

College Students and Young Adults Face Ongoing Mental Health Challenges

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Mental health challenges among young people remain persistently high, and many students and families are still trying to understand how best to respond.

UnitedHealthcare's fourth annual [Young Adult and College Student Behavioral Health Report](#) found that more than 6 in 10 (62%) college students and young adults not enrolled in college ages 18–28 reported experiencing a mental or behavioral health concern in the past year — consistent with elevated levels over the past four years.

Among college students, concerns are rising. UnitedHealthcare's [survey](#) found nearly 70% said they have experienced concerns such as anxiety/stress or depression, reaching the highest levels in four years. At the same time, many parents may not fully recognize what students are going through, pointing to an opportunity for more awareness, communication and support.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, a meaningful time to focus on practical ways to support young adults and students. Whether you're a parent, caregiver, educator or navigating these challenges yourself, here are three ways to help support mental well-being:

1. Start with open, honest conversations

Frequency doesn't always lead to understanding. [Survey findings](#) uncover that while 39% of parents of college students believed their child felt understood after conversations, only 28% of students agreed, and 26% said they felt misunderstood.

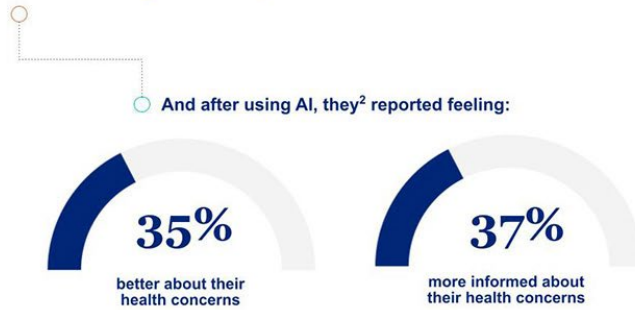
Meanwhile, young adults not enrolled in college report speaking with parents less often, yet their perceptions of mental health challenges were more closely aligned with their parents. Together, these findings suggest that how we communicate matters as much as how often. Prioritizing meaningful, two-way conversations that emphasize listening, empathy and understanding can make a meaningful difference.

2. Encourage balanced use of AI

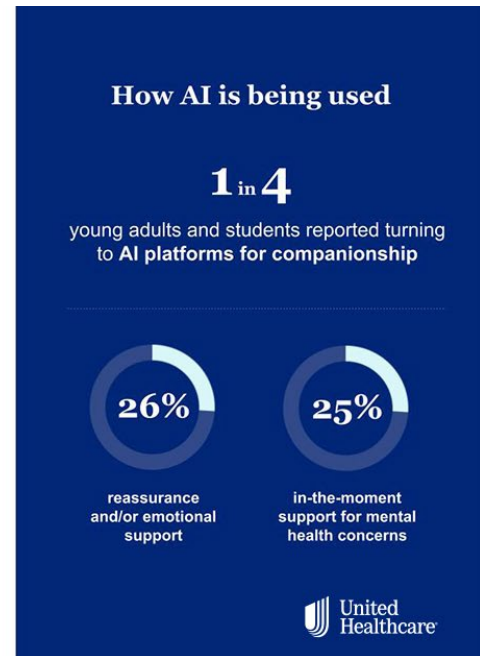
Digital tools are playing a growing role in how young adults and students manage their mental health. Nearly one-third (31%) of respondents reported using AI-based platforms to explore symptoms or find coping strategies, and 26% of those users said they've turned to these tools for companionship, reassurance or emotional support. While these resources can be helpful, they are most effective when used alongside guidance from qualified health care professionals.

Young adults¹ and students are turning to AI for health-related reasons

Over a third said they or a roommate/friend have **used or would consider using AI-based platforms** for health-related reasons.



Data from the 4th Annual UnitedHealthcare Young Adult and College Student Behavioral Health Report
¹ Young adults not enrolled in college (ages 18-28).
² Among young adults and students who reported using AI-based platforms for health-related reasons.



3. Help build awareness of trusted resources

Many young adults are unsure where to turn for help, which can be particularly true when they or their families are navigating mental health concerns for the first time. At the local level, community organizations, nonprofits and state-based services can provide accessible, often low- or no-cost support — from crisis lines to counseling and peer programs. Raising awareness of these options can make it easier to take the first step.

Health plans can also play a role in helping individuals understand and access available mental health support. For example, some insurers, including UnitedHealthcare, provide digital self-care tools, coaching and 24/7 support lines for in-the-moment assistance, as well as in-person and virtual care options.

Supporting mental health is not just a one-month focus — it's a year-round priority. By improving communication, increasing awareness and helping young adults connect to care, we can better support their mental well-being when it matters most.

For more information on mental health resources, visit uhcsr.com or uhc.com.

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