

ATLANTA'S HUB FOR TEEN MEDIA AND CULTURE

VOXATL

2025 TEEN SURVEY REPORT



Introduction

The 2025 **VOX ATL Teen Survey Report** is a snapshot of life, priorities, challenges, and ideas shared by teens across Georgia.

VOX ATL has been where teens speak, and Atlanta listens since 1993. What began as a small print journal created by teens has grown into a teen-driven platform for uncensored self-expression, journalism, and civic engagement. VOX ATL exists to ensure young people have the skills, space, and support to tell their own stories and shape the conversations that affect their lives.

This report is grounded in that same belief – teens are experts on their own lives! The 2025 Teen Survey marks VOX ATL’s 11th Annual Survey, representing over a decade of the organization’s commitment to supporting young people by listening to what they share, taking their experiences seriously, and amplifying their voices. Teens helped design the questions, guided the priority areas, participated in survey beta tests, and shared their perspectives in their own words. The survey captures how teens prefer to communicate and navigate the digital landscape, whether they feel heard (or not), and how they think about mental health. The survey was divided into the following sections:

- **Communication with Teens and the Digital Landscape:** Exploring which apps, tools, and online platforms teens use most, and how safe they feel navigating digital spaces.
- **When, Where, and How Teens Feel Heard:** Examining how adults and those who support teens can create inclusive spaces for teens to share their voices, talents, and ideas.
- **Teens and Mental Health:** Understanding the mental health challenges teens are facing and how prepared they feel to navigate stress, seek support, and care for their overall well-being.

This report is designed for teens and adults who want to support teens. We at VOX ATL hope it serves as an amplifier of teens and their voices, while also being a valuable tool to support them further. Parents, educators, mentors, youth workers, funders, and decision-makers all play a crucial role in shaping the environments young people navigate daily. The insights shared here are meant to provide both information, and direction. Listening is the first step. Acting on what teens are telling us is the responsibility that follows.

“Teens are the future, and they are going to be telling our stories. It is important that their voices are heard and we give them opportunities.”

— Supporter PTM

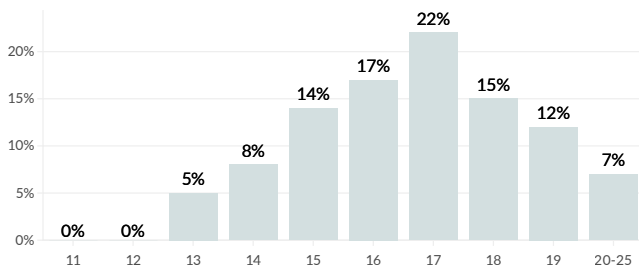


Who Took the Survey: Demographics Snapshot

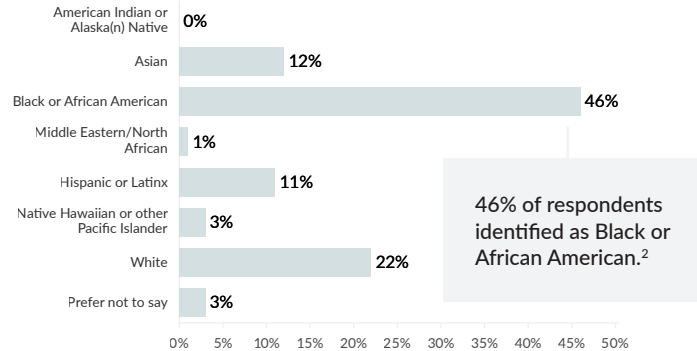
This year, VOX ATL received 238 responses to the Teen Survey, marking a 68% increase from 2024. Teens from more than 80 ZIP codes and over 20 counties within Georgia participated. As VOX ATL continues to expand its outreach, future surveys will aim to reach even more teens across the state. Here are the quick facts about who took our survey below.

Age of Teens

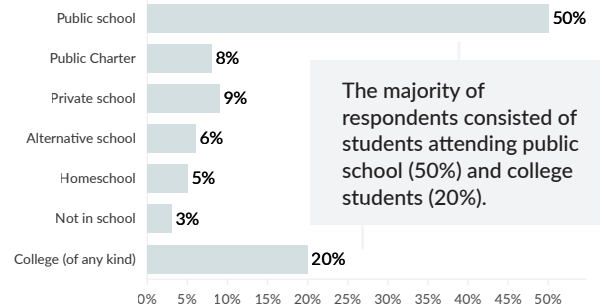
The majority of respondents were high school-aged youth ages 15-19, with 17-year-olds accounting for the largest share at 22%.



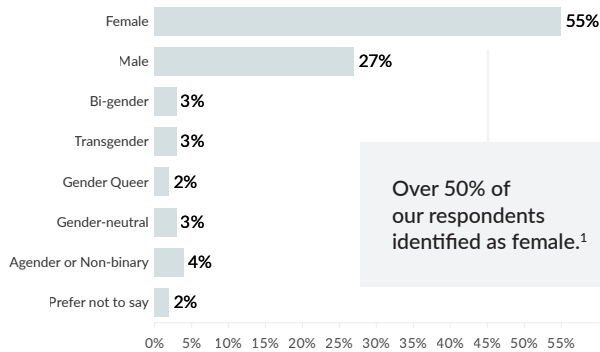
Racial Identity



School Type

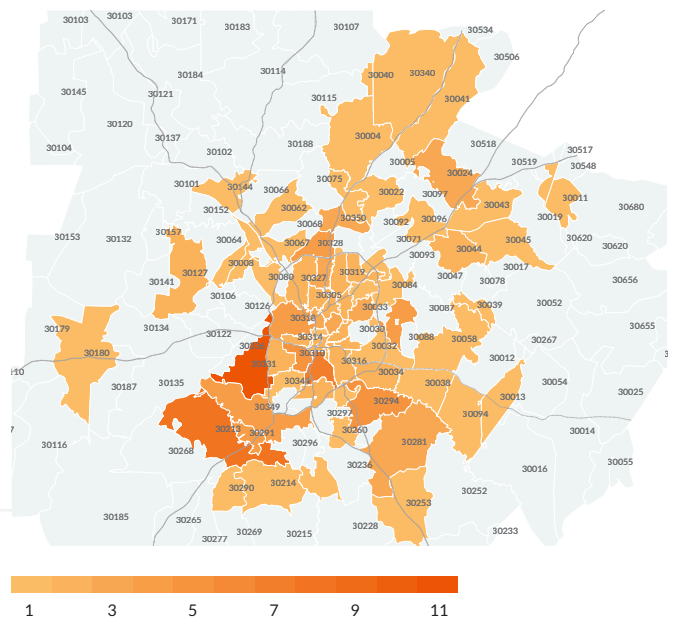


Identified Gender of Teens



Respondents were teens living in over 80 Zip codes, representing over 20 counties in Georgia. Teens living in 30331, located in Fulton County, had the highest response rate.

Respondent Zip Codes



1. Respondents were allowed to select multiple identities, so totals exceed 100%.

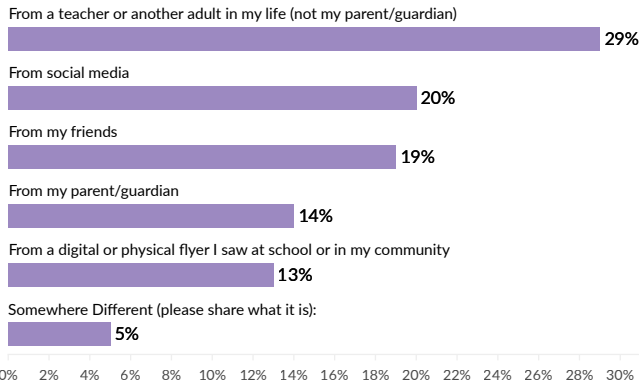
2. Respondents were allowed to select multiple identities, so totals exceed 100%.

Communication with Teens and the Digital Landscape

With constant digital distractions, relating across generations and connecting with teens can feel distant or unfamiliar. A Gallup report found that 8 in 10 parents worry about some aspect of their child's life, with 39% specifically concerned about their teen's time spent on social media.³ At the same time, the digital landscape is becoming more complex. Artificial intelligence is increasingly embedded in apps, devices, and everyday tools. National data indicates that 64% of U.S. teens utilize chatbots, with over 1 in 4 using them daily.⁴ Thus, creating uncertainty not only about which platforms teens use to communicate, but also about whom they interact with and what they learn.

VOX ATL aims to gain a deeper understanding of how teens navigate this reality, including the platforms they use for communication, their engagement with AI, and, most importantly, whether they feel safe online.

Where do you usually hear about opportunities?



Teens most often learn about exciting opportunities through trusted adults in their lives who are not their parents, such as coaches, teachers, and mentors (29%). Social media is the second most common source for discovering opportunities (20%).

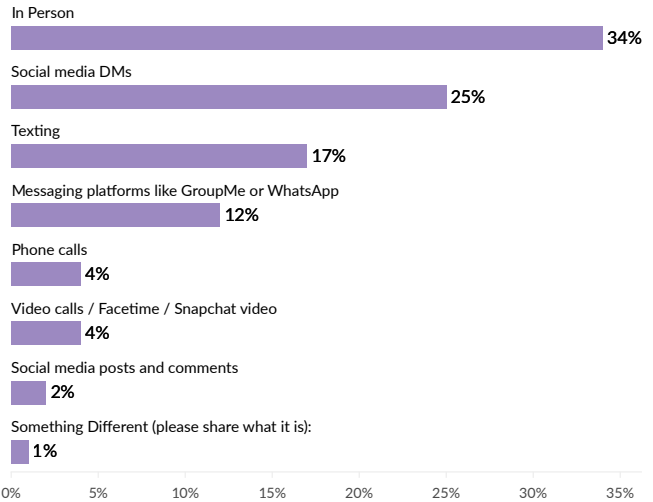
3. Gallup. (2025, January 14). Parents avoid hard but helpful conversations with teens, study finds. Gallup News. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/645602/parents-avoid-hard-helpful-conversations-gen.aspx>

4. Pew Research Center. (2025, December 9). Teens, social media and AI chatbots (Internet & Technology). <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2025/12/09/teens-social-media-and-ai-chatbots-2025/>

5. Frequently is defined as using 'daily' or 'often.'

Social media also plays a significant role in how teens communicate, with direct messages cited as the second most preferred method of communication (25%), the first being in-person interactions (34%).

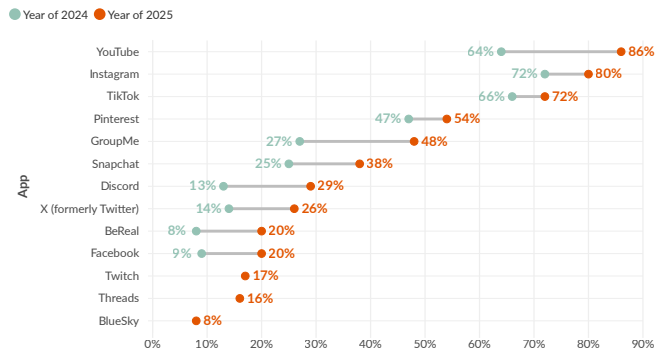
Modes of Communication



In 2024, teens reported that some of their least-used apps included Tumblr, Slack, and LinkedIn. To better reflect shifting digital habits, the 2025 survey replaced those platforms with emerging apps such as BlueSky, Twitch, and Threads. While Instagram was the most used app in 2024 (72%), it dropped to second place in 2025 (80%), overtaken by YouTube, which ranked first at 86%. TikTok rounded out the top three in 2025, with 72% of teens reporting frequent use.⁵

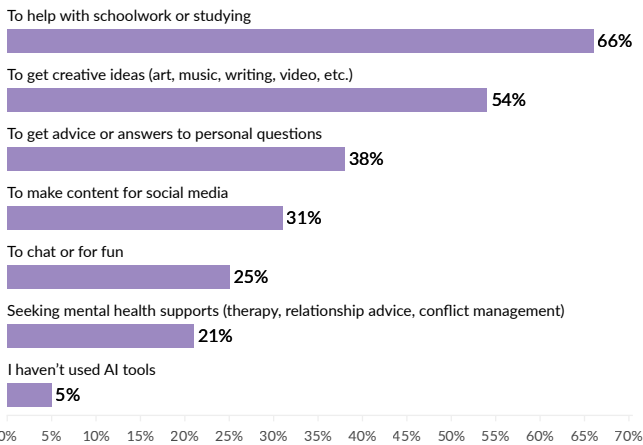
Furthermore, social media also influences how teens consume news. Social media is the primary source through which teens get news (71%), followed by friends (53%) and digital news websites (50%).

Which Apps Do Teens Use the Most? (2024 to 2025)



This year, artificial intelligence and its impact on teens' daily lives were top of mind. VOX ATL asked teens how they most often use AI. Educational purposes (66%), creative inspiration (54%), and personal advice (38%) were the most common ways AI has been utilized.

In the past year, I have used an AI tool to...



The survey, however, does reveal some areas of concern regarding teen AI usage. 38% of teens reported using AI for advice in personal situations, and 21% said they sought mental health support through AI tools. These data points indicate that teens are utilizing AI in increasingly intimate aspects of their lives. While most teens report some level of trust in AI tools, that trust is cautious rather than absolute. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (63%) say they trust AI sometimes, while far fewer (11%) report trusting it a lot. Some skepticism exists among teens when they engage with AI, but those who support them should help provide discernment and appropriate use cases. As AI becomes more embedded in everyday platforms, adults play a critical role in helping teens navigate these tools safely, responsibly, and with appropriate support.

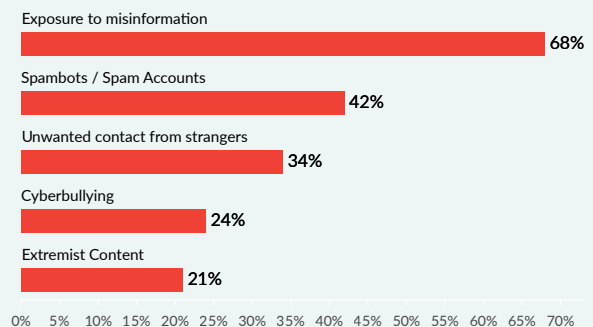


TEENS AND ONLINE SAFETY

In today's digital environment, technology can be increasingly valuable in terms of keeping teens connected. At the same time, as has always been the case, there remain many risks associated with navigating the web. Many teens report frequent exposure to unsafe or harmful online experiences. Exposure to misinformation is the most common concern (68%), and a significant share of teens report encountering spam accounts, unwanted contact from strangers, cyberbullying, and extremist content.

This risk is compounded by the frequency with which teens encounter violent or graphic content online. 64% of teens report seeing this type of content at least sometimes, including 28% who experience it often or almost every day. These findings highlight a digital landscape where teens consistently face safety risks that require clear guidance, protective measures, and trusted adult support.

In the past year, have you experienced any of the following online?

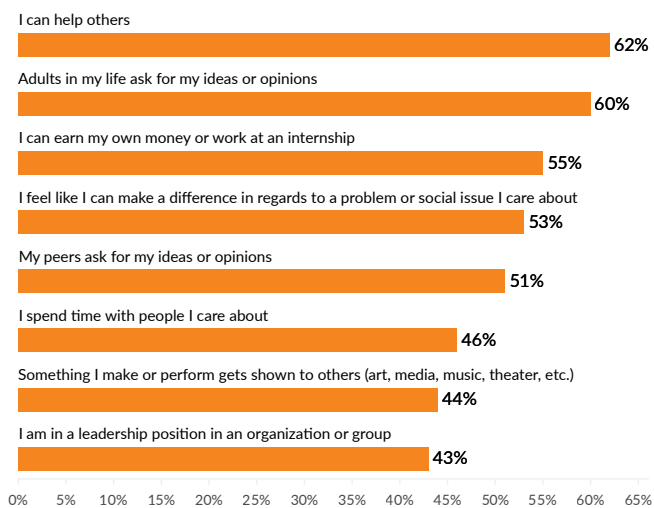


When, Where, and How Teens Feel Heard

Teens consistently tell VOX ATL that being heard means more than being asked for input. It means having their experiences taken seriously and seeing real action follow their words. This section explores where teens feel heard, where they do not, and what it takes to build trust with young people in meaningful ways.

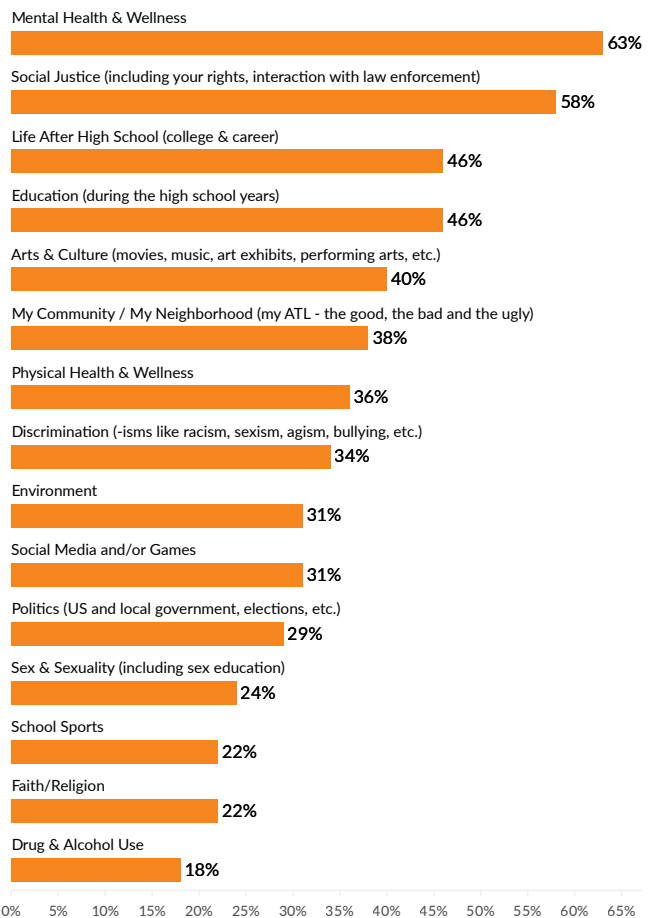
Teens say they feel most valued when their voices are taken seriously and connected to real opportunities. A majority report feeling valued when they can help others (62%) and when adults in their lives ask for their ideas or opinions (60%).

I feel valued when...



The topics teens identified as most important reflect both personal well-being and broader social concerns. Mental health and wellness (63%) and social justice (58%) are the top priorities, alongside education during and after high school.

What topics are most important to you today?



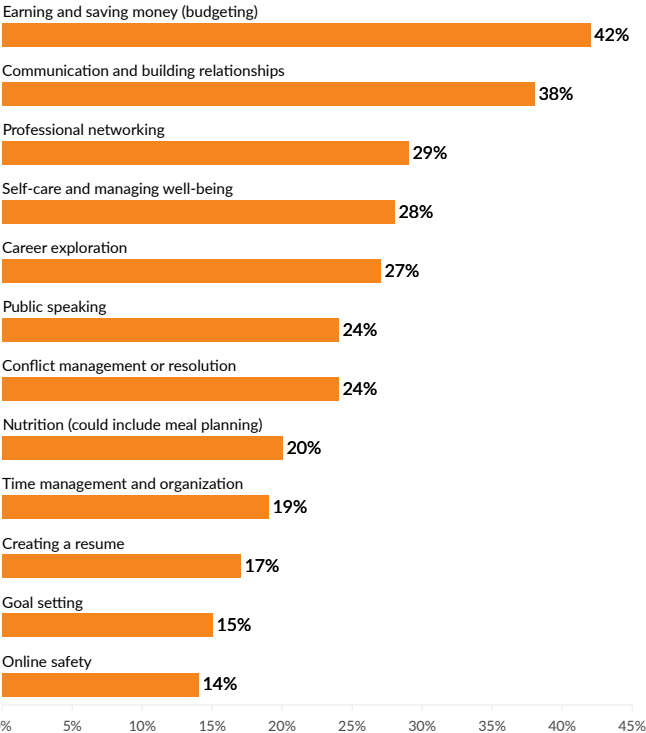
“[Adults can best support me by] providing a free space for me to explore my true interests and make mistakes along the way. Facilitating creativity and curiosity is most impactful for my growth.”

— Teen Survey Respondent



At the same time, teens point to gaps in their own sense of preparedness to navigate the world. The most frequently cited unmet needs include earning and saving money (42%), communication and relationship-building (38%), and professional networking (29%). Together, these findings suggest that teens are community-oriented and seeking skills to support their independence and long-term success, a foundation that, if nurtured, can aid their growth.

Most important topics not taught in school



“[Adults can best support me by] understanding the kind of encouragement that pushes me forward and supporting the things that I’m passionate about.”
 — Teen Survey Respondent

Teens and Mental Health



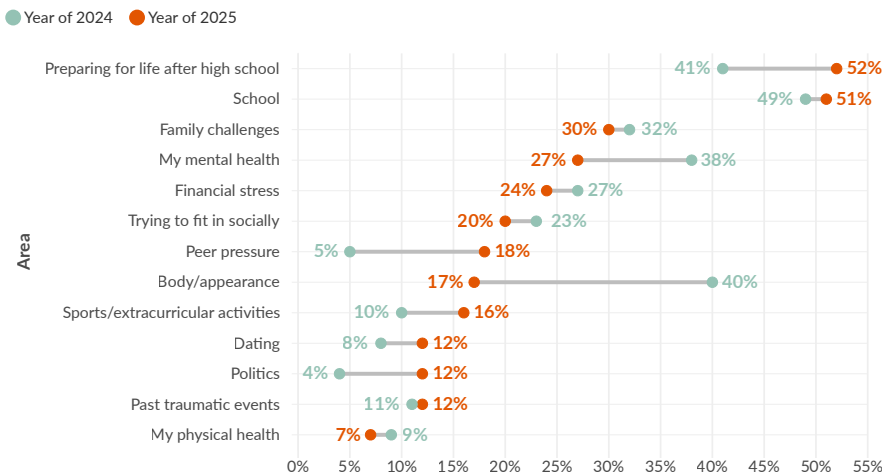
“Creating a safe space where I can talk about my mental health without being judged would help a lot.”

— Teen Survey Respondent

Teen mental health is a critical and growing concern in Georgia. According to Kids Count data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 11% of children and teens experienced anxiety and depression in 2023, up one percentage point from the year before and two percentage points since 2021.⁶ State data also show that in 2021, 44% of Georgia high school students reported feeling sad or hopeless, underscoring how often mental health challenges may show up in young people’s lives.⁷ These trends highlight the importance of understanding teens’ experiences, destigmatizing mental health challenges, and ensuring that supportive resources are available and responsive to their needs.



What causes you the most stress?



In 2025, teens identified preparing for life after high school (52%), school (51%), and family challenges (30%) as their top sources of stress. Compared to 2024, stress related to post-graduation planning increased significantly, rising from 41% to 52%, supporting our earlier findings about teens’ desire for more preparedness for success. At the same time, stress related to mental health declined from 38% to 27%, and body or appearance concerns dropped sharply from 40% to 17%. These shifts suggest that while internal and social pressures may be easing for some teens, uncertainty about the future and academic demands persist as growing and enduring stressors.

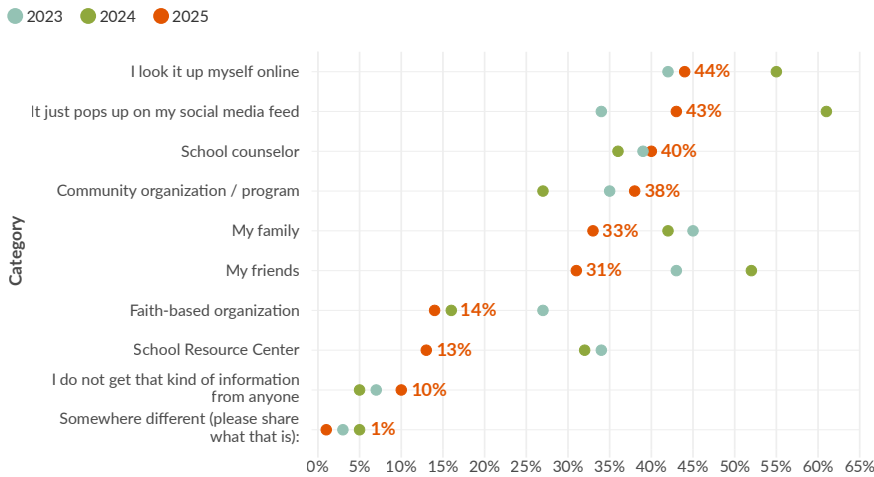
BARRIERS TO TALKING ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

- Fear of judgment or labeling
- Stigma and shame
- Lack of trust in adults
- Fear of consequences
- Difficulty expressing feelings
- Feeling unheard or unsupported

6. Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2025). Children and teens with anxiety or depression: Georgia [Data table]. Kids Count Data Center. <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/11429-children-and-teens-with-anxiety-or-depression?loc=1&loc=2>

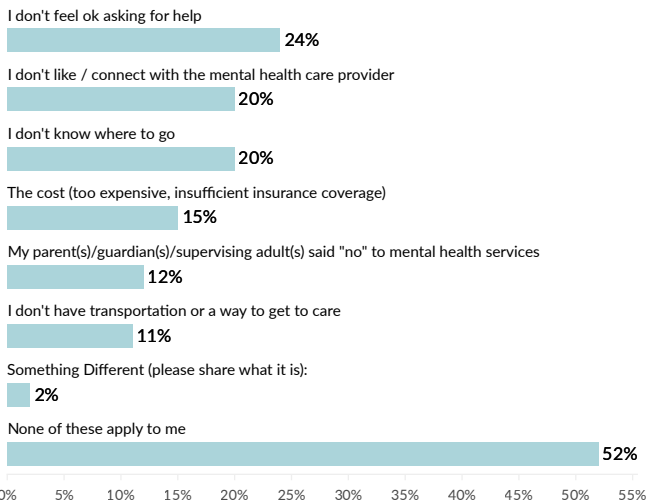
7. Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2025). High school students who felt sad or hopeless during the past year: Georgia [Data table]. Kids Count Data Center. <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/11203-high-school-students-who-felt-sad-or-hopeless-during-the-past-year?loc=1&loc=2>

Where do you get information on mental health?



Looking longitudinally, reliance on family and friends declined over time, while the use of institutional resources, such as school counselors, increased, reaching 40% in 2025. Community organizations also became a more common source of information, increasing from 27% in 2024 to 38% in 2025. At the same time, looking up information independently online and encountering it through social media remained among the top three sources in both 2024 and 2025, highlighting the continued role of digital platforms in how teens access mental health information.

What keeps you from accessing mental health care?



Most teens report having trusted people and resources they can turn to for support. 92% of teens say they have a caring adult they can confide in, and 72% report that they or their peers are aware of the 988 National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. At the same time, fewer teens report that mental health concerns are openly discussed, with 64% saying teens they know talk openly about mental health.

More than half of teens report that none of these barriers to accessing mental health apply to them, potentially suggesting that many feel equipped to access mental health support. At the same time, discomfort in asking for help, uncertainty about where to go, and challenges in connecting with providers remain significant barriers for a substantial share of teens.



"Mentors and adults can support me by... checking in on my stress levels, and helping me balance responsibilities without making me feel guilty."

— Teen Survey Respondent



Conclusion

“Honestly, just having open communication is the best way!”

— Teen Survey Respondent

“I appreciate when guidance is offered in a way that helps me think through my own, and reassurance helps me stay confident, while providing resources or opportunities helps me grow.”

— Teen Survey Respondent

Across Georgia and nationally, teens are navigating a complex moment, but the data points to real reasons for optimism. Nationally, a majority of Gen Z students feel optimistic about their futures, with 84% of middle and high school students stating they believe they have a great future ahead of them, and 57% reporting that they feel prepared for what comes next.⁸ VOX ATL’s findings echo this sense of possibility. Many teens report having caring adults they trust, a strong interest in social issues and mental health, and growing confidence in their ability to shape their futures.

Still, optimism exists alongside real and persistent challenges. Teens are balancing academic pressure, uncertainty about life after high school, mental health challenges, and rapidly changing digital environments. What consistently makes a difference is whether teens feel heard, supported, and connected to meaningful opportunities.

How Adults and Organizations Can Double Down

- 1 Listen with intention and follow through** by inviting teens into decisions that affect them and showing how their input leads to action.
- 2 Strengthen trusted relationships** by ensuring every teen has access to caring adults in schools, programs, and communities who can offer guidance without judgment.
- 3 Expand access to practical life skills** like financial literacy, career exploration, and networking that teens say they need but aren’t always taught.
- 4 Support mental health openly and visibly** by normalizing conversations, sharing clear pathways to help, and reinforcing that seeking support is a strength.
- 5 Meet teens where they are** by engaging responsibly across digital spaces while helping them navigate online safety, AI tools, and information critically.
- 6 Create and sustain third spaces** that empower teens to connect with one another, deepen their interests, and build trusted relationships with supportive adults.

8. Walton Family Foundation & Gallup. (2025). Voices of Gen Z study: Year 3 annual report. Gallup. <https://www.gallup.com/education/voices-of-gen-z.aspx>

A Message from the Executive Director

At VOX ATL, we believe young people already have the answers to our questions; all we need to do is listen. This survey provides a snapshot into the real lives, real concerns, and real hopes of Atlanta's teens. We are living in a moment that is asking a lot of young people.

Teens today are navigating a world that feels louder, faster, and more uncertain than ever. They are processing current events, mental health challenges, questions about their futures, and the daily weight of simply growing up. And they are doing it with more clarity and courage than most adults give them credit for.

This survey exists because youth perspectives are important, and their perspectives deserve to be at the foundation for how we build programs, policies, and communities that actually serve them.

At VOX ATL, we have spent over three decades walking alongside Atlanta's teens as they find their voices and use them. We have watched young people transform pain into powerful storytelling. We have seen what happens when a teen feels truly heard, not managed, not redirected, but genuinely heard. It changes everything.

What you hold in this survey is a gift. It is honest. It is timely. And it carries a responsibility.

We are calling on educators, funders, nonprofit leaders, and community builders to sit with these findings and ask yourselves the hard question: are we building for teens, or are we building with them?

VOX ATL is here to help answer that question together. We are committed to being a convener, a thought partner, and a bridge between what this data reveals and what our community decides to do about it.



Charaun Cash

Executive Director, VOX ATL





VOX ATL

is a youth communications nonprofit amplifying youth voice through publishing, and media education. Since 1993, VOX ATL has united diverse teens from across metro Atlanta to uplift Atlanta's teen perspective and create more stronger equitable communities by harnessing the power of uncensored self-expression.

Methodology

To gather responses for the 2025 VOX ATL Teen Survey, the outreach team developed a strategy that prioritized face-to-face promotion within the metro Atlanta community, partnerships with mission-aligned organizations, and the effective use of digital channels. The goal was to collect approximately 300 responses, which required live interaction with the demographic. To accomplish this, the team attended community resource fairs, teen summits, and other youth-centric events to engage with 11-to 20-year-olds, informing them not only about the teen survey but also about VOX's robust programming.

Similarly, VOX would like to extend its thanks to its many dedicated partners with whom it connected to promote the survey through their programs. Some added the links and graphics to their communication

materials, while others printed flyers with QR codes to hang in their spaces. We built on existing partnerships and added new ones this year, partnering with organizations like Covenant House, the Salvation Army, and the City of Atlanta's Youth R.I.S.E. program, where we exchanged skills sessions for meaningful face time with their youth. Lastly, we promoted heavily through both our MightyNetworks platform and Instagram.

The VOX ATL 2025 Teen Survey was administered from September to December 2025 and received a total of 238 responses. Responses were first filtered in the survey administration tool to include only completed surveys, resulting in 199 responses. Zip codes were then validated as Georgia ZIP codes using Neighborhood Nexus data and manual verification through

the USPS ZIP code finder, yielding a final analytic sample of 169 responses. Additional checks for duplicate IP addresses and a built-in stop question confirmed that all remaining responses were unique and authentic.

Zip code GeoJSON courtesy the Atlanta Department of City Planning.⁹ Atlanta Expressways GeoJSON data courtesy the Atlanta Regional Commission, licensed under CC BY 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.¹⁰

⁹ https://dpcd-coaplangis.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/8cf4efa805714f79aace71d1bd10725e_0/explore?location=33.872140%2C-84.428857%2C9

¹⁰ <https://opendata.atlantaregional.com/datasets/GARC::expressways-and-exits/explore?layer=1&location=32.792634%2C-83.276731%2C7>

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