



PEER COUNSELING IN COLLEGE MENTAL HEALTH

A survey of students' attitudes and experiences with mental health peer counseling

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MARY CHRISTIE
INSTITUTE

BORN THIS WAY/
FOUNDATION

THE **MassINC**
POLLING GROUP

STUDY TEAM

This report reflects the efforts of a broad team affiliated with Born This Way Foundation, the Mary Christie Institute, and the MassINC Polling Group.

RESEARCH LEADS

Maeve Duggan, MA
Research Director
MassINC Polling Group

Steve Koczela, MS
President
MassInc Polling Group

REPORT CONTRIBUTORS

Terez Hanhan, MSW
Programs and Research Manager
Born This Way Foundation

Dana Humphrey, MPH
Associate Director
Mary Christie Institute

Marjorie Malpiede, MPA
Executive Director
Mary Christie Institute

SURVEY ADVISORY BOARD

Dennis Cogan
Student
Fordham University

Daniel Eisenberg, PhD
Professor, Health Policy of Management
in Fielding School of Public Health
University of California Los Angeles

Director
Healthy Minds Network

Amy Gatto, MPH
Senior Manager of Higher
Ed and Evaluation
Active Minds

Annie Harrigan
Student
Harvard University

Intern
Born This Way Foundation

**Michael Gerard Mason,
PhD, LPC, NCC, NCSC**
Associate Dean of African American Affairs
Director of the Luther Porter
Jackson Black Cultural Center
University of Virginia

Makayla Nyambura
Student
Harvard University

Zoe Ragouzeos, PhD, LCSW
Associate Vice President, Sexual
Misconduct Support Services
Assistant Vice President, Student Mental
Health Executive Director, Counseling and
Wellness Services, Student Health Center
New York University

President
Mary Christie Institute

Tesia Shi
Student
*University of Maryland,
College Park*

Founder
Lean on Me UMD chapter

INTRODUCTION

Young adulthood is an exciting time of identity formation and personal growth, but it is also a challenging period of stressful transitions and, for many, the onset of mental health issues.

College student mental health has become particularly concerning, with students reporting year-over-year increases in anxiety and depression, compounded by the “triple pandemic” of COVID-19, the deepening of vast social inequities, and widespread economic insecurity. Indeed, two-thirds (67%) of college students say they have faced mental or emotional issues over the past 12 months.

In examining the most effective and scalable opportunities to answer this call to focus on and support the mental health of college students, our organizations chose to focus on the promising model of peer counseling.

Today’s students are emerging as part of the solution to their generation’s mental health issues, with a notable willingness to help one another and tackle their issues bravely and honestly. The heightened

altruism and lowered stigma experienced by today’s Gen Z college students have produced a proliferation of peer-led mental health support services. These services, while filled with promise, require further examination and coordination.

In this first-ever survey of college students on peer counseling, Born This Way Foundation and the Mary Christie Institute examine the perceptions and experiences of college students as they pertain to peer mental health support. Particular attention has been paid to the experiences of marginalized groups such as students of color, first-generation college students, and students within the LGBTQIA+ community.

While there is a plethora of student-led mental health support options, we chose to ask specifically about peer counseling, which we defined as obtaining support for mental health through a trained peer, not a friend. The findings are often encouraging, at times worrisome, and overall instructive in how colleges and universities can use peer support to empower students, improve student well-being, and help close the gap for treatment.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY – This report uses “LGBTQIA+” to refer to any student who describes their sexual orientation as anything other than “heterosexual” in a multi-select question. “Transgender” describes students who answer “yes” to a separate question, “Are you Transgender?” While “Transgender” was not included as an option in the sexual orientation question, we include the “T” in LGBTQIA+ to follow the commonly used moniker. For more information, please refer to the glossary in Appendix B and the full question texts in Appendix C.

KEY FINDINGS

/ Two-thirds of students say they have faced a mental health challenge in the previous year.

/ One in five college students already use peer counseling (20%); Of those who don't use it, 62% are interested in doing so. Interest in peer counseling among students is higher since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

/ Usage is higher among Black, Transgender, and first-generation college students, who are particularly likely to say it is "very important" to find a peer counselor with similar identities or life experiences as them.

/ Satisfaction with peer counseling is high, with nearly 60% of students who use the service calling it helpful. 82% of students who have peer counseling at their school say it is "able to serve students of various backgrounds and identities."

/ If facing a serious mental health issue, students are most likely to first turn to a peer, like a friend or romantic partner (36%), before other figures like a parent or campus staff. A majority believe their problems can become a burden to their friends.

/ Students who provide peer counseling report helping others as their main motivation (45%).

/ Peer counselors report a higher sense of well-being.

/ Peer counseling training is common (93%) but not universal. Further, 16% of peer counselors say they are unaware of an emergency protocol if they become worried for a student's safety.

Students report mental health challenges, recognize importance of mental health to overall well-being

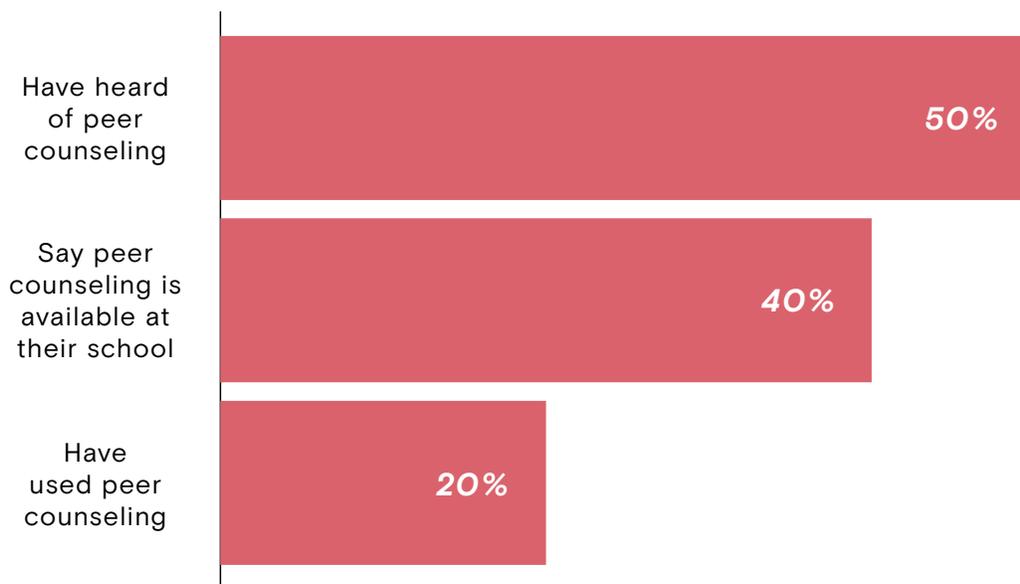
College represents an exciting time in life, but for many students it can also present mental health challenges. Many students find themselves navigating new places, academic expectations, social pressures, and financial responsibilities for the first time. Especially after over two years of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, mental health on college campuses is a

pressing and timely issue. Two-thirds (67%) of college students say they have faced mental or emotional issues over the past 12 months. But students appear to be facing the challenge with a degree of intentionality. They recognize their own struggles, the need for support, and the overall importance of mental health. In total, 85% of college students agree that “mental health is important to our overall well-being,” including two-thirds who “strongly agree.” Broad agreement with this idea extends across many demographic groups analyzed in this report.

PEER COUNSELING, DEFINED: *This survey defines peer counseling as ‘the process of confiding in trained peers (fellow students, not friends) for mental health support.’ In practice, peer mental health support on college campuses varies widely, with some groups directly affiliated with the counseling center, while others operate entirely outside of it. Peer counseling can be utilized in person, via telephone, or by text or chat. Variability also exists in training structures. In this report, we explore peer counseling programs that are created and run by colleges themselves and those that operate separately; We also included peer support offered in a group setting in addition to one-on-one peer counseling. This report does not thoroughly examine informal peer support (i.e. talking to a friend about your problems.)*

PEER COUNSELING ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

% of undergraduate students who _____



Source: Survey of 2,011 undergraduate college students in the U.S. Oct. 2021.

Interest in peer counseling is high. Usage is significant.

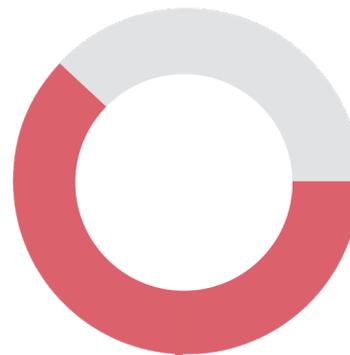
Peer counseling—defined here as the process of confiding in trained peers for mental health support—is relatively common on college campuses. One in five college students has personally used peer counseling. This is notable given that only 40% say it is available at their school. Awareness of peer counseling is even higher—half of undergraduate students say they have heard of peer counseling.

Meanwhile, interest in peer counseling is high. Among the 80% of students who do not already use the service, 62% say they were interested in doing so. That interest is particularly relevant given the upheaval students continue to manage during the COVID-19 pandemic. (See graph on page 12.) Indeed, nearly half of students (48%) say the disruptions caused by the pandemic make them more likely to seek out peer counseling, including 20% who say it has made them “much more likely.” This is especially true for Black students (58% likely, including 32% “much more likely”), Latinx students (54% / 24%), Transgender students (61% / 38%), and first-generation college students (54% / 27%). These differences emphasize how groups that were hardest hit by the pandemic may need additional support to recover.

Most students have a positive impression of peer counseling on their campus. Over half of students who use peer counseling (58%) call it “helpful,” including 23% who say it is “very helpful.” Among those who say peer counseling is available at their school, roughly three-quarters call it “confidential” (79%), “easily available” (79%), “respected” (76%), and “free” (75%). An even higher proportion of students (82%) say it is “able to serve students of various backgrounds and identities,” and another 69% say it is “competent.”

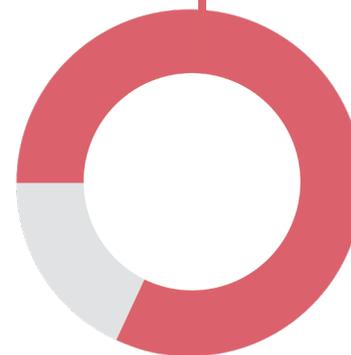
In open-ended comments, peer counseling was a familiar and welcome concept to many. A quarter of comments described peer counseling as a source of support and advice through talking with peers in a more structured context (24%). Some

students described peer counseling in a group setting where they could share their challenges with fellow students (22%). Other comments focused on the help peer counseling allows them to give and receive (10%). And a handful of respondents specifically mentioned how peer counseling allows them to share with people of similar backgrounds or experiences (9%).



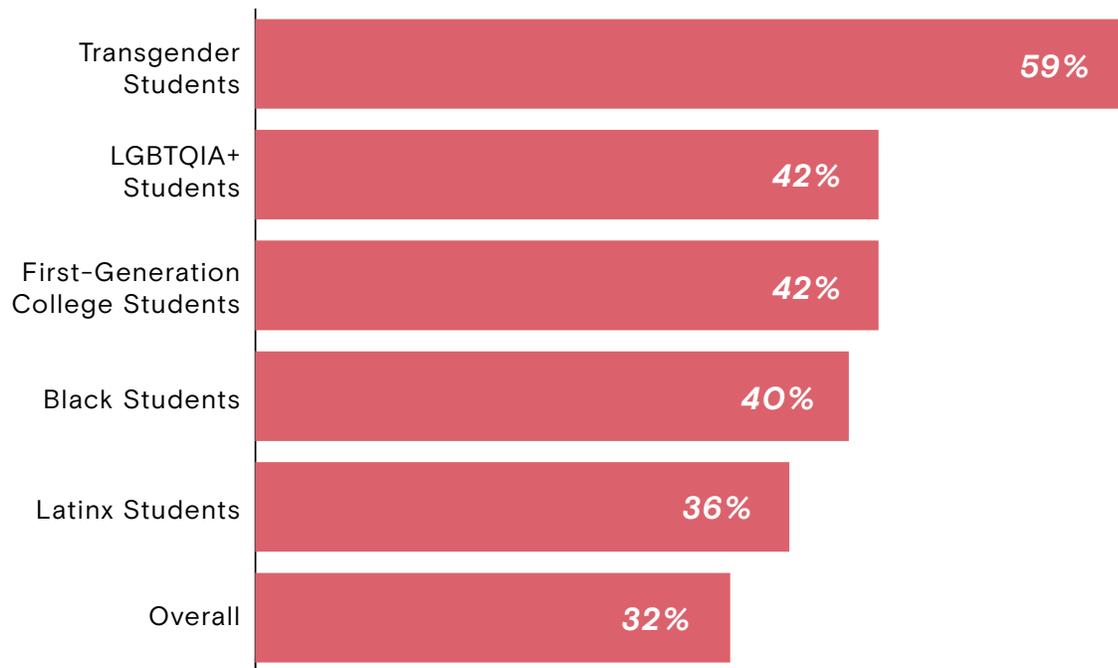
62%
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SHARED IDENTITY KEY TO APPEAL OF PEER COUNSELING

% of each group of students who say it is “very important” to find a peer counselor with similar identities or life experiences



Source: Survey of 2,011 undergraduate college students in the U.S. Oct. 2021.

Shared identities and experiences key to appeal of peer counseling

A number of groups are particularly likely to use peer counseling, including those with specific identities such as Black students (39%), Transgender students (39%), and first-generation college students (29%). These groups, among others, are also more likely to value shared identities and experiences when using peer counseling, indicating that the service can bridge a gap for students of marginalized identities who don't feel as though they are represented in the counseling center.

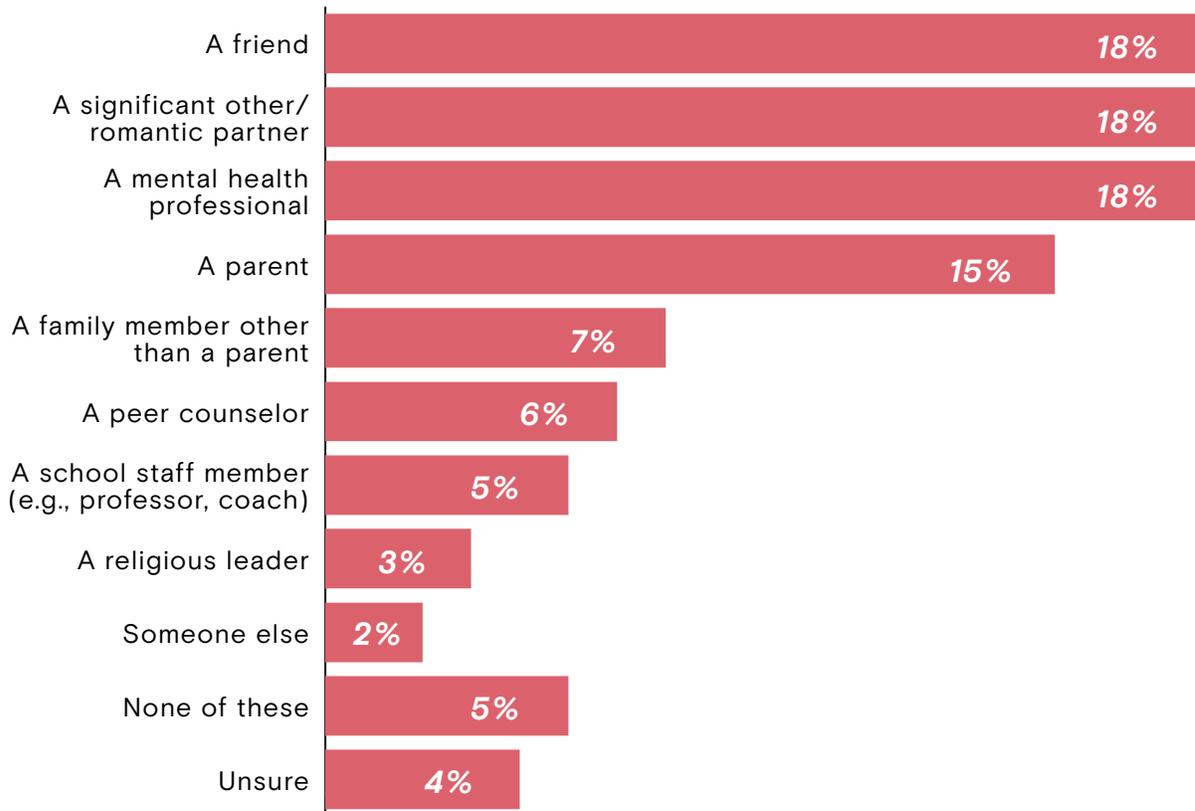
Overall, two-thirds of students (66%) say it would be important to them to find a peer counselor with similar identities or life experiences to themselves, including a third (32%) who call this “very important.” Black and Latinx students

are more likely than white students to say this is “very important” (40% and 36% vs. 29%, respectively). Transgender students (59%), LGBTQIA+ students (42%), and first-generation college students (42%) are all especially likely to call a shared identity or experience in a peer counselor “very important.”

“PEERS PROVIDE GUIDANCE BASED ON TRAINING AND THEIR EXPERIENCES— LISTENING AND REFLECTING WITH YOU TO ENCOURAGE YOU TO THINK THROUGH YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES.”

STUDENTS SEEK OUT FRIENDS, PARTNERS FOR MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

% of students who ranked _____ as who they would be most likely to talk to about a serious mental health issue



Source: Survey of 2,011 undergraduate college students in the U.S. Oct. 2021.

This type of shared background also comes into play when students decide whether to seek help from peer counselors or professionals. About three-quarters of students (78%) say speaking to someone who shares their identity or life experiences is an important factor when deciding between peer counseling and professional help.

Students seek support from peers, but worry problems may test bounds of relationships

When faced with a serious mental health issue, peers are a routine source of support. About a third of students would turn to a

peer first to help them (36%), including 18% each who name a friend or romantic partner. Another 18% of students say they would first turn to a mental health professional. Parents are also a common source of support (15% name a parent as their first choice), while students turn less frequently to other relationships like school staff (5%) or religious leaders (3%).

Only 6% of students say they would turn to a peer counselor as their first choice if they were facing a serious mental health issue.

Students who would turn to a friend or romantic partner if facing a serious mental health issue describe feelings of trust, closeness, and comfort.

In open-ended comments, 35% of students who select a friend or partner say it is because “I trust them most.” They also mention feelings of familiarity, such as “They know me the best” (15%) and “I am most comfortable with them” (14%).

Finally, students say their friends and partners provide a safe environment to discuss their problems. For instance, 17% say, “They understand me and what I’m going through; they can relate to me,” while another 11% say, “They will provide support and not judgment.”

At the same time, many students express misgivings about asking too much of their friends when it comes to mental health. Roughly two-thirds of students agree that sometimes their problems feel too big for their friends to handle (65%), or that their friends can’t always relate to their problems (64%). More than half agree that they sometimes feel like a burden to their friends (58%). This dynamic—wanting to confide in friends but being nervous about asking too much—could provide an opening for peer counselors who can relate to students’ problems while remaining removed from the direct situation.

Those who already use peer counseling confirm it can take pressure off friendships. More than three-quarters of those who use peer counseling (83%) agree that it lets them talk to someone who can understand their problems but is not directly involved in their personal life. This includes 53% who “strongly agree” with this sentiment.

Peer counselors viewed as source of support on a wide range of issues

Peer counseling can provide a source of support for a wide variety of issues, especially given how naturally peer counselors can relate to the particulars

“A PEER COUNSELOR IS ‘SOMEONE LIKE ME WHO USES THEIR LIFE EXPERIENCES TO HELP ME WORK THROUGH MY ISSUES.’”

of college life. For instance, a third of students (34%) would discuss academics with a peer counselor, along with their social life (35%), family (28%), work (27%), and financial concerns (21%).

But peer counselors can also provide an outlet for ongoing issues that may swell beneath the surface, like stress (55%), loneliness (35%), or a sense of belonging (26%). And when certain challenges do become more serious, a notable proportion of students would still turn to a peer counselor for issues like anxiety (48%), depression (43%), or suicidal thoughts (21%).

The breadth of issues suggests peer counselors can play a versatile role in student mental health. Administrators may consider focusing resources on the “everyday” issues peer counselors may be best able to handle.

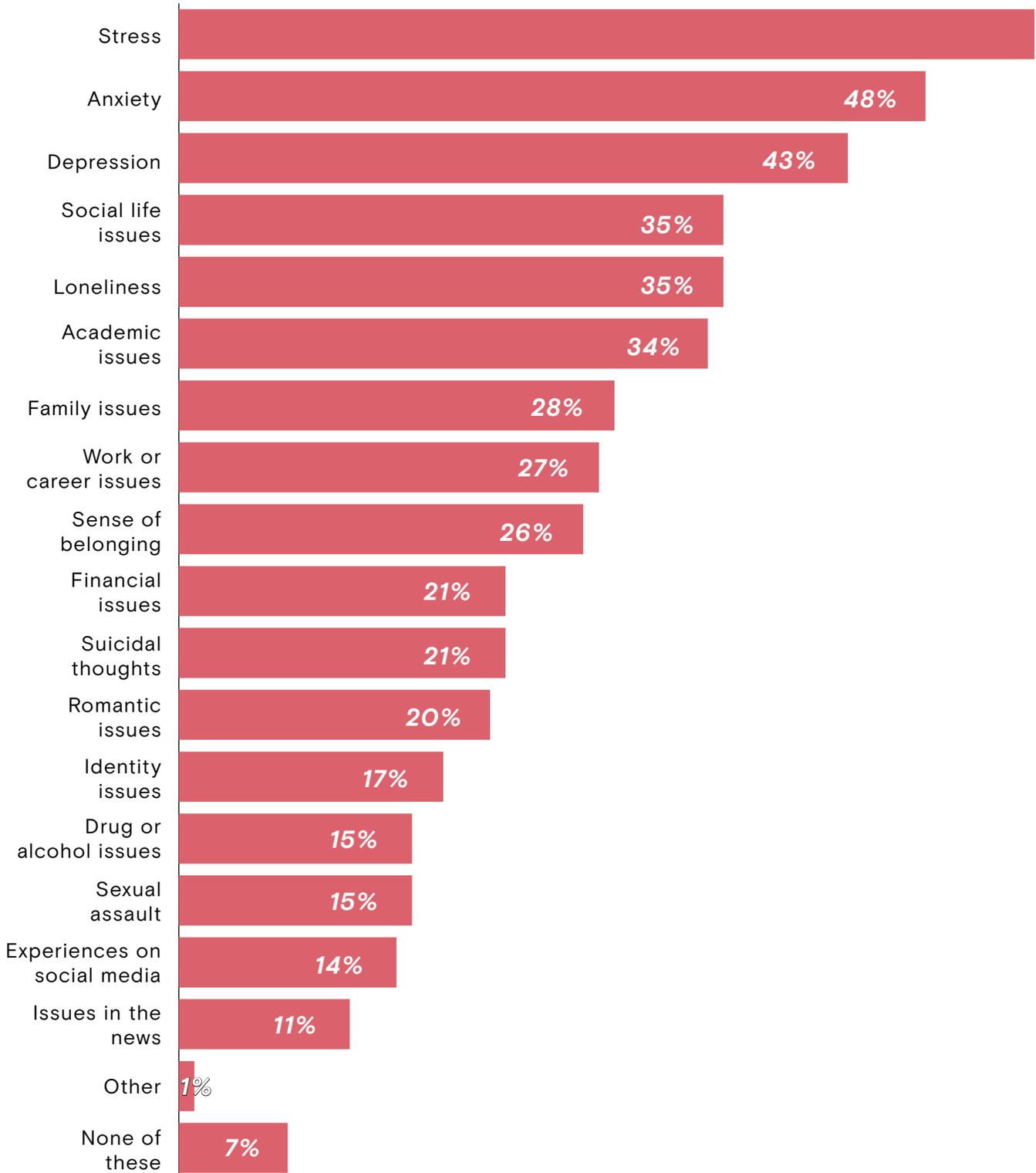
At the same time, it is important to ensure peer counselors are equipped to direct students facing more serious or urgent challenges to appropriate professional help. Students themselves are already factoring the severity of their issue into their decision-making. When deciding between seeking help from a peer counselor or a mental health professional, 86% say they consider how serious the problem is, while 85% consider the type of problem they face.

Students are motivated to help one another

One goal of this survey was to explore the views and experiences of students who have *provided* peer counseling. Given the potential benefits of a robust peer counseling program, it is important to understand what draws people to serve and the impact it may have on them. This survey finds peer counselors are motivated by a combination of common experiences, starting with altruism.

ISSUES RANGE FROM “EVERYDAY” TO MORE SERIOUS

% of students who would talk to a peer counselor about...



Source: Survey of 2,011 undergraduate college students in the U.S. Oct. 2021.

Note: Results may add to more than 100% as respondents could select more than one answer.

Nearly half of peer counselors (45%) say they serve because it makes them feel good to help other students. This was the top reason given, although a personal experience was also a common motivation. Some 40% of peer counselors say peer counseling has been helpful to them, and they are paying it forward. Another 36% say they have experienced mental health issues and know how it feels, thus making them want to be peer counselors themselves.

Once again, issues of identity are relevant when it comes to peer counseling. More than a quarter of peer counselors (28%) are motivated to help a specific group on campus (e.g., students of color, LGBTQIA+ students). This is particularly true for Black students who serve as

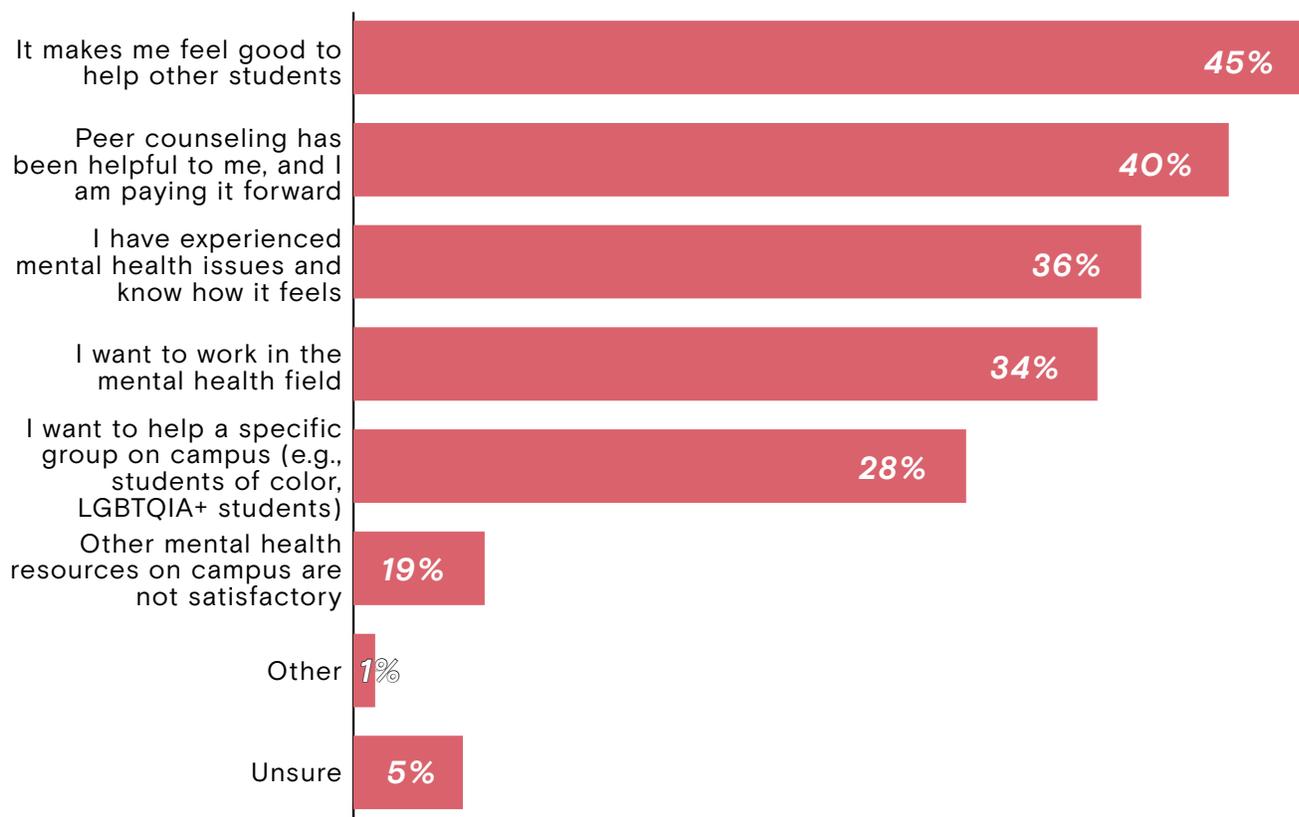
peer counselors (40%), along with LGBTQIA+ peer counselors (33%).

Other reasons include professional ambitions (34% of peer counselors want to work in the mental health field) or wanting to improve mental health resources on campus (19% find other mental health resources on campus unsatisfactory).

Peer counselors say the most important part of their role is providing students with a quality mental health care experience (25%) and being able to relate to students' identity or life experiences (21%). The latter role is especially important to LGBTQIA+ peer counselors, 28% of whom say relating to students' identities or experiences is the most important part of their role.

KINDNESS, PERSONAL EXPERIENCE MOTIVATES PEER COUNSELORS

% of peer counselors who say each is a reason they serve



Source: Survey of 2,011 undergraduate college students in the U.S. Oct. 2021.

Note: Results may add to more than 100% as respondents could select more than one answer.

Another 19% of peer counselors say the most important part of their role is listening to students without judgment (19%). Widening access to mental health services, whether through peer counseling itself or connecting students with the campus counseling center (17% and 15%, respectively), is also important to peer counselors.

The vast majority of peer counselors find it to be a rewarding experience. Nearly all (92%) are satisfied with their experience as a peer counselor, including 61% who are “very satisfied.”

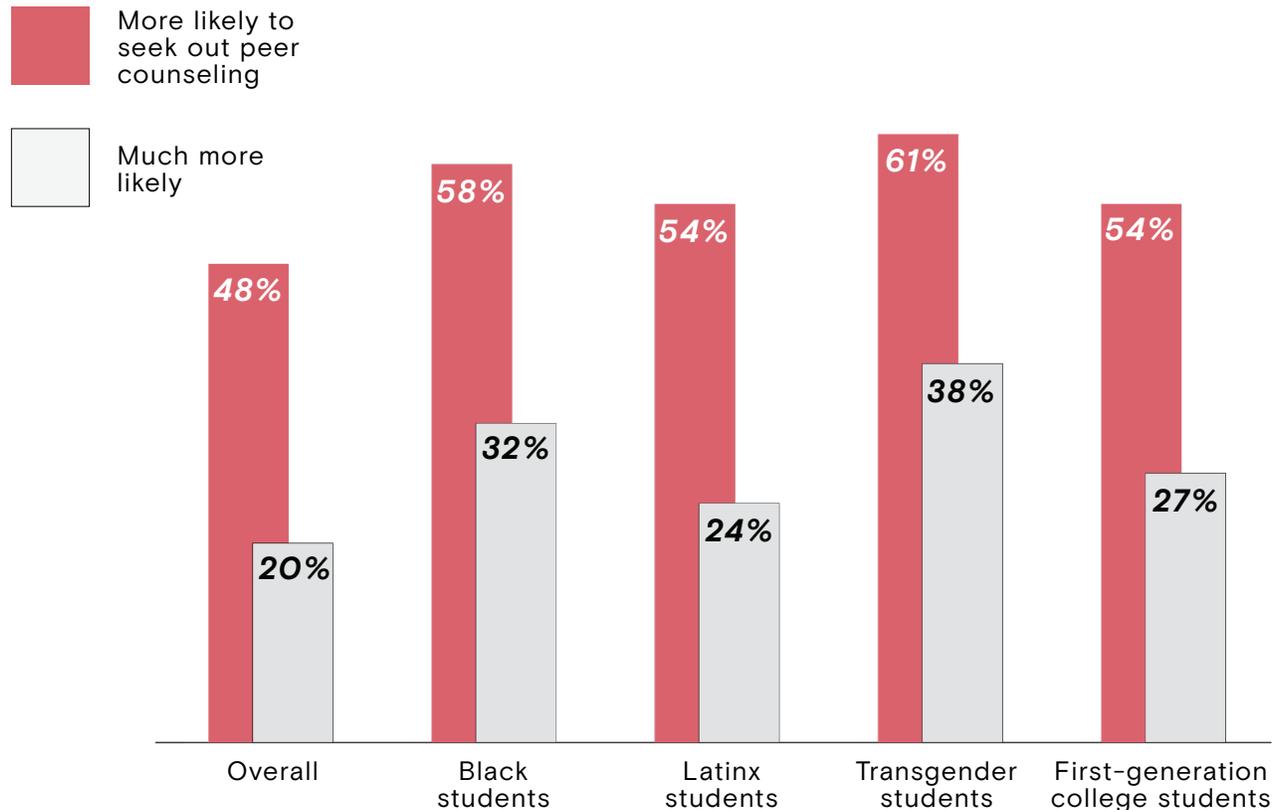
Peer counselor training is common, although not universal

Most peer counselors (80%) say they have received at least a fair amount of training, including nearly half (48%), who have received a “great deal” of training.

Campus counseling centers are responsible for most training, as 54% of those trained say it was done through the campus counseling center. Another 29% of those trained say they received training through an outside program or resource, while 16% say their training came from both campus counseling centers and outside sources.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC IMPACT ON PEER COUNSELING

Disruptions caused by COVID-19 pandemic make students _____ to seek out peer counseling



Source: Survey of 2,011 undergraduate college students in the U.S. Oct. 2021.

Regardless of where peer counselors were trained, they are highly satisfied with the training they received. More than 90% of peer counselors who received training say they are satisfied with their instruction. Among those who received counseling at the campus counseling center, 95% are satisfied, including 70% who are “very satisfied.” Those who received training from outside sources also report high levels of satisfaction (91% satisfied overall, including 55% who are “very satisfied”).

One of the goals of training is to ensure peer counselors will responsibly handle any issues or cases whose severity may exceed their ability, whether that means providing students with additional resources, providing information on how to access professional help, or knowing when to involve emergency services. The vast majority of peer counselors (84%) say there is a clear protocol of what to do if they are working with a student and are concerned about their safety.

Still, this leaves 16% of peer counselors who either say there is not a protocol in place (10%), or they are unsure if one exists (5%). While these numbers may seem small, any gap in communication or training could have serious consequences.

16%
OF PEER COUNSELORS SAY THEY ARE UNAWARE OF AN EMERGENCY PROTOCOL IF THEY BECOME WORRIED FOR A STUDENT’S SAFETY.

Well-being tied to likelihood of using mental health services

Another goal of this survey is to explore how mental health relates to overall well-being and whether services are reaching those in the greatest need.

This survey employs a widely used index of well-being called the “Flourishing Scale” developed by Diener, et. al.[1]. The scale is based on a series of eight questions, tallying respondents’ agreement across items such as, “I lead a purposeful and meaningful life,” “I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me,” and “I am optimistic about my future” (for the full list of statements, please see Appendix C).

Each question is shown on a one to seven scale, and the results are added together to create a continuous well-being score, ranging from eight on the low end to 56 on the high end. The average score in this survey was 45.6, similar to other surveys of college students in which this scale has been utilized. A score of 48 or higher is considered a “positive” well-being score, according to the threshold developed by the Healthy Minds Network. For more information on the scale methodology, please see Appendix B.

Those who have a stronger sense of well-being are more likely to use multiple mental health services such as counseling, support groups, or hotlines. For example, 51% of those with positive well-being scores use two or more mental health resources, compared with only 30% of those who do not have a positive well-being score.

The pattern extends to peer counseling. More than a quarter (29%) of those with a positive well-being score use peer counseling, more than double the proportion of those who do not have a positive well-being score (13%). Among students who do not currently use peer counseling, those who do not have a positive well-being score are less interested in using it (56% vs. 70% of those with positive well-being scores).

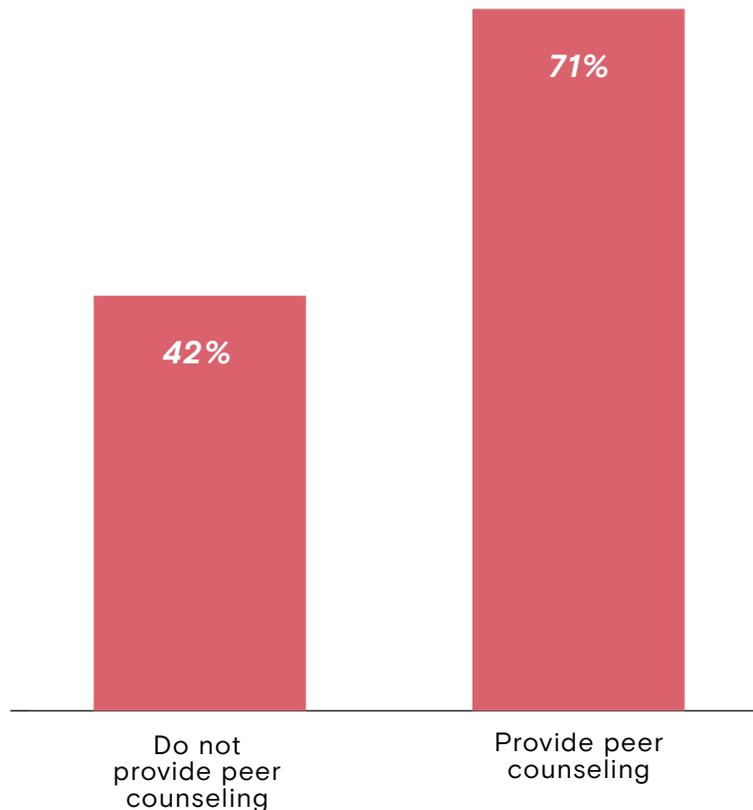
While many peer counselors have lived experience relating to mental health, their own well-being is an important factor in helping others and in avoiding becoming burdened themselves. Seventy-one percent of those who provide peer counseling have scores indicating psychological well-being compared with only 42% who do not provide peer counseling.

Peer counseling presents an opportunity to reach those on the low end of the well-being scale. Many of those with lower scores (under 48) use a range of “established”

mental health services on college campuses like hotlines to text (28%) or call (29%), one-on-one counseling (36%), or support groups (between 28% and 29% across the different types of support groups queried). While the majority of students say these kinds of traditional services are common on their campuses (e.g., 69% of students say professional counseling is available on their campus), peer counseling is not as widely available. Were it to be, it could provide a bridge into the broader network of mental health services.

PEER COUNSELORS MORE LIKELY TO HAVE POSITIVE WELL-BEING SCORE

% of students who do / do not provide peer counseling who have a positive well-being score



Source: Survey of 2,011 undergraduate college students in the U.S. Oct. 2021.

IMPLICATIONS

Curiosity about the benefits and risks associated with peer counseling for college students is particularly high as schools grapple with a campus mental health crisis marked by high demand and a lack of sufficient resources. This dynamic, made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, has administrators and practitioners recognizing the need to find alternative sources of support for their students, but they do so with caution and a desire for more information on which to create or sanction programs that work for students and institutions alike.

Taken together, the findings from this report provide a largely positive view of students' perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors regarding peer counseling. Whether or not it is embraced by colleges, students are utilizing the service, and satisfaction with peer counseling is quite high. Further, contrary to a long-held belief by many in the field, students who provide peer counseling are largely mentally and emotionally strong (what some counselors call "feeling well in the world") and do so with appropriate motivations—mainly a sense of altruism. Nearly half of the students who provide peer counseling listed "It makes me feel good to help other students" as their main motivation. Gen Z students are not content to be passive spectators to the challenges faced by their communities.



STUDENTS WHO PROVIDE PEER COUNSELING ARE LARGELY MENTALLY AND EMOTIONALLY STRONG AND DO SO WITH APPROPRIATE MOTIVATIONS—MAINLY A SENSE OF ALTRUISM.”

Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, students have expressed their wish to offer a helping hand, asking what they can do to serve others.

While generally the facts here are encouraging, the data reveal some cause for caution, and in some cases, action. Students in this survey report turning first to their friends or a romantic partner in the case of a serious mental health issue, indicating a need for more mental health training for all college students. It is imperative that when a student seeks help from a friend, that person is equipped with the tools and knowledge to have a healthy conversation, be a source of positive support, find available resources, and recognize when and how to get help from a professional to manage the situation. However, it is also important to recognize the limit of what can be asked of students who already undergo a significant number of mandatory training modules, especially during their first year.

Additionally, while reported usage of training is high for peer counselors, even a small percentage of peer counselors operating without training is reason for concern. And that some peer counselors, with or without training, do not know where to turn in the case of an emergency indicates the need for clearer guidance on crisis protocols and referrals to professional services.

As it is essential that peer counselors know what to do when facing a crisis, this new information suggests the need to standardize elements of peer support training—whether it is offered through the counseling center or an outside source.

Further, it is important to acknowledge the emotional burden that may go along with the duties of being a peer counselor. This is particularly notable for students with a marginalized identity, who may feel compelled to provide peer counseling because of a dearth of counselors who share their identity (either at the counseling center or elsewhere). All students providing peer counseling must be mentally and emotionally supported themselves. Additionally, providing compensation for peer counselors (either financial or through an academic credit system) is a strategy that should be further explored.

The promise of peer counseling lies in providing mental health support to those who would not otherwise be reached by traditional one-on-one counseling with a professional, whether due to stigma, affordability, long wait times at the counseling center, or lack of counselor diversity. The specific dynamics of the student population make peer support an appealing strategy for alleviating the campus mental health crisis.

First, as the largest constituency group on campus, with much higher numbers than counselors or faculty, students represent a considerable, often-untapped resource.

Second, the college student body is often much more diverse than the staff at counseling centers, offering more representative support for students across racial, ethnic, and LGBTQIA+ backgrounds. The role of peer counselors in meeting the needs of underrepresented students, who often want to talk to someone who shares their identity, cannot be over-emphasized.

Third, students are already relying on their peers for emotional support—turning to their friends because they can offer a unique level of comfort and understanding. Peers often share similar life experiences and everyday problems like academic stress and relationship issues and can easily empathize with those challenges. But it is important to note that friends alone may not be enough, or the right, support. Students fear overburdening those closest to them who also may be overfamiliar and lack objectivity. Here is where a trained peer counselor could play a role.

Every student should have someone on campus they can talk to when they need emotional support. For students who do not or will not seek help from the counseling center, peer support offers another option. Increasing peer support options for students who just need someone to hear them and empathize will also leave the counseling center available for students with greater needs.

PEER SUPPORT TRAINING + RESOURCES

THERE ARE A VARIETY OF WAYS TO ACCESS PEER SUPPORT TRAINING. FOR THOSE INTERESTED, SOME OPTIONS ARE LISTED BELOW.*

- / Learn the basics of supporting your peers with a program like Active Minds' [V-A-R](#).
- / Bring a peer support program like [The Support Network](#) or [Project LETS](#) to your campus. These programs will help build a program and train students to serve as one-on-one support or support group facilitators.
- / Take a training from a youth peer support organization like [Youth Era](#).
- / Complete an online or in-person peer support training through organizations like the [Academy of Peer Services](#), [Intentional Peer Support](#), or the [Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance](#).
- / Get training to become a [state certified peer support specialist](#) where you can work to support other young people in a formalized role.

**Peer support resources provided by Kelly Davis, Associate Vice President of Peer and Youth Advocacy, Mental Health America.*

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

Survey Methodology

These results are based on a national survey of 2,011 undergraduate college students in the U.S. The survey was conducted online October 6 – 20, 2021. Results were weighted to estimated demographics of the U.S. population of undergraduate students. Demographic estimates were generated using data from the Census Bureau and other publicly available sources. The poll was sponsored by the Mary Christie Institute and Born This Way Foundation.

Flourishing Scale (Well-Being Scale) Methodology

The Well-Being Scale used in this report was originally developed as the Flourishing Scale by Diener et. al. (full citation below). Scores were calculated using the original 1 to 7 scale. Positive well-being is defined as any score 48 or higher, utilizing the threshold developed by the Healthy Minds Network in their 2021 Winter / Spring Data Report.

Diener, E., Wirtz, D., Tov, W., Kim-Prieto, C., Choi, D., Oishi, S., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2009). New measures of well-being: Flourishing and positive and negative feelings. *Social Indicators Research*, 39, 247-266.

APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY

Gender – Students indicated their gender in a select-all format. In this report, any reference to a particular gender (e.g., “men” or “women”) represents those students who only made one selection. Those who selected multiple options are still included in the overall data.

LGBTQIA+ – Any student who indicated they identify as any of the following: asexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian, pansexual, queer, questioning or unsure, same-gender loving, some other way (specify).

Racial and ethnic groups – Students indicated their racial and/or ethnic identity in a select-all format. In this report, any reference to a racial or ethnic group (e.g., “Black” or “Latinx”) represents those students who only made one selection. Those who selected multiple options are still included in the overall data.

Transgender – Any student who said “yes” to the question “Are you Transgender?”

APPENDIX C: TOPLINE RESULTS

MARY CHRISTIE INSTITUTE AND BORN THIS WAY FOUNDATION COLLEGE STUDENT PEER SUPPORT SURVEY

Topline Results

National Survey of 2,011 Undergraduate College Students in the U.S.

Field Dates: October 6-20, 2021

[Opening demographic questions omitted; demographics are reported at the end of this document.]

The next set of questions will ask you about your overall well-being. Remember that your responses are confidential and you may choose to skip questions or stop responding at any point. Below are 8 statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the scale below, please indicate your agreement with each item by indicating that response for each statement.

RANDOMIZE ORDER	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Mixed	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I lead a purposeful and meaningful life.	1%	2%	5%	13%	19%	31%	29%
My social relationships are supportive and rewarding.	1%	2%	3%	13%	18%	35%	28%
I am engaged and interested in my daily activities.	1%	2%	5%	12%	18%	34%	29%
I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others.	1%	1%	2%	10%	15%	38%	32%
I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me.	0%	1%	2%	8%	14%	39%	36%
I am a good person and live a good life.	0%	1%	2%	10%	17%	37%	33%
I am optimistic about my future.	1%	2%	4%	12%	16%	33%	32%
People respect me.	1%	2%	4%	13%	19%	35%	27%

Over the past 12 months, have you felt like you needed help for emotional or mental health problems or challenges such as feeling sad, anxious, or nervous?

Yes I have 67%
 No I have not 28%
 Unsure 5%

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the mental health resources available to you through your college or university?

Very satisfied 27%
 Somewhat satisfied 42%
 Somewhat dissatisfied 15%
 Very dissatisfied 6%
 Unsure 11%

If you needed help with a mental health issue, how quickly do you think you could get an appointment with a licensed mental health professional *on campus*?

Right away 26%
 In less than a week 34%
 In a week to a month 19%
 In more than a month 5%
 Unsure 15%

To the best of your knowledge, which of these mental health resources are available to students at your school either in-person or online?

RANDOMIZE ORDER	Available	Not available	Unsure
One-on-one professional counseling through a campus counseling center	69%	14%	17%
Mental health awareness programs or activities	71%	13%	16%
General purpose support groups led by a professional therapist	54%	17%	29%
Support groups led by a professional therapist for a specific group of students, e.g., students of color or LGTBQIA+ students	54%	17%	29%
Support groups led by a professional therapist for a specific issue, e.g., eating disorders, PTSD, depression	51%	17%	32%
A hotline you can call to talk to a professional therapist	56%	20%	25%
A hotline you can text to talk to a professional therapist	55%	18%	27%
A psychiatrist on campus who can prescribe medication	39%	27%	34%

AMONG THOSE WHO INDICATED EACH ITEM WAS AVAILABLE ON THEIR CAMPUS

Below is the list of mental health resources you indicated are available through your college either in-person or online. Which of these have you personally used through your college, if any?

FILTER FROM PREVIOUS BATTERY	Used	Have not used	Unsure
One-on-one professional counseling through a campus counseling center	42%	54%	3%
Mental health awareness programs or activities	42%	54%	4%
General purpose support groups led by a professional therapist	36%	58%	6%
Support groups led by a professional therapist for a specific group of students, e.g., students of color or LGTBQIA+ students	34%	60%	6%
Support groups led by a professional therapist for a specific issue, e.g., eating disorders, PTSD, depression	36%	60%	4%
A hotline you can call to talk to a professional therapist	35%	59%	5%
A hotline you can text to talk to a professional therapist	35%	60%	5%
A psychiatrist on campus who can prescribe medication	41%	53%	6%

When you hear the term peer counseling, what do you think it means?

OPEN END, CODED INTO CATEGORIES

Talking to friends / peers: support, advice on challenges / struggles	24%
Counseling from peers: others around my age, like counseling but informal / not professionals	24%
Group counseling: with counselors or fellow students with similarities	22%
Helping others: getting help, giving help, helping one another, support	10%
People with similar experiences or backgrounds sharing / supporting / helping / counseling	9%
General mentions of mental/emotional health	6%
Professional counseling: therapy, psychiatrist, on-campus counselors, etc.	6%
Descriptions of peer counselors: active listeners, empathetic, bring own experiences, etc.	3%
Unsure	5%

The rest of the survey refers to “peer counseling services” for mental health. **Peer counseling is defined as the process of confiding in trained peers (fellow students, not friends) for mental health support.** This support is NOT provided by professionals (e.g., licensed therapists). Peer counseling is NOT the same as talking to a friend about your problems.

Before this survey, had you ever heard of peer counseling services?

Yes 50%
 No 45%
 Unsure 5%

To the best of your knowledge, are peer counseling services available at your school?

Yes 40%
 No 20%
 Unsure 40%

Have you used peer counseling services at your school?

Yes 20%
 No 72%
 Unsure 8%

ASK IF PEER COUNSELING AVAILABLE

To the best of your knowledge, is peer counseling on your campus...?

ROTATE ORDER	Yes, it is	No, it is not	Unsure
Free	75%	15%	10%
Confidential	79%	11%	11%
Easily available	79%	11%	9%
Widely used	55%	23%	22%
Respected	76%	12%	12%
Competent	69%	12%	18%
Able to serve students of various backgrounds and identities	82%	11%	7%

ASK IF HAVE NOT USED PEER COUNSELING

You mentioned you have not used peer counseling services in the past. If peer counseling services were available at your school, how interested would you be in using them?

Very interested 17%
 Somewhat interested 45%
 Not too interested 22%
 Not interested at all 10%
 Unsure 6%

ASK IF USE PEER SERVICES

You mentioned you have used peer counseling services in the past. How helpful has peer counseling been to you personally?

- Very helpful 23%
- Somewhat helpful 35%
- Not too helpful 13%
- Not at all helpful 6%
- Unsure 23%

ASK ALL

How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

RANDOMIZE ORDER	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Mixed	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
Some of my problems feel too big for my friends to handle	37%	28%	19%	7%	5%	3%
My friends can't always relate to my problems	32%	32%	21%	8%	4%	2%
Sometimes I feel like a burden to my friends	31%	27%	19%	10%	11%	2%
Mental health is important to our overall well-being	67%	18%	8%	3%	2%	2%
IF USE PEER SERVICES						
Peer counseling lets me talk to someone who can understand my problems but is not directly involved in my personal life	53%	30%	12%	3%	2%	1%

ASK ALL

If you were experiencing a serious mental health issue while on campus, whom would you be most likely to talk to about this? Please rank your top three. **RESULTS PRESENTED INCLUDE % WHO RANKED EACH ITEM #1.**

A mental health professional	18%
A friend	18%
A significant other / romantic partner	18%
A religious leader	3%
A peer counselor	6%
A parent	15%
A family member other than a parent	7%
A school staff member like a professor or a coach	5%
Someone else	2%
None of these	5%
Unsure	4%

You mentioned you would be most likely to talk to **PIPE IN #1 RANK FROM WHO** if you were experiencing a serious mental health issue. Why would you turn to this person first?

OPEN END RESPONSES WILL BE CODED INTO CATEGORIES

Which of these problems would you consider talking about to a *peer support counselor*? Select all that apply.

Academic issues	34%
Social life issues	35%
Romantic issues	20%
Financial issues	21%
Family issues	28%
Work or career issues	27%
Issues in the news	11%
Drug or alcohol issues	15%
Sexual assault	15%
Identity issues	17%
Experiences on social media	14%
Sense of belonging	26%
Anxiety	48%
Depression	43%
Stress	55%
Loneliness	35%
Suicidal thoughts	21%
Other	1%
None of these	7%
Unsure	4%

If you were experiencing a serious mental health issue and decided to seek help from either peer counseling or a mental health professional, how important would each factor be in making your decision?

RANDOMIZE ORDER	Very important	Somewhat important	Not too important	Not at all important	Unsure
Which is available sooner	41%	37%	13%	4%	5%
Which one I can afford	54%	28%	10%	3%	5%
How serious the problem is	57%	29%	8%	3%	4%
The type of problem I am facing	52%	33%	8%	3%	4%
How my career options may be impacted	39%	32%	17%	6%	6%
What kinds of records might be kept	40%	33%	16%	6%	5%
Whether I can speak to someone who shares my identity or life experiences	41%	37%	14%	3%	5%

If you were to use peer counseling, how important would it be to find someone with similar identities or life experiences to yourself? (Race, age, gender identity, LGBTQIA+, etc.)

Very important	32%
Somewhat important	34%
Not too important	18%
Not at all important	9%
Unsure	7%

Have you ever provided peer counseling? **Again, peer counseling is defined as the process of confiding in trained peers (fellow students, not friends) for mental health support.** This support is NOT provided by professionals (e.g., licensed therapists). Peer counseling is NOT the same as talking to a friend about your problems.

Yes	16%
No	69%
Unsure	15%

IF PROVIDE PEER SERVICES

Why do you serve as a peer counselor? Select all that apply.

Peer counseling has been helpful to me, and I am paying it forward	40%
I have experienced mental health issues and know how it feels	36%
It makes me feel good to help other students	45%
I want to work in the mental health field	34%
Other mental health resources on campus are not satisfactory	19%
I want to help a specific group on campus (e.g., students of color, LGBTQIA+)	28%
Other	1%
Unsure	5%

IF PROVIDE PEER SERVICES

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your experience providing peer counseling?

Very satisfied	61%
Somewhat satisfied	32%
Somewhat dissatisfied	4%
Very dissatisfied	1%
Unsure	2%

IF PROVIDE PEER SERVICES

Thinking about your experience as a peer counselor, what is the most important part of your role?

Connecting students to the campus counseling center	15%
Being accessible to students on campus	17%
Providing students with a quality mental health care experience	25%
Being able to relate to students' identity or life experiences	21%
Listening to students without judgment	19%
Something else	0%
Unsure	3%

IF PROVIDE PEER SERVICES

How much training have you received to be a peer counselor?

A great deal	48%
A fair amount	32%
Just a little	13%
None	5%
Unsure	2%

IF RECEIVED TRAINING

Has the training you received to be a peer counselor been online, in-person, or a mix of both?

Online	40%
In-person	39%
Mix of both	21%
Unsure	<1%

IF RECEIVED TRAINING

Was the training you received as a peer counselor through a campus program or through an outside program/resource?

Campus counseling center	54%
Outside program/resource	29%
Some of both	16%
Other	<1%
Unsure	2%

IF RECEIVED TRAINING FROM EACH SOURCE

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the peer counselor training you received from...?

	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Unsure
The campus counseling center	68%	26%	5%	<1%	<1%
An outside program/resource	55%	36%	8%	<1%	1%

IF PROVIDE PEER SERVICES

Would you prefer any training you receive to be a peer counselor to be online, in person, or a mix of both?

Online	33%
In person	41%
Mix of both	24%
Unsure	2%

IF PROVIDE PEER SERVICES

In your experience, is there a clear protocol of what you should do if you are working with a student and are concerned about their safety?

Yes	84%
No	10%
Unsure	5%

IF DO NOT PROVIDE PEER SERVICES

Which of the following are reasons you have never provided peer counseling? Select all that apply.

Not interested	24%
Not available at my school	22%
Have never heard of it	30%
Don't have enough time	28%
Need to work instead	15%
Too challenging	15%
Too emotional	19%
Other	4%
Unsure	10%

ASK ALL

Thinking about the past 18 months and the disruptions caused by COVID-19, are you more or less likely to seek out peer counseling, or has it made no difference?

Much more likely	20%
Somewhat more likely	29%
Made no difference	35%
Somewhat less likely	5%
Much less likely	4%
Unsure	8%

DEMOGRAPHICS:

These last few questions are for statistical purposes only.

Gender

Man	39%
Woman	53%
Other	7%
Prefer not to say	1%

Race

White, non-Hispanic	51%
Black, non-Hispanic	13%
Latinx	21%
Asian, non-Hispanic	7%
Other	8%
Prefer not to say	1%

School Region

Northeast	17%
Midwest	21%
South	36%
West	26%
Territories	2%

What is your age?

18	15%
19	12%
20	13%
21	16%
22	9%
23	7%
24	4%
25+	23%
Prefer not to say	1%

Sexual orientation

Heterosexual	61%
LGBTQIA+	35%
Prefer not to say	5%

Are you Transgender?

Yes	5%
No	92%
Unsure	2%
Prefer not to say	1%

How would you describe your immediate family's overall financial situation?

My family has more than enough to live comfortably	18%
My family has enough to live comfortably	35%
My family's needs are met with a little left	21%
My family just meets basic expenses	14%
My family does not meet basic expenses	5%
Unsure	3%
Prefer not to say	3%

Are you the first generation in your family to go to college?

Yes	37%
No	55%
Unsure	6%
Prefer not to say	3%

Approximately how many students attend your school?

Less than 1,000	10%
1,000 to 4,999	30%
5,000 to 9,999	19%
10,000 or more	24%
Unsure	17%

Which of the following best describes your school?

2-year junior or community college	32%
4-year college	48%
University with undergraduate and graduate students	17%
Unsure	3%

Is your college or university public or private?

Public	75%
Private	20%
Unsure	4%

About the poll

These results are based on a national survey of 2,011 undergraduate college students in the U.S. The survey was conducted online October 6 – 20, 2021. Results were weighted to estimated demographics of the U.S. population of undergraduate students. Demographic estimates were generated using data from the Census Bureau and other publicly available sources. The poll was sponsored by the Mary Christie Institute and Born This Way Foundation.



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