

A Return to “Normal”

Assessing Mental Health Concerns Among U.S. Teens



COVID-19 has left a notable impact on the mental health of teens. While the worst of the pandemic may seem to be over, many U.S. teens are concerned and anxious about transitioning back to “normal” life. These findings by the Morgan Stanley Alliance for Children’s Mental Health draw on a nationally representative poll of 516 U.S. teens ages 15-19, and will help inform families, educators and caregivers as teens make their transition to their “new normal” life.



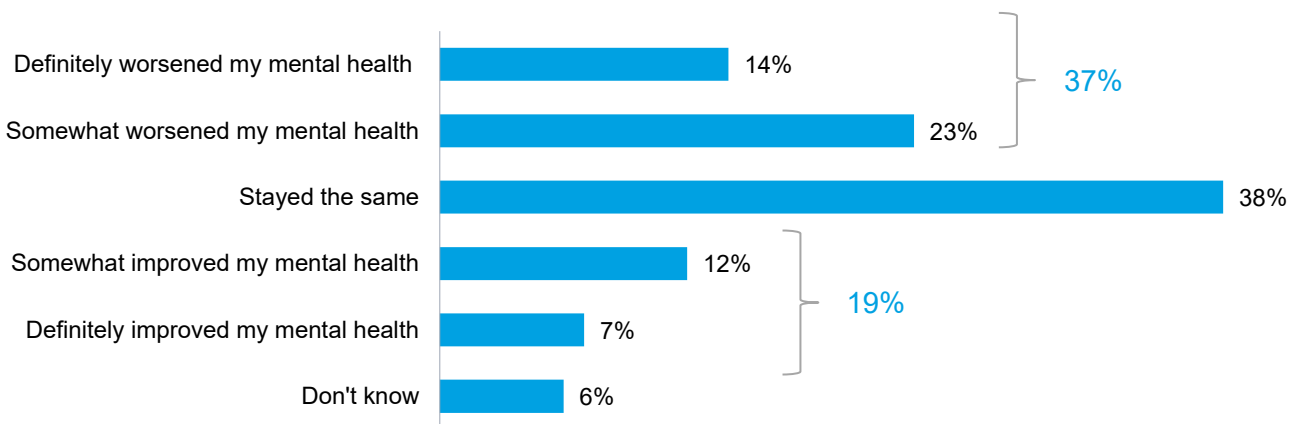
KEY FINDINGS

COVID-19 IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

Over a third (37%) of teens surveyed say their mental health has worsened throughout the pandemic. Girls (44%) are more likely to self-report this feeling than boys (29%).

FIGURE 1

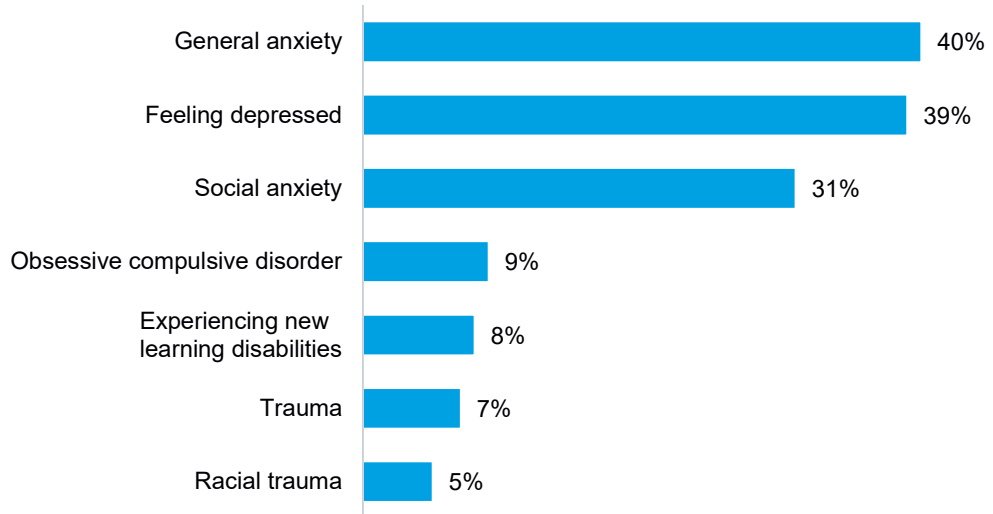
Thinking about your mental health before the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., before March 2020) compared with now, to what extent do you feel the pandemic has improved or worsened your mental health, or has it stayed the same?



Four in 10 teens self-report that they have experienced general anxiety and feeling depressed since March 2020. Girls (46%) are more likely to self-report feeling depressed than boys (33%).

FIGURE 2

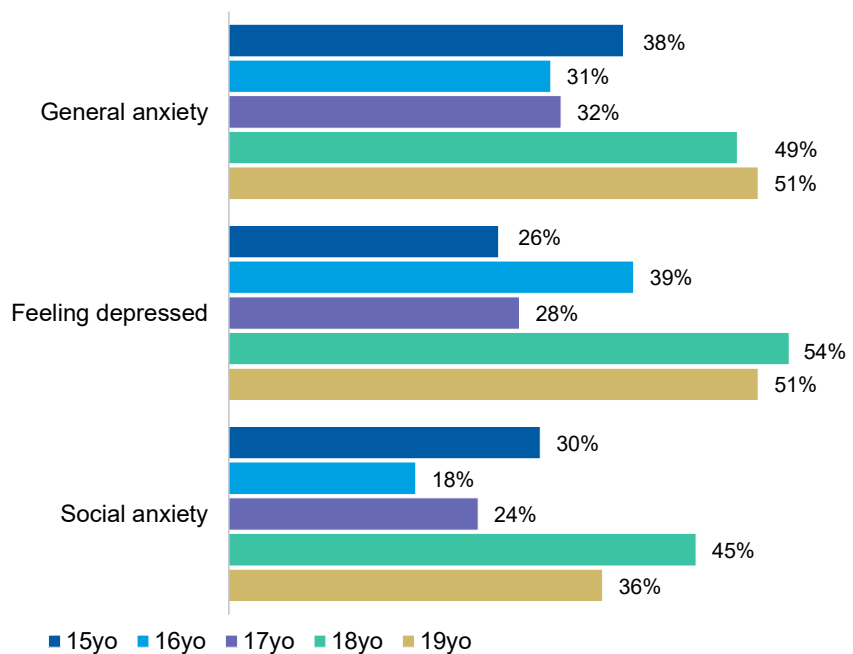
Which, if any, of the following mental health challenges have you experienced since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020? Please select all that apply.



Older teens ages 18 and 19 are more likely to self-report general anxiety, feeling depressed and social anxiety during the pandemic.

FIGURE 3

Which, if any, of the following mental health challenges have you experienced since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020? Please select all that apply.

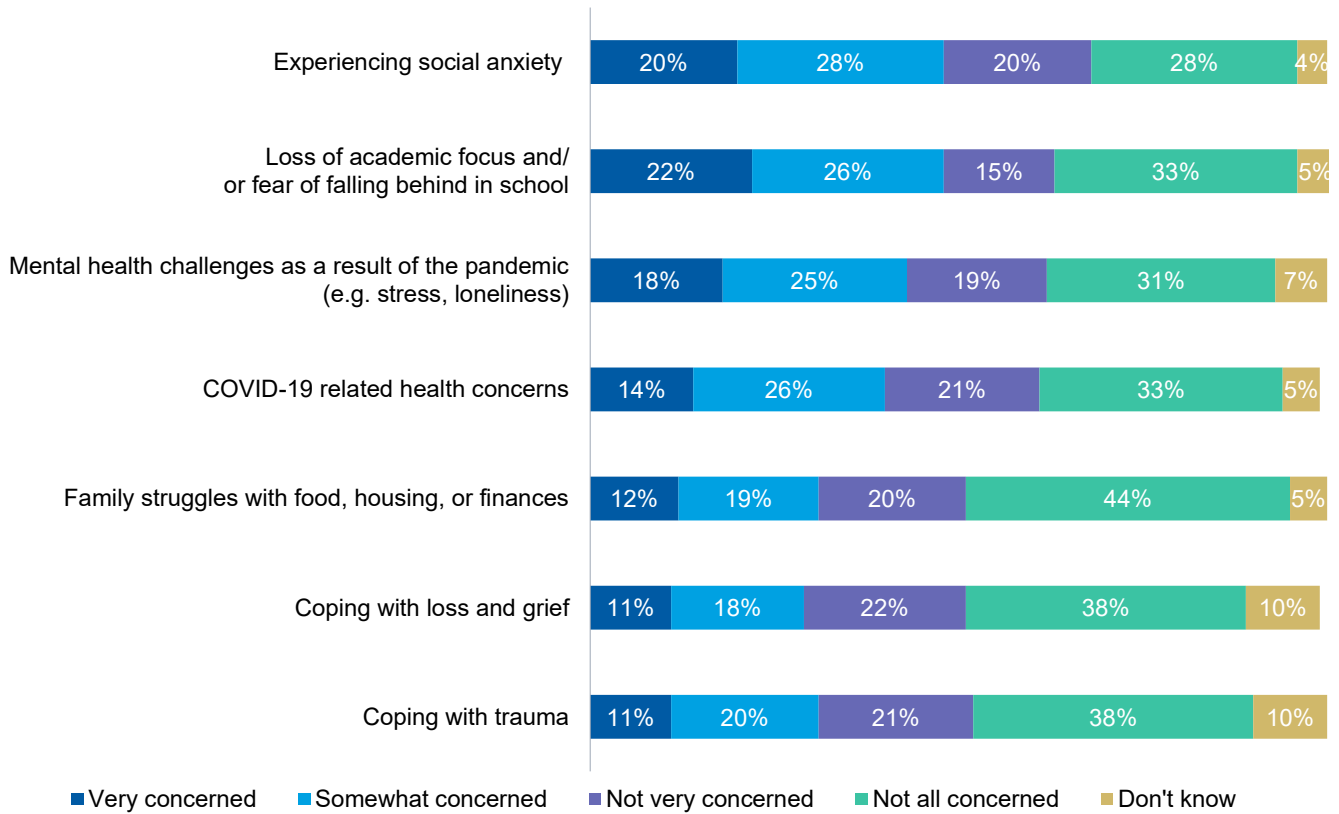


CONCERNS ABOUT RETURNING TO NORMAL

After months of isolation, canceled plans, and remote/hybrid learning environments, many U.S. teens are nervous about returning to their regular activities. Almost half of teens surveyed express concerns about experiencing social anxiety (48%) and falling behind academically (47%) respectively. 43% say they are concerned about mental health challenges as a result of the pandemic.

FIGURE 4

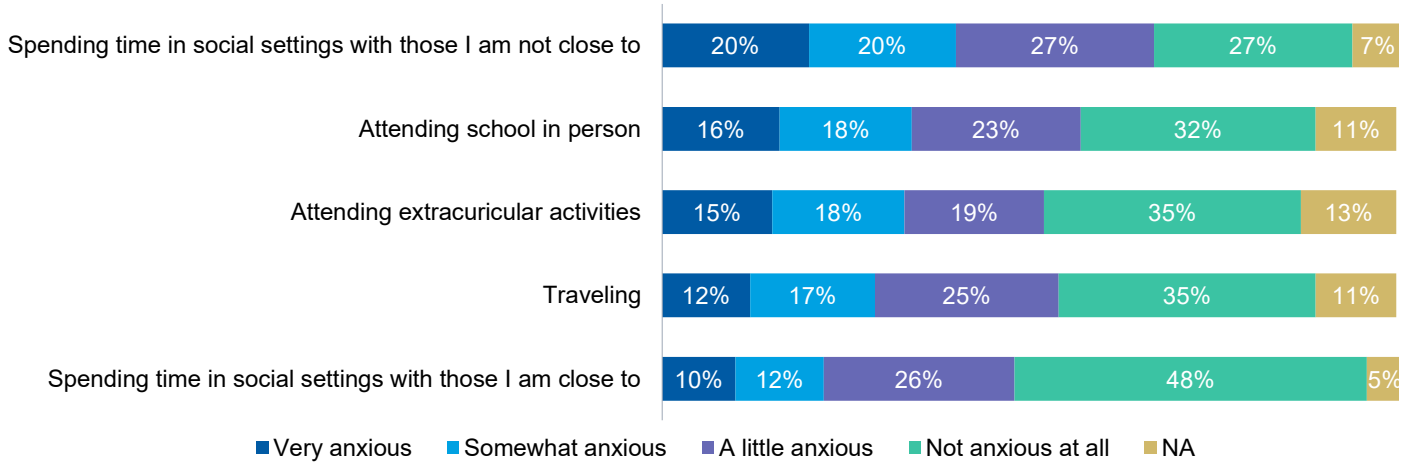
How concerned, if at all, are you about each of the following when thinking about returning to your regular activities (e.g., school, extracurricular activities, part-time jobs, or in-person social events) that you used to do before the pandemic?



When it comes to socializing, four in 10 teens say that they feel anxious about spending time in social settings with those they are not close to. On the subject of school, a third say they are anxious about going back to in-person learning.

FIGURE 5

How anxious (worried or nervous), if at all, are you feeling about doing each of the following activities following the COVID-19 pandemic?



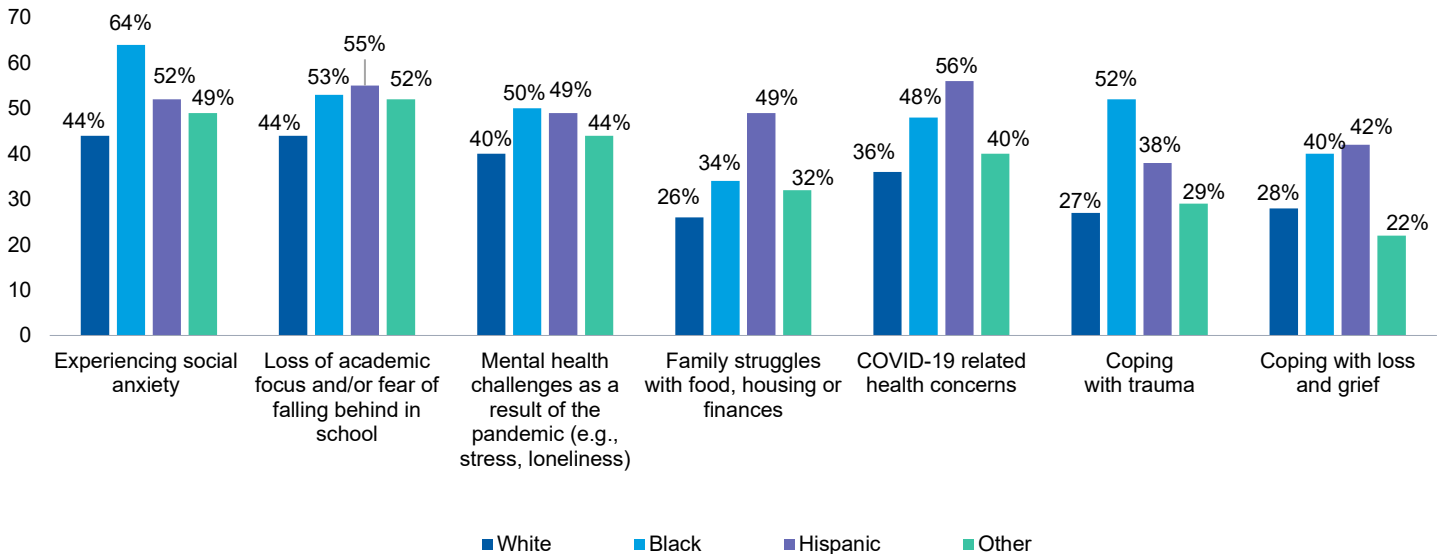
RACIAL DISPARITIES IN TRANSITIONING

Across the board, Black and Hispanic teens are more likely to express concern than white teens about social anxiety, falling behind in school, coping with trauma, loss and grief, and mental health challenges as a result of the pandemic; family struggles with food, housing or finances; and COVID-19 related health concerns.

FIGURE 6

How concerned, if at all, are you about each of the following when thinking about returning to your regular activities (e.g., school, extracurricular activities, part-time jobs, or in-person social events) that you used to do before the pandemic?

Very/Somewhat concerned



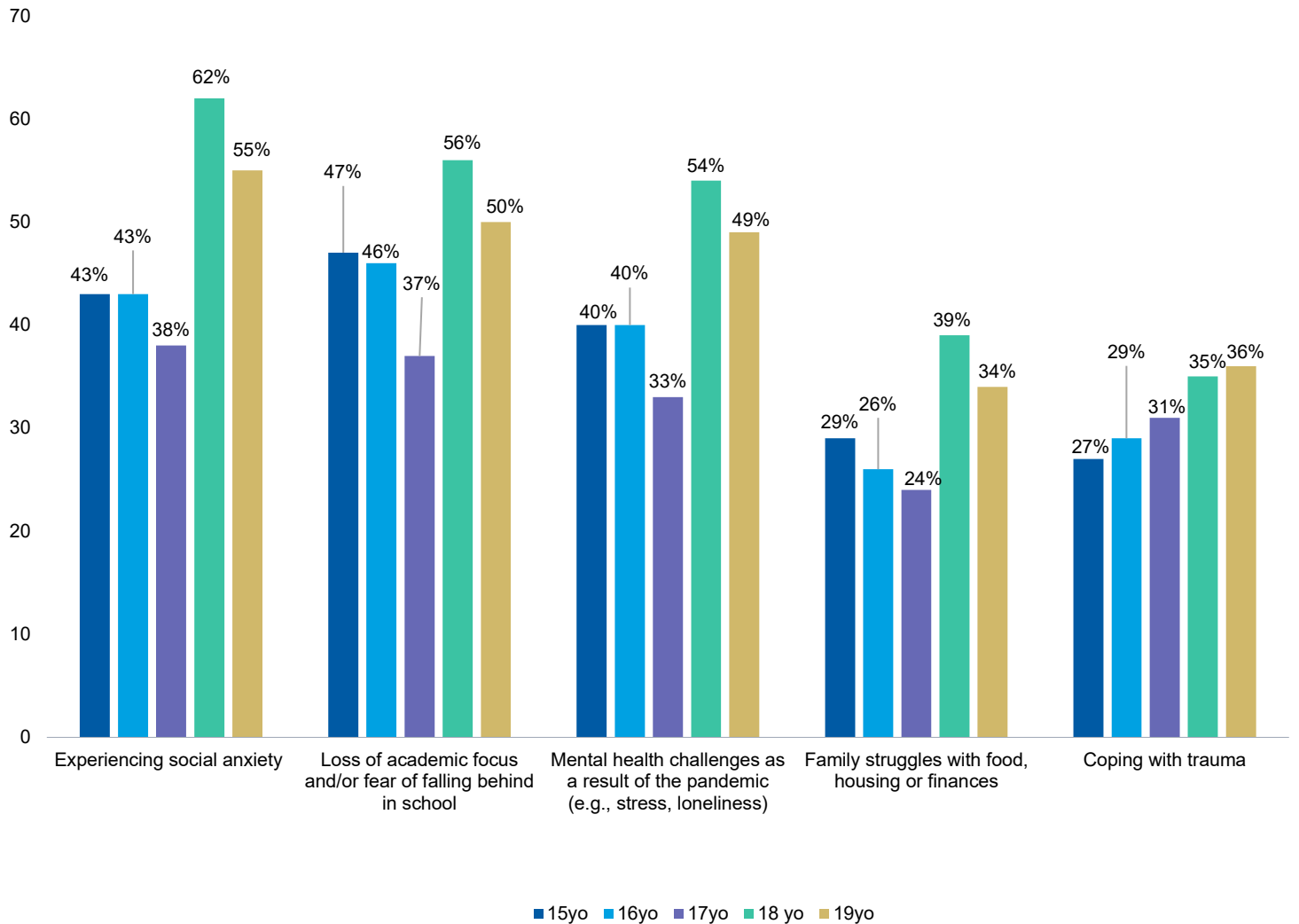
EXPERIENCES BY AGE

Many teens in the older age group are looking to begin new chapters in their lives, such as career or educational opportunities. In addition to being more likely to self-report feeling anxious and depressed during the pandemic, older teens, ages 18 and 19, are more likely to express concern about social anxiety, mental health challenges, and falling behind academically post-pandemic.

FIGURE 7

How concerned, if at all, are you about each of the following when thinking about returning to your regular activities (e.g., school, extracurricular activities, part-time jobs, or in-person social events) that you used to do before the pandemic?

Very/Somewhat concerned



GAPS IN MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCING

33% of teens report having access to mental health resources but say they are not using them. An additional 22% report not having access to mental health resources at all. Teens in families with a household income under \$80K (27%) are more likely to say they do not have access to mental health resources versus those whose family incomes are over \$80K (16%).

Finding ways to close these gaps may be key in this transition—as teens who regularly use services like in-person counselling (23%) and online therapy (24%) are more likely to say their mental health improved during the pandemic.

FIGURE 8

Which, if any, of the following mental health resources are you currently using regularly?

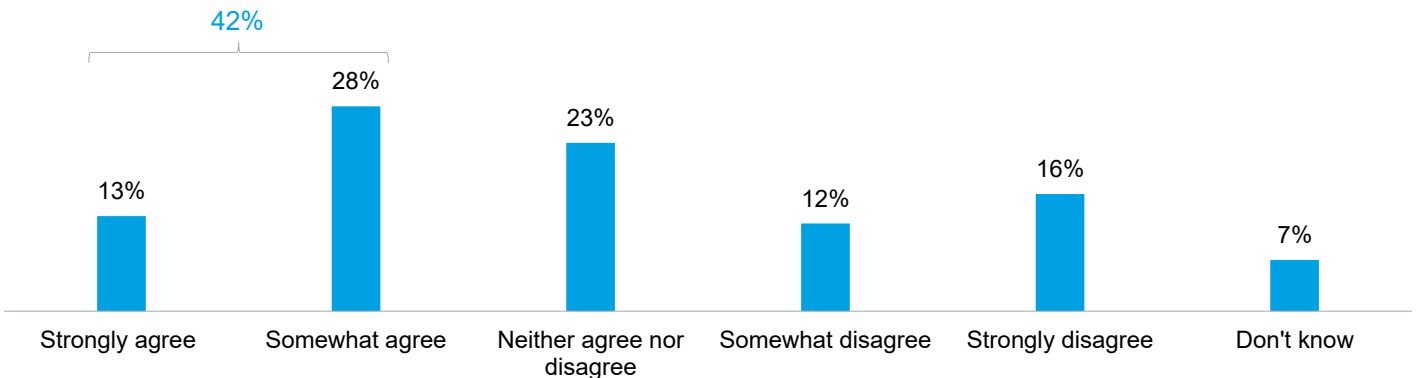


ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

Despite the issues facing teens, 42% have increased the number of conversations they have with others about mental health. About half of Hispanic and Black teens (51% and 50%) say so.

FIGURE 9

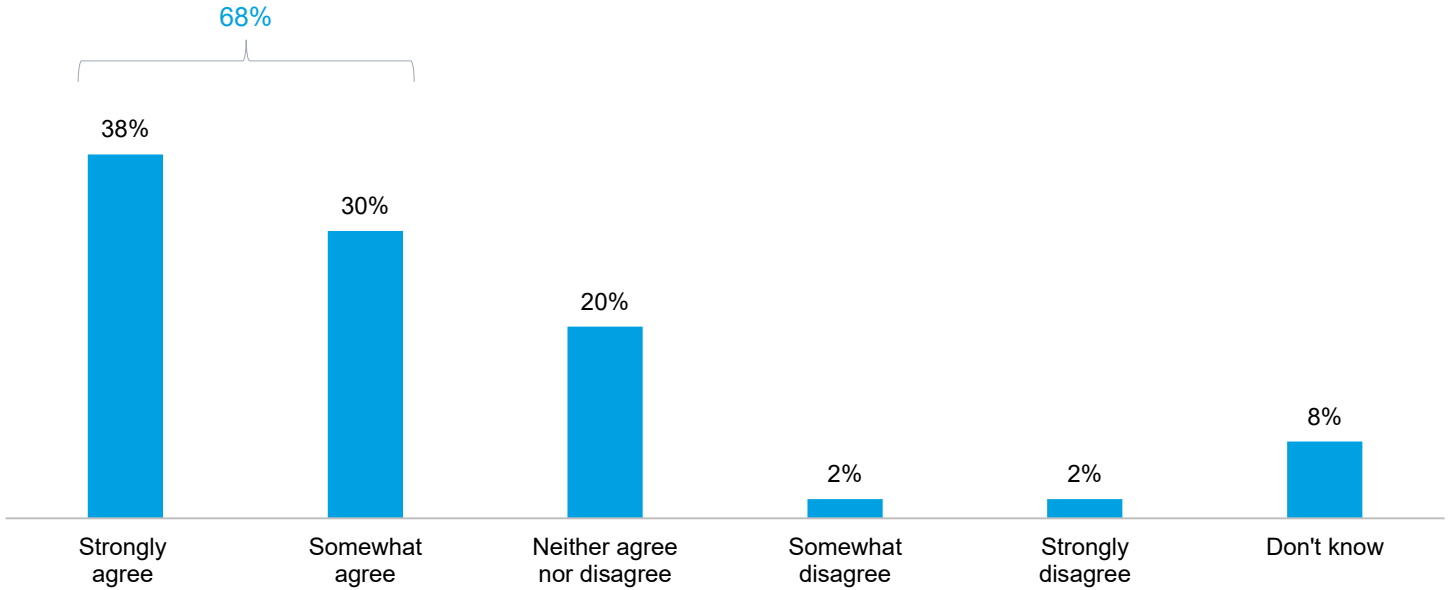
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? “The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the number of conversations I have with others about mental health.”



Two-thirds (68%) of teens feel hopeful that they will adapt and rebound from the pandemic.

FIGURE 10

To what extent if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "I am hopeful that I will adapt and rebound from the challenges of the pandemic."



CONCLUSION

The pandemic has taken a toll on the emotional well-being of U.S. teens. Reemerging back into everyday life will likely prove to be challenging, especially in underserved communities. To help aid in that transition, the Morgan Stanley Alliance for Children’s Mental Health has launched a new reemergence program to provide support and resources for educators and families during this crucial time. This multi-faceted program aims to help teens re-engage with school and their daily activities. Key components of the program include parent and educator tip sheets, comprehensive digital resources, webinars, and a convening for educators and school administrators. The program will expand throughout the school year, as the Alliance gains a better understanding of reemergence issues and needs, allowing it to continue to deliver school and community-based programs.

METHODOLOGY

Morgan Stanley commissioned research firm YouGov to survey 516 nationally representative U.S. teens ages 15-19 online from June 10-16, 2021.

MORGAN STANLEY ALLIANCE FOR CHILDREN’S MENTAL HEALTH

The Morgan Stanley Alliance for Children’s Mental Health combines the resources and reach of Morgan Stanley with the knowledge and experience of distinguished nonprofit partner organizations to help deliver positive, tangible impact on the critical challenges of stress, anxiety, and depression in children, adolescents and young people.

To learn more visit morganstanley.com/mentalhealthalliance