

Mental health can be a very tricky thing to talk about in life & in our churches. One reason is that there's often not a clear understanding of what it is & isn't.

I (Brett) once had a student confide to me that they were struggling with depression about 12 years ago. I encouraged him to talk to his parents about it. When he did, I got a call from his dad later that night & his dad thanked me for being there for his son & informed me that the situation is resolved as his son is upstairs making a list of 100 things he's grateful for because his son had too good of a life to be depressed.

Sure everyone could use a gratitude challenge, but his dad had a misunderstanding about what was really happening with his son & I don't think it's that uncommon.

So, let's put some language to this. To do so, I did what any sane person in 2023 would do...i went to Chat GPT. Here's what AI says mental health is:

Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes their potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to their community. Mental health encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being.

Mentalhealth.org defines it as:

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.

TENSION KATIE

If you chose this workshop, we're assuming that you don't need us to convince you why valuing mental health - and understanding it as a piece of a teenager's faith - is vital.

You chose this workshop, so in order for you to care about mental health, you don't need us to tell you that...

- **Nearly 30% of teenage girls in the US seriously considered attempting suicide—up nearly 60% from a decade ago. CDC**
- **18% of teen girls experienced sexual violence in the past year—up 20% since 2017 when CDC started monitoring this measure. CDC**
- **14% of teen girls had ever been forced to have sex—up 27% since 2019 and the first increase since CDC began monitoring this measure. CDC**
- **Teens who feel sad or hopeless have increased in both girls (36% in 2011 to 57% in 2022) and boys (21% in '11 to 29% in '21). CDC**
- **47% of young people say they are moderately or extremely depressed (springtide)**
- **55% of young people say they are moderately or extremely anxious**

- **57% of young people say they are moderately or extremely stressed**
- **45% of young people say they are moderately or extremely lonely**
- **Those with poor mental health are less likely than those with good mental health to say they are flourishing spiritually. And young people without a connection to religion are less likely than those with a connection to report good mental health.**
- **61% of young people agree, "The adults in my life don't truly know how much I am struggling with my mental health."**

But, some of you might be sitting in here because YOU value mental health, but you might have some parents, volunteers or leadership at your church that is skeptical & doesn't feel the same. 2 of the best ways for us to help raise the tension in others to get them to care about something as much as we do is by sharing stories & statistics.

So, you can grab those statistics in the **notes at [brettryantalley.com/oc23](https://brettryantalley.com/)** or scan this **QR code** for an info-graphic from the National Alliance of Mental Illness & share those with folks that might need to raise the value for mental health in your church.

Another resource to help you do this, and the resource that is making up a bulk of the content we're going to be talking through is **Springtide Research's 2022 State of Young People & Religion report** titled Mental Health: what faith leaders need to know. These stats are all based on research done with 13-26 year old's. Not christian only stats, but still think there is so much in this report that is helpful for christian leaders.

They even have a guide companion to the report that is definitely worth your time.

It is money well spent & will get you all sorts of statistics, stories as well as a deep dive into some of the content that we'll be sharing today.

TENSION - BRETT

So...you're also probably in this room because you believe that...

1. We can't ignore mental health when it comes to the development of a healthy, resilient, everyday faith for your students.
2. There is something about a healthy, resilient, everyday faith & being a part of a faith community that can have positive impact on someone's mental health. There's actually statistical evidence for that...
 - **67% of those who attend a faith community weekly are very satisfied with their personal life, compared with 48% among those who are infrequent attenders GALLUP**
 - **73% of religious young people agree that their religious and spiritual practices positively impact their mental health.**
 - **57% of young people agree that their spiritual/religious practices positively impact their mental health.**

- **The more religious or spiritual a young person is, the more likely they are to say they are “flourishing a lot.” 40% who consider themselves very religious say they’re ‘flourishing a lot’ vs only 17% who consider themselves not religious at all.**

So, before we jump in to what else we need to know about this & what we can do about it, I’m hoping we can all stack hands on the following.

- 1. Mental health is something that we need to take seriously in the church.**
- 2. Mental health is an aspect of spiritual health.**
- 3. Having a healthy faith, participating in spiritual practices & being a part of a healthy faith community statistically increases the mental health of teenagers.**

In their research, Springtide concludes there are 3 qualities of faith communities that are highly likely to succeed at promoting the mental health & flourishing of their students:

- 1. They enable social connections to foster belonging.**
- 2. They align tools with expectations to foster healthy narratives.**
- 3. They help young people develop a sense of purpose to connect with something bigger.**

We’re going to dive into those for the next bit of our time, but if you’re familiar with the work of the Fuller Youth Institute, you might notice some overlapping themes with their Identity, Belonging & Purpose research, which makes sense to me.

KATIE - CONNECTIONS

- 1st quality of faith communities where students and their mental health flourish is Connection – the basis of community.
 - **“Community... where they know who you are and here they miss you when you’re gone.” - Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**
- Connection describes the depth, number, and type of relationships
 - Found at school, home, work - and hopefully in the church!
 - Quantity and quality matter when it comes to enhancing young people’s mental health (45)
- Young people initially enter into relationships, groups, organizations because of commonalities, but they stay when they feel like they belong.
- **BELONGINGNESS PROCESS**
 - **Level 1: Feeling noticed**
 - **Level 2: Feeling named**
 - **Level 3: Feeling known**
- **(I AM) NOTICED**
 - Dominant experience of young people with adults is being dismissed, but those who are connected to a religious community feel acknowledged, greeted, and seen.
 - Notice who’s new
 - Notice who’s back
 - Notice who’s standing on the sidelines
 - **“To deepen belonging, find ways to move beyond noticing, acknowledging, and accepting, towards celebrating the young people in your community?” (49) -**
 - What are they doing well?
 - When are they embodying your church/ministry values - inviting others, being welcoming, bringing their Bible, taking notes, reposting on social, etc.

- How can you celebrate them for doing those things?
 - Not only for what they do, but how can you celebrate them for WHO they're becoming?
- Noticing amounts to more than presence, but absence too
 - "When adults notice that you aren't - not just physically gone - but if they notice that you aren't being yourself, if you're kind of withdrawn, it's so significant to have them notice that too." (51)
 - Do you know the young people at your church well enough, that you can tell when they're withdrawn, overwhelmed, not quite themselves?
 - ***Make a plan with your team and volunteers for how you might reach out to young people when they seemed overwhelmed, withdrawn, or not quite themselves.*** (51)
 - Connect, pray for, offer practical resources for stress, be present, offer to show up
- **(I AM) NAMED**
 - Know their name including accurate pronunciation
 - Use of a name triggers immediate connection; our name forms and shapes our identity, and using someone's name confirms that you are in a relationship with them... that you know who they are
 - Tricks and Tips: Glenn Kirby
 - Say their name 3x
 - Ask how to spell it
 - If it's unique, ask if it's a family name
 - If you can't remember at the end of the convo, ask again
 - Write it down! (phone, notecard)
 - Give them a nickname - personalize it, ask if it's ok. (Delaylay)
 - Remember it next time - if you don't, ask again!

- Don't make excuses.. There are lots of things you can remember - make it a priority. If I gave you \$20 every name...
- **(I AM) KNOWN**
 - Belongingness reaches a new level when a person feels known
 - Built on the sense of feeling known, builds n being noticed and named,
 - But adds in the important dimension of *unreserved acceptance*
 - Free from fear of rejection, young people feel safe having open and honest conversations
 - Share hopes, anxieties, challenges, and joys
 - Experience TRUST within that relationship - Antidote to loneliness, isolation stress
 - SAFE
 - Some students shared that being known resulted in increased self-knowledge - their leaders helped to identify skills, traits, giftings in them
 - Speak life over young people and help them to identify their gifts
 - ***Find ways to activate young people by witnessing their natural skills and passions and making a point of connecting those skills and passions to real opportunities within your faith community.*** (53)
 - Take great photos and post a lot on social media? Encourage them towards photography, social media team
 - Have a heart for kids? Great with siblings or younger kids? - kids ministry! Babysitting!
- Two challenges to think about:
 - Stats say that less than 40% of young people attend 1x or 2x/ mo

- How do we facilitate connection in ways that don't assume that young people are walking through their doors on a regular basis -
- ***How do we create connection and belonging for people who don't come on to our campuses?***

BRETT - **EXPECTATIONS**

I think this one can get a little tricky. One way to simplify this as we dive in is to think about how unrealistic expectations - along with a lack of necessary tools to achieve them - often lead to negative outcomes. Have you ever been given a task to do, but not been given the clarity of how to go about the task or the tools to complete it? It's wildly frustrating, right?

Not that it's our goal in faith communities to do that, but it seems to be the experience countless students. But it doesn't mean that expectations aren't good...

"To be clear, religious leaders can (and should!) have high expectations for the young people in their care. Part of their job is setting those expectations. But without giving young people the proper tools, those expectations lack stakes."

"When religious expectations are unachievable, unclear, or unfair, some young people will judge themselves negatively, causing their mental health to suffer. Others will walk away from the religious organization that makes them or their peers feel inadequate."

“Clear and achievable expectations are imperative for any organization that wants to help promote mental health among young people.”

So, as ministry leaders, what is it that we can do in order to give clear & achievable expectations to our students in a way that helps them know their place in their faith & doesn't set them up for failure in how they understand their role.

Springtide breaks it down in to 2 ideas: **Presence & Participation.**

Normally when we talk about presence in student ministry, it's about creating environments where we get students to show up...to be present in our buildings. To design environments, events & programs where students show up. That's a piece of this for sure, but there's also a wildly important piece we can't leave out & that is our *proactive presence* in their life. Not just creating things for them to be present for.

So, when we design the strategy of our ministries, i think there are a couple of things we need to do to accomplish this.

One is that, when we do have things students show up for, design them with presence in mind. Most of us understand the downside of creating ministries where people just hear things & leave, but we have to be intentional about helping students build a meaningful faith community with their peers & other consistent adult leaders.

We'd call that leading small. Springtide talks about how young people need other people to talk to & they need people to look up to. We have to figure out how to build faith communities where students can be honest & transparent & where we can facilitate relationships, not just when people are at church, but relationships that are intertwined in the whole life of the student.

A great book to help you build that kind of ministry is **When Relationships Matter**...but I am a little biased.

The second part of Expectations they talk about is the idea of **participation**. The teenage phase, especially in high school, is when the idea of agency is gaining prevalence. There has to be a participation in their faith, not just a passive acceptance of their faith.

This part can be a dance, because we need to give them both direction & ideas on what participation in their faith looks like, but they also need the freedom & the agency to lead in significant ways & maybe even outside the box ways.

Springtide puts it this way, *"Young people need to feel guided, not forced to participate in their faith. What's more, young people need to feel challenged without feeling defeated by the community's expectations."*

How can we get better at this? Here are a few questions to process that I think can help.

Where do your students have a chance to lead & serve? Are they meaningful places? Are they equipped & empowered to actually do what they're being asked to do?

Do they know the why? Whether we're gauging participation by attendance, sacraments, serving or whatever...do they know the 'why' behind the what? Do they know the reasons behind what we're inviting them into?

When it comes to helping your students participate in their faith, they need to feel challenged, but not defeated. When we have unrealistic expectations for them or when we create too many barriers to entry into our faith communities, we're not doing them any favors.

I don't just want to read the whole thing to you, but here's how they close this section:

"Defining clear and achievable expectations is a key step for any organization to support young people's mental health. Yet, inflexible systems, structures, and traditions may make it difficult for leaders to consistently fill that need. To help navigate this dilemma, faith leaders can utilize presence and participation to position themselves as trusted partners while young people explore their beliefs. Young people need adults to talk to, and having someone they can talk with about matters big and small helps build trust. They also need to feel guided toward participation, not forced into it. Building relationships where young people feel heard, and creating spaces where they can participate in genuine and authentic ways, are key elements in helping young people feel challenged by expectations, not defeated by them."

KATIE - PURPOSE

- Gen Z = "activist generation" - purpose matters to young people
- **Springtide defines purpose as a sense of connection with something or someone bigger than oneself, a mode of self-transcendence that can have several vehicles and several ends, depending on the tradition or the participant in it. (78)**
 - Hobby
 - Community
 - Spiritual practice
 - Belief in divine source
- Broader definition: direction for their lives or careers, system for making sense of suffering or calling, synonymous with happiness or satisfaction in life.

- In *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, William Damon writes: "Purpose is a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at the same time meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond the self."
 - makes room for both the individual layer of purpose and the way purpose relates to the rest of the world.
- How young people discover purpose? (83)
 - **IMAGE of STATS?**
 - Top response: (50%) by asking questions and seeking information about things that matter to me
 - (43%) Experiencing trauma, hardship, or illness, either of my own or someone I care about.
 - (35%) following beliefs I was taught about how to treat others
- Participating in spiritual or religious practices ranks at the bottom - even below "Nothing"
 - Sociologists know that spiritual practices do indeed help young people discover purpose and encourage mental wellness, but young people don't seem to recognize the importance of these practices unless they're already using them.
 - So how do we bridge the gap between young people *accessing* spiritual resources to help discover their purpose and *acknowledging* those avenues as modes of such discovery?
 - Our church communities need to focus on facilitating purpose.
 - In moments that young people begin to figure out who they are and how they fit into the world, *it is vital that a religious leader is there* (84)
- Second ranked response was (43%) Experiencing trauma, hardship, or illness, either of my own or someone I care about.
 - We need to make space for trauma and hardship

- The reality is - it's difficult to talk to a kid about God while they were dealing with trauma that they can't process or even understand
 - Goal isn't to find an avenue to engage them -it's an opportunity to demonstrate love and care because of faith = win/win
 - Young people can feel cared for and experience God at the same time
- **Leaders who make space for young people to process this kind of hardship put themselves in a position to accompany young people as they find a sense of purpose.**
 - **How can you train your team of leaders and volunteers to make space to process trauma and hardship?**
 - *What are the boundaries that you have? When do you refer to professional counseling? Do you have counseling resources available?*
- Putting beliefs about how to treat others into action is ranked next. (35%)
 - Encourage integrity between beliefs and practices - actions speak louder than words.
 - Church viewed as hypocritical? Practice what you preach!
 - Still developing ability to process abstract thought, so young people benefit from taking action
 - Caring for and supporting people in my life (34%) was next and more than 1 in 3 say that helps them to find their purpose.
- Springtide uses this language - young people are at the intersection of being and becoming.
 - Find or create concrete opportunities for young people to discover their purpose - to help them *become*
 - practical workshops/experiences that give tools and resource

- spiritual conversations with intentional and practical next steps
- For young people, purpose has stakes in the *personal*. Encourage young people to bring their own perspective and practices to the table when and where their flexibility for such things
 - Ask - what has worked for you?
 - How have you experienced this?
- Putting some of these into practice will help your church, your ministry, your team connect students to purpose, which will benefit students' mental wellness
 - *What is one thing you can take home and focus on with your team?*

CLOSE - BRETT

In the church, we do need to get better at crisis response. When there are tragic headlines or situations in our communities, we have to be ready to address mental health head on. But we also have to be intentional about recognizing the role of mental health in the midst of a healthy faith. As faith leaders, we need to be informed & we need to be consistent in how we address mental health as a part of a healthy faith.

Hopefully, the language around **connection, expectations & purpose** gives you a framework on how we can be sure that our ministries are safe places for students to show & not just learn about our faith, but experience it in helpful & healthy ways.

In just a few minutes, we're going to share some resources & jump into a Q & A, but before we do that, I want to mention something: **all this**

mental health stuff is not just about your students, it's about you too.

Whether you are a volunteer or on staff at your church, we cannot be good guides for our students in their faith or their mental health if we're not intentional about our own mental health.

Some of us grew up in settings where we were encouraged to pay attention to stuff like that & some of us grew up in settings where we were encouraged to ignore that...but this all matters for you too. You will not be able to be who your students need if you aren't intentional about your own mental health.

That shouldn't be the only reason you're intentional about it though...you also won't be able to be the friend, the husband, the wife, the neighbor, the son, the daughter or the person God created you to be if this isn't something we're aware of & intentional about.

So, as you think through what role mental health has in your ministry, we just wanted to encourage you to be sure that it starts with you.

RESOURCES - KATIE

So, be thinking about any questions you might want to ask for the Q & A in a moment. But before we jump into that, we wanted to make sure there were some resources on your radar that should help with all of this.

- Springtide's 2022 State of Young People & Religion Report
- Seen by Will Hutcherson and Dr. Chinwe Williams

- Beyond the Spiral by Will Hutcherson and Dr. Chinwe Williams (out next week)
- thinkorange.com/mentalhealth
- Feelings Wheel resource
- XP3 MS & HS series on Anxiety
- Parenting with Mental Health in Mind
- Deep breathing exercise. Resetting your nervous system exercise.
- Handout (text on screen?)

IF THERE'S TIME

WORKSHEET

Resetting your nervous system exercise