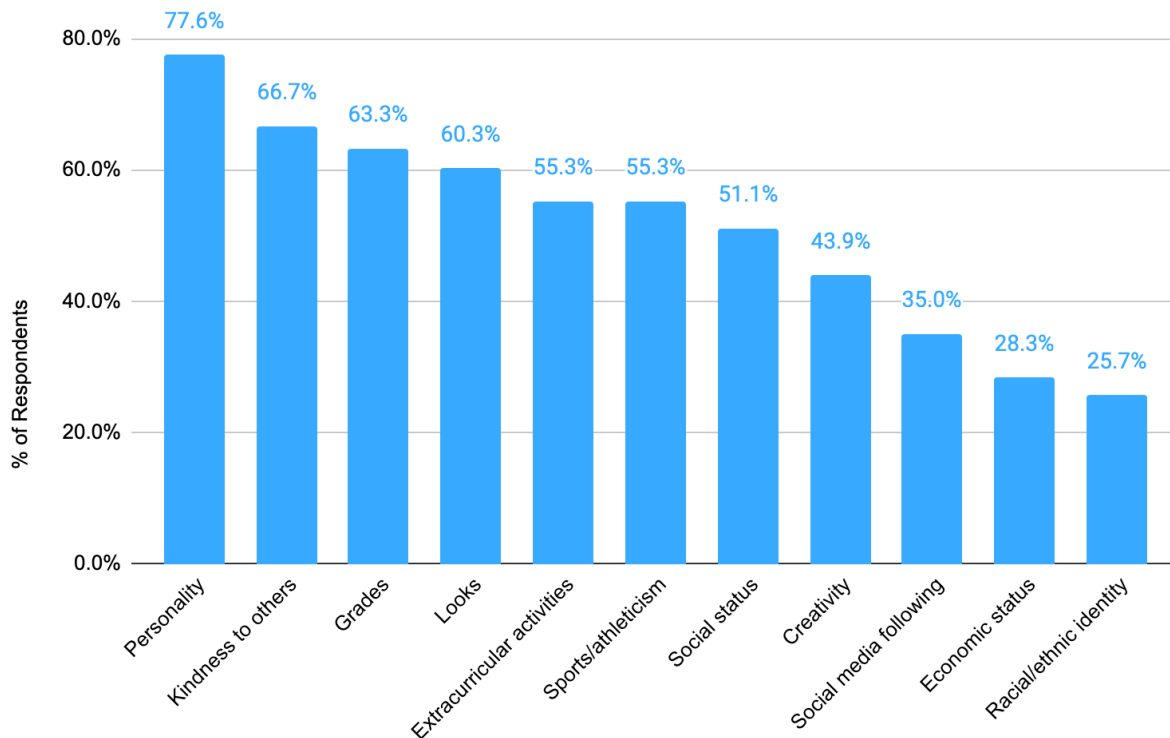


Figure 12. Factors teens in Alameda and Santa Clara counties perceive as positively influencing how others see them.

Q.9. Please select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding various aspects of teen mental health?

The data presents a concerning picture of the disconnect between students and adults in the school environment, particularly regarding mental health support. Only 16.1% of students feel that adults in their community understand the struggles of youth mental health, with a significant 48.5% somewhat or strongly disagreeing with this statement. This lack of understanding appears to create an environment where youth are less comfortable seeking support from teachers, as reflected in the low percentage (16.1%) of students who feel comfortable asking teachers for mental health support. A striking 55.3% of students either somewhat or strongly disagree that youth at their school are comfortable seeking such support.

Additionally, the data reveals that social comparisons and academics are prevalent issues among teens. A significant 83.4% of respondents agree that youth often compare themselves to others on social media, and 80.0% acknowledge that academics are used as a way to fit in with peers. While a majority of students (71.9%) are aware of healthy coping mechanisms, there is also a recognition that unhealthy coping strategies are common, with 71% acknowledging this behavior among their peers.

The findings indicate that while there is some awareness and agreement on the importance of mental health education and support, significant gaps exist in how effectively schools and communities are addressing these needs. The low percentage of students who feel that mental health support is easily accessible at their school (50.4% somewhat or strongly agree) and the mixed responses regarding the effectiveness of schools in supporting students' mental health (only 33.7% agree) highlight the need for more robust mental health initiatives and better understanding from adults in both school and community settings.

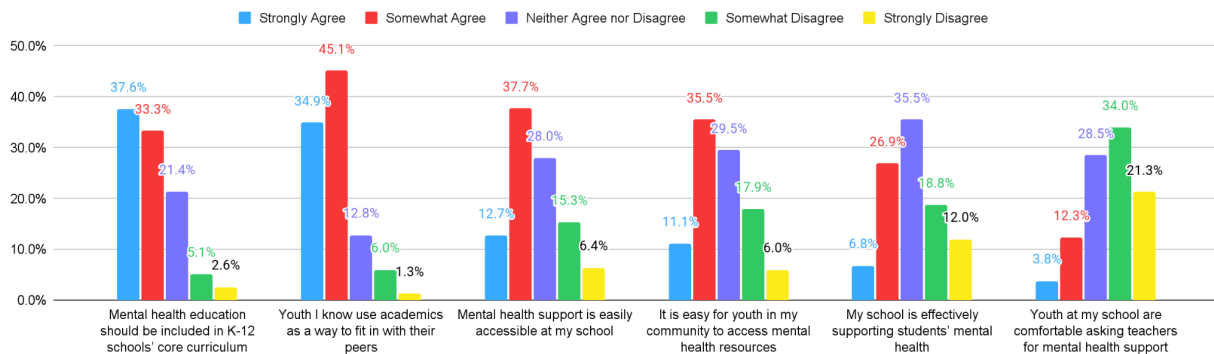


Figure 13. Insights into student perceptions of mental health resources + support.

In addition to the disconnect between students and adults in school environments, the data also highlights that a substantial portion of students (72.4%) believe that mental health education should be included in the K-12 core curriculum, indicating a strong demand for integrating mental health awareness into everyday education. Despite this, only 50.4% of students feel that mental health resources are easily accessible, and an even smaller percentage (33.7%) feel that their school effectively supports students' mental health.

Moreover, social media's impact on decision-making and mental health is notable, with 50.4% of students agreeing that social media influences their decisions. This reinforces the earlier finding that social comparisons on social media are pervasive, potentially exacerbating feelings of inadequacy and stress. The data underscores the need for schools and communities to address these issues more comprehensively by providing education on healthy social media usage and improving access to mental health resources.

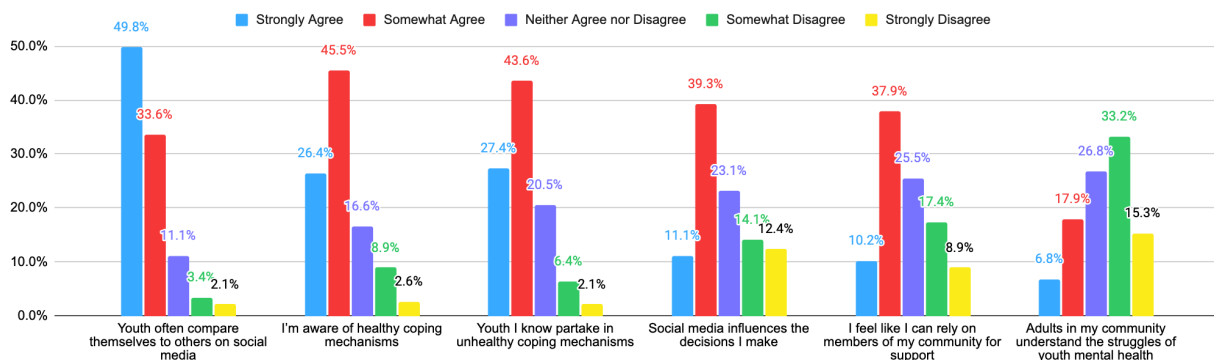


Figure 14. Insights into student perceptions of coping skills + support systems.

Table 7. Alameda and Santa Clara Teens’ assessment of various aspects of mental health.

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Youth often compare themselves to others on social media	49.8%	33.6%	11.1%	3.4%	2.1%
Youth I know use academics as a way to fit in with their peers	34.9%	45.1%	12.8%	6.0%	1.3%
I’m aware of healthy coping mechanisms	26.4%	45.5%	16.6%	8.9%	2.6%
Youth I know partake in unhealthy coping mechanisms	27.4%	43.6%	20.5%	6.4%	2.1%
Mental health education should be included in K-12 schools’ core curriculum	37.6%	33.3%	21.4%	5.1%	2.6%
Mental health support is easily accessible at my school	12.7%	37.7%	28.0%	15.3%	6.4%
Social media influences the decisions I make	11.1%	39.3%	23.1%	14.1%	12.4%
I feel like I can rely on members of my community for support	10.2%	37.9%	25.5%	17.4%	8.9%
It is easy for youth in my community to access mental health resources	11.1%	35.5%	29.5%	17.9%	6.0%
My school is effectively supporting students’ mental health	6.8%	26.9%	35.5%	18.8%	12.0%
Adults in my community understand the struggles of youth mental health	6.8%	17.9%	26.8%	33.2%	15.3%
Youth at my school are comfortable asking teachers for mental health support	3.8%	12.3%	28.5%	34.0%	21.3%

Recommendation: Teachers should practice open communication around mental health in class (e.g., open door policy) so students can feel comfortable being open and honest about their needs.

Recommendation: Campaign to support the [P.E.E.R Mental Health Act](#), which includes grant funding to increase the education school staff receive

Recommendation: Schools should host a mental health seminar (e.g Youth Mental Health First Aid, [“What I Wish My Parents Knew”](#)) to help adults in the community understand youth mental health.

Q.10. How can your school better support student's mental health ?

The survey results indicate several actions schools can take to better support students' mental health, with the ability to take extensions for schoolwork being the most favored option, selected by 67.7% of respondents. Closely following this, 66.0% of respondents believe offering redos on quizzes and schoolwork would help, highlighting the need for second chances in academic assessments to reduce pressure. The results suggest that flexibility with school assignments could significantly alleviate stress for students, with students reporting that strict deadlines and requirements for assignments cause students a lot of stress.

Encouraging mental health days is also a popular suggestion, with 65.5% of students in favor. The emphasis on grades, however, remains a concern, as 64.3% of respondents suggest that schools should place less emphasis on academic performance to improve students' well-being. This aligns with the finding that 61.3% of respondents want more resources during stressful periods, such as finals and college application seasons, pointing to a need for additional support during high-pressure times. Other significant actions include reducing homework (60.4%) and adjusting school schedules to allow for more sleep (60.0%), both of which are directly linked to students' physical and mental health.

Overall, the results reflect a strong desire for more flexibility in academic expectations and greater support during stressful periods. Addressing these concerns, alongside fostering a more understanding and supportive school environment, could lead to substantial improvements in students' overall well-being.

Table 8. Actions schools can take to better support student's mental health.

Action	Selection Rate
Ability to take extensions for schoolwork	67.7%
Offering redos on quizzes and schoolwork	66.0%
Encouraging students to take mental health days	65.5%
Less emphasis on grades	64.3%
More resources during stressful times e.g., finals, college applications	61.3%
Reducing amount of homework	60.4%
Adjusting the schedule so students can get more sleep	60.0%
Teachers who understand what students are going through	59.1%
More academic support	58.7%
More time to socialize with peers	52.3%
Reducing number of tests	49.8%
Educating parents/guardians about youth mental health	41.7%
Tips to combat student stress	40.9%
Education on how students can support one another	34.9%
More promotion of the wellness centers and wellness programming	34.0%
More counselors and staff educated about youth mental health	32.3%
More education about mental health resources e.g., 988 crisis line	30.2%
Defunding school resource officers to fund more mental health professionals	19.1%
Other - Write In	1.7%

Q.11. On average, how much time do you spend on social media each day?

With 234 respondents, the survey results reveal that most participants engage in moderate social media usage. Specifically, 45.7% of respondents spend 1-3 hours on social media daily, while 32.5% report spending 4-6 hours. A smaller group, 9.0%, uses social media for either 0-1 hours or 7-9 hours per day. Only 1.7% of respondents exceed 10 hours of social media use, and 2.1% do not use social media at all.

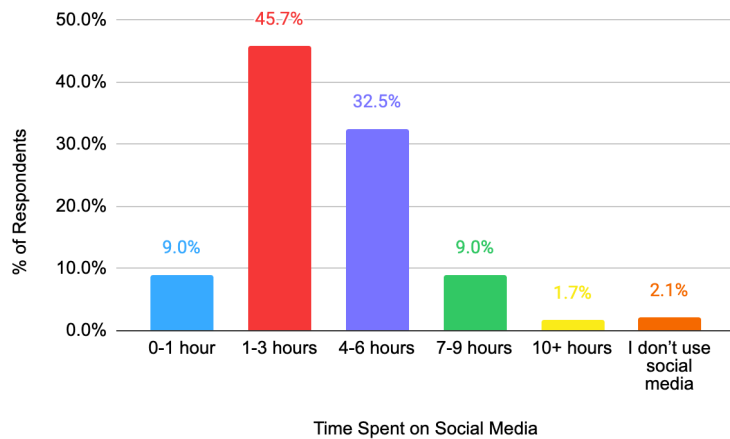


Figure 15. Average time teens in Alameda and Santa Clara spend on social media each day.

These results suggest that while most students maintain a relatively balanced approach to social media, spending moderate amounts of time online, there is still the potential for negative consequences associated with prolonged usage. Even moderate levels of social media use can impact mental health, social interactions, and exposure to negative content.

Recommendation: Promoting awareness of the impacts of social media and supporting healthy online behaviors can help mitigate any adverse effects.

Recommendation: Set screen time limits for apps that don't support mental health, build healthy relationships with technology at school

Q12: What types of accounts do you follow on social media?

Among the 244 respondents, the survey data shows that the most commonly followed social media accounts are those related to friends and family, with 66.4% of respondents selecting this option. Music accounts are also popular, followed by 61.2% of participants, while 48.3% follow funny or meme accounts. Celebrities (39.7%) and lifestyle content (39.2%) are also widely followed, along with sports (37.1%), shopping/fashion (35.8%), and fitness (34.5%) accounts. This data suggests teens' social media practices place a strong emphasis on personal connections, entertainment, and lifestyle content. Particularly during Covid-19, social media was a means to connect with others and it is apparent that teens today are continuing to rely on social media to maintain connections with people in their lives.

Additionally, a notable portion of respondents follow accounts related to food/diet (33.6%),

learning/studying (33.2%), and beauty (29.3%). Books/reading (27.2%), gamers (25.9%), and news/politics (23.7%) are also represented, though to a lesser extent. Fewer respondents follow social activists (17.7%) or mental health and wellness (15.9%) accounts, indicating a lower engagement with these types of content.

Recommendation: Youth should build healthy boundaries with social media and technology by curating your feed and limiting screen time.

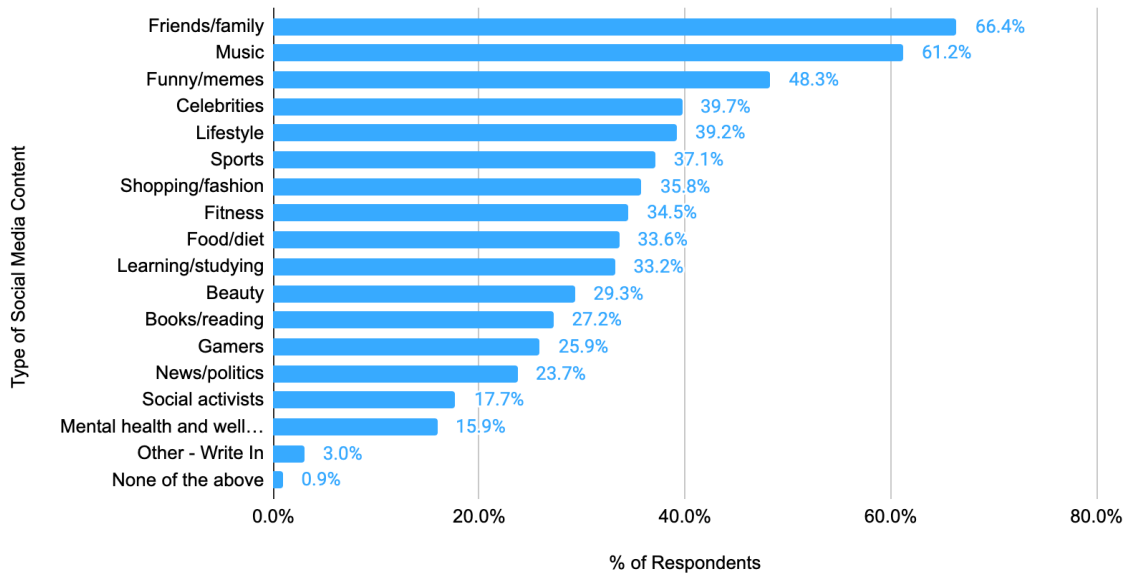


Figure 16. Social media accounts that are most commonly followed by teens in Alameda and Santa Clara County.

Q13: How would you rate the way social media impacts the following aspects of your life?

(1 = Negative Impact, 10 = Positive Impact)

The data provides insight into how social media impacts various aspects of teens' lives, as rated on average by respondents. Creativity is the highest-rated category with an average score of 6.7, suggesting that teens find social media to be a significant source of creative inspiration. Relationships with peers (6.4) and a sense of community (6.0) also receive relatively high ratings, indicating that social media is seen as beneficial for social connections.

On the other hand, aspects related to personal well-being and self-perception, such as self-esteem (4.3), body image (4.2), and mental health (4.7), receive lower ratings, highlighting concerns about the potential negative impact of social media on these areas. Peer pressure (4.4) and views of self (4.4) are similarly rated, pointing to the challenges teens may face in navigating social comparisons and external expectations online.

Categories such as sleep (4.0), attention span (3.7), and schoolwork (3.9) receive the lowest average ratings, reflecting the distractions and potential adverse effects of social media on these crucial

areas of life. Overall, the data suggests that while social media can foster creativity and social connections, it may also contribute to challenges in mental health, self-esteem, and academic focus.

Recommendation: Education around healthier sleep habits and hygiene, such as limited screen time before bed

Recommendation: Build attention span through consuming longer forms of content.

Table 9. Average rating of the impact social media has on various aspects of teens' lives.

Category	Average Rating	Category	Average Rating
Creativity	6.7	Spending money	4.6
Relationships with peers	6.4	Peer pressure	4.4
Sense of community	6	View of self	4.4
Mood	5.3	Self-esteem	4.3
Relationships with family	5.2	Body image	4.2
Decision making	5	Sleep	4.0
Mental health	4.7	Schoolwork	3.9
Free time	4.6	Attention span	3.7

Q14: How do you think youth in Alameda and Santa Clara counties typically feel after consuming social media? (Open-ended) (N = 176)

Youth feel they have to follow societal standards, which can lead to positive attitudes but

most people end up feeling “bad”, which shows up as a motif among the responses. In general people recognize both the positive and negative aspects of social media and acknowledge that its effects depend on the kind of media being consumed, yet most lean towards bad/negative feelings towards one’s self.

Common Themes	Direct Quotes
Range of negative emotions: Depressed, drained, guilty, disappointed, stressed, anxious, exhaustion	<p>“They feel depressed due to not being able to achieve the things they see on social media”</p> <p>“... are exhausted and disappointed that so much time was spent doing something seemingly unproductive”</p>
Constantly comparing themselves to others and having feelings of unworth and being lesser than. Insecurity and negatively affects self-esteem	<p>“They often compare themselves to the edited pictures they see and don't understand they're perfect”</p> <p>“Most teens here have lots of self esteem issues, so after consuming lots of media, it's easy for them to compare themselves.”</p>
Makes them feel unproductive and like they wasted time	<p>“Many may feel unsatisfied after spending lots of time on social media because of the amount of time they put into social media with no reward or benefit to their lives.”</p>
Concerned about the effects on body image specifically	<p>“Having a false perception of what people should look like could have a negative impact on how they interact with others. Men who follow accounts of women with highly edited bodies will have that expectation with women they know in real life. If women see these distorted images, they may compare themselves to these high standards that aren't even naturally achievable (photo editing or plastic surgery).”</p>
Depends on the type of media consumed	<p>“It does ultimately depend on the posts on their feed whether or not it's something that regards self image.”</p> <p>“It depends on what kind of content they consume. if they regularly watch healthy media that promotes a healthy lifestyle balance between work and rest, they will feel seen and be more motivated to lead a healthy lifestyle themselves. if they consume more materialistic and political content, i think it negatively impacts their mental health. for most youth it would be a mix of both but it really depends on the person”</p>

Q15: What coping mechanisms do you believe are the most effective for youth in your community? (Open-ended) (N = 176)

Recommendation: Building positive habits early on. Find time to recharge and focus on you. Encouraging and celebrating time spent away from academics.

Common Themes	Direct Quotes
Having a trusted emotional support system and talking to people who understand. Prioritize interactions with others.	<p>“Learning how to communicate one's feelings, finding a support group”</p> <p>“I honestly think talking about it with people you trust is the most effective”</p> <p>“Communication with friends and trusted adults”</p>
Self care, resting, and taking breaks	<p>“Doing something you enjoy, meditation, journaling”</p> <p>“Knowing when to take time off for yourself.”</p> <p>“Doing activities that allow you to slow down and take time to reflect are the most effective. This could include taking a walk, taking care of your body, taking deep breaths, or journaling.”</p>
Physical activity, exercise, hobbies	<p>“Having time to participate in a hobby/time to yourself such as taking a walk, listening to music, painting, etc.”</p> <p>“Sports, it gets your mind off your daily issues. Going outdoors and spending time in nature.”</p>
Getting off technology	<p>“Having designated time away from social media just to clear the mind.”</p> <p>“Deeper interpersonal relationships offline”</p> <p>“Dopamine cleansing”</p>
Reduced academic pressure	<p>“Understanding the big picture, that not everything is about grades/school”</p> <p>“Less stress on academics”</p>