



Research Brief: Online Experiences and Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People

Most LGBTQ+ young people agreed that they go online to connect with people because it is difficult finding others to relate to and connect with in their daily lives.

September 2025

Key Findings

- LGBTQ+ young people who reported not feeling safe and understood anywhere on the internet (7% of participants) had worse mental health outcomes and a greater likelihood of past-year suicide consideration and attempts than those who felt safe and understood somewhere online.
- Compared to their cisgender peers, TGNB youth were more likely to agree that they go online to find others because it is hard to make in-person connections (79% vs. 65%), and because they feel they can be their complete selves online (78% vs. 64%).
- LGBTQ+ young people who reported higher rates of anxiety and depression symptoms, as well as past-year suicide consideration and attempts, were also more likely to agree that they go online to find people to connect with due to difficulty relating with others in their daily lives.

Background

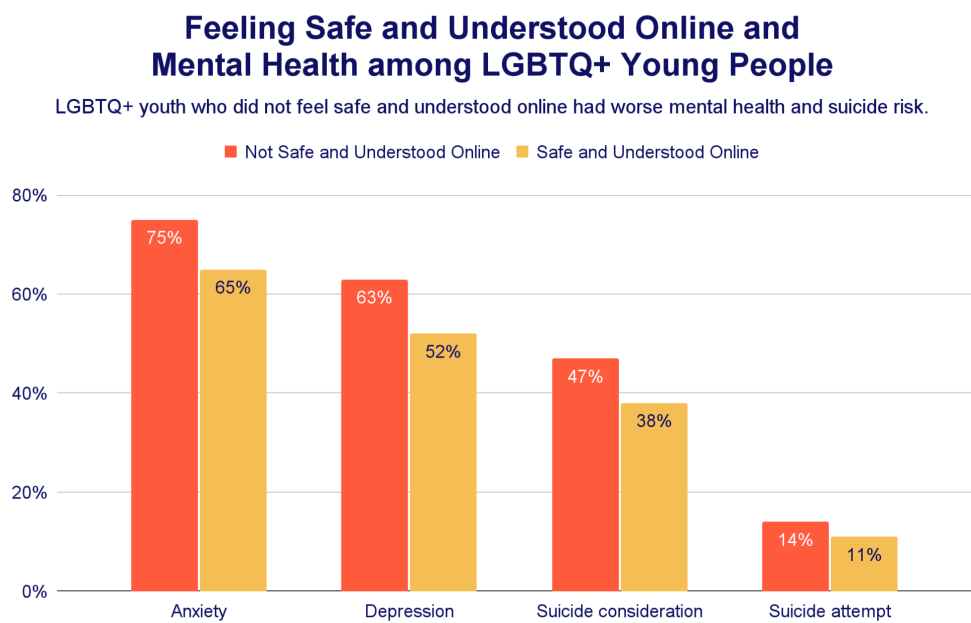
Given that LGBTQ+ youth often lack sufficient support from their families and communities,^{1,2} a factor closely related to poor mental health and suicide risk,^{2,3} they often turn to online spaces to find the support and connection they need.⁴ Importantly, the LGBTQ+ community cannot be reduced to one shared experience, meaning their experiences and needs can differ widely based on specific identities. For example, transgender, nonbinary, and gender questioning (TGNB) youth may use online platforms to access transition-related resources or critical social and educational support.⁵ TGNB youth report using online spaces despite knowing that they may encounter gender-related victimization, harassment, and exclusion, partly because some may consider these negative online experiences to be normal.⁵ Research has consistently documented the harmful mental health impacts of negative online experiences and cyberbullying on mental health in LGBTQ+ young people, with cyberbullying being related to lower self-esteem, depression, and suicidal ideation and attempts.⁶ Yet, even in the face of these risks, LGBTQ+

youth still report using online spaces, possibly due to the variety of benefits they can offer, like a sense of community, support, and resources.^{4,5} While some research has explored how LGBTQ+ people navigate online spaces and how these experiences relate to mental health, few have examined how these patterns differ by gender identity or included large, diverse samples of TGNB young people. Using data from The Trevor Project's [2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People](#), this brief examines LGBTQ+ young people's use of online platforms, including motivations for going online and how online experiences relate to mental health and suicide.

Results

LGBTQ+ young people reported feeling safe and understood on the following online platforms: TikTok (59%), Discord (45%), YouTube (41%), Instagram (41%), Reddit (20%), X (formerly known as Twitter; 19%), Snapchat (18%), social networking sites just for LGBTQ+ young people (17%), Twitch (13%), Steam (9%), dating applications/sites (8%), Facebook (4%), and Quora (3%). Another 9% named other online spaces, most commonly Tumblr. These findings represent which social media sites are both popular and considered safe. The low endorsement rate for some platforms could be related to fewer LGBTQ+ young people using the platforms, or because those who do use them find them unsafe. Additionally, there were meaningful differences by gender identity: 53% of TGNB youth reported feeling safe and understood on Discord compared to 30% of cisgender youth. Differences between TGNB youth and cisgender youth were also observed for LGBTQ+ specific sites (19% vs. 13%) and Twitch (15% vs. 9%).

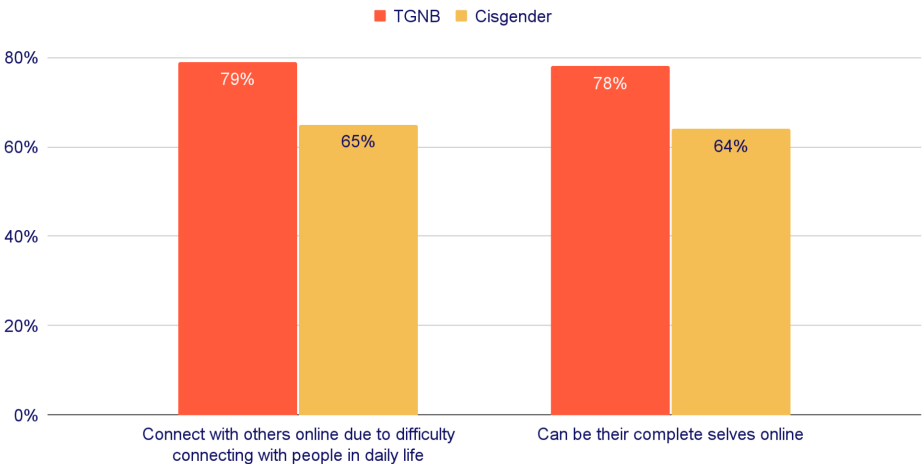
A small proportion of LGBTQ+ young people (7%) reported not feeling safe and understood anywhere on the internet. Cisgender boys/men and transgender boys/men reported the highest rate of not feeling safe or understood anywhere online (both 9%), followed by cisgender girls/women, transgender girls/women, and gender questioning youth (all 6%), and lastly, nonbinary youth (5%). Not feeling safe and



understood anywhere online was associated with higher rates of recent anxiety (75% vs. 65%) and depression (63% vs. 52%), as well as higher rates of past-year suicide consideration (47% vs. 38%) and attempts (14% vs. 11%), compared to those who felt safe and understood somewhere online.

LGBTQ+ Young People's Motivations for Going Online, by Gender Identity

TGNB youth reported higher rates of both motivations for going online.



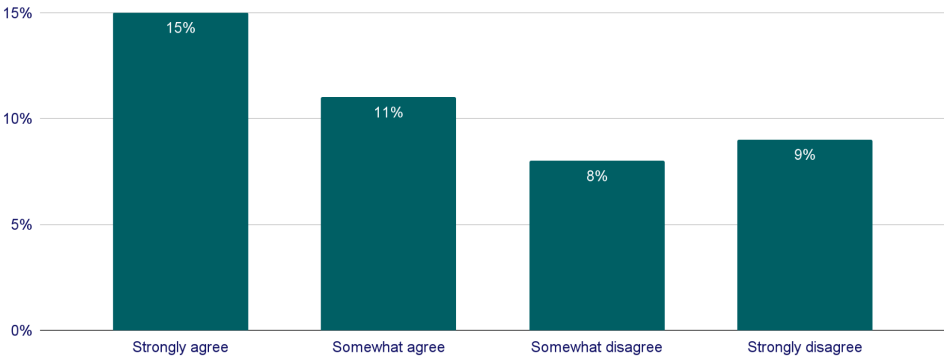
The majority of LGBTQ+ young people agreed that they go online to connect with others because it is difficult to do so in their daily lives, with 38% somewhat agreeing and 36% strongly agreeing. A similar number of participants somewhat agreed (38%) or strongly agreed (35%) that they could be their complete selves online. Both of these findings varied by gender identity, with TGNB youth reporting higher rates of going online to connect

due to difficulty with in-person connections compared to their cisgender peers (79% vs. 65%; 82% for transgender girls/women, 79% nonbinary, 79% questioning, 78% transgender boys/men, 67% cisgender girls/women, 65% cisgender boys/men). There were also significant differences by age, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and Census region (see Data Tables). Additionally, TGNB youth reported higher rates of agreeing that they can be their complete selves online compared to their cisgender peers (78% vs. 64%; 86% transgender girls/women, 79% nonbinary, 78% transgender boys/men, 72% questioning, 70% cisgender boys/men, 62% cisgender girls/women).

LGBTQ+ young people who reported higher rates of mental health concerns, as well as past-year suicide consideration and attempts, were more likely to agree that they go online to connect with others because of difficulty finding connections in

LGBTQ+ Youth who Reported a Past Year Suicide Attempt, by Agreement of Going Online to Connect with Others Due to In-Person Struggles

LGBTQ+ youth who attempted suicide in the past year reported higher rates of going online to increase connections.



their daily lives. A higher level of agreement with this statement was related to 21% greater odds of recent anxiety (aOR = 1.21, 95% CI: 1.17 - 1.26, $p < .001$) and 29% greater odds of depression (aOR = 1.29, 95% CI: 1.24 - 1.34, $p < .001$), as well as 24% greater odds of past-year suicide consideration (aOR = 1.24, 95% CI: 1.19 - 1.29, $p < .001$) and 19% greater odds of suicide attempts (aOR = 1.19, 95% CI: 1.12 - 1.26, $p < .001$).

Looking Ahead

Aligning with prior research on the benefits of online spaces for LGBTQ+ youth,⁴ we found that many LGBTQ+ youth turn to online platforms for connection. Importantly, many also reported that they could be their authentic selves in these spaces. Access to an online space where youth felt safe and understood was related with better mental health and lower likelihood of past-year suicide consideration or attempts. However, LGBTQ+ youth who reported higher rates of mental health problems and considering or attempting suicide in the past year were also more likely to go online to connect with others due to difficulty finding connection in their daily lives.

Significant differences existed by gender identity. For example, TGNB youth more frequently reported that they felt safe and understood as an LGBTQ+ person on Discord compared to their cisgender peers. A key limitation is that our analyses regarding specific online platforms can only identify which sites participants felt safe using, not which platforms made them feel unsafe or a list of all sites they have tried using in the past. Another consideration is that online safety can be defined in various ways. For some users, safety may be a function of their online community, while others may consider the platform policies. Compared to their cisgender peers, TGNB youth were also more likely to agree that they go online to find connection due to difficulty connecting in their daily lives and to be their true selves. They were also more likely to find online spaces where they feel safe and understood. This may be due to ignorance about or resistance to transgender identities in their homes and local communities, leading to them going online.

In general, the majority of LGBTQ+ youth reported going online because of difficulties forming offline connections. Notably, this group also reported worse mental health, including higher rates of anxiety, depression, and past-year suicide consideration and attempts. Given the impact of unsupportive environments and experiences on LGBTQ+ youth,^{2,3} many may experience mental health challenges and turn to online platforms for connection and support, potentially explaining these findings. Using these results to justify limiting access to online platforms could have harmful consequences, possibly increasing isolation and reducing support for LGBTQ+ youth, thereby exacerbating mental health challenges and suicide risk. Instead, these findings can be used to help identify LGBTQ+ youth in need of support: if LGBTQ+ youth are struggling to connect offline and are relying on online spaces for connection, they may benefit from additional assistance and resources, both online and in-person.

Future research should continue to examine experiences in and motivations for using online spaces for LGBTQ+ young people, including studies with large samples of TGNB young people and longitudinal studies that can better determine causal relationships. Additionally, qualitative studies exploring recommendations from youth to make online spaces feel more safe and welcoming would be valuable, especially considering that cisgender LGBTQ+ youth reported greater difficulty finding safe spaces online. Relatedly, further exploration of what makes online platforms feel safe could offer critical insights for improving these spaces, whether that be refining platform structures, strengthening policies, or fostering healthier communities. Understanding these dynamics is not only helpful for platform developers, but also legislators working to enforce legislation for online safety. Finally, we encourage all LGBTQ+ youth to access spaces that feel safe, avoid spaces that feel unsafe, and reach out for help when needed. Parents, caregivers, and adults working with LGBTQ+ youth can play a role by helping young people evaluate the safety of online spaces and linking them to resources that foster their mental health and well-being.

All LGBTQ+ young people deserve to feel safe and have access to welcoming online spaces. Our TrevorSpace platform is a safe and supportive online space for LGBTQ+ young people between the ages of 13 to 24 years. On TrevorSpace, LGBTQ+ youth can make friends, explore their identity, and find support in a moderated online community specifically designed for them. Our free, 24/7 crisis services are committed to make sure that all LGBTQ+ young people are provided high-quality care via phone, text, and chat. In order to best support LGBTQ+ youth contacts, we have a team of highly trained crisis counselors that align with the demographics of the LGBTQ+ young people we serve. Finally, our Research team is dedicated to the ongoing dissemination of research related to online platforms and mental health to help make sure that all youth can feel safe and understood online.

To read more on this topic, check out our brief on [LGBTQ Young People of Color in Online Spaces](#), as well as our guides on [Online Safety for LGBTQ+ Young People](#) and [Finding Support & Building Community Amid Political Uncertainty](#).

Methods

Sample

Data were collected through The Trevor Project's [2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People](#). In total, 18,663 LGBTQ+ young people between the ages of 13 to 24 were recruited via ads on social media, and among those, 65% were TGNB.

Measures

Demographics were collected by asking participants to select a single identity category from a provided list.³ They were asked, "Where on the internet do you feel safe and understood as an LGBTQ young person?"

Please select all that apply.” If they did not feel safe anywhere, they could select, “I don’t feel safe and understood as an LGBTQ young person anywhere on the internet.” They could also reply with, “Another place online” and type their own response. In addition, participants were asked to respond to the following statements: “I go online to find people I can relate to and connect with because it’s hard for me to find people I can relate to and connect with in my daily life” and “I feel like I can be my complete self online.” Both items were rated on a 4-point scale (Strongly agree, Somewhat agree, Somewhat disagree, Strongly disagree). For some analyses, these questions were dichotomized to Agree (Strongly agree, Somewhat agree) and Disagree (Somewhat disagree, Strongly disagree). The GAD-2 was used to assess recent symptoms of anxiety⁷ and the PHQ-2 was used to assess recent symptoms of depression.⁸ Questions assessing past-year suicide consideration and attempts were taken from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey.⁹

Analysis

Chi-square tests were run to examine differences between groups. After checking assumptions, logistic regression models were run to examine the association between agreeing that they go online for connection with others and mental health outcomes, controlling for age, socioeconomic status, Census region, sexual orientation, gender identity, and race/ethnicity. Unless otherwise noted, all results are statistically significant at least at $p < 0.05$. This means there is less than a 5% likelihood these results occurred by chance. Percentages in tables may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

Data Tables

Demographic Characteristics of LGBTQ+ Youth, by Going Online to Find Connections

	“I go online to find people I can relate to and connect with because it’s hard for me to find people I can relate to and connect with in my daily life.”		
	Agree or Strongly Agree (n = 11,572)	Disagree or Strongly Disagree (n = 4,053)	p-value
Age			<.001
13-17	48.5%	43.3%	
18-24	51.5%	56.7%	
Sexual orientation			<.001
Gay	12.0%	14.7%	
Lesbian	16.0%	16.1%	
Bisexual	27.2%	29.7%	
Queer	12.7%	12.4%	
Pansexual	17.0%	14.6%	
Asexual	10.4%	8.1%	
Heterosexual	0.9%	1.3%	
Questioning	3.7%	3.2%	

Gender identity		< .001	
Cisgender Boy / Man	12.8%	19.7%	
Transgender Boy / Man	14.6%	11.8%	
Cisgender Girl / Woman	22.9%	32.1%	
Transgender Girl / Woman	8.0%	5.0%	
Nonbinary	35.2%	26.2%	
Gender Questioning	6.6%	5.1%	
Race/ethnicity		< .05	
Asian American / Pacific Islander	5.4%	6.1%	
Black / African American	7.7%	6.3%	
Hispanic / Latinx	12.1%	12.3%	
Middle Eastern / Northern African	0.6%	0.7%	
Native / Indigenous	1.1%	1.0%	
White	61.2%	62.7%	
More than one race/ethnicity	11.8%	10.9%	

Region			.<.001
Northeast	15.4%	18.3%	
Midwest	23.7%	22.1%	
South	36.1%	31.6%	
West	24.8%	28.4%	
Socioeconomic Status			.<.001
Just meets basic needs or more	84.4%	90.1%	
Unable to meet basic needs	15.6%	9.9%	

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