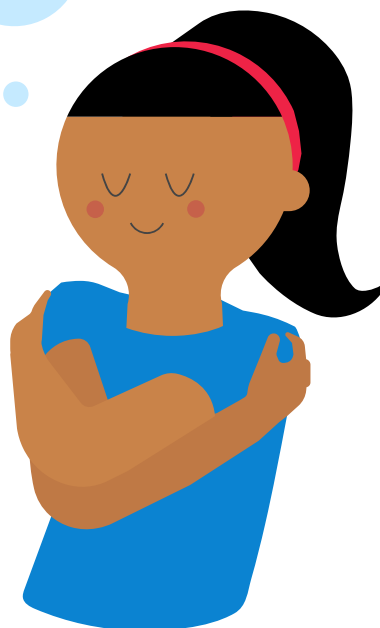
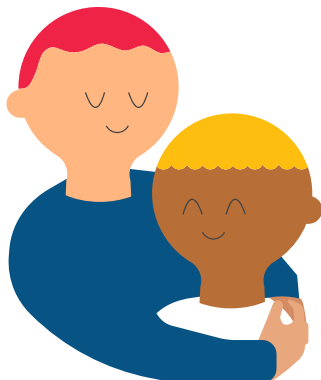


Young People and Relationships: January 2022



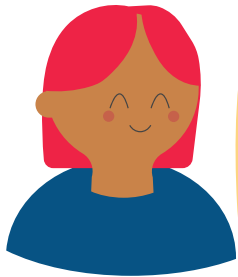
THE MIX

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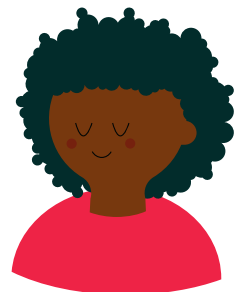
Introduction

Many young people feel that they or relationships like theirs are not represented in the mainstream media, which can have negative consequences for them.



"The media as it is currently puts so much pressure on how we are supposed to 'be' and act in relationships. Not just romantic relationships, but those with our friends, families and anyone else. The idealised picture can make you feel sub-par in many ways and promotes self-shaming. With shame comes isolation and I think people often feel unable to express their true feelings, particularly about something that they aren't sure about in their relationships. It needs to be shown that disagreements, compromise, doubts etc are all normal parts of a healthy relationship."

"Most people out there are struggling to show what their identity or relationships are because of the fear instilled into them by society, and that needs to be corrected."



Young people would like to see more honest representations of the complexity of relationships within mainstream media, rather than idealised versions, as this would help many feel more confident in themselves and help them form quality relationships that are vital for positive mental health and the formation of a positive sense of well-being¹.



"Media is a very powerful tool that shapes the mind. It'll go a long way if people can learn through realistic representations of honest relationships, which they can use to shape their relationships."

"I want the media to normalise things that should be normalised -- and to empower people."



Yet, there are many factors that affect young people's relationships, some of which include sexuality, disability, ethnicity, gender identity and religion. For instance, nowadays young people are more likely to identify as LGBTQI+². However, as they are embracing these non-traditional identities that are still not fully accepted by many people, some

¹ Why relationships are so important for children and young people? <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/blog/why-relationships-are-so-important-children-and-young-people>

² Sexual orientation, UK:2019 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2019>

young people struggle. This is manifested in high levels of LGBTQI+ young people who experience mental health issues³.

To better understand the current world of young people's relationships and to identify how we can improve our support, The Mix together with young people designed a survey focusing on factors affecting their relationships with partners, their families, themselves and their experiences of these relationships.

A brief summary of the research by The Mix with young people aged 16 to 25:



Overall, sexuality emerged as a key factor affecting young people's relationships with family members, partners, and themselves, with the impact of sexuality being more pronounced for young people who are either gay⁴/lesbian⁵, bisexual⁶ or identify with "other"⁷ sexuality. Disability, religion, ethnicity and gender identity also play a key role for many young people in their relationships.

Relationships with partners

Almost half of young people surveyed were in at least one type of relationship, with romantic⁸ relationships (34%) being the most common, followed by casual⁹ (5%), open¹⁰ (3%) and asexual¹¹ (3%) relationship, with a small proportion being in other relationship types.



Romantic
relationships
(34%)



Casual
relationships (5%)



Open
relationships
(3%)



Asexual
relationships
(3%)

³ Mental health statistics: LGBTQI+ people <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-lgbtqi-people>

⁴ Gay: The adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attractions are to people of the same sex. Sometimes lesbian is the preferred term for women.

⁵ Lesbian: A woman whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to other women. Some lesbians may prefer to identify as gay or as gay women.

⁶ Bisexual: A person who has the capacity to form enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attractions to those of the same gender or to those of another gender.

⁷ Other: People who identify with other sexuality than mentioned above or are who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity.

⁸ Romantic: Relationship involving both emotional and physical intimacy, some level of ongoing commitment, and monogamy - romantic and sexual exclusivity.

⁹ Casual: A physical and emotional relationship between two people who may have casual sex without expecting additional commitments.

¹⁰ Open: Emotional and intimate relationship between two partners, with some level of commitment, who agree to the possibility of sexual intimacy with other people.

¹¹ Asexual relationship: Asexual means the lack of sexual attraction to others, or a low interest in sexual activity. Asexual people can have romantic relationships with others. Some may be comfortable with some amount of physical or even sexual contact, while others are not.

Although many young people have positive experiences of relationships with partners, there are some groups of young people who seem to have less positive relationship experiences. Young people in “unconventional” relationships¹² (open, casual, and asexual) seem to have far poorer relationship experiences with partners compared to young people in a romantic relationship. Young people aged 21 to 25 years seem to have better relationship experiences compared to those aged 16 to 20 years. Young people who are married or in a civil partnership also seem to have slightly poorer relationship experiences with partners compared to their counterparts.

“Unconventional” forms of relationships and sexuality appear to be associated with a lower level of support from partners. “Unconventional” relationship types and frequent conflict in a relationship appear to be associated with the negative impact of the relationship on mental health. Additionally, young people in “unconventional” relationships were more likely to have experienced frequent conflict with their partners compared to those in romantic relationships.

Relationships with family

Although many young people identify their families as a significant support network, the proportion of young people finding family to be a supportive network was far lower in comparison to support systems provided by young people’s partners. While families are a source of encouragement and provide a vital support for many young people, they do not seem to be a strong support system for young people who are gay/lesbian, as 43% of such young people disagreed that their families supported them in challenges. Young people identifying their sexuality as “other” and bisexual young people were also more likely to disagree than heterosexual¹³ young people.



While around three quarters of young people felt comfortable being themselves around their family, a fifth disagreed. Yet again, sexuality and the type of relationship a young person was in seem to influence how they feel around their family.

Relationships with self

A large proportion of young people feel they have established a sense of self-identity. However, some young people are still exploring their self-identity, especially bisexual young people, young people identifying their sexuality as “other” and young people in “unconventional” relationships. In fact, over 1 in 10 young people think that they are likely to change their sexuality in the future, with bisexual people with “other” sexuality (18%) more likely to do so. This may help to explain why they are less likely to be certain “who they are” in terms of their identity. Our research shows that sexuality and relationship types also play an important role in how comfortable a young person feels with their identity.



¹² The term “unconventional” relationships is used throughout the report to refer to non-traditional relationships or relationships other than

¹³ Heterosexual: A person sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex.

Representation in mainstream media

Only 42% of young people agreed that they see people like “them” represented in mainstream media. Gay/lesbian and young people identifying their sexuality as “other” were more likely to feel unrepresented by mainstream media. Even fewer (36%) young people believe they see relationships like theirs represented in mainstream media. Young people want to see more honest representations of the complexity of relationships within mainstream media rather than idealised versions. Agreement with this statement was particularly strong among gays and lesbians (86%), bisexual young people (83%) and those with “other” sexuality (86%); the groups that feel particularly underrepresented.



We are releasing our research in order to call for change

The Mix are calling for the UK media to address the lack of representation of the reality of young people’s relationships within mainstream film, TV and advertising. They want to see real diversity of relationships across all media channels, which will allow young people and their families to see their relationships portrayed as normal and healthy, leading to greater levels of acceptance and support.

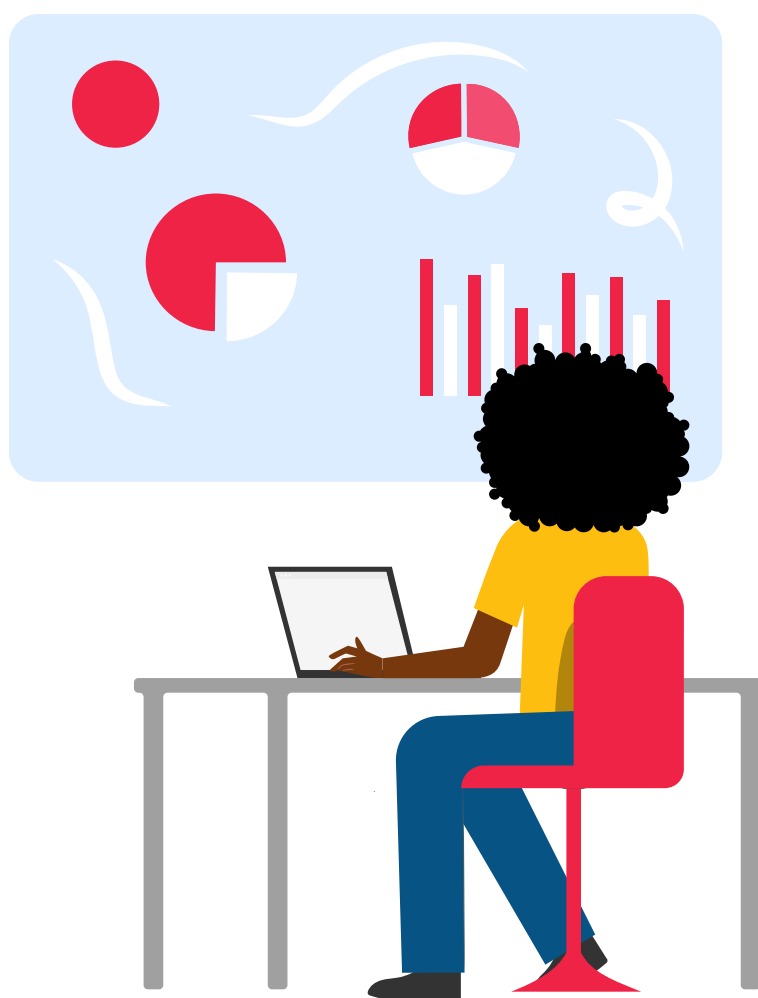
The Mix also wants to point young people and those who care for them in the direction of existing services they can turn to for support on relationship issues, such as the counselling, helplines, support articles and peer-to-peer support that The Mix offers. The Mix wants young people to know they are there to listen and support them, no matter what kind of relationships they are having.



Gathering our data

The Mix surveyed young people in the UK to understand relationship experiences, perspectives and how the mainstream media represents the different types of relationships among young people. Two thousand (2,000) young people between 16 and 25 years of age completed an online survey between the 3rd of December 2021 and the 16th of December 2021. The sample was weighted to represent young people between 16 and 25 years of age in the UK.

Results are grouped into themes from the survey questions and are linked to existing literature where possible. Where quotes are used, they are taken from the open-ended questions included in the YouGov survey, with some quotes obtained also through The Mix's internal user survey.

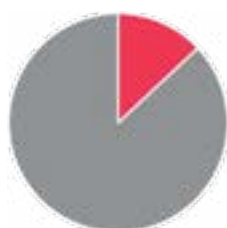


Factors affecting relationships

Factors affecting relationships with family

Sexuality¹⁴ and disability^{15, 16} have been reported, in literature, as key risk factors negatively affecting young people's relationships with their families.

The Mix asked all respondents about the factors affecting relationships with their family members. Three key factors impacting young people's relationship with family members are sexuality (13%), disability (8%), and religion (8%).



Sexuality
(13%)



Disability
(8%)



Religion
(8%)

The impact of these three factors varied greatly depending on a young person's sexuality. For gay/lesbian young people, the most significant factors affecting relationships with family members were sexuality (60%), gender identity (13%), and disability (11%). A similar pattern was identified for bisexual young people, who mentioned sexuality (35%), disability (14%), and gender identity (13%) as key factors affecting their relationships with family members. Young people who identified their sexuality as "other" also identified sexuality (27%), disability (23%), and gender identity (16%) as key factors. However, for heterosexual young people, the most mentioned factor in their relationship with family members was religion (7%).

Young people identified sexuality, disability, and religious beliefs as sources of non-acceptance, judgement, and tension within the family.



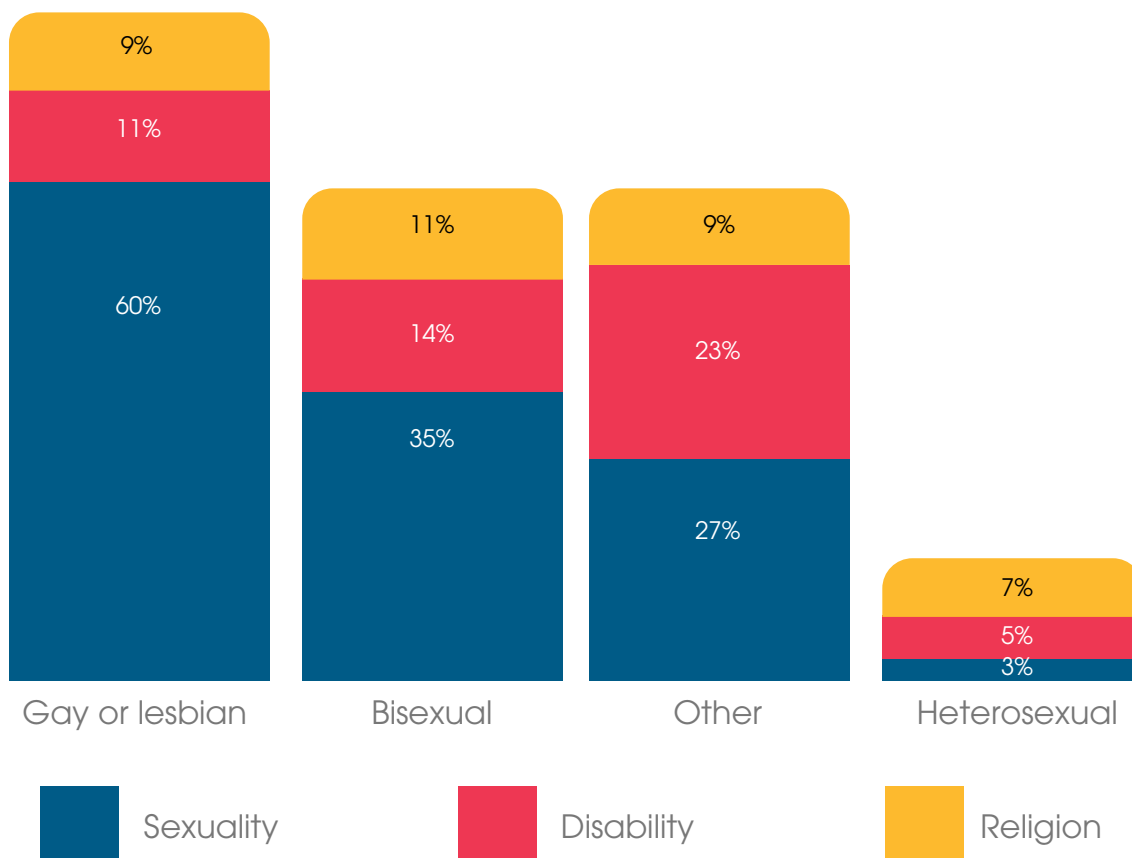
"I am no longer religious, but my mother is, and her behaviour towards me changed when she found out I was no longer religious. I have mental health problems that have made it hard to communicate how I feel to some members of my family."

¹⁴ <https://metrocharity.org.uk/sites/default/files/201704/National%20Youth%20Chances%20Integrated%20Report%202016.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://happiful.com/young-people-with-learning-disabilities-denied-sex-education-due-to-societal-stigma/>

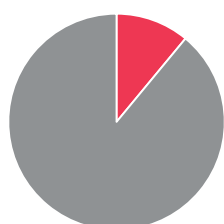
¹⁶ https://www.basw.co.uk/system/files/resources/it_s_not_on_the_radar_report_0.pdf

"I cannot be myself with my family because they will reject me due to their beliefs. I must hide that I am bisexual and agender and that I have to push myself physically beyond what I'm able to do because they think I'm weak and lazy, but I have chronic fatigue syndrome. I have mental health problems too which I have to hide."



Factors affecting relationships with partners

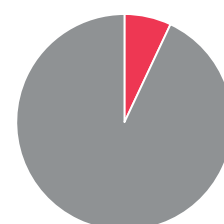
For young people in a relationship (953), three key factors affecting relationships with their partners were: sexuality (11%), religion (8%), and ethnicity (7%). Young people with a UK ethnic background (English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British) were less likely (3%) to identify ethnicity as a key factor affecting relationships with partners. Although other ethnic backgrounds had an overall small proportion in the sample, for 60 young people identifying with any other white background, 16% mentioned ethnicity as a key factor impacting a relationship with a partner.



Sexuality
(11%)



Religion
(8%)

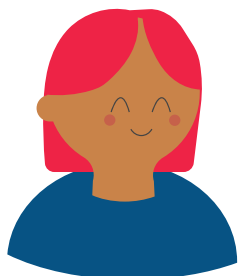


Ethnicity
(7%)

Although sexuality was a key factor for different types of relationships, young people in “unconventional” relationships were more likely to identify it as a key factor. Two key factors identified by young people in romantic relationships were sexuality (10%) and religion (7%). Young people in open relationships identified sexuality (20%), ethnicity (15%), and disability (15%) as key factors affecting relationships with partners. Young people in asexual relationships identified sexuality (22%), disability (19%), and gender identity (16%), while for young people in casual relationships, sexuality (16%), ethnicity (12%), and religion (9%) mostly impacted relationships with partners.

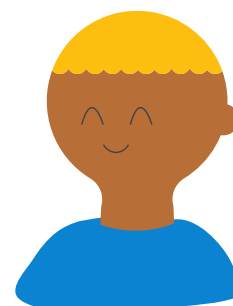


Although sentiments shared by young people on how sexuality, religion, and gender identity impacted relationships with family members were mainly negative, for relationships with partners, these factors sometimes positively impacted relationships with partners.

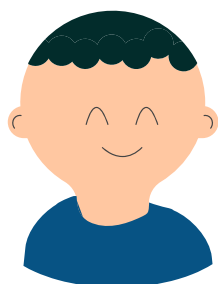


“It affects it positively. Gender and sexual attraction are pivotal in this relationship, it wouldn’t work if they were different.”

“I share the same religion with my partner, and this is important to both of us.”

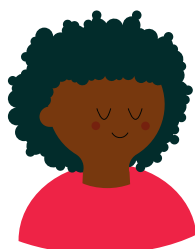


In some instances, ethnic background, disability, and sexuality negatively impacted relationships with a partner.



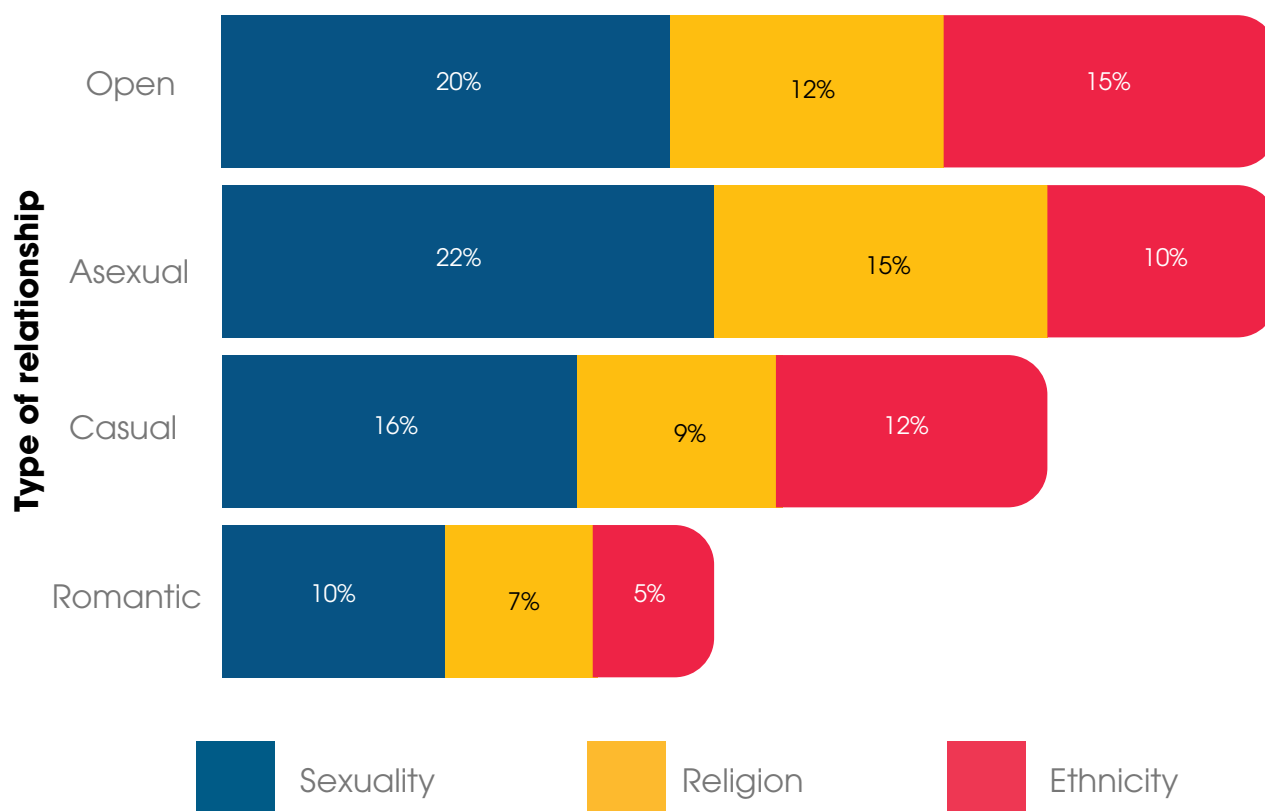
"I'm autistic, so I can find sometimes things are misunderstood by myself or my partner. This can lead to arguments."

"My straight partner is sometimes unsure about me being bisexual"



"I am African, and she is British therefore, cultural perspectives sometimes crash"

Factors affecting relationship with partner by relationship type



Factors affecting relationships with selves

All young people in the survey were asked about factors affecting their relationship with themselves. The top three mentioned factors were sexuality (17%), disability (11%), and religion (10%). The impact of sexuality on relationships with self, slightly varied depending on the gender and age of young people. Females (19%) were more likely than males (15%) to mention sexuality as affecting their relationships with themselves. In terms of age, 16- to 20-year-olds (20%) were more likely to mention sexuality, compared to 21- to 25-year-olds (15%), as a significant factor affecting their relationship with self.



Sexuality
(13%)



Disability
(8%)



Religion
(8%)

Factors affecting relationship with self also differed depending on a young person's sexual identity. While heterosexual young people identified religion and disability (8% apiece) as critical factors affecting relationships with selves, a different pattern was noted for either gay/lesbian or bisexual young people. For gay/lesbian young people, the top three factors affecting their relationship with self were sexuality (64%), gender identity (19%), and religion (11%). Significant factors for bisexual young people were sexuality (42%), disability (20%), and religion (13%).

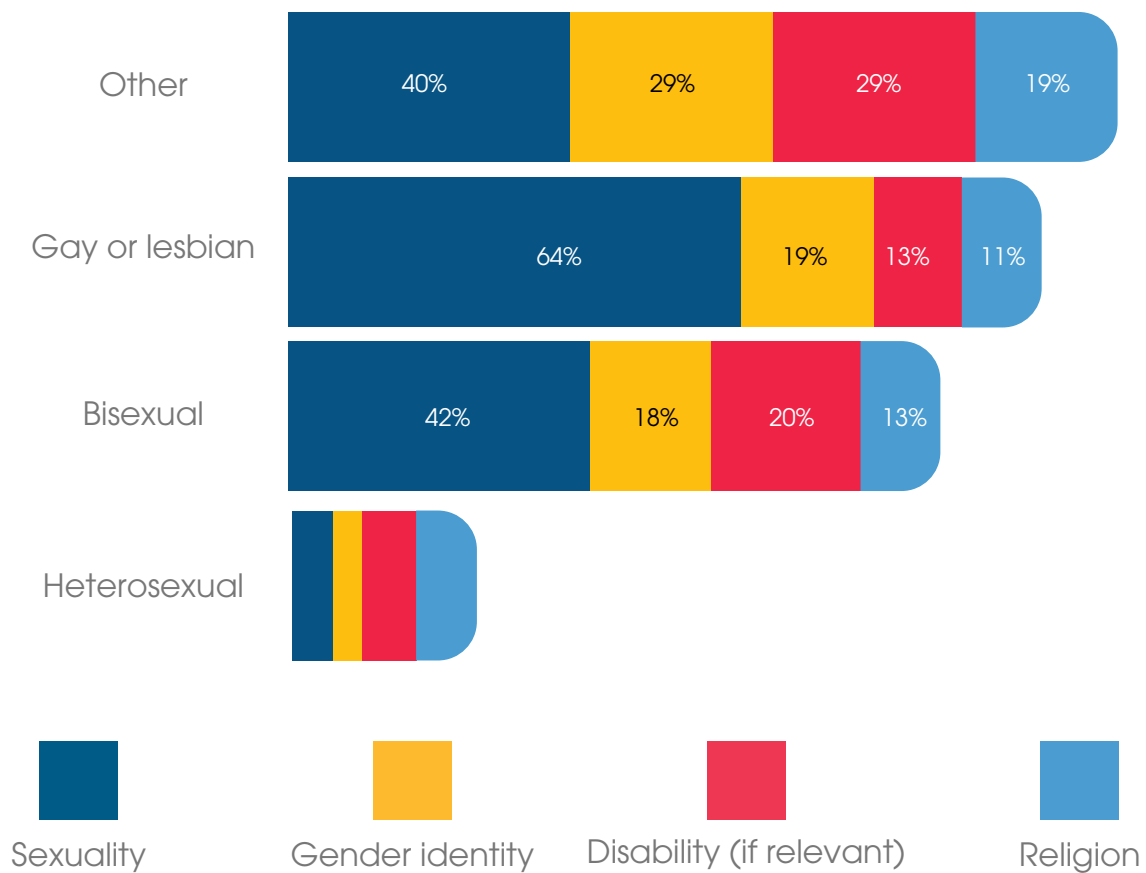


"I identify as bisexual but sometimes I feel like a fraud as I'm attracted to women and men, but I've never been emotionally attracted to a woman"

"I think I'm still struggling to accept some of my own identity because of internalised biphobia and acephobia regarding demi-sexuality"



Factors affecting relationship with self by sexual identity



Overall, sexuality emerged as a key factor affecting relationships with family members, partners, and selves. The impact of sexuality is more pronounced for young people who are either gay/lesbian or bisexual. Sexuality has more impact on young people's relationship with self, followed by a relationship with family members and least on relationship with partners.

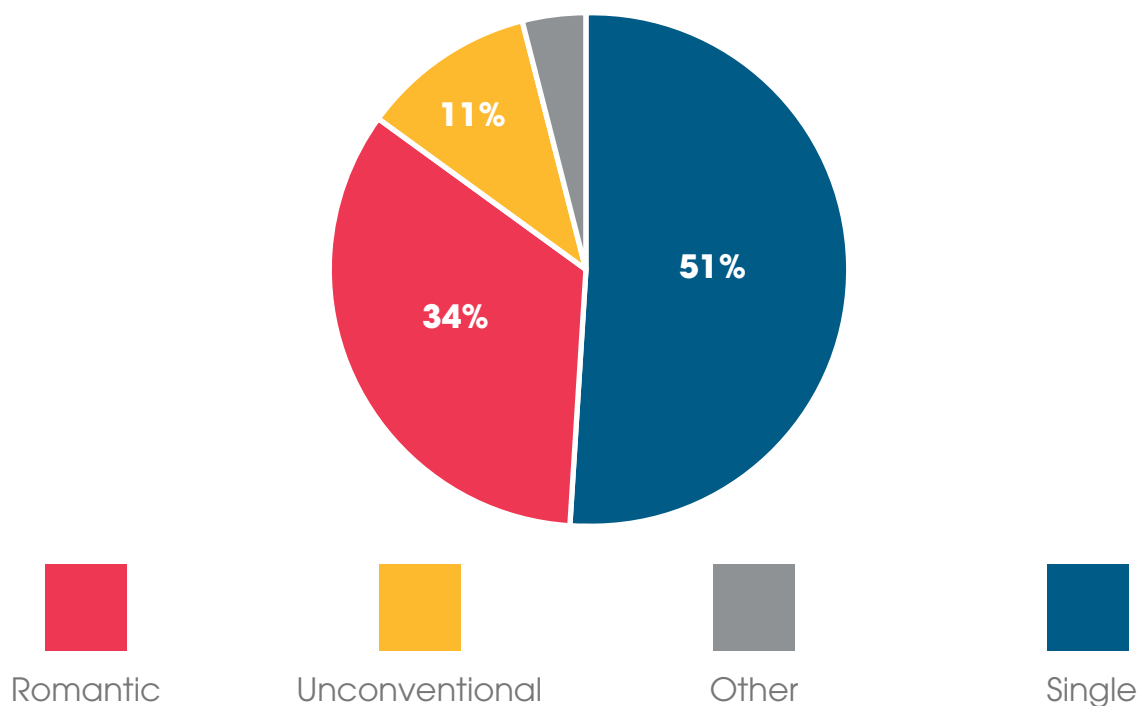
Young people and their relationships with a partner

Different types of relationships

Young people were asked about the types of relationships which they currently have and had five different types of relationships to choose from.

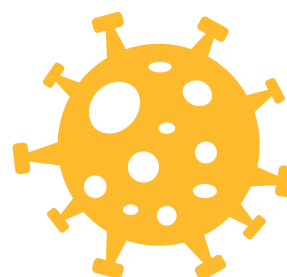
Almost half (46%) of young people were in one or more types of relationship, with romantic (34%) being the most common and casual (5%) the second most common relationship type among young people. Some 3% were in open relationships, with another 3% being in asexual relationships. A small proportion had other relationships.

Different types of relationships among young people



Impact of the pandemic on dating

In general, the pandemic had an impact on relationship experiences, with some young people not having any relationships since the beginning of the pandemic. YouGov's survey in April of 2020 established that 58% of young people (aged 18 to 25 years) were single¹⁷. Among young people (18 to 25 years) who were not single before the pandemic, 19% had completely stopped dating since the beginning of the pandemic¹⁸. With more than half of young people not in any type of relationship (51%), the impact of the pandemic on young people's relationships may also be apparent in The Mix's data.



58%

Of young people were single

19%

Of young people had completely stopped dating since the beginning of the pandemic

51%

Of young people are not in any type of relationship

Specifically focusing on romantic relationships, The Mix's data shows, the age group of 21 to 25 years had a larger proportion of young people in a romantic relationship (45%) compared to 22% of young people between 16 and 20 years. Heterosexual young people were more likely to have a romantic relationship (39%).

¹⁷ You Gov survey results <https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/l2llsos027/YouGov%20-%20dating.pdf>

¹⁸ You Gov survey results <https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/l2llsos027/YouGov%20-%20dating.pdf>



39% of
heterosexuals



29% of gay/
lesbian



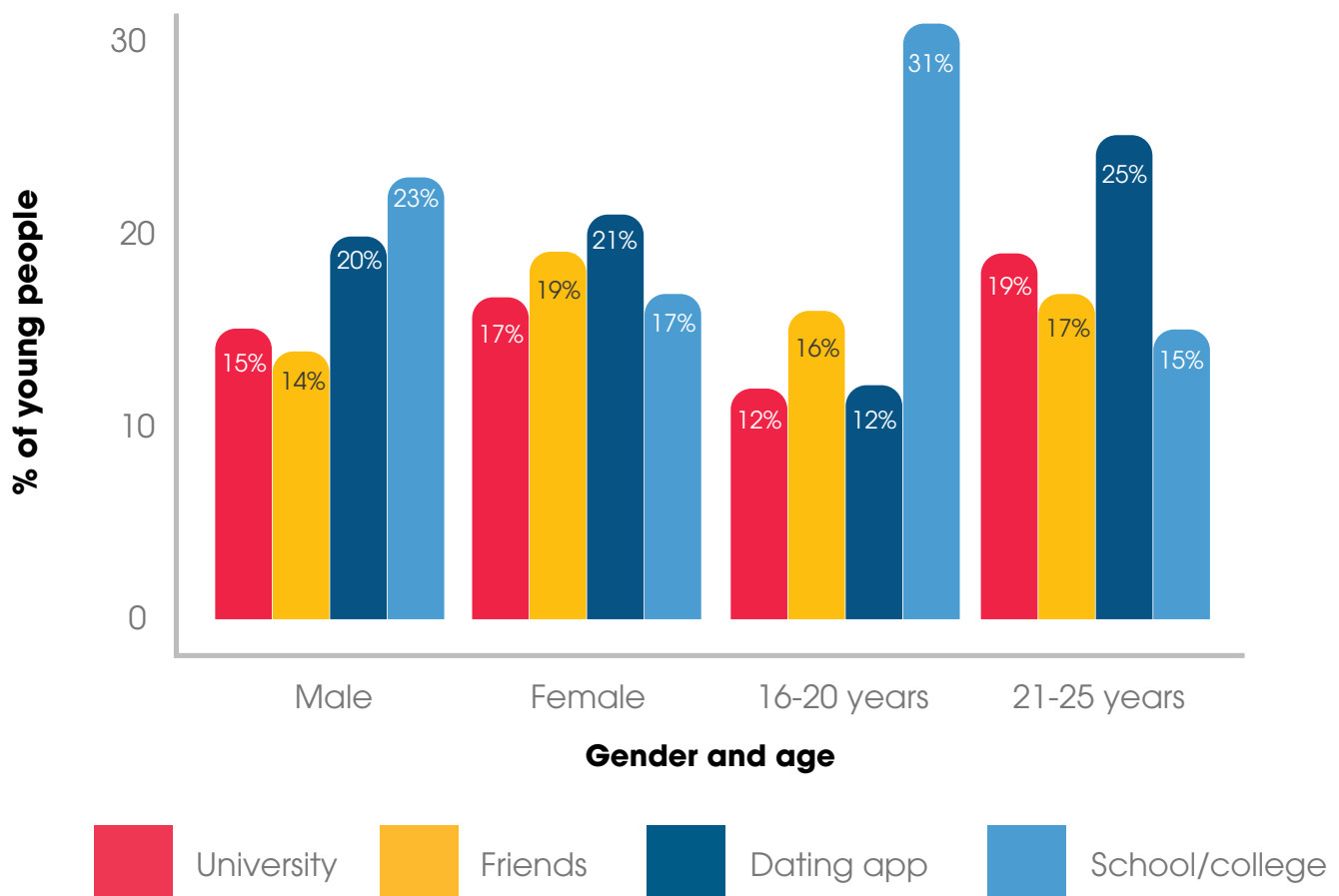
36% of
bisexual



16% of
"other"

Of the young people who were in a relationship, two common ways that young people met their current partner were through a dating app (20%) and at school/college (20%). Other significant ways young people met their current partners were at university (16%) and through friends (17%). Young people aged 21 to 25 years (25%) were more likely to have met their current partner through a dating app than those aged 16 to 20 years (12%). The use of social media to find a partner was more popular among the younger age group (16 to 20 years) (18%) than among the older age group (21 to 25 years) (7%).

Where young people met their partners by gender and age



Partners as a source of encouragement and support

88%

Of young people in a relationship agreed that their partners supported their goals

8%

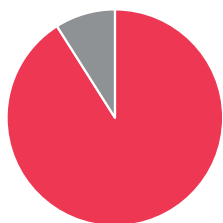
Of young people in a relationship did not agree that their partners supported their goals

Almost 9 in 10 young people in a relationship (88%) agreed that their partners supported their goals (85% of males agreed, and 90% of females agreed), while some 8% of young people did not feel their partners were supportive of their goals.

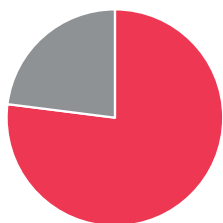
Some differences were observed around how young people felt their partners were supportive of their goals depending on their marital status. Young people married/ in a civil partnership were most likely (11%) to disagree their partners are supportive of their goals. This is in comparison to 6% of young people who have never been married and 5% of those living together.

Similarly, differences were observed around young people's working status. Young people working part-time (77%) and unemployed young people (82%), were the least likely to feel their partners are supportive of their goals. Young people working full-time (91%), and full-time students (91%) were more likely to agree their partners were supportive of their goals.

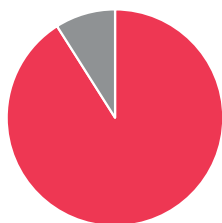
Proportion of young people agreeing their partner is encouraging and supportive of their goals by working status:



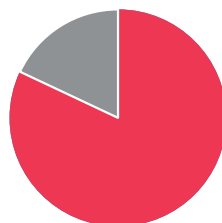
91% of those working fulltime



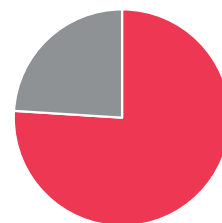
77% of those working part time



91% of fulltime students



82% of those unemployed



76% of those working/other

When it comes to support from partners when young people experience challenges, almost 9 in 10 (86%) young people in a relationship felt their partners supported them in challenges and some 8% did not feel so.

There appears to be a relationship between the type of a relationship the person is in and support provided by partners when challenges are experienced. Almost 1 in 3 (31%) young people in asexual relationships felt unsupported by partners when experiencing challenges, 20% of young people in casual relationships and also 24% of those in open relationships felt unsupported by partners in challenges. In comparison, only 4% of those in romantic relationships felt unsupported by their partners in challenges.



Gay/lesbian young people were the least likely to feel their partners supported them



Heterosexual young people were the most likely to feel their partners supported them

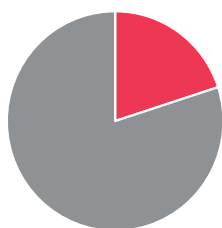
Similarly, sexuality is an important factor; gay/lesbian young people were the least likely to feel their partners supported them in challenges (76%) while heterosexual young people (91%) were the most likely to agree their partners supported them in challenges, followed by bisexual young people (85%).

Pressure from partners

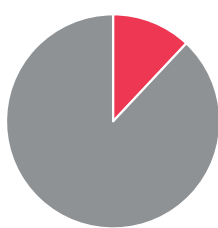
Consent in relationships relates to giving permission for something to happen or an agreement to do something¹⁹. Consent means someone has the freedom to choose without coercion, they have the capacity (mental capacity, not under influence of drugs), and have the choice to say no if they wanted to²⁰. Previous studies in the UK have demonstrated that 6.9% of young people say they have been pressured into sex²¹.

In The Mix's survey, 16% of young people in a relationship felt they were pressured by their partners, sometimes to do things they did not want to do in general. (The question did not ask specifically about being pressured into sex). Males (20%) and those aged between 16 and 20 years (19%) were the most likely to feel so, compared to females (12%) and those aged 21 to 25 years (14%).

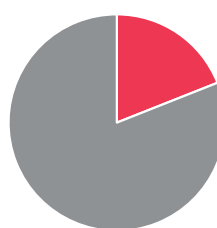
Proportion of young people feeling pressured by their partner



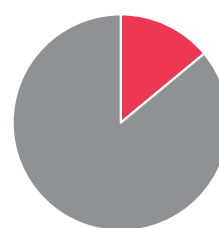
20% of males in a relationship



12% of females in a relationship



19% of 16-to-20-year-olds in a relationship



14% of 21-to-25-year-olds in a relationship

¹⁹ What is consent? <https://youngandfree.org.uk/relationships/consent/>

²⁰ What does the law say? <https://youngandfree.org.uk/relationships/consent/>

²¹ https://www.youngpeopleshealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/AYPH_KDYP2019_FullVersion.pdf

Although fewer young people were in “unconventional” relationships, such young people felt the most pressured by their partners, with young people in open (37%) and asexual relationship the most likely (32%) to feel so. Only a small proportion of young people in romantic relationships (13%) felt pressured by their partners sometimes to do something they did not want to do.

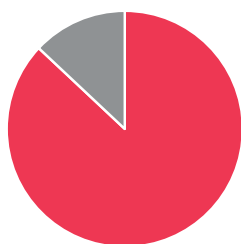
79%

Almost 4 in 5 (79%) of young people in a relationship agreed they knew how to refuse a request from their partner to do something they disagreed with, while some 16% did not know how to refuse. Males (17%) and those aged between 16 to 20 years (18%) were more likely to say they did not know how to say “no” to their partners, compared to females and those aged 21 to 25 years (14%, apiece).

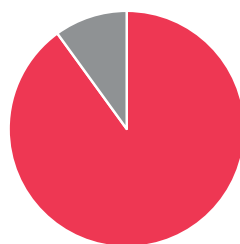
Young people who are married or in civil partnership were the most likely to feel they did not know how to say “no” to their partners (23%), compared to those never married (14%) or living together (10%).

Most young people in a relationship (88%) feel comfortable being themselves around their partners, with females (90%) and those aged 21 to 25 years (91%) most likely to feel so compared to males (87%) and those aged between 16 to 20 years (83%).

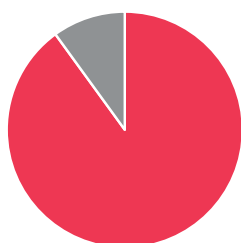
Proportion of young people feeling comfortable around their partner:



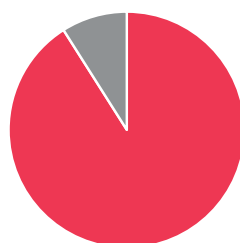
87% of males



90% of females



83% of those aged 16 to 20 years



91% of those aged 21 to 25 years

Surprisingly, young people who are married/in a civil partnership (83%) were less likely to feel comfortable around their partners compared to young people never married (90%) or young people living as married (98%).

Yet again sexuality plays an important role here. Gay/lesbian young people were less likely to feel comfortable around their partners (79%). This compares to 90% of bisexual and 93% of heterosexual young people feeling comfortable being themselves around their partners.

Effect of relationships on mental health



For young people in relationships, mental health can affect and be affected by a relationship experience. The top mental health triggers for young people in relationships can include arguing with a partner, having mental health difficulties misunderstood by a partner, issues around sexual activity or physical intimacy, being critical of each other's personalities, and getting naked with a partner²².

12%

Of young people agreed that their relationships negatively affected their mental health

In The Mix's survey, 12% of young people in a relationship agreed that their relationships negatively affected their mental health. Males and those aged between 16 to 20 years (15% apiece) were more likely to agree that they experienced a negative impact of their relationship on their mental health compared to females (10%) and those aged 21 to 25 years (11%).



Gay/lesbian and bisexual young people (17% apiece) were far more likely to feel their relationship negatively affected their mental health compared to heterosexual young people (10%).

²² <https://metro.co.uk/2019/05/15/single-people-believe-mental-health-issues-makes-harder-find-relationship-9554236/>

“Unconventional” relationship type and frequent conflict in a relationship appear to be associated with negative impact on mental health. Young people in “unconventional” relationships were more likely to feel their mental health was negatively affected by the relationship in comparison to young people in romantic relationships.

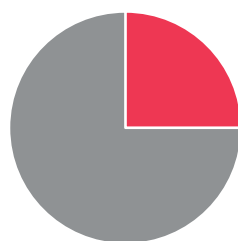
Proportion of young people agreeing their mental health was affected by the



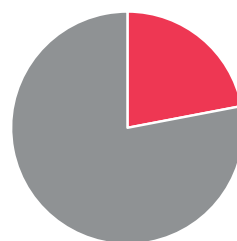
9% in romantic relationships



25% in casual relationships



25% in open relationships



25% in asexual relationships

Young people who sometimes (19%) or often (40%) experienced conflict with their partners were more likely to feel their relationship negatively affected their mental health, compared to young people who rarely (9%) or never (6%) have a conflict with their partners.

26%

Of young people in a relationship never experience conflict with their partners

65%

Of young people in a relationship experience conflict rarely or sometimes

6%

Of young people in a relationship experience conflict with their partner often

2%

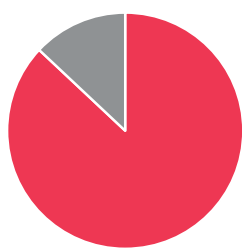
Of young people in a relationship experience conflict with their partner all the time

Overall, 1 in 4 (26%) young people in a relationship never experience conflict with their partners, with 65% experiencing conflict rarely or sometimes. Some 6% experience conflict with their partner often and 2% all the time.

Young people in “unconventional” relationships were more likely to have experienced conflict with their partners all the time or often. Some 19% of young people in open relationships, 21% of young people in asexual relationships, and 18% of young people in casual relationships experienced conflict all the time or often with their partners. This is in comparison to only 4% of those in romantic relationships experiencing conflict all the time or often.

Over 3 in 4 (78%) young people never felt unsafe with their partner, with only 2% feeling unsafe all the time. Females (80%) and those aged 21 to 25 years (82%) were more likely to say that they have never felt unsafe with their partner compared to males (75%) and those aged 16 to 20 years (70%). There were great differences in how safe young people felt with their partner depending on the relationship type.

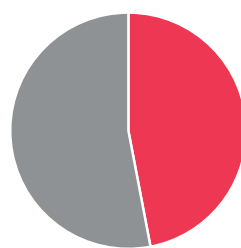
Proportion of young people who never felt unsafe with their partner:



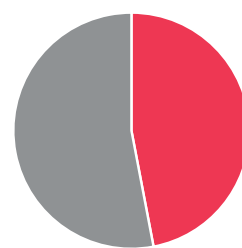
87% in romantic relationships



45% in casual relationships



39% in open relationships



47% in asexual relationships

In summary, although most young people seem to have positive experiences of relationships with partners, there are some groups of young people who seem to have less positive relationship experiences, in comparison to other groups. For instance, young people aged 21 to 25 years seem to have better relationship experiences compared to those aged 16 to 20 years. Young people married or in a civil partnership also seem to have slightly poorer relationship experiences with partners compared to their counterparts. Young people in “unconventional” relationships seem to have poorer relationship experiences with partners compared to young people in conventional relationships.

Young people aged 21 to 25 years seem to have better relationship experiences compared to those aged 16 to 20 years.

Young people married or in a civil partnership also seem to have slightly poorer relationship experiences with partners compared to their counterparts.

Young people in “unconventional” relationships seem to have poorer relationship experiences with partners compared to young people in conventional relationships.

Young people and their relationships with family members

Relationships with family members are key for young people. However, the family context can be a source of challenges for young people, especially for minority groups like LGBTQ+ groups.

Previous studies in the UK have shown that LGBTQ+ young people are often rejected by their family and community²³. This can even lead to homelessness with nearly 1 in 10 LGBTQ+ young people having to leave home for reasons relating to their sexuality or gender identity²⁴. Coming out presents young LGBTQ+ people with challenges, especially coming out to family members²⁵.

²³ <https://metrocharity.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-04/National%20Youth%20Chances%20Intergrated%20Report%202016.pdf>

²⁴ <https://metrocharity.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-04/National%20Youth%20Chances%20Intergrated%20Report%202016.pdf>

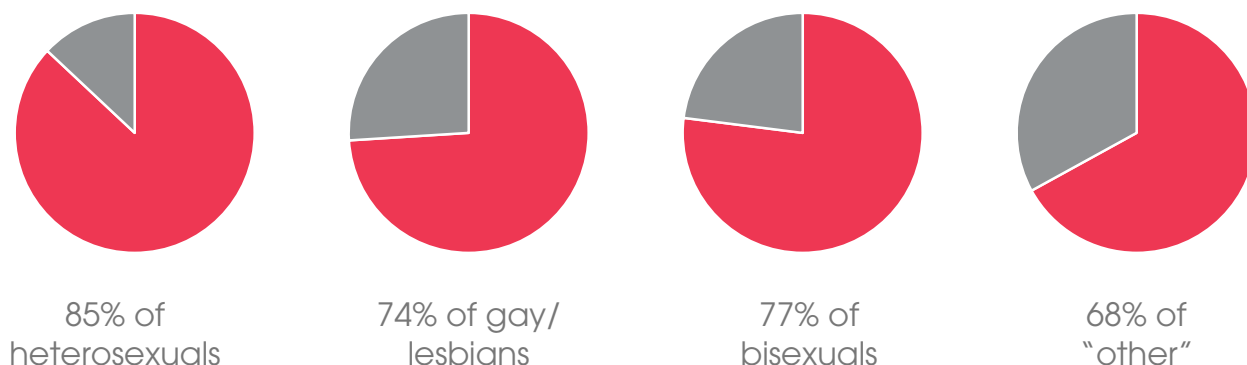
²⁵ <https://metrocharity.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-04/National%20Youth%20Chances%20Intergrated%20Report%202016.pdf>

Family as a source of encouragement and support



While 79% of young people agreed that their families were supportive of their goals, there were vast differences depending on young people's sexuality. Young people identifying their sexuality as "other" (68%) were the least likely to agree that their families were supportive of their goals. This was followed by gay/lesbian (74%) and bisexual (77%) young people. In comparison 85% of heterosexual young people agreed that their families were supportive of their goals.

Proportion of young people feeling agreeing their families support their goals



67% of young people agreed that their families provided a support network when experiencing challenges, while some 22% of young people disagreed. Families do not seem to be a strong support system for young people who are gay/lesbian, as 43% of such young people disagreed that their families supported them in challenges. Young people identifying their sexuality as "other" (28%) and bisexual young people (27%) were also more likely to disagree their families supported them in challenges. Conversely, families tend to provide a strong support network for heterosexual young people, with only 18% of heterosexuals feeling their families are not supportive during challenges.

72%

Of young people felt comfortable being themselves around their family

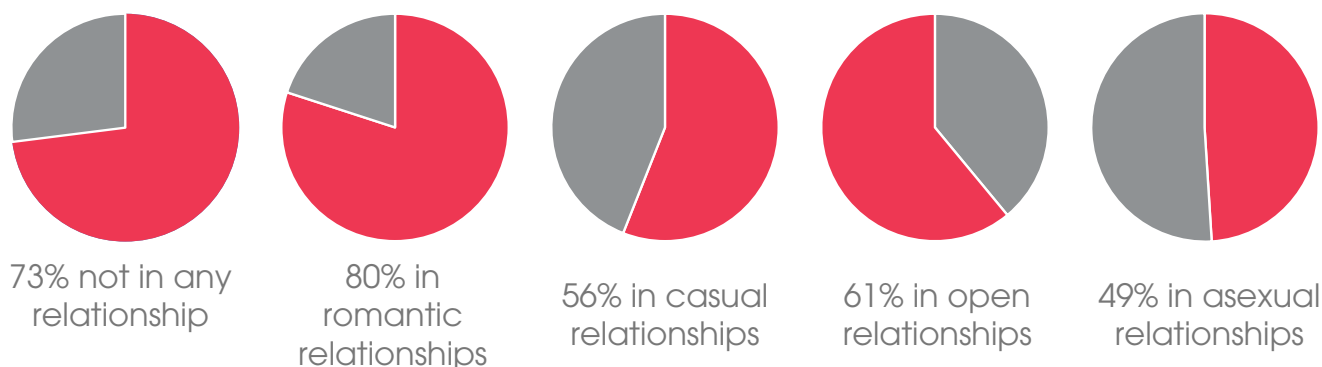
20%

Of young people disagreed with feeling comfortable being themselves around their family

While around three quarters (72%) of young people felt comfortable being themselves around their family, some 20% disagreed. Yet again, sexuality and the type of relationship a young person is in appear to influence how they feel around their family. Gay/lesbian young people ranked as the most likely to feel uncomfortable being themselves around their families, with 40% feeling so. This was followed by young people with "other" sexuality (39%) and bisexual young people (35%). Heterosexual young people are the least likely to be uncomfortable being themselves around their families (13%).

Similarly, young people in “unconventional” relationships (open, casual, and asexual) were more likely to feel uncomfortable around their families. Young people not in a relationship and those in a romantic relationship were less likely to feel uncomfortable around their family.

Proportion of young people feeling comfortable around their families:



Although young people identify their families as a significant support network, the proportion of young people finding a family to be a supportive network was far lower in comparison to support systems provided by young people’s partners. More importantly, some young people find it difficult to have a positive experience of families as a support system and many of these are from the LGBTQ+ community. Also, young people in “unconventional” relationships are somewhat less likely to be able to draw on the support from their families when experiencing challenges.

Young people and their relationships with self

Self-identity

Self-identity is very important in young people’s relationships as it helps develop intimacy, assertiveness, exercise good boundaries with family, friends, and partners and guard against feeling manipulated or resentful in personal relationships²⁶.

Previous studies demonstrated that young people’s elements of self-identity can be shaped by the networks they associate with and the environment they live in. For instance, young people who have sexually active friends are more likely to feel pressured to be sexually active too²⁷. Also, young people who are friends with a young person in a romantic relationship are twice as likely to desire to have a romantic relationship too²⁸.

²⁶ <https://www.reconnectcounseling.com/the-importance-of-self-identity-for-setting-relationship-boundaries/>

²⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3888648/>

²⁸ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3888648/>

All young people in the The Mix's survey were asked several statements about their self-identity and these related to awareness of self-identity, comfort with self-identity, feeling pressured to be in a relationship, and comparing self to others.

70%

Of young people agreed that they knew their identity

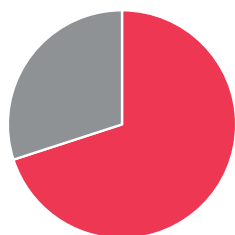
19%

Of young people did not think they knew "who they are" yet

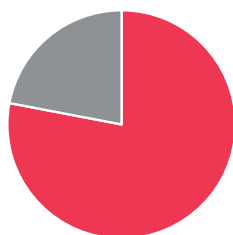
Some 70% of young people agreed they knew their identity, and some 19% did not think they knew "who they are" yet. Those aged between 21 to 25 years were more likely to know "who they are" (72%) than those aged 16 to 20 years (68%).

With regards to relationship type, young people in "unconventional" relationships asexual (45%), open (66%), and casual (58%) were less likely to know their identity. In comparison, young people who are not in any relationship (70%) and those in romantic relationships (79%) appeared to be the most likely to be certain of their identity.

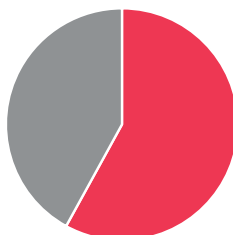
Proportion of young people knowing who they are in terms of identity:



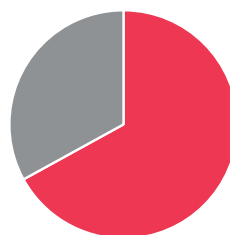
70% of those not in a relationship



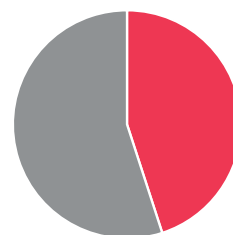
79% in a romantic relationship



58% in a casual relationship



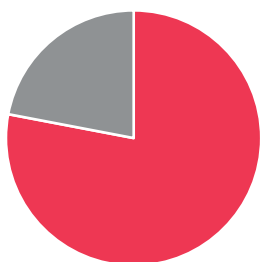
66% in an open relationship



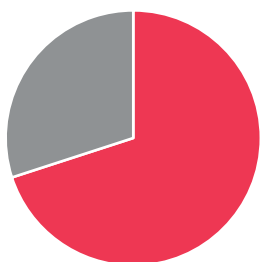
45% in a asexual relationship

Differences existed also depending on young people's sexual identity. Young people identifying their sexual identity as "other" (56%) and bisexual (63%) were less likely to be certain they knew "who they were". In contrast, heterosexuals (78%) and gays/lesbians (70%) were more likely to agree they "knew who they were" in terms of their identity.

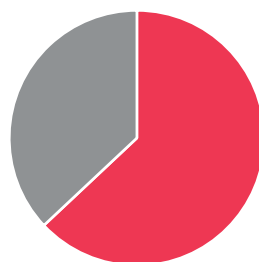
Proportion of young people knowing who they are in terms of identity:



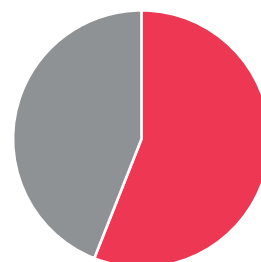
78% of
heterosexual



70% of gay/
lesbian



63% of
bisexuals



56% with
"other"
sexuality

Sexuality is fluid for many young people



It's common for young people to question their sexuality and explore different options.²⁹ Some 11% of young people said that they are likely to change their sexuality in the future. Females and those aged 16 to 20 years (13% apiece) are more likely to change their sexuality in the future compared to males and those aged 21 to 25 years (9% apiece).

Bisexual young people (26%) and young people with "other" sexuality (18%) are more likely to change their sexuality in the future which may contribute to explaining why they are less likely to feel certain of "who they are" in terms of their identity. Heterosexuals (6%) and gay/lesbians (8%) are far less likely to change their identity in the future.



Young people who are bisexual
or with "other" sexuality are
more likely to change their
sexuality in the future



Young people who are
heterosexual and gay/lesbians
are less likely to change their
identity in the future

²⁹ <https://www.themix.org.uk/sex-and-relationships/gender-and-sexuality/how-to-explore-your-sexuality-3353.html>

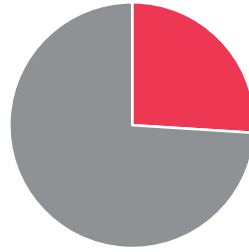
Proportion of young people likely to change their sexuality in the future:



6% of
heterosexuals



8% of gay/
lesbians



26% of bisexuals



18% with "other"
sexuality



Young people in asexual relationships (28%) and open relationships (27%) are more likely to change their sexuality in the future compared to 11% of young people not in any relationship and 9% of young people in romantic relationships.

77%

Of young people felt
comfortable with their
identity

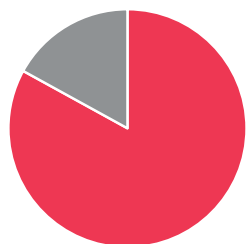
14%

Of young people did not
feel comfortable with their
identity

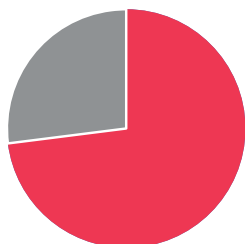
While 77% of young people felt comfortable with their identity, some 14% did not feel so. Not surprisingly, comfort with one's identity grows with age. Young people aged between 16 and 20 years were more likely to be uncomfortable with their own identity (16%) compared to those aged 21 to 25 years (12%).

Yet again, sexuality and relationship type play an important role in how comfortable a young person feels with their identity. While 84% of heterosexual young people felt comfortable with their identity, gay/lesbian, bisexual, and young people identifying their sexuality as "other", were less likely to be comfortable with their identity.

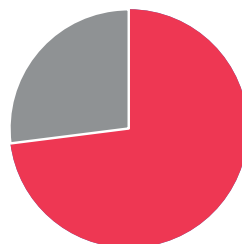
Proportion of young people comfortable with their own identity:



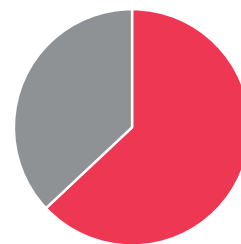
84% of heterosexuals feel comfortable with their own identity



73% of gay/lesbians feel comfortable with their own identity



71% of bisexuals feel comfortable with their own identity



64% with "other" sexuality feel comfortable with their own identity

Young people in "unconventional" relationships were less likely to be comfortable with their self-identity. While young people in romantic relationships (87%) and young people not in any relationship (78%) felt comfortable with their identity, only 41% of young people in asexual relationships, 63% of young people in casual relationships, and 71% of young people in open relationships felt comfortable with their own identity.

Pressure to be in a relationship

23%

Of young people felt they were pressured to be in a relationship

Previous studies have established that when a friend of a young person desires to have a romantic relationship, a young person's desire to have a romantic relationship too is increased by 169%³⁰. In this survey, 23% of young people felt they were pressured to be in a relationship.

Young people identifying their sexuality as "other" (33%) and gay/lesbian young people (28%) were more likely to feel pressured to be in a relationship. In comparison, 25% of bisexual and 21% of heterosexual young people felt pressure to be in a relationship.

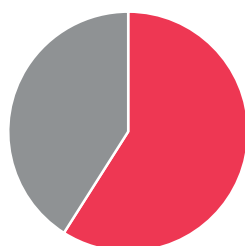
For young people not in any relationship, 29% felt pressured to be in a relationship. Among young people who have ever used a dating app, 28% felt pressured to be in a relationship.

³⁰ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3888648/>

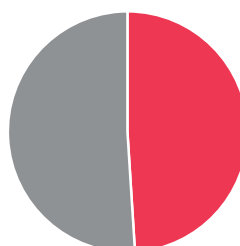
Among young people not in any relationship, 58% were happy being single while some 30% were not happy being single. Females (65%) and those aged 21 to 25 years (60%) were more likely to feel happy being single compared to males (53%) and those aged 16 to 20 years (57%).

Gay/lesbian and bisexual young people were less likely to feel happy being single compared to either heterosexual young people or those young people identifying their sexuality as "other".

Proportion of young people comfortable with their own identity:



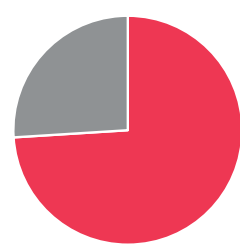
59% of
heterosexuals



49% of gay/
lesbians



53% of bisexuals



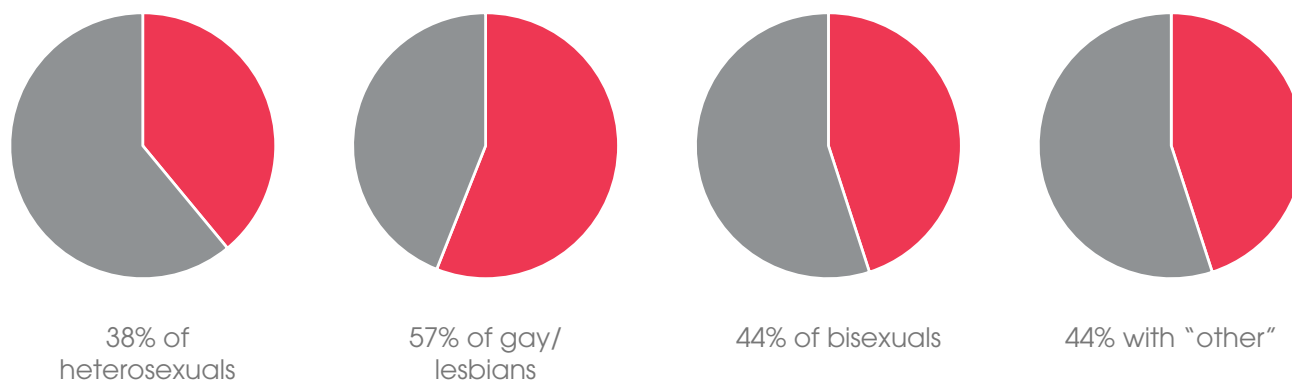
74% with "other"
sexuality

Many young people struggle with communicating feelings in relationships

Some 40% of young people agreed they struggle communicating their feelings in relationships. Females (44%) were more likely to say that they struggle in communicating their feelings in relationships, compared to males (37%).

Largely, gay/lesbian young people were more likely to struggle with this compared to bisexual young people or young people identifying as "other" sexuality. However, heterosexual young people were less likely to struggle communicating feelings in their relationships.

Proportion of young people struggling communicating feelings in relationships



Young people in "unconventional" relationships found it more difficult to communicate their feelings in relationships compared to young people in romantic relationships (43%) or young people not in any relationship (44%). Young people in casual (50%), open (43%) and asexual relationships (42%) were the most likely to struggle with communicating their feelings in a relationship.

In summary, a large proportion of young people aged 16 to 25 years seems to have established a sense of self-identity. However, some young people are still exploring their self-identity, especially females, bisexual young people, young people identifying their sexuality as "other" and young people in "unconventional" relationships (especially asexual relationships). A large proportion of young people not in any relationship also feel pressured to be in a relationship, and almost 1 in 2 young people struggle to communicate their feelings in relationships.

Media representation of young people's relationships

Young people often feel their voices are missing in mainstream media, leading to a failure to address issues that affect them³¹. Some reports have established that very few young people see young people on TV that share similar interests or experiences with them, young people sounding like them and young people looking like them³².

However young people have a desire to see more diverse representation in mainstream media, especially young people from ethnic minority backgrounds or from the LGBTQ+ community, who feel completely invisible from TV altogether³³.

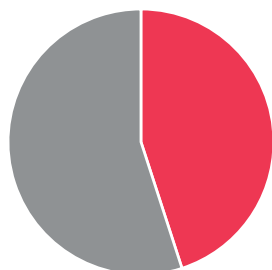
³¹ https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/15482673/Behind_the_Headlines_Printed_Summary_Report.pdf

³² <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news/young-people-uk-television-report>

³³ <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news/young-people-uk-television-report>

In The Mix's survey, only 42% of young people agreed that they see "people like me" represented in mainstream media, while 41% disagreed. Gay/lesbian and young people identifying their sexuality as "other" were more likely to feel not represented by mainstream media. In contrast, heterosexual and bisexual young people were more likely to see people like "them" represented in mainstream media.

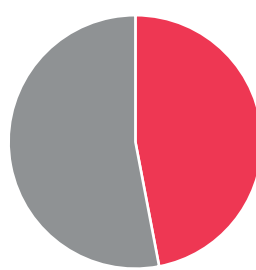
Proportion of young people seeing people like them in the mainstream media:



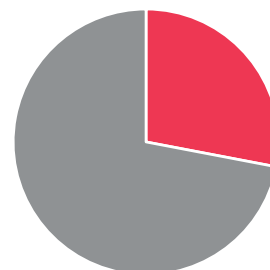
46% of
heterosexuals



25% of gay/lesbian



48% of bisexuals



28% with "other"
sexuality



In terms of location, young people in Wales (32%) and Northern Ireland (33%) were less likely to see people like "them" in mainstream media. In contrast, 38% of young people in Scotland and 43% of young people in England saw people like "them" represented in mainstream media.

36%

Of young people believe they see relationships
like theirs represented in mainstream media

When it comes to representation of relationships in mainstream media, the figures are even lower. Only about a third (36%) of young people believe they see relationships like theirs represented in mainstream media, with one in three feeling that their relationship is not represented. Gay/lesbian young people were more likely to feel their relationships were not represented in mainstream media (71%). This was followed by young people identifying their sexuality as "other" (43%) and bisexual young people (42%). Heterosexual young people were less likely to feel that mainstream media did not show relationships like theirs (28%).

Young people in “unconventional” relationships were more likely to believe they did not see relationships like theirs represented in mainstream media. In contrast, young people in romantic relationships were more likely to see their relationships represented in mainstream media.

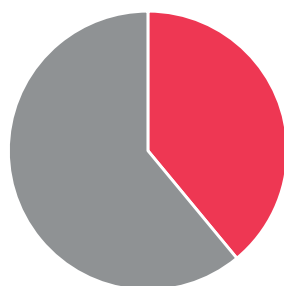
Proportion of young people seeing people like them in the mainstream media:



55% in romantic relationships



45% in casual relationships



39% in open relationships



39% in asexual relationships

In terms of representation of families in mainstream media, only 43% of young people believed mainstream media represented families like theirs, with a similar proportion (40%) feeling that families like theirs are not represented.

Supporting young people with relationship issues: Response from The Mix

While some young people feel mainstream media represents them, their relationships, and their families, a larger proportion of young people do not believe so.

67%

Of young people want to see more honest representations of the complexity of relationships within the mainstream media

Over two thirds (67%) of young people surveyed told us that they do want to see more honest representations of the complexity of relationships within mainstream media rather than idealised versions. Agreement with this statement was particularly strong among gays and lesbians (86%), bisexual young people (83%) and those identifying as “other” sexuality (86%); groups that feel particularly underrepresented.

It is important that young people see more varied representations of the relationships that exist within mainstream media as 44% of young people believe as a result they would feel more confident in themselves. This was particularly true for gay/ lesbian young people (81%), bisexuals (65%) and those identifying as “other” sexuality (66%), who were around twice as likely to agree with the statement than heterosexual young people (36%), many of whom feel well represented in the media.

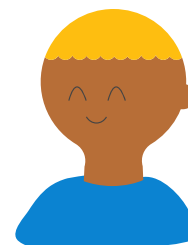
Young people in casual (51%), open (65%), and asexual (57%) relationships were also more likely to believe they would feel more confident if there were more varied representations of the relationships that exist shown in mainstream media.

Below are some quotes from young people who told us why it is important to have more varied representations of the relationships that exist shown in mainstream media:



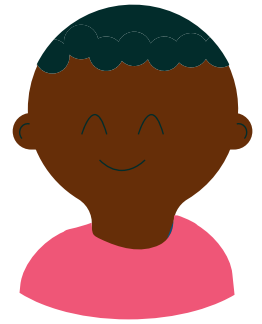
“Because the idealised versions give people false premises for what normal relationships are. Excluding the bad stuff just creates a fantasy people will end up being disappointed by in real life, since it’s not real. It’s so important to portray real life relationships so people can evaluate their own relationships to see if they are truly healthy or not.”

“People can relate and realise what you’re thinking is normal and not wrong. Also, it makes you feel less alone.”



“I have trouble understanding and expressing my emotions. Seeing media reflect things that I experience helps to give me the words I need to understand myself. The more media represents complex relationships, the more I can understand my own.”

"Life and relationships aren't perfect. Young people get a large majority of information from either school or media. If we're not educated on unhealthy relationship signs in school and idealised versions are pervasive in media, we are more likely to ignore the signs of an unhealthy relationship and perhaps normalise these. Good representation of LGBTQ+ identities also has the power to validate others in their identities and let LGBTQ+ individuals know they're not alone, and they're perfect the way they are. That they don't have to be a sassy best friend trope, or constantly a victim of bullying. That they're just normal people, with normal lives and interests."



"People expect the false to be true then are really upset when they realise its false."

In response to many young people not feeling that they, their families and their relationships are not represented in mainstream media, The Mix is working on our new relationships campaign to help represent and celebrate the many different kinds of relationships young people are having. The Mix is calling for more media platforms to take this issue seriously. We believe this will also improve family relationships by leading to greater levels of acceptance and understanding.

The campaign will be led by insights from young people via co-design sessions and the YouGov survey. It will include a youth-led social campaign and a range of article and video content offering expert guidance on navigating relationships, forming new ones and building self-acceptance and self-esteem. The campaign will also include relationship-focused discussions and group chats on The Mix's community, as well as a watch club featuring NOW content, where young people can discuss the relationship themes in shows such as Euphoria.



The Mix wants to see more diverse and complex relationships in the media that make young people feel their voices and experiences are heard.

The Mix are calling for the UK media to address the lack of representation of the reality of young people's relationships within mainstream film, TV and advertising. They want to see real diversity of relationships across all media channels, which will allow young people and their families to see their relationships portrayed as normal and healthy, leading to greater levels of acceptance and support.

The Mix also wants to point young people and those who care for them in the direction of existing services they can turn to for support on relationship issues, such as the counselling, helplines, support articles and peer-to-peer support that The Mix offers. The Mix wants young people to know they are there to listen and support them, no matter what kind of relationships they are having.

Resources for those seeking support with any relationship issue

The Mix

The Mix is a digital youth charity for under 25s, offering support on any and every issue through their multichannel helpline, counselling service, peer-to-peer community, 24-hour crisis messenger and online resources.

You can talk to the helpline team by calling 0808 808 4994 between 3pm - 12am, seven days a week (changing to 4pm - 11pm from 1st Feb 2022).

The Mix's website is www.themix.org.uk. You can contact crisis messenger by texting THE MIX to 85258.

Cool2talk

Cool2talk is an NHS-approved site that provides a safe space where young people aged 12-26 can get their anonymous questions answered. All questions posted to the site are answered by a trained, experienced worker within 24 hours. They are there for questions about your body, mental health, relationships and lots more.

Their website is <https://cool2talk.org/>

Click

Click offers an online chat service, relationship forums, and quizzes. Their Listening Room gives you the opportunity to offload in a private space. You can chat to one of the helpers, who have counselling backgrounds, for up to 15 minutes. The helpers support you to explore and understand what is going on in your relationship.

You can visit their website at www.clickrelationships.org.

Disrespect Nobody

Disrespect Nobody offers information and advice on healthy relationships and abuse. They cover topics like sexting, relationship abuse, consent, rape, and porn.

They do not have a helpline, but their website is www.disrespectnobody.co.uk

Think U Know

Deals with sex, relationships, and the internet. On their website, there are question and answers for anything from sex, blackmail, sexting, online dating, and LGBTQ+ questions.

Their website is www.thinkuknow.co.uk.

Relate

Relate provides relationship support for young people, individuals and families over the phone, by email, webchat and face to face counselling. There is a charge for some of their services. To book telephone counselling call 0300 100 1234. They are open Monday-Thursday from 8am-10pm, Fridays from 8am-6pm and Saturdays from 9am-5pm.

You can also email them at relate.enquiries@relate.org.uk. You can visit their

Respect Not Fear

Respect Not Fear is a website which provides information about domestic violence, self-esteem and healthy relationships. They provide access to other websites and helplines for further, direct support.

For more information, you can visit their website www.respectnotfear.co.uk

MeeTwo

MeeTwo is a free mobile app. You can get it on the App Store (Apple) or Google Play (Android). The MeeTwo app provides a safe and secure forum for teenagers wanting to discuss any issue affecting their lives.

You can anonymously get advice from experts or other teenagers going through similar experiences in areas such as mental health, self-harming, relationships and friendships. It's primarily geared towards young people aged between 13-19.

LGBT Foundation

LGBT Foundation run a national helpline and local support, a well-being clinic, pop-in service and counselling service. They offer support on a wide range of issues affecting the LGBT community.

Their helpline is open Monday to Friday 10am - 10pm and Saturday 10am - 6pm on 0345 330 30 30. You can also email them at info@lgbt.foundation.

For more information, you can visit www.lgbt.foundation