

THRIVING COLLEGE STUDENTS

2023 College Student Fall Mental Wellness Survey

January 2024

GAME CHANGERS



INTRODUCTION

The 2023 Thriving College Student Survey was conducted in the U.S. in October 2023 by Ipsos, a world leader in research. It was commissioned and by the College Student Mental Wellness Advocacy Coalition and the Hi, How Are You Project with support from The Jed Foundation.

The first Thriving College Student Index Report was published in 2022 and serves as the baseline for this year's data comparisons. Its purpose is to provide resident insights on mental wellness that help to inform mental wellness programs for college and university students, especially at off-campus residential communities.

Partnership Background

From 2019-2021, the Hi, How Are You Project (HHAYP), an Austin-Texas based nonprofit dedicated to mental health awareness, conducted a College Student Fall Mental Wellness Survey to better understand the student experience. The results helped HHAYP and American Campus Communities (ACC) to create programs that have become guiding tenets for ACC's Residence Life program. In 2022, ACC and HHAYP expanded the effort with other student housing companies, which led to the creation of the [College Student Mental Wellness Advocacy Coalition](#) in 2022. The Coalition, which is composed of 24 college student residential housing companies across the U.S., envisions a world where all young adults thrive with the support of residential communities whose teams are dedicated to promoting and advocating for mental wellness.



college student
mental wellness
advocacy coalition



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Compared to the 2022 results, students reported less frequent feelings of stress, anxiety and being overwhelmed.

- 65% reported feeling stressed “all the time” or “often” (down from 70% in 2022)
- 57% reported feeling anxious/worried “all the time” or “often” (down from 63% in 2022)
- 57% reported feeling overwhelmed “all the time” or “often” (down from 61% in 2022)
- 55% reported feeling happy “all the time” or “often” (up from 50% in 2022)

For the second year in a row, listening to music remains the number one behavior students engage with to manage stress (cited by 82% of respondents) followed by socializing with friends (cited by 67% of respondents).

Thriving Students

- Thriving students (79%) are more likely to socialize than Maintaining (55%) and Struggling (28%) students. They regularly practice healthy behaviors such as getting fresh air, good sleep, and healthy eating to feel their best.
- Thriving students are more likely to feel thankful (79%) and happy (76%) and are less likely to feel stressed (53%) anxious/worried (44%), overwhelmed (44%) or lonely (14%) than students in Maintaining and Struggling categories.

On-Campus Support

- One in four students surveyed feel a strong connection to their residential community.
- 74% acknowledge that opportunities to socialize within their residential communities are abundant.
- 41% are unsure whether residential communities can support their mental well-being.
- Friends (90%) are the most utilized source students turn to for information about mental health, followed by the Internet (83%) and parents (77%).
- 52% of students have received mental health treatment from a mental health professional; 1 in 6 have done so on campus.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The research suggests many ways in which residential communities and other on-campus and off-campus entities can support college students who are struggling.

SPOTLIGHT ON “THRIVING”

Survey results revealed that thriving students rely on personal connection and healthy behaviors, such as fresh air, good sleep, and healthy eating, to feel their best. Residential communities can encourage other students to adopt these behaviors by:

- Educating students about behaviors that promote good mental health, as well as accessible ways to adopt these behaviors.
- Promoting on-site programs and amenities, such as fitness centers, green spaces and walking paths, that can help boost students’ well-being.
- Organizing events and activities that promote connection and well-being.

SUPPORT ‘AT HOME’ AMONG RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITIES

Students acknowledge that opportunities to socialize within their residential communities are abundant. However, many are unsure if residential communities can support their mental well-being. Residential communities can help students feel supported by:

- Continuing to host events—especially those featuring music—to help students connect.
- Communicating frequently about the community’s dedication to mental health and its related amenities, programs and events.
- Training community staff to educate and refer students to the appropriate resources to support mental health.
- Fostering open dialogue about mental health among student staff and students.

ON-CAMPUS SUPPORT

A sizable number of students question whether they could find a mental health professional that understands their background and whether they could fit mental health treatment into their schedules. Meanwhile, the sources students are currently leveraging for mental health information are not necessarily those that they trust the most. Residential communities can help students connect to trusted on-campus resources by:

- Meeting with leaders of on-campus mental health systems to understand their offerings and how students can best access them.
- Promoting on-campus resources to students at all touchpoints, emphasizing the breadth and accessibility of the services.
- Inviting experts to residential communities to educate students about mental health and finding the right resources.

METHODS & SAMPLE

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METHODOLOGY



Field Period

Survey collection started on October 9th, 2023, and concluded on November 6th, 2023. Housing providers were free to communicate and promote the survey to residents at the times/intervals most appropriate for their organization.



Sample & Mode

Coalition members sent invitations via email to the residents of their housing communities to take part in the online 2023 College Student Fall Mental Wellness Survey. A total of 24,791 students participated. Participation in the survey was voluntary and the instrument included links to mental health resources.



Qualifications

The design of the study and collection method means that survey respondents had to be currently enrolled at an educational institution and living in housing that is provided by one of the Coalition member organizations. Non-students living in Coalition member housing were invited to respond but, their results are not included in the analysis for this study.

SAMPLE PROFILE

Age

18	7%
19	23%
20	27%
21	21%
22	9%
23 or older	13%

Gender Identity

Female	67%
Male	30%
Non-binary	2%
Prefer to self-describe	1%

Race

White	59%
Black	12%
AAPI	15%
Other/Multi-race	3%
Hispanic	17%

College Year

Freshmen	9%
Sophomores	26%
Juniors	31%
Seniors	23%
Graduate students	11%

Mental Health Diagnosis

Any (net)	43%
Anxiety disorder	32%
Depression	26%
ADD/ADHD	15%
Eating disorder	7%
PTSD	6%
OCD	6%
Mood disorder	3%
Bipolar disorder	3%
Substance use disorder	1%
Other	3%

WHAT IS THRIVING?

Respondents rated their current lives – and expectations for their future lives – on a scale of 0 through 10, where 0 represents the worst possible life and 10 represents the best possible life. Most respondents fell into one of the three groups based on their responses:

THRIVING



Rate their current life as 7 and higher and their future life as 8 and higher. These individuals are living their best lives and see the future as even brighter.

MAINTAINING



Maintaining individuals rate their current life a 5 or 6 and their future life between 5 and 7. These individuals might be doing just fine in their own eyes but, perhaps they can envision a better life both now, and in the future.

STRUGGLING



Rate their current life 4 and below and their future life 4 and below. These individuals are likely to be having a tough experience managing life and they aren't necessarily optimistic that this is going to change.

See appendix for more details on these groupings.

PROFILE OF THRIVING STUDENTS

 Thriving
45%

Age

18	7%
19	22%
20	27%
21	21%
22	10%
23 or older	11%

Gender Identity

Female	68%
Male	31%
Non-binary	1%
Prefer to self-describe	*

Race

White	60%
Black	11%
AAPI	15%
Other/Multi-race	3%
Hispanic	17%

College Year

Freshmen	8%
Sophomores	25%
Juniors	30%
Seniors	23%
Graduate students	11%

Mental health diagnosis

Any (net)	36%
Anxiety disorder	26%
Depression	18%
ADD/ADHD	12%
Eating disorder	5%
PTSD	4%
OCD	4%
Mood disorder	2%
Bipolar disorder	1%
Substance use disorder	1%
Other	2%

PROFILE OF MAINTAINING STUDENTS

 Maintaining
12%

Age

18	7%
19	25%
20	27%
21	20%
22	9%
23 or older	11%

Gender Identity

Female	66%
Male	29%
Non-binary	4%
Prefer to self-describe	1%

Race

White	58%
Black	10%
AAPI	18%
Other/Multi-race	3%
Hispanic	16%


College Year

Freshmen	8%
Sophomores	28%
Juniors	31%
Seniors	23%
Graduate students	9%

Mental health diagnosis

Any (net)	49%
Anxiety disorder	36%
Depression	32%
ADD/ADHD	16%
Eating disorder	9%
PTSD	8%
OCD	6%
Mood disorder	5%
Bipolar disorder	4%
Substance use disorder	1%
Other	3%

PROFILE OF STRUGGLING STUDENTS

 Struggling
2%

Age

18	5%
19	19%
20	26%
21	20%
22	10%
23 or older	19%

Gender Identity

Female	54%
Male	37%
Non-binary	6%
Prefer to self-describe	2%

Race

White	55%
Black	13%
AAPI	20%
Other/Multi-race	6%
Hispanic	13%

College Year

Freshmen	8%
Sophomores	24%
Juniors	32%
Seniors	24%
Graduate students	9%

Mental health diagnosis

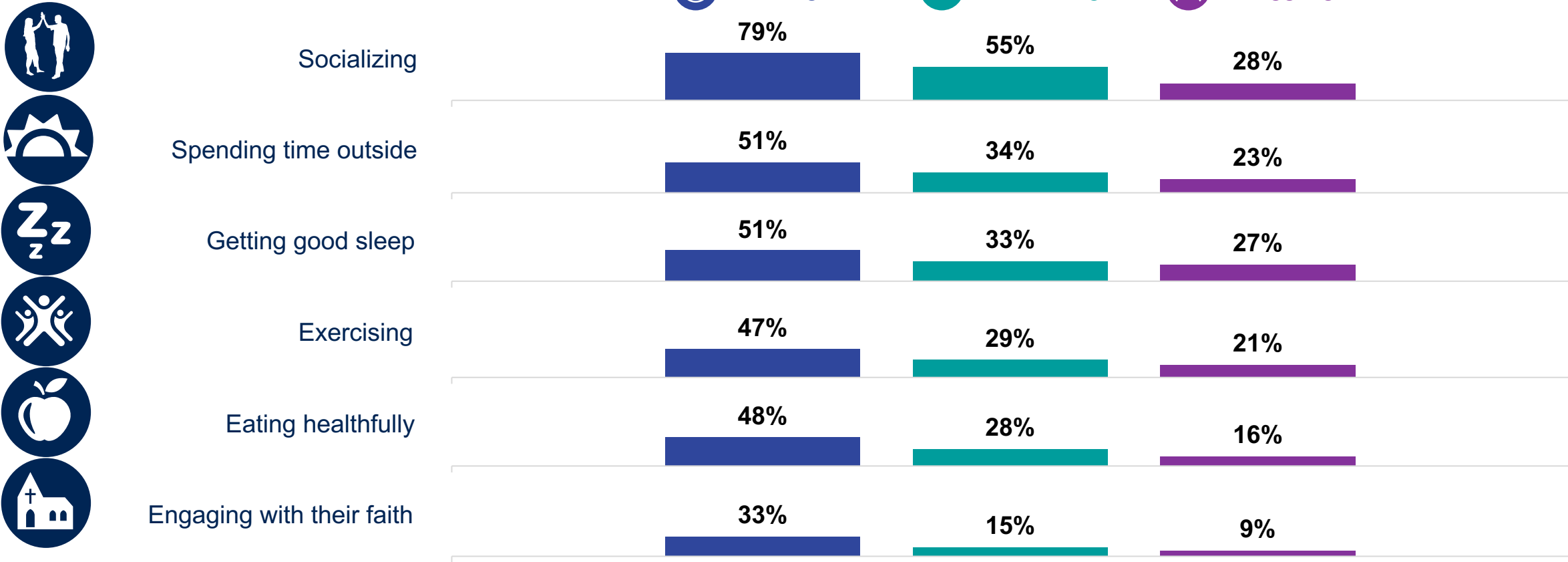
Any (net)	62%
Anxiety disorder	45%
Depression	49%
ADD/ADHD	23%
Eating disorder	14%
PTSD	14%
OCD	9%
Mood disorder	10%
Bipolar disorder	9%
Substance use disorder	4%
Other	6%

SPOTLIGHT ON THRIVING

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BEHAVIORS THAT STUDENTS ENGAGE “IN ALL THE TIME” OR “OFTEN” TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH

Thriving students are more likely to socialize and practice many healthy behaviors

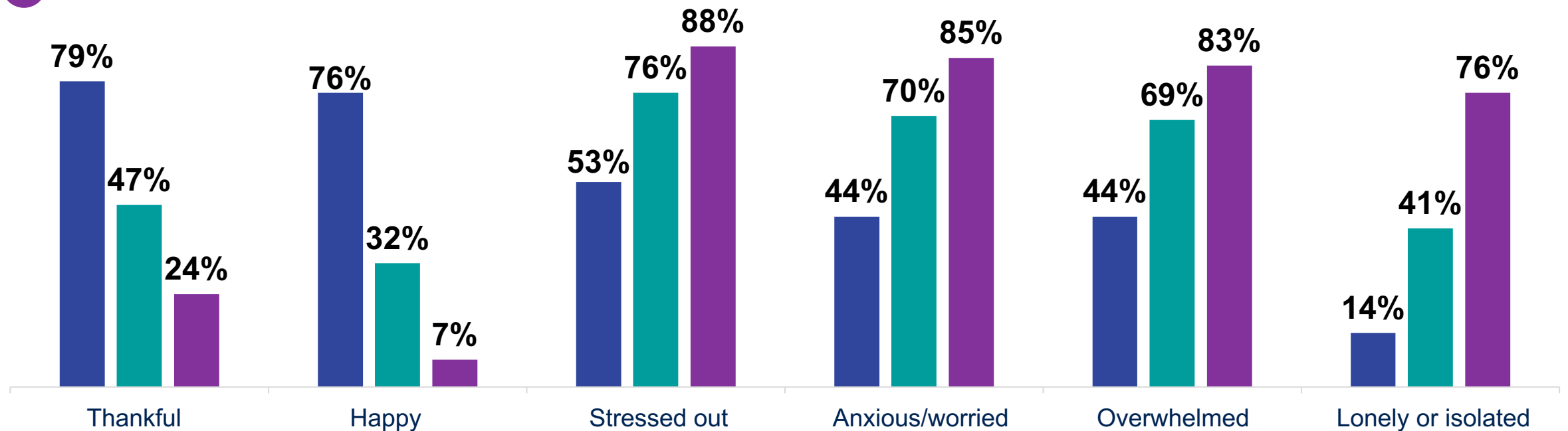


Source: B11. Please indicate the amount of time you have spent doing the following activities during the past month to support your mental health. All the time / Often shown. Base: Total Thriving n=11047, Total Maintaining n=3028, Total Struggling n=494

STUDENTS FEEL THESE EMOTIONS “ALL THE TIME” OR “OFTEN”

Thriving students are more likely to feel thankful and happy – and less likely to feel stressed, anxious, overwhelmed, or lonely

- ☺ Thriving
- ☹ Maintaining
- ☹ Struggling



Source: B4. In the past month, how often, if at all, would you say that you feel each of the emotions listed below? All the time / Often shown. Base: Total respondents n=24791, Total Thriving n=11047, Total Maintaining n=3028, Total Struggling n=494

STUDENTS FEEL THESE EMOTIONS “ALL THE TIME” OR “OFTEN” – BY DEMOGRAPHICS

White students are more likely to feel several negative emotions – but also “happy”

Those who are non-binary / prefer to self-describe their gender identity are more apt to feel negative emotions

Freshman are most inclined to feel thankful, but also lonely

Rank out of 16 emotions		Total	Race/Ethnicity					Gender			School Year				
			White	Black	Hispanic	AAPI	Other	Male	Female	Other	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grad student
1	Stressed out	65%	68%	60%	66%	59%	62%	51%	71%	79%	60%	66%	67%	68%	56%
2	Thankful	64%	63%	71%	67%	60%	63%	62%	67%	38%	69%	66%	64%	63%	64%
3	Anxious/worried	57%	60%	52%	58%	52%	55%	42%	63%	73%	55%	58%	59%	59%	49%
4	Overwhelmed	57%	60%	55%	57%	52%	56%	42%	64%	70%	55%	58%	59%	59%	50%
5	Happy	55%	58%	48%	53%	50%	48%	54%	56%	32%	54%	56%	55%	54%	53%
12	Lonely or Isolated	29%	28%	33%	31%	27%	33%	28%	28%	42%	35%	29%	28%	28%	27%

Shading represents a significantly higher figure vs. all other race/ethnicity groups

Shading represents a significantly higher figure between Male/Female vs. Non-Binary/Prefer to self-describe

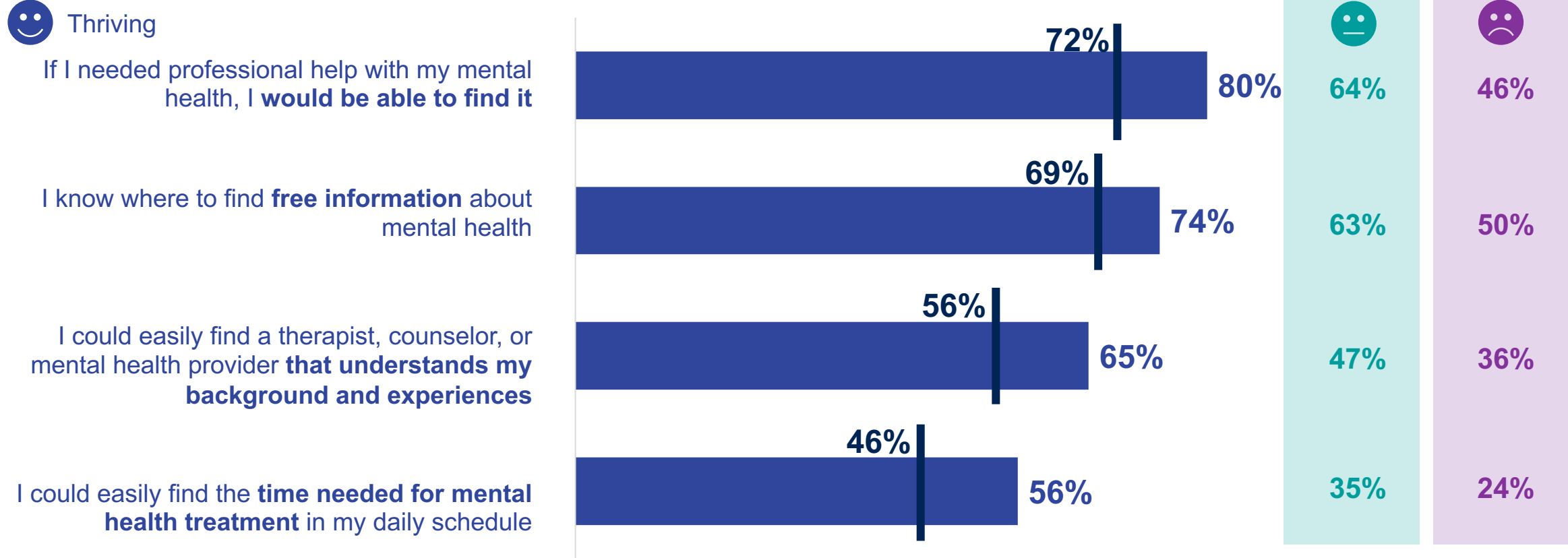
Shading represents a significantly higher figure vs. all other school year groups

Source: B4. In the past month, how often, if at all, would you say that you feel each of the emotions listed below? All the time / Often shown

ATTITUDES TOWARDS FINDING MENTAL HEALTH INFO AND SUPPORT

Thriving students are more likely to agree with each of these statements

Students “strongly” or “somewhat” agree



Source: B7. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Strongly / Somewhat agree shown. Base: Total respondents n=24791, Total Thriving n=11047, Total Maintaining n=3028, Total Struggling n=494

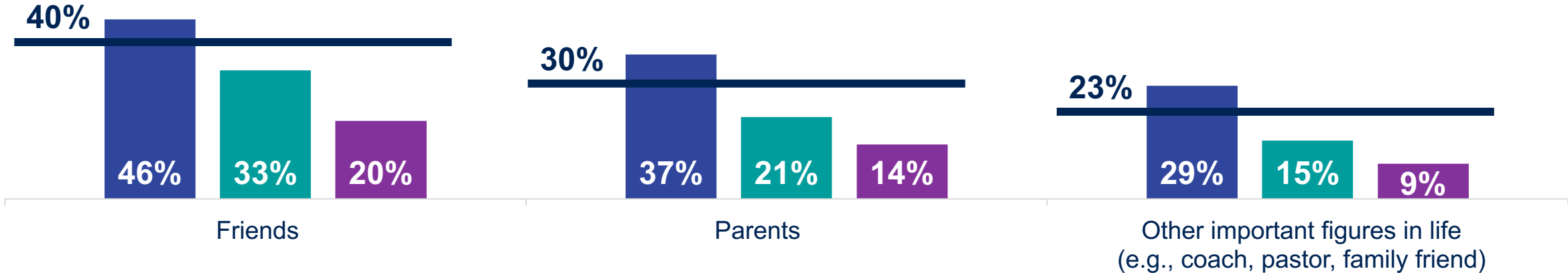


STUDENTS GO TO THESE RESOURCES FOR MENTAL HEALTH INFO “ALL THE TIME” OR “OFTEN”

Thriving students are more likely to use human relationships and support

- 😊 Thriving
- 😐 Maintaining
- 😞 Struggling
- Total

! ‘Thriving’ students are similar to other types of students in their use of online resources, such as the internet, social media, or wellness apps.

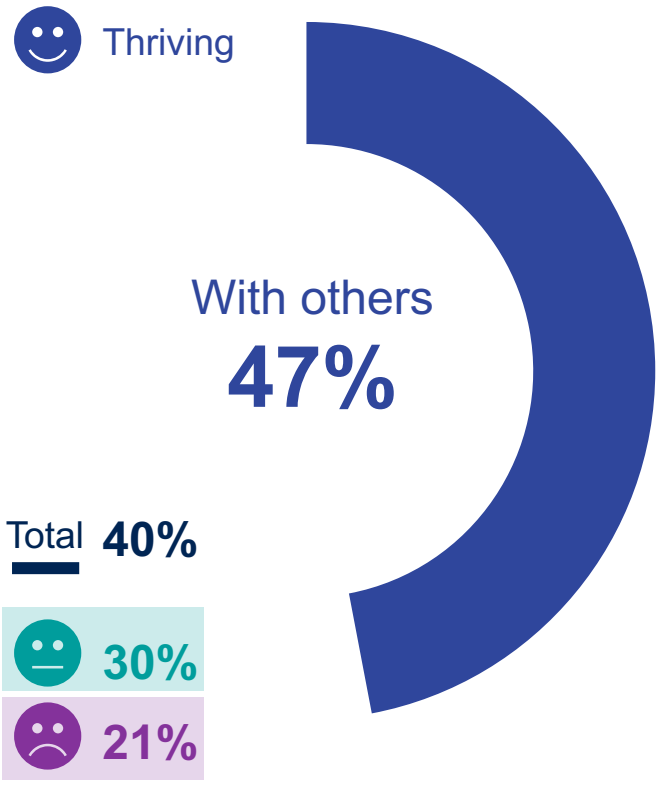
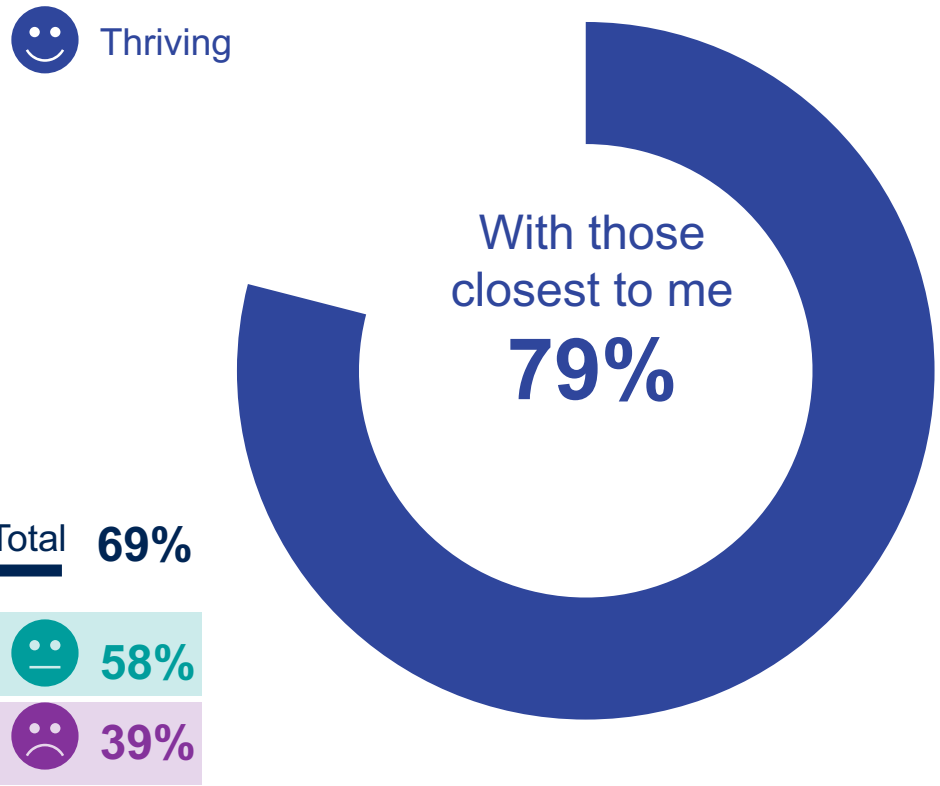


Source: B8. How often, if at all, do you go to the following sources for information about mental health? All the time / Often shown. Base: Total respondents n=24791, Total Thriving n=11047, Total Maintaining n=3028, Total Struggling n=494



STUDENTS “STRONGLY” OR “SOMEWHAT” AGREE THEY FEEL COMFORTABLE DISCUSSING THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

Thriving students are more likely to feel comfortable discussing their mental health with both those closest to them and with others



Source: B7. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Strongly / Somewhat agree shown. Base: Total respondents n=24791, Total Thriving n=11047, Total Maintaining n=3028, Total Struggling n=494



RECOMMENDATIONS



Thriving students provide clues as to behaviors that can positively affect mental wellness.

Residential communities can encourage other students to adopt these behaviors by:

- Educating students about behaviors that promote good mental health, as well as accessible ways to adopt these behaviors.
- Promoting on-site programs and amenities, such as fitness centers, green spaces and walking paths, that can help boost students' well-being.
- Organizing events and activities that promote connection and well-being.

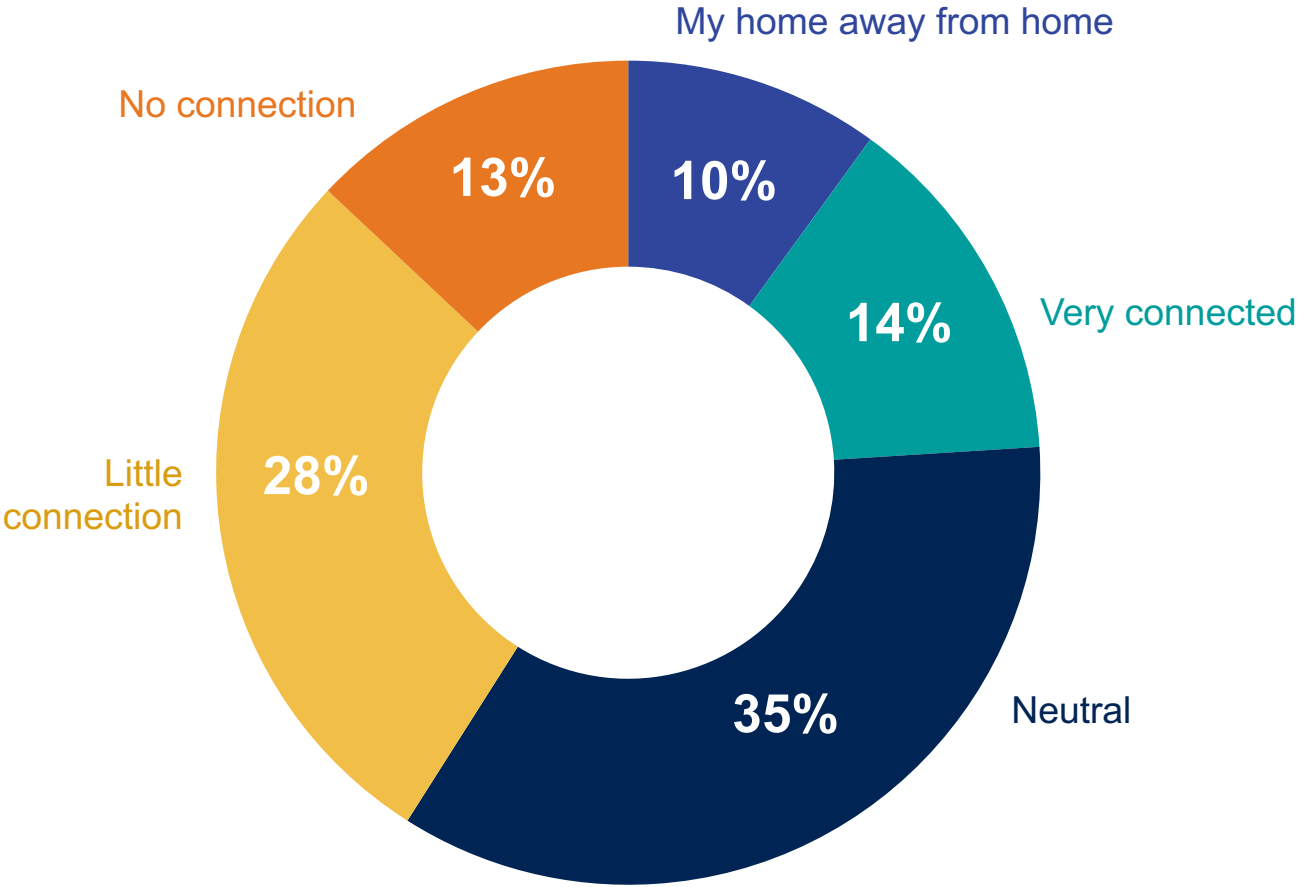
SUPPORT 'AT HOME' AMONG RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITIES

3

STUDENTS' PERSONAL CONNECTION TO THEIR RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITIES

One in four feel a strong connection to their residential community: “my home away from home” or “very connected”

! More than half (53%) of those who are non-binary or prefer to self-describe their gender say they have little or no connection to their residential community

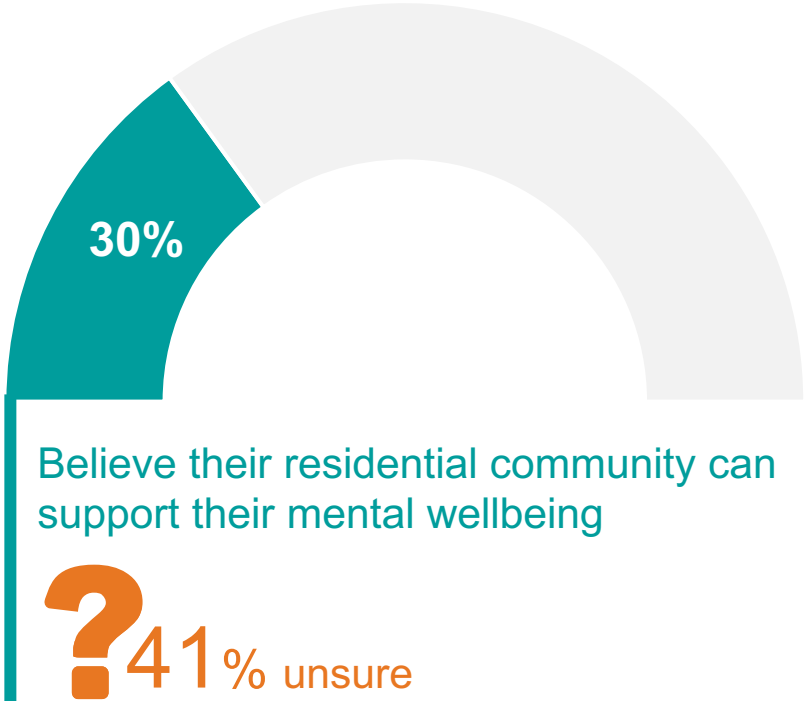
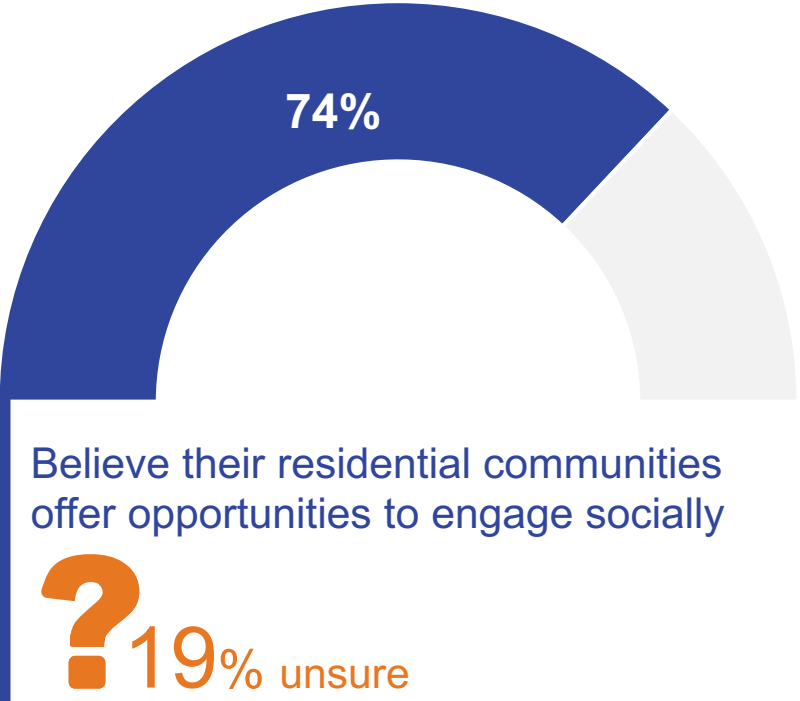


Source: B12. How would you describe your personal connection to your residential community? Base: Total respondents n=24791, Non-binary / prefer to self-describe gender identity n=772



ATTITUDES TOWARDS RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITIES' SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Most – three in four – say their residential community provides opportunities to engage socially; far fewer – three in ten – believe their residential community can support their mental wellbeing



Source: B12.1. Does your residential community provider communicate and promote opportunities to engage socially with other residents or staff members? B13. Do you think your residential community can help support your mental wellbeing? Yes and Unsure shown; Base: Total respondents n=24791

HOW CAN RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITIES SUPPORT MENTAL WELLBEING?



Getting out and doing activities or having a community with direct interaction with multiple life coaches or something that would help ease stress and give hope.



Creating more events geared towards freshman meeting like they do in the dorms for a sense of community coming to college.



We have this social media feature on the app that we use to request maintenance, pay rent, etc, but no one uses it. I think most people here have other social outlets, so they don't need to use this, and I don't want to seem desperate by being the only one using this platform. Also, they hold "social events", but with little to no warning and in the middle of the day when people have classes, which, isn't very effective and seems to just be a way for staff to have free food.



Maybe getting one of the counselors from the university to come and talk to us and give us access to local resources.



I think having small events to help engage people could help support people's mental wellbeing. I think having the fields, basketball courts, and gym also gives a way to help by giving people a break place to go and exercise.



By providing opportunities in engage with the community is a great way to support well being and mental health by creating a safe social space.



Having a wellness day, maybe hosting yoga. Or having pets like puppies that we can play with and spend time with. Doing certain activities that we can do with friends so we can talk and rant about our mental health.



Offer events to engage with neighbors foster a positive living environment, keep the shared spaces clean, make sure the building smells nice, play music in the lobby.

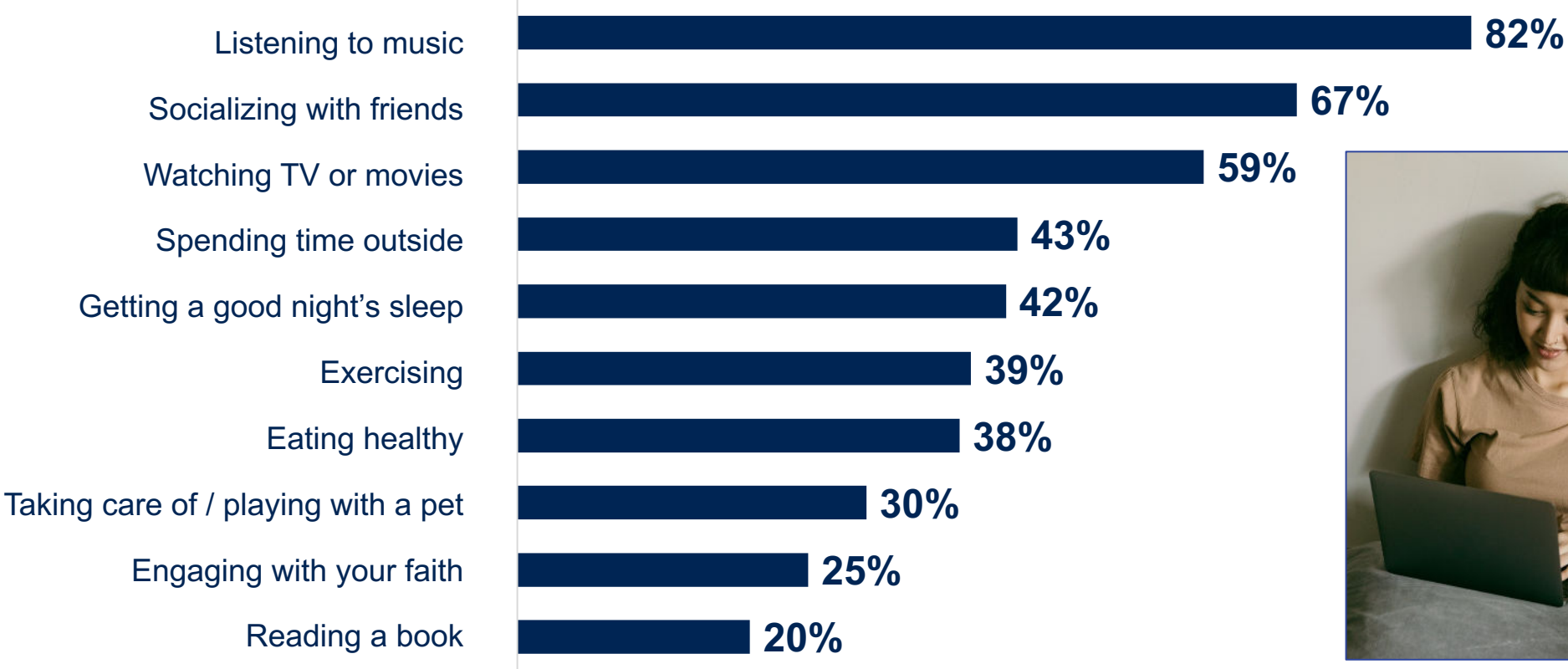


I believe that hosting various events surrounding the mental health realm would be very helpful especially for people who are all walking the college life path together.

Source: B13.1. You answered that "Yes" your residential community can support your mental wellbeing. What types of things can your residential community do to support your mental health and wellbeing? Base: Those who believe their residential community can support your mental wellbeing n=7499

TOP-10 BEHAVIORS THAT STUDENTS ENGAGE “IN ALL THE TIME” OR “OFTEN” TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH

Listening to music and socializing with friends are most popular



Source: B11. Please indicate the amount of time you have spent doing the following activities during the past month to support your mental health. All the time / Often shown. Base: Total respondents n=24791

RECOMMENDATIONS



Residential communities can help students feel supported by:

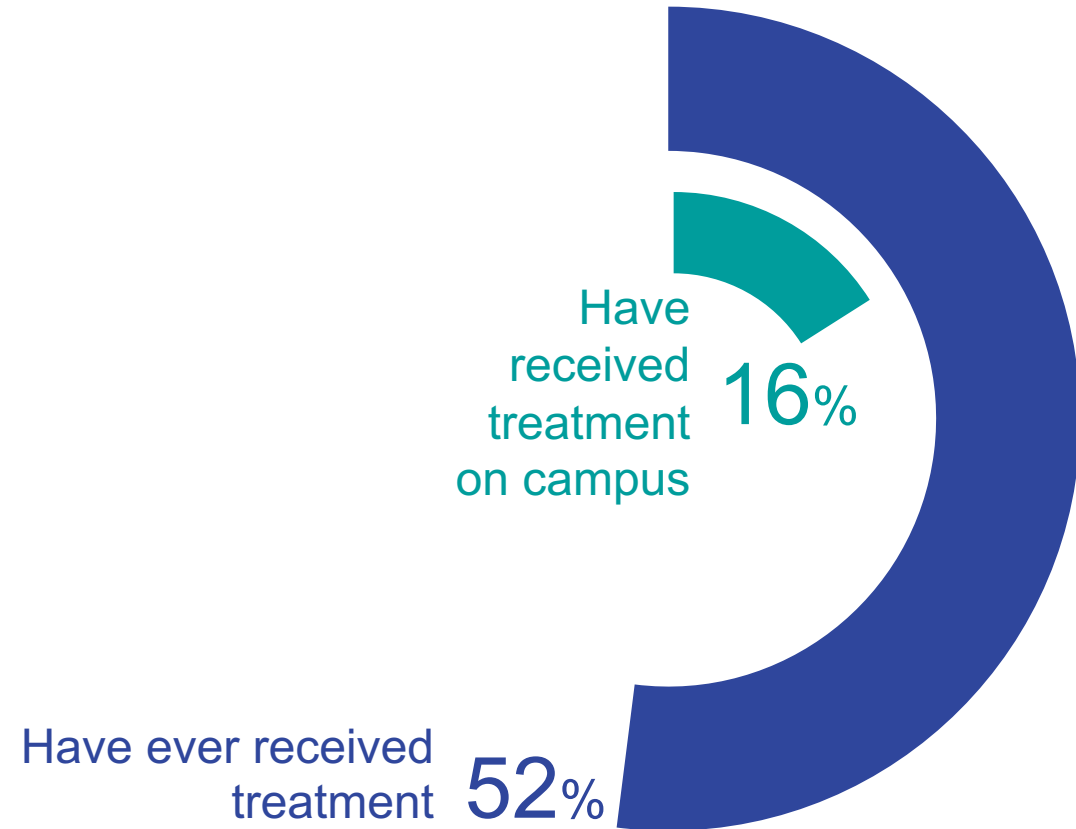
- Continuing to host events—especially those featuring music—to help students connect.
- Communicating frequently about the community’s dedication to mental health and its related amenities, programs and events.
- Training community staff on how to support students’ mental health and well-being, including providing training on how and when to refer residents to support resources.
- Fostering open dialogue about mental health among student staff and students.

ON-CAMPUS SUPPORT

4

RECEIVING PROFESSIONAL MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT

About half have received mental health treatment from a mental health professional;
1 in 6 have done so *on campus*



Source: B14.1. Have you ever received mental health treatment from a therapist, counselor, doctor, or other mental health professional? If so, where have you gotten this treatment? Base: Total respondents n=24791

ATTITUDES TOWARDS FINDING MENTAL HEALTH INFO AND SUPPORT

Just over half believe they could find a professional that understands their background, while less than half could fit mental health treatment into their schedule



If I needed professional help with my mental health, I **would be able to find it**

Students “strongly” or “somewhat” agree



I could easily find a therapist, counselor, or mental health provider **that understands my background and experiences**



I could easily find the **time needed for mental health treatment** in my daily schedule



Source: B7. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Strongly / Somewhat agree shown. Base: Total respondents n=24791

FINDING / RECEIVING PROFESSIONAL MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT – BY DEMOGRAPHICS

White students are more likely to believe they can locate services / resources – and to have received professional treatment

Those who are non-binary / prefer to self-describe their gender identity are more likely to have received professional treatment, but feel less secure about locating and fitting in treatment

Freshman have the most time to fit in mental health treatment, though upper-classman are more likely to have sought treatment; 1 in 4 grad students have sought on-campus help

	Total	Race/Ethnicity					Gender			School Year				
		White	Black	Hispanic	AAPI	Other	Male	Female	Other	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grad student
Attitudes, Strongly / Somewhat agree														
If I needed professional help with my mental health, I would be able to find it	72%	76%	68%	69%	69%	65%	69%	74%	62%	69%	73%	73%	72%	74%
I know where to find free information about mental health	69%	70%	66%	65%	68%	65%	65%	70%	67%	67%	69%	69%	68%	69%
I could easily find a therapist, counselor, or mental health provider that understands my background and experiences	56%	60%	50%	53%	50%	46%	53%	58%	44%	53%	58%	57%	55%	54%
I could easily find the time needed for mental health treatment in my daily schedule	46%	45%	51%	47%	45%	43%	47%	46%	35%	51%	46%	46%	45%	47%
Have received professional mental health treatment														
Anywhere	52%	57%	46%	52%	38%	51%	37%	57%	81%	45%	49%	53%	56%	49%
On campus	16%	16%	17%	16%	15%	19%	12%	17%	30%	5%	12%	16%	21%	23%

Source: B7. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Strongly / Somewhat agree shown.

Shading represents a significantly higher figure vs. all other race/ethnicity groups

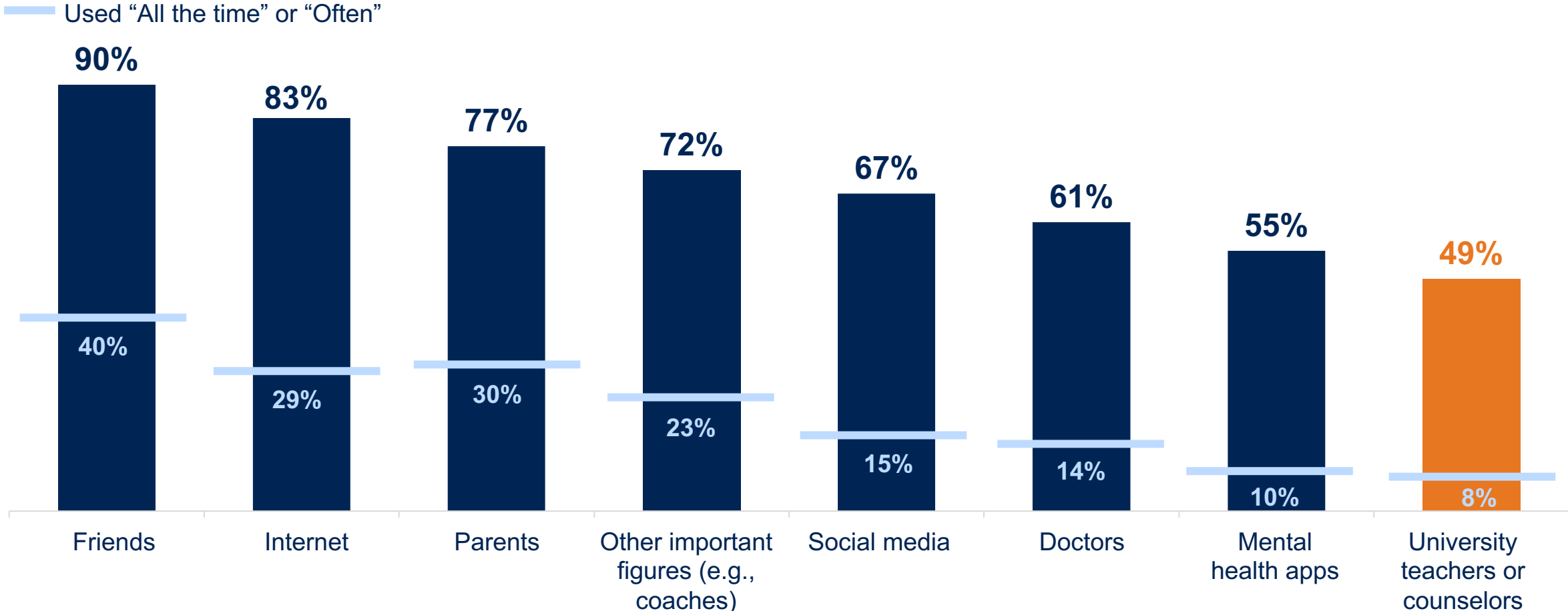
Shading represents a significantly higher figure between Male/Female vs. Non-Binary/Prefer to self-describe

Shading represents a significantly higher figure vs. all other school year groups



RESOURCES USED FOR INFORMATION ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

Friends are the most-utilized source; about half of students leverage campus professionals

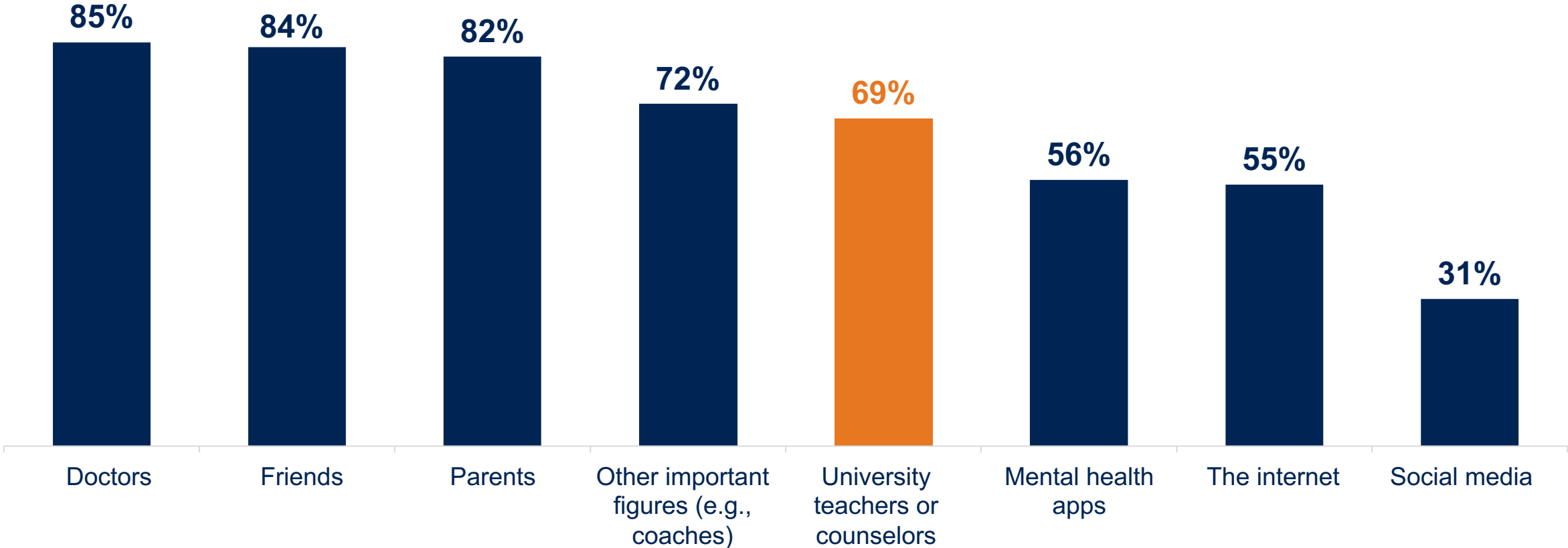


B8. How often, if at all, do you go to the following sources for information about mental health? Rarely / Sometimes / Often / All the time shown. Base: Total respondents n=24791



TRUSTED RESOURCES FOR INFORMATION ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

Doctors and friends are the most trusted resources for information about mental health; campus professional land in the middle of the pack, ahead of online / digital sources



B9. Now for each of the below, think about how much you TRUST them as sources of information about mental health. A lot / A fair amount shown. Base: Those who ever use each resource for info on mental health. Base varies.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Residential communities can help students connect to trusted on-campus resources by:

- Meeting with leaders of Campus Counseling Centers to understand their offerings and how students can best access them.
- Promoting on-campus resources to students at all touchpoints, emphasizing the breadth and accessibility of the services.
- Inviting campus experts to residential communities to educate students about mental health and finding the right resources.

APPENDIX

WHAT IS THRIVING?

Method details

Respondents were asked to rate their current lives on a scale of 0 through 10, where 0 represents the worst possible life and 10 represents the best possible life. Respondents were also asked how they think their lives will rate in the future. Leveraging this time-tested approach based on the Cantril Scale for life evaluation, most respondents fell into one of the three groups based on their responses. (Note, not all students fell into one of the three subgroups. Rather, they are included in the total respondent/student population group throughout the report.)

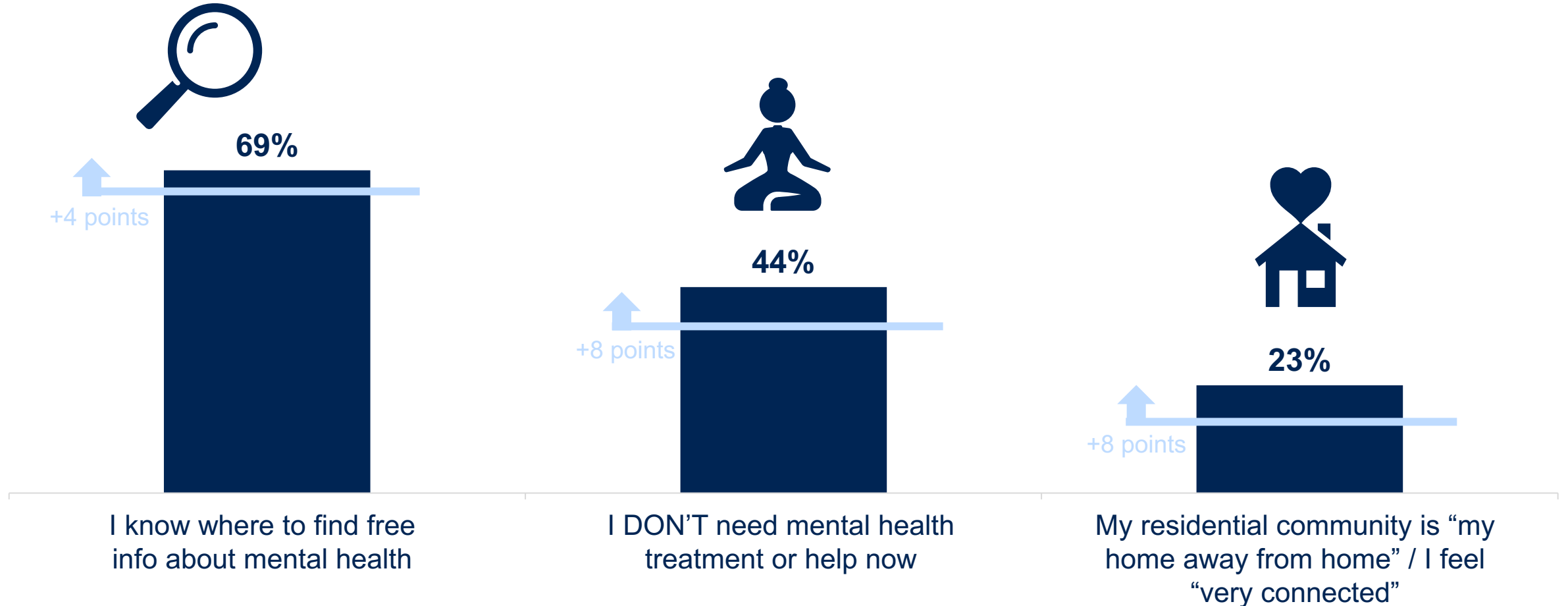
- **Thriving students** rated their current life as 7 and higher and their future life as 8 and higher.
- **Maintaining students** occupy the in-between, rating their current life between 5 to 6 and their future life between 5 and 7.
- **Struggling students** rated their current life 4 and below and their future life 4 and below.

Students who fall in the **Thriving** category are living their best lives and see the future as even brighter. Conversely, students who fall into the **Struggling** category don't have a very good opinion about the current state of their life, and they aren't optimistic that this is going to change. Those students that fall in the **Maintaining** category are uncertain. They think their current life could be better, but they may not see a path to thrive in the future or are uncertain about how to improve their current reality.

This Thriving College Student Index allows us to better understand the students that are Thriving and take a closer look at their habits, behaviors, relationships, and connection to their housing communities. By further understanding Thriving students, we can dig deeper into the behaviors of those students in the Maintaining and Struggling categories to identify potential opportunities that can help foster positive environments and relationships.

CHANGE VS. 2022

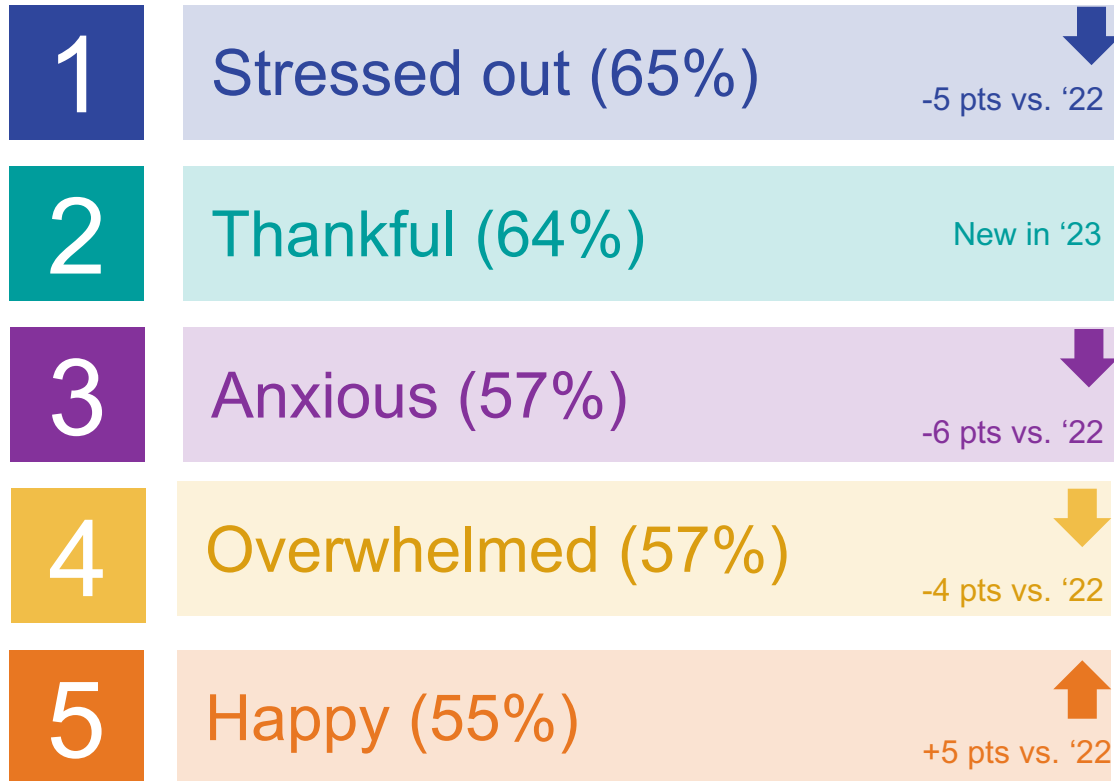
Some attitudinal measures see an uptick vs. the 2022 study



Source

CHANGE VS. 2022

Students feel somewhat less negative, though emotions like stress and anxiety persist



Source:

CHANGE VS. 2022

Group of 'Thriving' grows slightly, though remains under half

THRIVING



45%



(+6 percentage points vs. 2022)

MAINTAINING



12%



(-1 percentage point vs. 2022)

STRUGGLING



2%



(-1 percentage point vs. 2022)

None of these categories, considered part of the “overall respondent/student” population, these students answered the current and future questions on opposite extremes. (41%, -3 percentage points vs. 2022)