



# Young People and Mental Health: 2023 Podcast Revisited A 2025 Update

2025 - Online Youth Centre



In 2023, in conjunction with Sam Wilkinson at Exeter University, with funding from The Wellcome Trust, Space Youth Services worked in collaboration with a group of young people to create a series of podcasts. This project aimed to unearth interesting features about young people's conception of mental health and its relation to other topics. The podcasts demonstrate a surprising degree of variability and vagueness in young people's conception of mental health. It also shows the extent to which a biomedical orthodoxy has become entrenched in folk discourse surrounding mental health. The work showed how Youth Work could be re-conceptualised as a vital form of mental health work, and should be more closely and holistically integrated with CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services).

The podcasts consisted of engaging conversations facilitated by the Space team, exploring various aspects of mental health. We released four concise podcasts, each focused on a specific theme: The Pandemic, Gaming and Social Media, Friends, Family and Belonging, and Sports, Hobbies & Education. To ensure meaningful discussions, we prepared some guided questions based on prior conversations with team members. However, the conversations themselves were organic and flowed naturally, with facilitators providing prompts to delve into the key areas of discussion. To involve a diverse range of perspectives, we recruited young individuals from suitable locations in Exeter and Exmouth.

The original podcasts can be found here: [The Youth Work Podcast](#)

**We have revisited this in 2025 to establish if these themes resonate with young people in 2025 and how this can influence approached by practitioners within Devon.**





## Our Process

We have worked with young people that access our Online Youth Centre to review the themes and questions brought up in these podcasts.

Digital Youth Work attracts young people of a slightly different demographic to that of traditional, in person, open access sessions. Many of the young people we engage with are Neurodiverse, identify as LGBTQIA+, and/or struggle with in person interactions, often due to struggles with mental health.

Interactions online often are not quite as forthcoming as you might encounter in a focus group setting. This could be due to the fact that young people often are attending from their own homes, perhaps with family members within the same room, or just simply that this environment is more distracting than could be provided for an in person group.

With this in mind, we created a few ways for young people to interact with the themes and questions brought up in the podcasts - asking questions in both voice and text chats, and curating polls that asked young people to agree or disagree with the questions asked and opinions voiced in the podcasts. Polls were by far the most popular choice for engagement, perhaps as these are a low pressure way to make their voices heard. Approximately 16 young people took part in this study, with only 2 choosing to engage only through voice chat, the rest participated both through the polls and in conversations.

Four podcasts were created in 2023, the first of which was on Mental Health in the Pandemic. Unfortunately, the majority of young people who would have been at an age to more fully understand and process their experiences during that time have aged out of our service. We therefore felt it more prudent to focus on the other three topics - Gaming & Social Media, Family & Belonging, and Sports, Hobbies & Education.



The main themes explored in this podcast were:

### **SOCIAL MEDIA**

- Exploring young people's relationship with social media
- Online relationships (platonic or otherwise) and interactions
- Online tools - image filters, comment filters, etc
- Online Communities
- Social Media for good

### **GAMING**

- Exploring young people's relationship with gaming
- Escapism
- Competition & Comparison
- Addiction



## SOCIAL MEDIA

### Relationship With Social Media

Young people mostly said that social media is a big part of their life, which is in line with the podcast participants. With a larger pool of young people, we had some variation - with around half the number of those that said it is a big part of their life either saying it wasn't or not siding either way.

The majority of young people said that they use social media to find friends or communities based on their personal interests and to find inspiration. This is perhaps not surprising for the demographic, as the platform we use is based around online communities, both large and small, that usually are centred around a particular interest - e.g. a video game or celebrity. Generally, we hear from young people that they feel they don't "fit in" in their physical lives, and find they can be more authentic online, which also aligns with these results. It also aligns with the opinions of the young people who took part in the podcast.

The group was split again on whether having a social media presence causes problems for people's mental health, with half saying it caused problems and the other half remaining neutral. This question was phrased more positively in a separate agree/disagree statement with different results, with more people agreeing, which could imply some bias.



## Online Relationships & Interactions

Most young people have friends on social media that they have only known online, but opinion was split as to whether online only friends have the same value as in person friendships, with half saying they are just as valuable, and the other half either disagreeing or being unsure. This is slightly different to the opinions of the podcast participants, some of whom said that they preferred to know a person in person as they are different in person to online. One young person on the podcast stated that they felt more comfortable sharing their “problems” with people online due to the anonymity it gives them, but opinion was divided on that when we asked - with a fairly even split across agreeing, disagreeing and neither agreeing or disagreeing.

Young people online also felt less strongly about the impact of online comments on their mental health.

## Online Tools

There was division around the idea that filters or editing tools such as Photoshop have a negative effect on people’s mental health, which is different from opinion in 2023. Tools used to filter social media comments were seen as beneficial in both instances. We hear frequently that schools are doing a fantastic job educating around online safety and resilience, which could well feed into these results. Often we approach the topic of online safety with members of the Online Youth Centre, only to find they are incredibly clued up around safety tools for social media, and have good digital literacy skills. More often, we find that is the social side of social media that is the struggle for the young people - making friends or navigating friendships comes up more frequently than the use of security settings.



## Online Communities

The majority of young people we spoke to said they felt a sense of belonging in online communities, echoing that of the podcast participants, and again, most agreed that online communities are beneficial for finding others with shared interests or experiences - particularly for neurodiverse people and/or people in minority groups. As a service, we have previously run targeted support groups for both neurodiverse and LGBTQ+ both of which were well received by young people as safe spaces to explore the interests and issues faced by these communities. Additionally, our membership at the Online Youth Centre has trended away from being young people who mostly also attended an in person youth provision to mostly only attending an online youth provision.

## Social Media for Good

Young people in the podcast had said that social media inspired their creativity, which still resonates with young people today. In the Online Youth Centre, we have a space for young people to share their creativity - whether that be artwork, music, cooking, poetry, coding - they are constantly sharing their talents and things they are proud to have made or achieved.

Opinion was slightly more divided on whether social media had created opportunities for them. Perhaps this question was a little too vague, but one person who agreed is one of our Young Volunteers, who most certainly has grown immensely in confidence, has made friends and had the opportunity to give back through working with us.



# Relationship With Social Media 2025 Poll Results

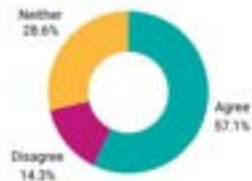
## Social Media is a big part of my life



## Having a Social Media presence causes a lot of problems for people's mental health



## Social Media is good for my mental health



## What do you use Social Media for?

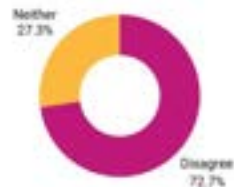






# Online Relationships, Interactions & Online Tools 2025 Poll Results

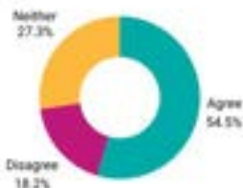
People are the same in person as they are online



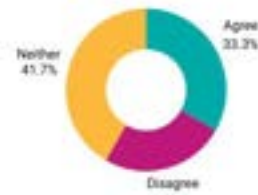
Do you have friends on Social Media who you only know online?



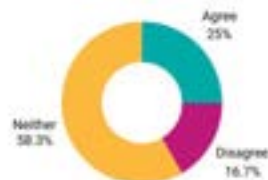
Online only friends are just as valuable as in person friends



Because no one knows who I am on Social Media, I feel more able to share my problems with people online



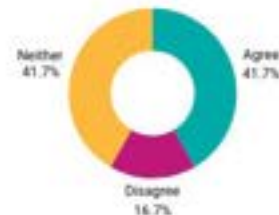
The ability for anyone to comment on things you share publicly is harmful to mental health



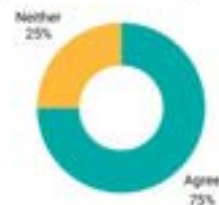
The ability for anyone to comment on things you share publicly is beneficial as a learning experience for people who share problematic things



Filters or editing tools like Photoshop have a negative impact on people's mental health



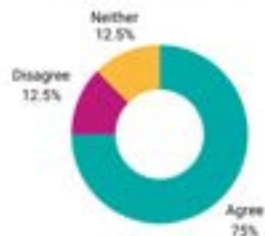
Tools to filter comments on Social Media platforms are a good thing





# Online Communities & Social Media for Good Poll Results

**I experience a sense of belonging  
in online communities**



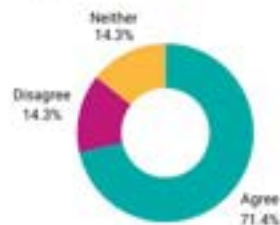
**Social Media inspires my creativity**



**Social media is particularly good  
for neurodiverse people and/or  
people in minority groups to find  
others who share interests or  
experiences**



**Social Media has created  
opportunities for me**





## GAMING

### Relationship with Gaming

Given our demographic, it is possibly unsurprising that every young person asked said that they enjoy video games, though only a little over half of those thought that games are a good way to interact with people. This is particularly interesting because, as digital youth workers, almost every session we use games to facilitate discussions, or simply to get a group of young people to talk to each other to help them make friends. An ongoing theme amongst members of the Online Youth Centre is a lack of confidence and ability to initiate friendships, so perhaps this is a reflection of how useful a facilitator is in getting young people started down the road of social confidence.

### Escapism

Almost all agreed that they play video games to wind down and/or escape from real life, and everyone said that they enjoy video games because they allow them to experience things they wouldn't be able to in real life. On the podcast this was not just in regards to particularly unusual experiences, with one young person saying they enjoy a game called Powerwash Simulator, where you simply clean things with a power washer.

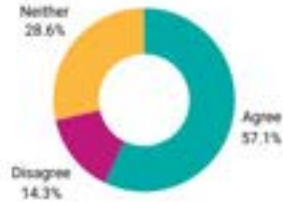


# Relationship with Gaming & Escapism Poll Results

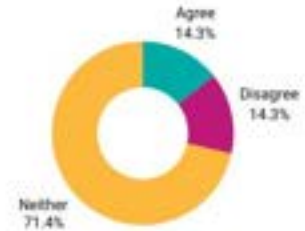
**I enjoy video games**



**Video games are great for interacting with people**



**Compared to video games, real life is comparatively rubbish, regardless of how good your real life is**



**I play video games to wind down and/or escape from real life**



**I enjoy video games because they allow me to experience things I wouldn't be able to in real life**



**Social Media and Gaming have an effect on people's mental health (either good or bad or both)**





## Competition & Comparison

Unlike in the podcast, young people were almost equally divided as to whether the competitive nature of games had ruined the experience for them. With a vast variety of games available in 2025, they are able to pick and choose the genre they play - cozy games being particularly popular amongst our demographic.

Almost all young people had experienced negative comments about them while gaming online, but all young people agreed that they didn't care about those comments. It is not clear whether this is due to resilience, education or numbness, but is certainly a positive.

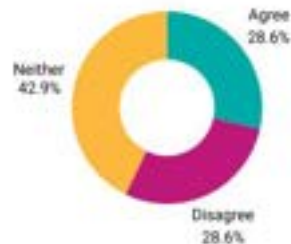
## Addiction

Despite most young people saying they were not good at managing how much time they spend playing video games, they were mostly undecided on whether or not they are addicted to them. It is our experience in the Online Youth Centre that young people do not always want to play video games during our sessions, though when they do want to, they often want to play the same game for long periods of time, and this goes through cycles as to which game it is. This could be due to our large neurodiverse demographic, trends in gaming, or we have also had young people express a fear of trying new things, including games. One young person in particular has said that Minecraft is the only game they play, and is currently trying to broaden their gaming horizons as they have realised this is not healthy.



# Competition, Comparison & Addiction Poll Results

**There is too much of a competitive nature around gaming and it's ruined the experience for me**



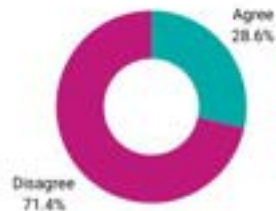
**I have experienced someone saying something negative about me when playing games online**



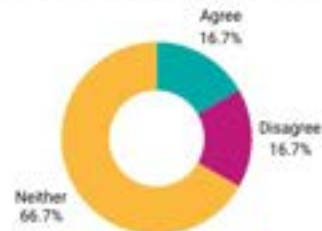
**I don't care about people saying negative things about me when playing games online**



**I am good at managing how much time I spend playing video games**



**I would describe myself as addicted to video games**





We asked:

**What do you wish adults knew about your experiences online?**

"Not everything done behind closed doors is bad"

"Not every mistake is to do with our phones"

"Not everyone is a creepy old man"

"A text is not the same as a real life conversation. I might be able to message somebody everyday but still miss them after a week of absence"



## The Podcasts: Mental Health in Family & Belonging - Main Themes in 2023

The main themes explored in this podcast were:

- Personal support networks
- Family
- Friends
- Generational differences
- Personal identity
- Environmental / Lifestyle conditions
- Self Worth





# Mental Health in Family & Belonging - Themes in 2025

## Personal Support Networks

Young people in 2025 wholeheartedly agreed with podcast participants that there is a difference between talking to your friends about something and talking to your family about something, and that they feel there are some things they are unable to talk to their family about and vice versa with their friends. The idea of loneliness despite having friends and family is perhaps a bit nuanced for an agree/disagree statement, as although most agreed that you can be lonely while having friends/family, a large number also chose “neither”.

Perhaps the most interesting choice amongst the questions asked is that young people, in their darkest moment, said they would turn to themselves for support. This is not in line with the young people who took part in the podcast, who were fairly evenly split over “friends” “family” or “both” with only one young person saying they would turn to “the library”. The young person who said they would choose the library (self help), also attends the Online Youth Centre as well as in-person provision. It could be, that the demographic of young people who spend more time online, in an environment where you can simply search for an answer without reaching out to a human being, would just “Google” their problems. This opens up wider questions and considerations around critical thinking, and the motivations to seek support from resources rather than people.



# Personal Support Networks 2025 Poll Results

**There's a difference between talking to your friends about something and talking to your family about something**



Agree  
100%

**There are things you can talk to your friends about that you can't talk to your family about and vice versa**



Agree  
100%

**Young people are still lonely even if they have friends and family to talk to**

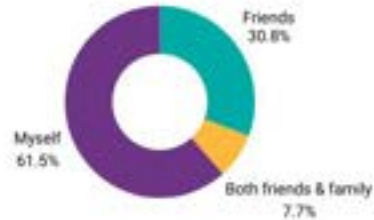


Neither  
40%

Agree  
50%

Disagree  
10%

**At my darkest point, I would turn to:**



Friends  
30.8%

Myself  
61.5%

Both friends & family  
7.7%



# Mental Health in Family & Belonging in 2025

We asked:

**What can families do to make their young people feel like they can go to them with their problems?**

“Having open and honest conversations as always and also way to go about things and just reminding your young person whether that be your daughter, son child or young person that you’re there to talk if they ever feel they need to occasionally my mum will just say “ hey if you need to chat, I’m here “ and that makes me feel confident that anything I feel I don’t have to keep a secret.”



# Mental Health in Family & Belonging in 2025

## Family

There are positive trends in the results from 2025, with young people saying they feel more comfortable talking about mental health with their families. Only a third of those surveyed felt they couldn't talk to their family at all, and over half felt they could speak back against negative comments made by their families, despite over half saying their families feel differently about mental health than they do. This is particularly healthy as we work with a subset of young people, with a large number having one or more protected characteristics. Young people in the podcast described releasing information to their families a little at a time, whereas young people online were more of the opinion that they don't talk about mental health at all unless their opinions are aligned.

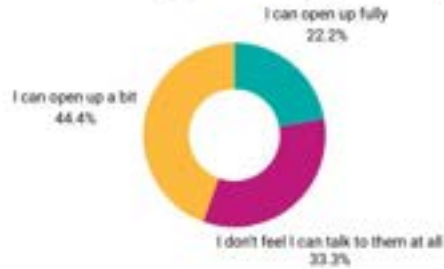
One third of young people felt that the opinions or things said by their family did not impact their mental health. When asked about this, one member of the Online Youth Centre opened up about how they recently learned that their father had joined a political party with vastly different views to them, how this makes them feel uncomfortable and is having a negative effect on their wellbeing.

Reflecting on the initial podcast, we felt that a few responses from young people led to questions that were quite leading, and while we have kept some in, we did omit others. One of these questions asked if young people feel that their families take things personally when approached with a problem. Over half polled agreed with this, though the results may have been different had the wording been more neutral.

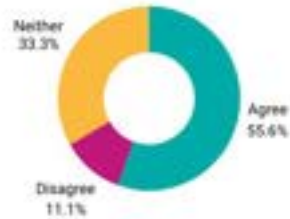


# Family 2025 Poll Results

**How authentic about yourself and your worries can you be with your family?**



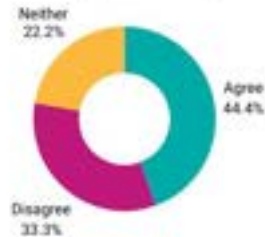
**My family feel differently about mental health as a concept than I feel about it**



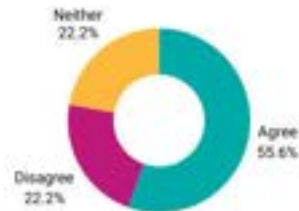
**I feel I can speak back to my family when they say something negative about me**



**My family's opinions on things and what they say have an impact on my mental health**



**I think my family take it personally when I come to them with a problem, as if my having a problem is a complaint about their parenting, or perhaps they feel that they didn't get the same support from their family so maybe I shouldn't either**





# Mental Health in Family & Belonging - 2025

We asked:

**What's the best way to deal with having very different opinions to your family about mental health?**

"They're entitled to their wrong opinion"

"I've never had to deal with that, my family are very supportive"

"I don't get to have an opinion with my family"

"My mum had a very different opinion until she had a child with mental health rather than someone else having mental health. She was really understanding. My dad's opinion won't change and I just don't deal with it"

"I just never mention it"



# Mental Health in Family & Belonging- 2025

## Friends

Within the Online Youth Centre, many young people have discussed the struggles they face to make and maintain friendships. Friendships online are a little different, but the previous polls showed that mostly, young people feel online friendships are just as valid as in person friendships. It is, therefore, heartening to see that the vast majority of young people surveyed feel that friendships are valuable, yet also have the understanding that they impact their mental health.

With a large LGBTQIA+ and neurodiverse community within our service, it is perhaps, not surprising that most young people felt they could be more authentic around their friends - with some young people not being “out” or feeling they can “take off the mask” around their friends. The Internet is also a place where you can experiment more freely with the idea of identity and find communities of like-minded people, where young people can be comfortable to express themselves.



# Friends Poll Results

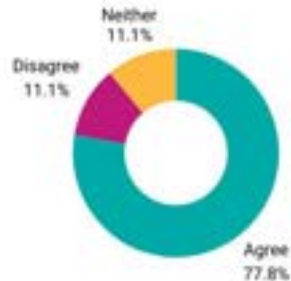
**Friendships have an impact on our mental health (for good or for bad)**



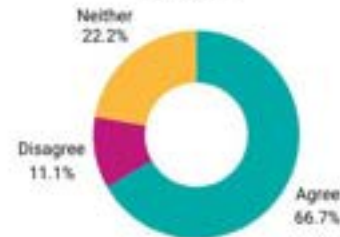
**Good friends are supportive when we need help with mental health**



**I feel more authentic or a different version of myself around my friends**



**I get a sense of comfort from having friends**







# Mental Health in Family & Belonging - 2025

## Environmental / Lifestyle Differences

In contrast to the podcast, young people were more divided on as to whether quality of life correlates to struggles with mental health. Podcast participants were more of the opinion that everyone can struggle equally, however, half of young people in 2025 agreed that people with a higher quality of life do not suffer with mental health as much as those with lower qualities of life.

The term “forced family events” is not the most unbiased language, however, it is a term frequently used by young people and was used in the podcast. Unsurprisingly for our demographic, most young people feel negatively about these, with Christmas in particular being a struggle due to the change in routine, sensory issues from lighting, and an increase in social obligations, particularly talking to family members who you rarely see. It is unclear whether the difficulties around social activities are due to neurodiversity, growing up during the pandemic, or a mixture of the two.

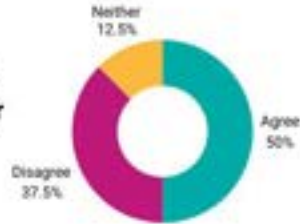
## Generational Differences

All young people felt that there was a difference in opinion on mental health between older and younger generations, in line with the podcast. Interestingly, no one disagreed that talking about mental health helps reduce stigma, but the majority were undecided whether it did help or not. When asked how best to deal with this difference with your immediate family, the most common response was that they simply don't talk about it in order to avoid conflict of opinion. This could be unique to our membership as many have shared they don't enjoy conflict and actively avoid it.



# Environmental / Lifestyle & Generational Differences 2025 Poll Results

**How good someone's lifestyle is is impactful on their mental health. Someone who lives a high quality of life cannot suffer from mental health issues as much as someone with a low quality of life**



**Do forced family events affect you?  
Eg. Christmas**



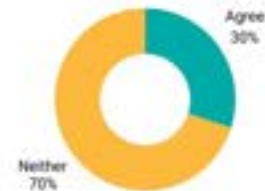
**I think there's pressure at school/college to act a certain way. Eg. being a role model for younger students**



**Older people think differently about mental health than younger people**



**Talking about mental health in general helps with the stigma amongst older generations**





# Mental Health in Family & Belonging - 2025

## Personal Identity & Self Worth

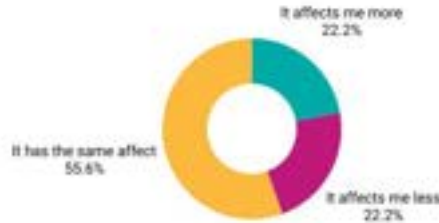
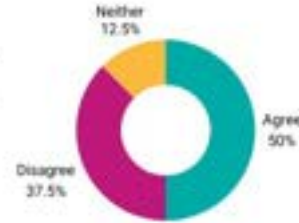
Young people in 2025 feel they are not as heard as they could be regarding their mental health, suggesting they feel their struggles are minimised by their families. Devon is, despite pockets of poverty, a fairly affluent county. In order to attend the Online Youth Centre, young people must have access to both internet, and a device such as a mobile phone, tablet, computer or modern games console, signifying a level of comfort and quality of life in the most part. It is interesting, then, to compare this result with how divided opinions were on whether quality of life impacts the validity of one's struggles with mental health. Empathy is a subject that comes up in many conversations between staff around the behaviours of young people at the Online Youth Centre. We have found that many of our members lack empathy, or cannot see similarities in their own behaviour compared to, for example, a peer who they do not get along with. Whether this is due to the large neurodiverse membership or this is something affecting a wider majority is not clear.

Most young people felt their identities and opinions were not shaped by their families, and that their families opinions or negative comments about them do not have a greater impact than anyone else's. Young people online seem to feel a greater sense of both individuality and independence, but also tell us they are keen to find communities where they fit in.



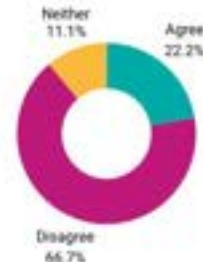
# Personal Identity & Self Worth 2025 Poll Results

**My family's way of handling my mental health is damaging to the way I process my feelings.  
Eg. comparing my issues to people who have no food/shelter making me feel invalid, etc**



**When family members comment on something about you, because they have a particular status in your life, do they have a greater impact on how you take that comment, compared to a stranger or someone you know from school/college?**

**My family are a big reason why I feel any way about certain things (eg. opinions) or why I feel how I do about who I am in myself**





The main themes explored in this podcast were:

### **SPORTS**

- Exercise
- Self Discipline & Routines
- Pressure & Comparison

### **EDUCATION**

- Support Available & Neurodiversity
- Peers
- Tests / Exams



## SPORTS

### Exercise

Young people indicate that they recognise the positives of exercise and the correlation between exercise and positive mental health. Despite this, a quarter see exercise as a “hassle”, and another quarter are undecided on whether never exercising would have a negative effect on mental health.

### Self Discipline & Routines

The ability to commit to routines seems to be difficult for many, and they did not resonate with being able to exercise or have self discipline. In contrast to this, young people are aware that not being able to maintain a healthy routine has an impact on their mental health, evidencing a need for education or support around starting and maintaining routines. Once again, this could be in part due to the demographic of young people, as this is something that people with neurodiversities can struggle with. Further insight into a wider group of young people would be useful to gain better understanding.

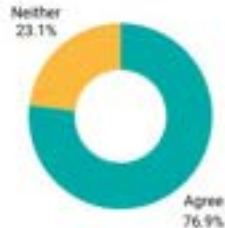


# Exercise 2025 Poll Results

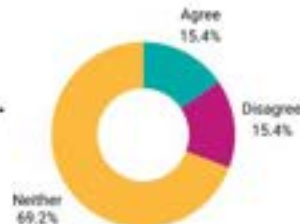
**There is a link between physical health & mental health**



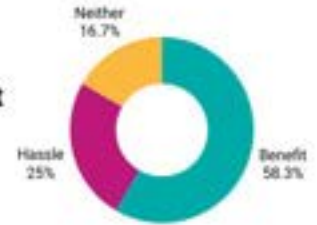
**Never exercising would be bad for your mental health**



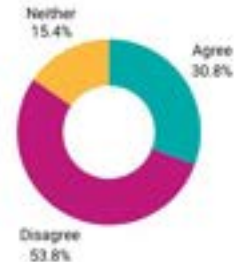
**I have the self discipline to maintain an exercise routine. Eg. going to the gym once a week every week**



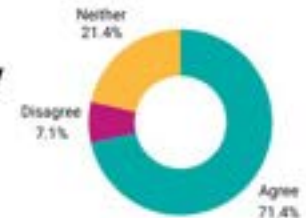
**Do you feel that exercise is a benefit or a hassle?**



**Doing exercise in the morning motivates me to do things for the rest of the day - it gives me a "jump start"**



**Not being able to maintain a healthy routine impacts my mental health**





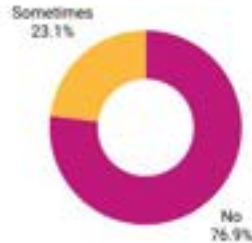
## Pressure & Comparison

The vast majority of young people surveyed online in 2025 do not take part in competitive physical sports, though some have an interest in e-sports.

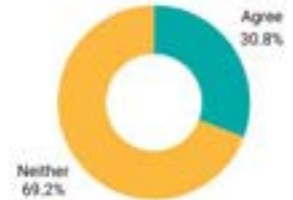
All agreed that comparing yourself to others in ability or appearance impacts your mental health, however, almost half still feel a societal pressure to look a certain way, and 30% feel “looked down on” by those “better” at sports than them. This could suggest a “clique” society exists in schools & colleges and/or that work around self image and self worth would be beneficial.



**Do you take part in competitive sports?**



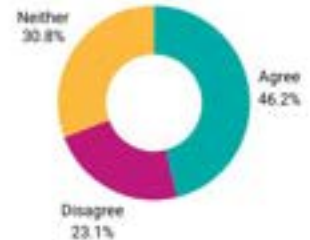
**I feel that people who take part in sport look down on people who are less good at it than them**



**Comparing yourself to others in ability or appearance impacts your mental health**



**I feel a societal pressure to look a certain way**





## EDUCATION

### **Support Available & Neurodiversity**

The podcast had quite a bit of discussion around learning disabilities and neurodiversities, which are not mental health conditions in themselves, but can impact mental health. These topics were raised by the young people in the podcast in response to questions around the inflexibility of the school day, and resonated with our membership, many of whom are either diagnosed or seeking diagnosis.

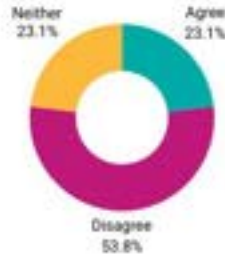
Most young people in 2025 do not feel there is enough support at school/college for pupils with learning disabilities or neurodiversities. One of the young people at the Online Youth Centre is currently refusing to attend school due to the lack of support available whilst seeking a diagnosis. With waiting lists reported as incredibly long, we often hear stories of frustration from young people who are unable to access support until they have an official diagnosis, which perhaps leads to dissatisfaction with their education provider in more general terms.

With self-diagnosis being increasingly common amongst young people, it is interesting that the vast majority were undecided on whether young people lie about having a condition in order to access support or to avoid doing work at school/college. We have found that young people are very accepting of others self-diagnosing in their social circles, but, as mentioned previously, can lack empathy for peers outside of those circles, despite having similar conditions to their own.

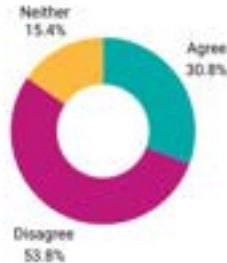


# Neurodiversity and Support Available in 2025 Poll Results

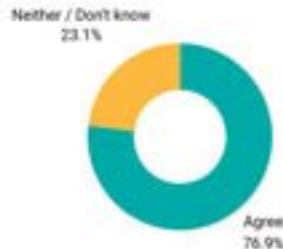
**My school/college does enough to help students with learning disabilities or neurodiversities**



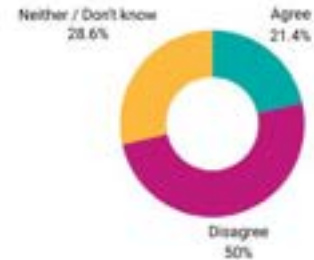
**I have seen a positive change in support available to young people with learning disabilities and/or neurodiversities while I've been in education**



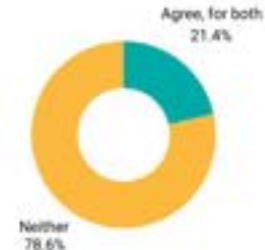
**I feel that getting a diagnosis is like getting a key that opens a door to support**



**My school/college is supportive before you have an official diagnosis**



**I think some young people lie about having a learning disability or neurodiversity to get more support at school/college or to get out of doing work**





We asked:

**What could your school do better to accommodate mental health issues?**

“More open sessions for students to be able to go to pastoral at break time lunchtime and or any free periods to be able to ask for support regarding their mental health.”

“I’m fully aware of their safeguarding policies but sometimes I want to be able to tell my teacher this is bothering me without them immediately feeling like they have to do something about it.”



# Mental Health in Sports, Hobbies & Education in 2025



## Peers

Similarly to the previous poll around comparison in sports, around a third of young people believe people in higher sets “look down” on those in lower ones. The word “hierarchy” was used in the podcast to describe this divide between the different sets. Almost all young people agreed that their peers have an impact on how enjoyable they find education, which is also in line with podcast participants.

## Tests / Exams

Young people were almost unanimous in saying that tests are not the best way to assess ability. We hear year round about the stresses felt from formal exams and education in general. More positive conversations often occur around coursework - particularly for more creative subjects or topics on which the young person is able to have an influence on what they work on - eg. an LGBTQIA+ themed graphic design project. Many young people discuss the idea of “hyperfixations” and find that they are able to focus on little else than what currently has captured their attention. While this is a common trait in the neurodiverse community, some more work around resilience may be useful. These opinions were in line with the podcast who discussed how beneficial more long term assessments would be to students.

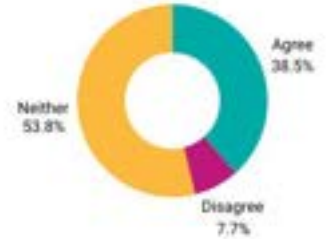


# Peers & Tests / Exams Poll Results

**Who is in a lesson with me makes a difference to how enjoyable the lesson is**



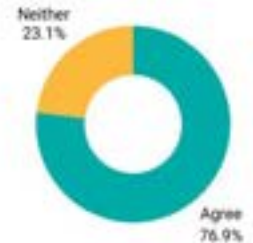
**I think people in higher "sets" look down on those in lower ones**



**Tests are the best way to understand someone's ability to do something**



**It is better to assess ability over a long period of time. eg. how grades were done in the pandemic**





## Conclusion

The clearest comparison to be made from all of the polls is that **young people in 2025 appear much more self-reliant than those in 2023**, with the majority saying that, in their darkest times, they would turn to themselves for help over their friends or family. They also **do not feel, in terms of learning disabilities and neurodiversity, that they receive enough support from their education provider**. These two things could be connected - they may feel they cannot rely on other sources for help, and must therefore, help themselves.

Mostly, **young people surveyed in 2025 feel they are not shaped by their families** - again signifying a sense of independence.

### The Continued Need for Our Services:

Despite this, or perhaps because of this, it is vital that we continue to support young people in their journeys of self discovery, providing them with the tools they need to manage their mental health and thrive. Our findings at the Online Youth Centre reinforce the need to continue to discuss and work on the themes raised through this study. We assess the needs of young people constantly, working to the National Youth Agency's Youth Work Curriculum, with youth voice at the forefront, shining a light on areas that need the most attention. **In 2024, the most discussed topic with us by far was mental health**, with decision making and self esteem and confidence following. There were over 1207 instances of mental health being raised by young people that year- this is overwhelmingly what they want to talk about with both each other and staff.

It is imperative to us that young people's voices are heard, no matter who they are, where they live, or what their life circumstances may be. Digital youth work is unique in that we are able to support young people who, for whatever reason - be it disability, location, mental health, etc - cannot attend or prefer not to attend a physical youth service. This, unfortunately, means that their voices usually go unheard, their problems go unseen - but we are fortunate enough to be able to share their thoughts and views for and with them.



## Limitations of Our Process

Limitations of Our Process: Comparing a free flowing conversation from two years ago with our 2025 poll results was challenging. We needed to prioritise due to the volume of information and to ensure this work had a useful focus for the sector. Some questions asked in 2025 were based on statements made by a single young person in the 2023 podcasts and so, perhaps, do not reflect a consensus difference in opinion since then but simply that the individual young person's experiences didn't match those of the people surveyed in 2025. It would be misleading to say that these are hard, definitive comparisons and results.

We based the poll on questions asked by Exeter University's Sam Wilkinson and our colleagues in 2023 combined with ones that arose from opinions and experiences shared by the young people on the podcast. This led to some questions being posed two different ways with different results, and we believe it would be interesting to delve deeper into this study using neutral language, and comparing and contrasting the opinions of a wider variety of young people, perhaps considering factors such as age, location, etc.

We are very aware that we host a particular subset of young people at the Online Youth Centre, and their thoughts and opinions will be different from those that access Space's in-person provision, or to those that don't access youth work at all. Those young people may be different again to people outside Devon.



# Thank you



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