



Belonging in a Digital Age: Teens, Tech, & Third Places



California Partners
PROJECT

ĀURA



BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
CALIFORNIA ALLIANCE

FOSI
Family Online Safety Institute



SOCIAL
MEDIA
LAB
Stanford University

Credits

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Jennifer Siebel Newsom
California First Partner

“Our kids don’t just need protection from harm. They need meaningful places to belong.”

In a world where technology is evolving by the hour, everything we do as parents and caregivers begins with our children—and their safety, health, and sense of belonging—in mind.

Across California, I hear from parents and teens trying to navigate this reality. Young people are growing up in a digital landscape that moves faster than any generation before them. While technology has expanded innovation and opportunity, it has also reshaped how young people spend their time, how they build relationships, and how they experience community.

As a mom of four, I’ve watched how quickly screens can crowd out real-world connection. In this digital age, being a parent can sometimes feel like an impossible task. The tug-of-war over devices. The pull of endless scrolling. The challenge of creating spaces where kids can just be kids in a culture that monetizes attention.

But here’s what I also know: our kids don’t just need protection from harm. They need meaningful places to belong.

That’s why, in partnership with the California Partners Project, we launched Teens, Tech, & Third Places—to hear directly from young people and caregivers about the places beyond home and school where teens feel they can connect and relax together.

What we heard from young people was both sobering and hopeful.

Young people are not asking for more time online. They are asking for more opportunities to connect in real life. **In fact, more than half of teens surveyed say they wish they connected more with people in person.** They want places where they feel safe—places where, as one teen put it, they can just be themselves.

“The lesson is clear: When young people have welcoming places to gather, real-world relationships become easier to choose.”

At the same time, many teens told us that real-world connection is not always easy to access—with factors like cost, transportation, overscheduling, and a lack of teen-friendly places creating barriers to gathering with their peers.

When those opportunities are missing, technology fills the gap. **Nearly half of teens who use AI chatbots (47.8%) say they would use them less if there were more opportunities to connect in person.**

The lesson is clear: When young people have welcoming places to gather, real-world relationships become easier to choose.

Parks, libraries, youth centers, sports programs, arts spaces, and cultural institutions—these “third places” are essential infrastructure for youth well-being. Every young person deserves access to environments that allow them to do the hard and beautiful work of growing up: building friendships, exploring their interests, and discovering who they are beyond a device.

Our children have a right to a childhood that belongs to them—not to the platforms competing for their time.

They deserve vibrant places to gather—parks filled with movement and laughter, libraries buzzing with curiosity. They deserve places that remind them they matter, and communities that show up for them.

Investing in these spaces—and in the young people who need them—is how we put children and families first. In a digital world, that means investing not only in innovation, but also in the real-world places where young people connect, grow, and belong.

In partnership always,



California First Partner Jennifer Siebel Newsom

Co-founder, California Partners Project

About This Research

This brief draws on two complementary sources of data collected across California between September and November 2025. The youth survey gathered responses from 1,088 teens ages 13–18 on topics including social connection, loneliness, barriers to in-person interaction, and AI chatbot use. The caregiver findings come from six focus groups with 36 parents and caregivers, exploring family dynamics, safety perceptions, and the role of technology in teens' social lives. Together, these sources inform the five key findings and the Youth–Caregiver Disconnect insight boxes throughout this brief. For full methodology, see page 30.

Key Finding 1

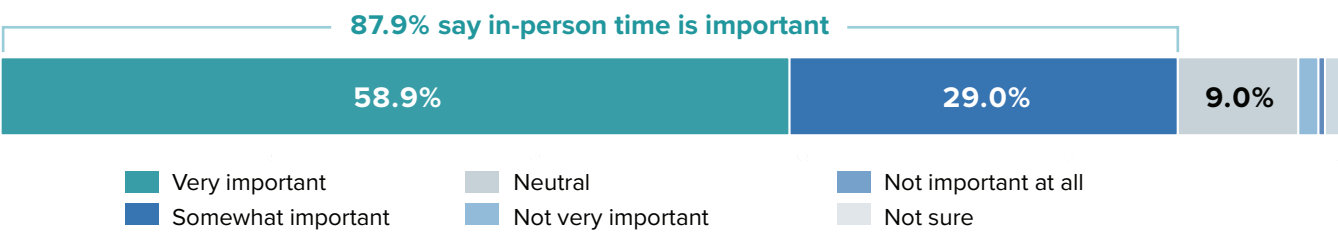
Teens Want More In-Person Connection — Even as Loneliness Persists

What Teens Told Us

- Nearly 9 in 10 teens (87.9%) say spending time with friends in person is important.
- More than half of teens (52.8%) wish they connected more in person with other people.
- Of teens surveyed, 69.9% prefer unstructured in-person hangouts—time spent together without a set plan or schedule—over organized activities (16.9%) or online interaction (11.5%).
- More than half of California teens (54.3%) report experiencing some degree of loneliness in the past month.
- Among teens who felt mostly lonely, more than half (52.8%) still hung out with friends in person doing something unstructured in the past week.

How important is it to you to spend time with friends in person?

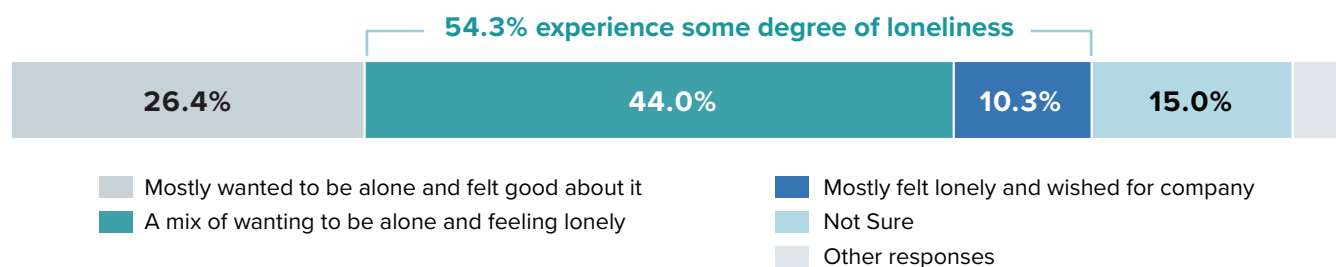
% of teens age 13-18



Note: n=1,035; excludes 53 blank entries and "No response."

In the past month, which have you felt more often?

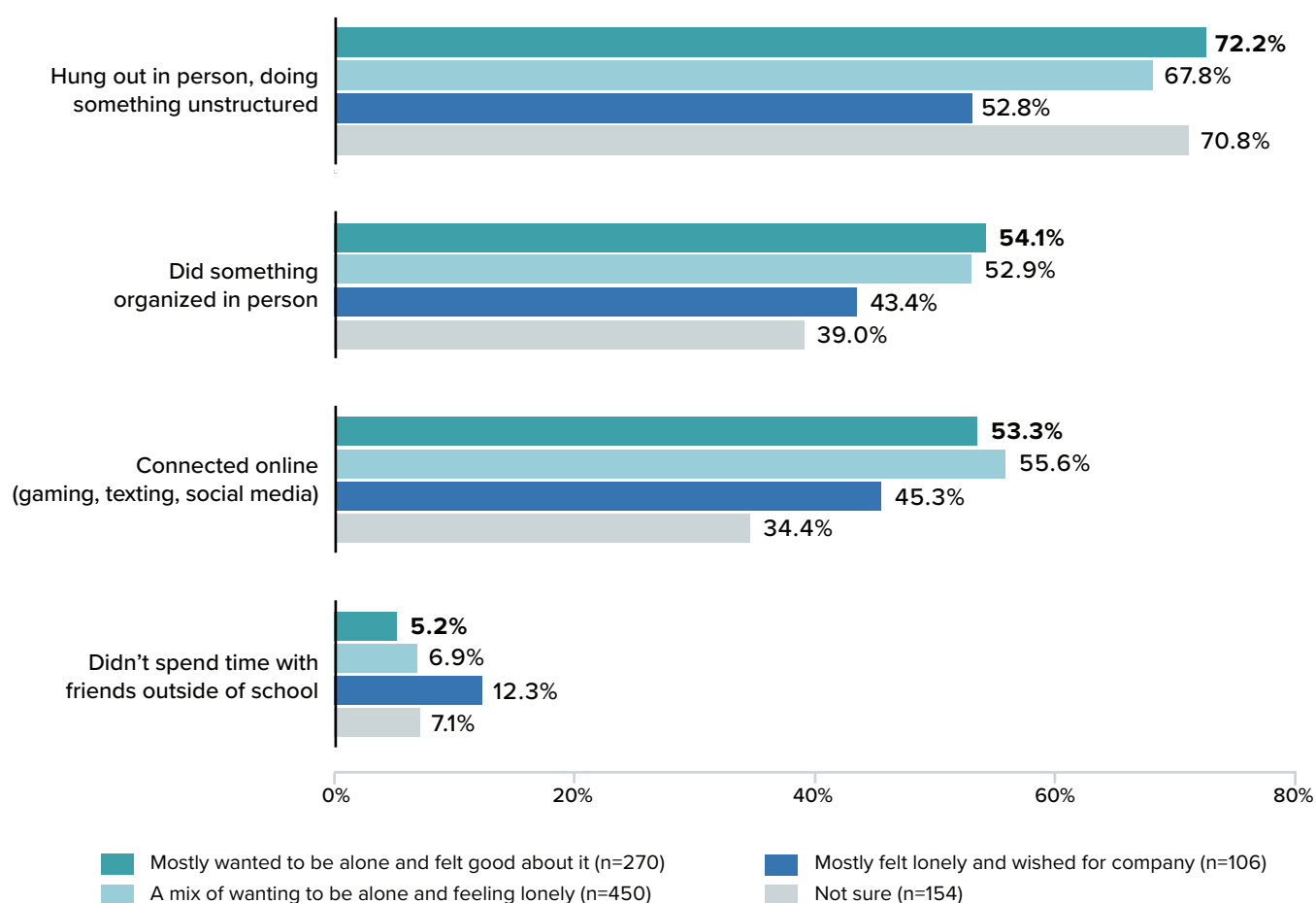
% of teens age 13-18



Note: n=1,030; excludes "No response" and other responses.

In the past week, how did you spend time with friends or peers outside of school?

% of teens age 13-18, by how they felt in the past month



Note: Select all that apply; percentages do not sum to 100%. Loneliness group responses include interpretable write-in entries in addition to the four core response options.

Voices From Teens

“ **I love people... When I’m alone... I wait for messages** and signs that people like to be around me. If there isn’t any, I feel lonely. It’s depressing and confusing to be by myself... Every step I take alone is ten I wish I could take with somebody else.

– Teen girl, age 14

“ **Sometimes after school I’m overstimulated** and my social battery is drained. So I like to be alone then, but on weekends if I don’t see any of my friends I can feel alone.

– Teen girl, age 14

“ **I feel lonely because a lot of the time I’m by myself** and people are busy with their own stuff. I don’t always get invited to hang out, so it feels like I’m on the outside looking in.

– Teen boy, age 18

“ **I think it’s really important to have more safe and welcoming spaces** where teens can connect in person. Many of us spend a lot of time online, so having real-life places to hang out, talk, and build friendships would help us feel more connected and supported.

– Teen boy, age 15

“ **I have known my online friends for 8 years now...** I’d rather meet in person and do fun things than talk through the phone and play video games, but it is what it is I guess.

– Teen boy, age 17

What It Means

Teens’ desire for in-person connection is strong and consistent across communities—rural, suburban, and urban. But loneliness persists even when teens are socially engaged—among teens who felt most lonely, more than half still spent time with friends in person in the past week. What’s missing is not always contact, it’s the quality and timing of connection: whether teens can gather when they need each other, not just on a schedule, and whether the environments available to them make them feel genuinely seen and included. Teens can be surrounded by peers and still feel lonely—presence is not the same as belonging.



Youth–Caregiver Disconnect

Loneliness Isn't Always Visible

Teens say

They can feel lonely, even when they're with friends.



Caregivers tend to focus on

What they can see, like safety risks, schedules, and screen time.

This gap can make loneliness difficult for adults to recognize or address. A teen may be showing up—at dinner, at a club, with friends—but still feel unseen. Checking in on how teens feel around others, not just whether they're participating, matters.

“Because sometimes, I feel like although I have people around me, I still feel lonely.”

– Teen girl, age 16

Key Finding 2

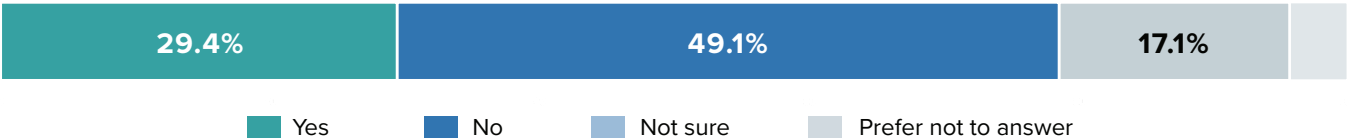
Belonging Matters More Than Buildings

What Teens Told Us

- Nearly 1 in 3 teens (29.4%) have stopped going somewhere because it didn't feel safe or welcoming.
- Teens who feel unwelcome are more likely to use AI chatbots, with 48.2% reporting usage.
- This trend is even stronger among teens who cite unsafe environments as a barrier, 57.3% of whom use AI chatbots.
- Of teens who say places aren't open when they're available, 47.1% use AI chatbots—above the overall baseline of 36.7%.
- By comparison, teens who say there are 'no places nearby' use AI chatbots at rates comparable to teens overall—34.0% versus a baseline of 36.7%.

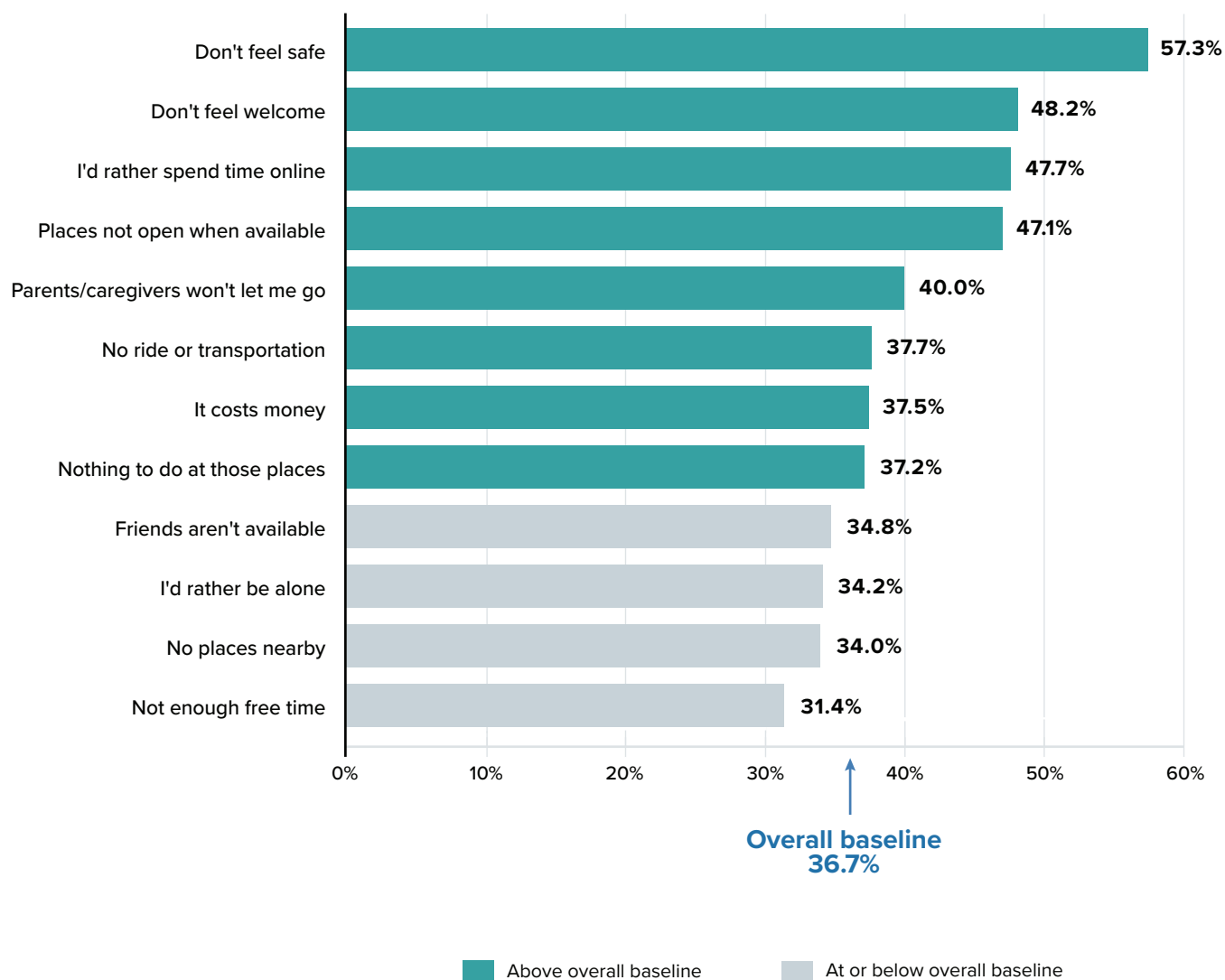
Have you ever stopped going to a place because it didn't feel safe or accepting of who you are?

% of teens age 13-18



Note: n=1,081; excludes 7 blank entries.

% of teens who use AI chatbots, by barrier to in-person connection



Note: Q: "What makes it hard for you to spend time in places in real life outside of home or school?"
Select all that apply. Barrier group n values range from 114 to 477.

Voices From Teens

“ **Sometimes it feels like there’s nowhere for teens to go, especially in the evenings.** More spaces that are open later and easy to get to would be awesome.

– Teen boy, age 18

“ **It [the ultimate hangout spot] would be free** and not give teens looks [of suspicion] when they walk in thinking they will mess around or ruin something.

– Teen girl, age 14

“ **A place feels like it’s for teens when it’s welcoming,** has fun things to do, and lets us hang out without feeling judged.

– Teen girl, age 15

“ **If places felt more welcoming and less strict,** more teens would actually show up and connect.

– Teen boy, age 18

“ **When it’s welcoming to everyone,** no matter your vibe or friend group. Not just for popular kids.

– Teen girl, age 17

What It Means

Teens who report emotional barriers to in-person connection—feeling unsafe or unwelcome—also report AI chatbot use at notably higher rates than teens who cite a lack of nearby places. The gap between these groups is striking. It suggests that physical accessibility alone doesn’t explain the pattern: belonging appears to play a larger role.



Youth–Caregiver Disconnect

Teens and Caregivers Define Safety Differently

Teens ask

Do I feel accepted and comfortable here?



Caregivers ask

Is this space physically safe and supervised?

A space can feel practically safe to a caregiver and unwelcoming to a teen at the same time. Places that feel physically secure but socially exclusive won't necessarily keep teens coming back, and teens who don't return are more likely to turn to digital alternatives instead.

“[When I was growing up] I used to go outside and play for hours before coming home. But now, my children, I don’t even allow them... we have so many horrible stories out there... safety [is a concern].”

— Mother of 3, Los Angeles area

“I want to go out more, but my parents worry about safety and it limits where I can go.”

— Teen boy, age 17

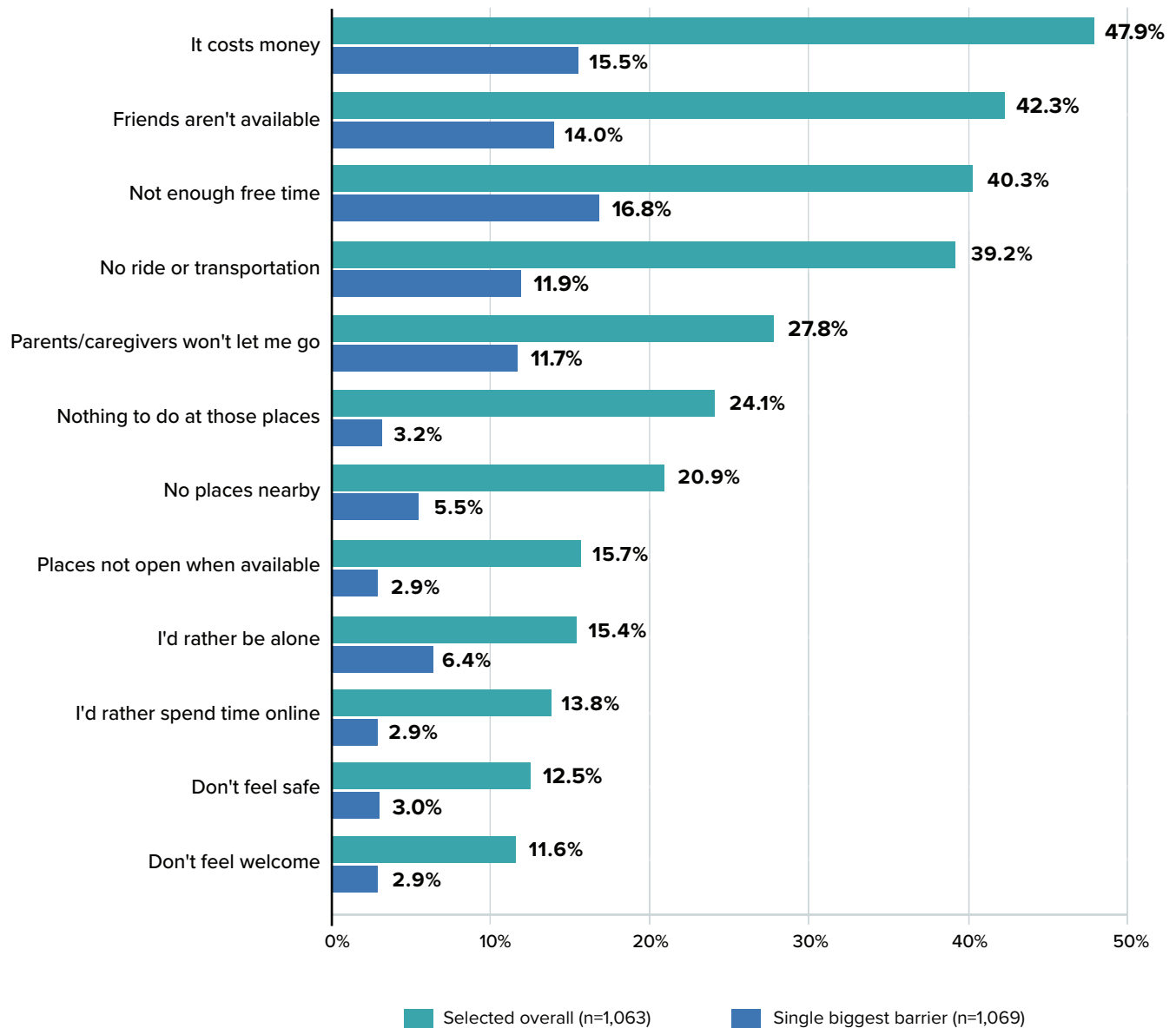
Key Finding 3

Everyday Barriers Shape When and Where Teens Can Connect

What Teens Told Us

- Cost is the most widely experienced barrier to spending time in person, cited by 47.9% of teens.
- Lack of free time (40.3%) and lack of transportation (39.2%) also limit teens' ability to connect in person.
- More than 1 in 4 teens (27.8%) say their parents or caregivers won't let them go out.
- When asked to name their single biggest barrier, no one obstacle dominates—the top response, 'not enough free time,' was cited by 16.8% of teens, followed by 'it costs money' at 15.4%.
- Suburban teens are twice as likely as their urban and rural peers to name not having enough free time as their single biggest barrier—26.3%, compared to 13.7% and 11.5% respectively.
- Among rural teens, feeling unwelcome is cited as the single biggest barrier at the same rate as parents/caregivers won't let me go (13.1% each)—and at six times the rate of urban and suburban teens (2.3% and 2.1%).

What makes it hard for you to spend time in places in real life outside of home or school?



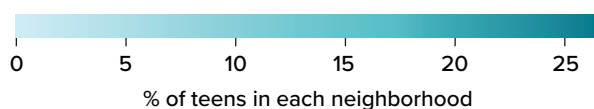
Note: Percentages for the multi-select question do not sum to 100%.

KEY FINDING 3

What is the single biggest barrier that stops you from spending time in places outside of home or school?

% of teens age 13-18 by neighborhood type

	Urban (n=432)	Suburban (n=334)	Rural* (n=61)
Not enough free time	13.7%	26.3%	11.5%
It costs money	21.3%	11.4%	9.8%
Friends aren't available	13.7%	16.2%	16.4%
No ride / transportation	13.4%	12.6%	11.5%
Parents won't let me go	10.6%	12.9%	13.1%
I'd rather be alone	5.6%	4.5%	3.3%
No places nearby	4.2%	5.1%	4.9%
I don't feel safe	4.9%	2.4%	1.6%
Nothing to do at those places	3.7%	3.6%	3.3%
I don't feel welcome	2.3%	2.1%	13.1%
Places aren't open	3.5%	1.8%	4.9%
I'd rather spend time online	3.2%	1.2%	6.6%



Note: Based on valid question responses. *Rural n is small; interpret with caution.

Voices From Teens

“ **I don’t live very close to my friends,** which causes fewer hangouts because it’s hard to find a place in between. There’s also the fact that most of the places available for us to hang out cost money that we don’t have or don’t want to spend.

– Teen girl, age 16

“ **Sometimes it’s hard to find a time everyone’s free,** and transportation can be an issue too.

– Teen girl, age 15

“ **I think there need to be more safe and affordable places** where teens can hang out in person instead of always being online. Real-life connection is important, but sometimes there just aren’t enough spaces made for us.

– Teen boy, age 17

“ **A lot of teens want to hang out in person,** but there aren’t many places that actually feel made for us. Most spots either cost money, close early, or have rules that make it hard to just relax.

– Teen boy, age 16

“ **There aren’t many safe or comfortable places** just for teens to hang out and be themselves.

– Teen girl, age 14

“ **I have had less time** for hanging out than I would like.

– Teen girl, age 17

“ **It’s really hard when my friends can’t drive,** and also because we have so much homework.

– Teen boy, age 17

What It Means

Teens’ opportunities to connect in person are shaped by structural and cultural constraints. Cost, transportation, lack of free time, parental rules, and peers’ availability each play a role. Several of these barriers reflect broader shifts in how young people’s time and movement are organized, limiting not just access to places but also the everyday circumstances that make gathering possible. When barriers persist, teens don’t describe giving up on connection—they describe finding it online instead.



Youth–Caregiver Disconnect

Independence Is Negotiated

Teen experience

Independence often depends on adult permission.



Caregiver experience

Rules, supervision, and monitoring are used to manage safety and risk.

These dynamics mean that even well-designed third places can go unused if families don't trust them or teens can't get there. Practitioners and policymakers need to address the full journey—not just whether a space exists, but whether families feel comfortable enough to say yes.

“[With] iPhones and iPads, you track your kids’ locations. So, if something’s [wrong], we will know where they’re at exactly, at all times.”

— Parent of 5, Central Valley

“Sometimes... my parents won’t let me hang out [with] my friends so I just hang out in my room alone.”

— Teen girl, age 13

Key Finding 4

For Some Teens, Digital Alternatives Feel Safer Than People

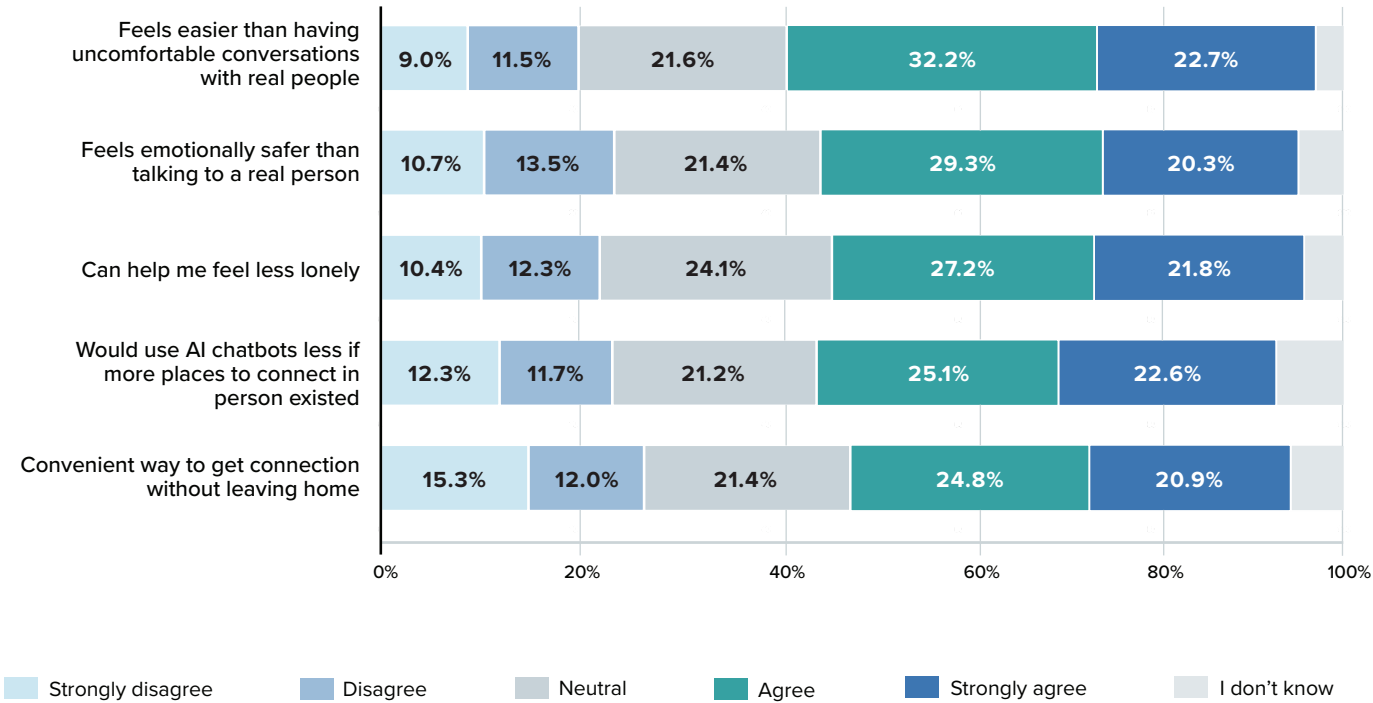
What Teens Told Us

- Of teens who use AI chatbots, 49.6% say talking to an AI chatbot feels emotionally safer than talking to another person.
- This reliance isn't inevitable: nearly half of all teens who use AI chatbots (47.8%) say they would use them less if more opportunities to connect in person existed.
- Teens who feel mostly lonely are significantly more likely to use AI chatbots—48.1% compared to 36.7% of teens overall.
- Among mostly lonely teens who use AI chatbots, 41.2% say they turned to one because no one was available to talk to them.

KEY FINDING 4

Based on your personal experience, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about AI chatbots or companions?

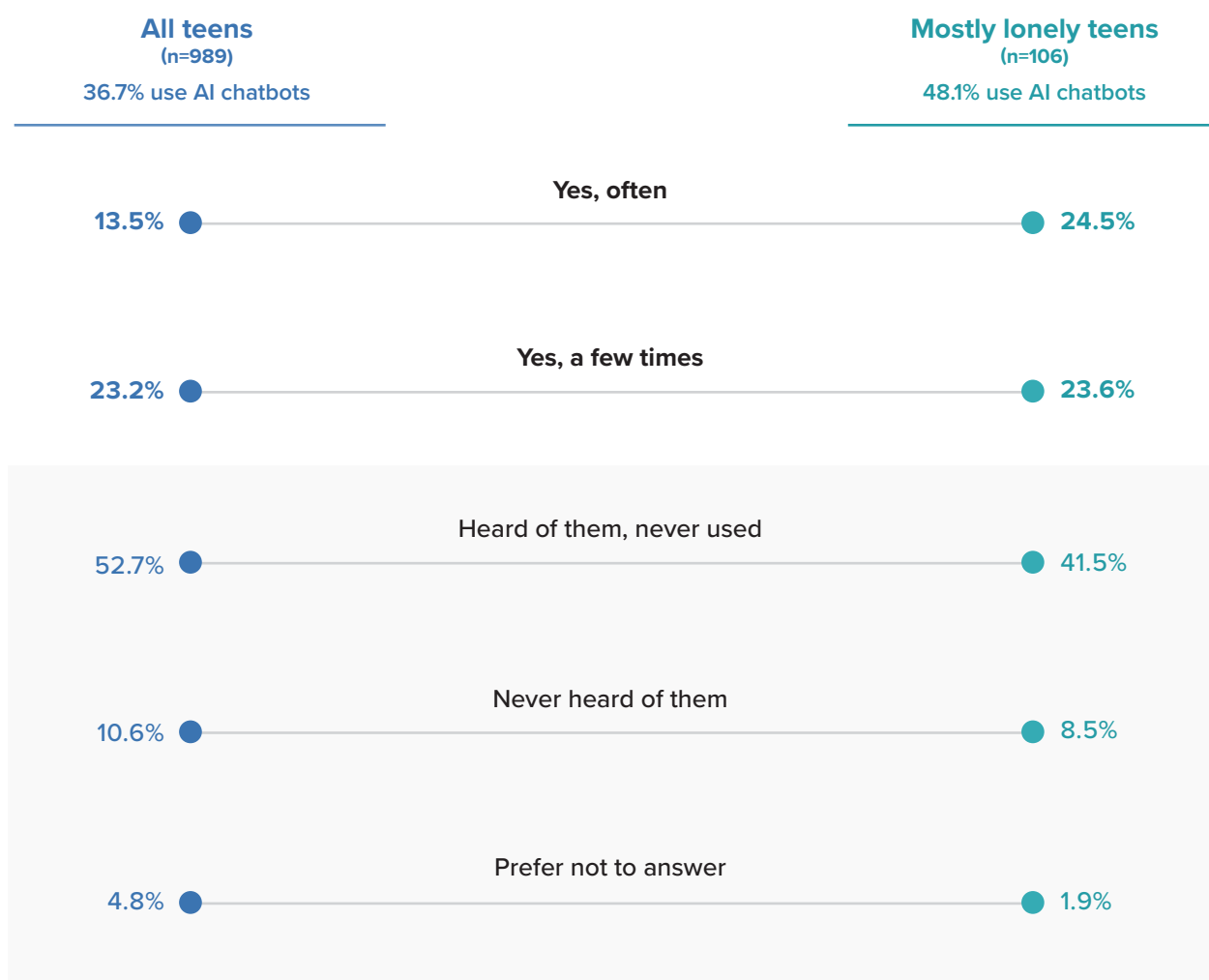
% of teens age 13-18 who have used an AI chatbot



Note: Based on valid responses among AI users (n=355-359). "I don't know" responses ranged from 3.1% to 7.0% across statements.

Have you ever used an AI chatbot or companion bot for friendship or to get social advice?

% of teens age 13-18, by loneliness experience in the past month



Note: n=989 (all teens, excludes blank entries and "No response"). n=106 (mostly lonely teens). Percentages based on valid responses.

Voices From Teens

“ **I think that every kid knows talking to AI is bad**, but the fact that it is so normalized makes it very easy to access, and in a world where it is harder and more unsafe to meet friends, as well as people being more judgmental online, AI is simply a way to release strong feelings.

– Teen girl, age 16

“ **Real-life connection is crucial for teens**, especially in an era where digital interactions often dominate.

– Teen boy, age 18

“ **Sometimes teens resort to being online out of fear of interacting with others** and possibly with the ease that pulling out a phone and scrolling gives.

– Teen girl, age 18

“ **Technology has impacted me** and I mostly get connected to my social media community, people see it as if [I] am not friendly with people because [I] am always online, so it scares [away] physical friendship.

– Teen girl, age 15

“ **It's hard to make connections with people** when you can just be on your phone.

– Teen, non-binary/non-conforming, age 16

What It Means

When teens turn to AI chatbots or companions, it is often because human connection itself feels like a risk—not simply because no one is around. For a significant share of teens, talking to an AI feels easier and emotionally safer than talking to a real person. This points to something loneliness statistics alone don't fully capture: some teens are not just isolated, they are guarded. Teens who describe in-person connection as emotionally out of reach, not just logistically unavailable, report higher rates of AI chatbot use. For these teens, technology appears to be serving a different role than simple convenience.

Key Finding 5

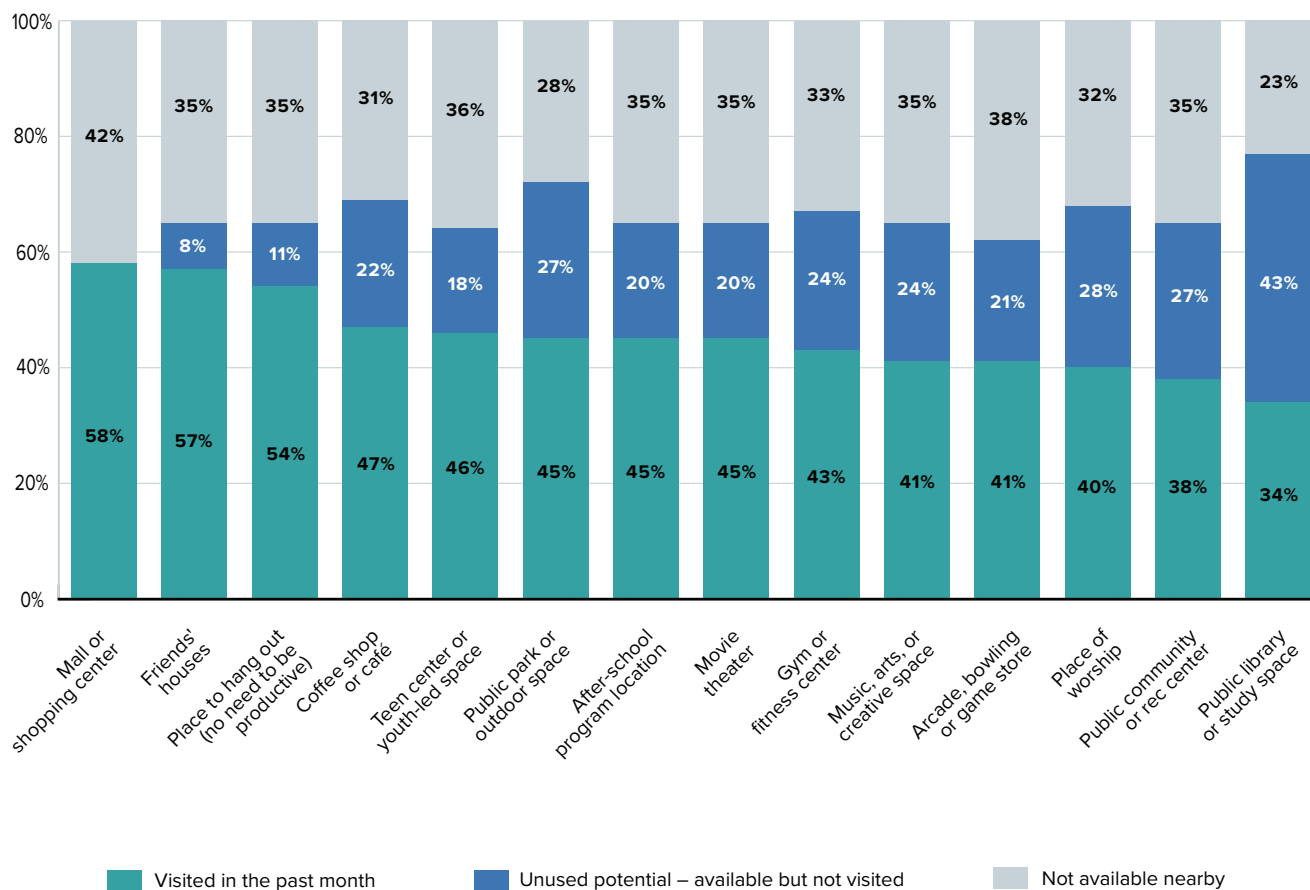
When Places Meet Teens' Needs, Teens Engage

What Teens Told Us

- Malls (58%), friends' houses (57%), and unstructured hangout spaces (54%) are the three most-visited place types—each visited by more than half of teens in the past month.
- Public libraries have the highest unused potential of any place type—43% of teens have one available but haven't visited in the past month.
- When asked what makes a place feel like it's for them, teens rank free or low-cost first (59.8%), followed by friends being there (56.1%) and feeling safe (54.7%).
- Nearly half of teens (49.2%) say food is an essential element of a teen-friendly place—a finding echoed consistently in teens' own descriptions of their ideal hangout spot.

KEY FINDING 5

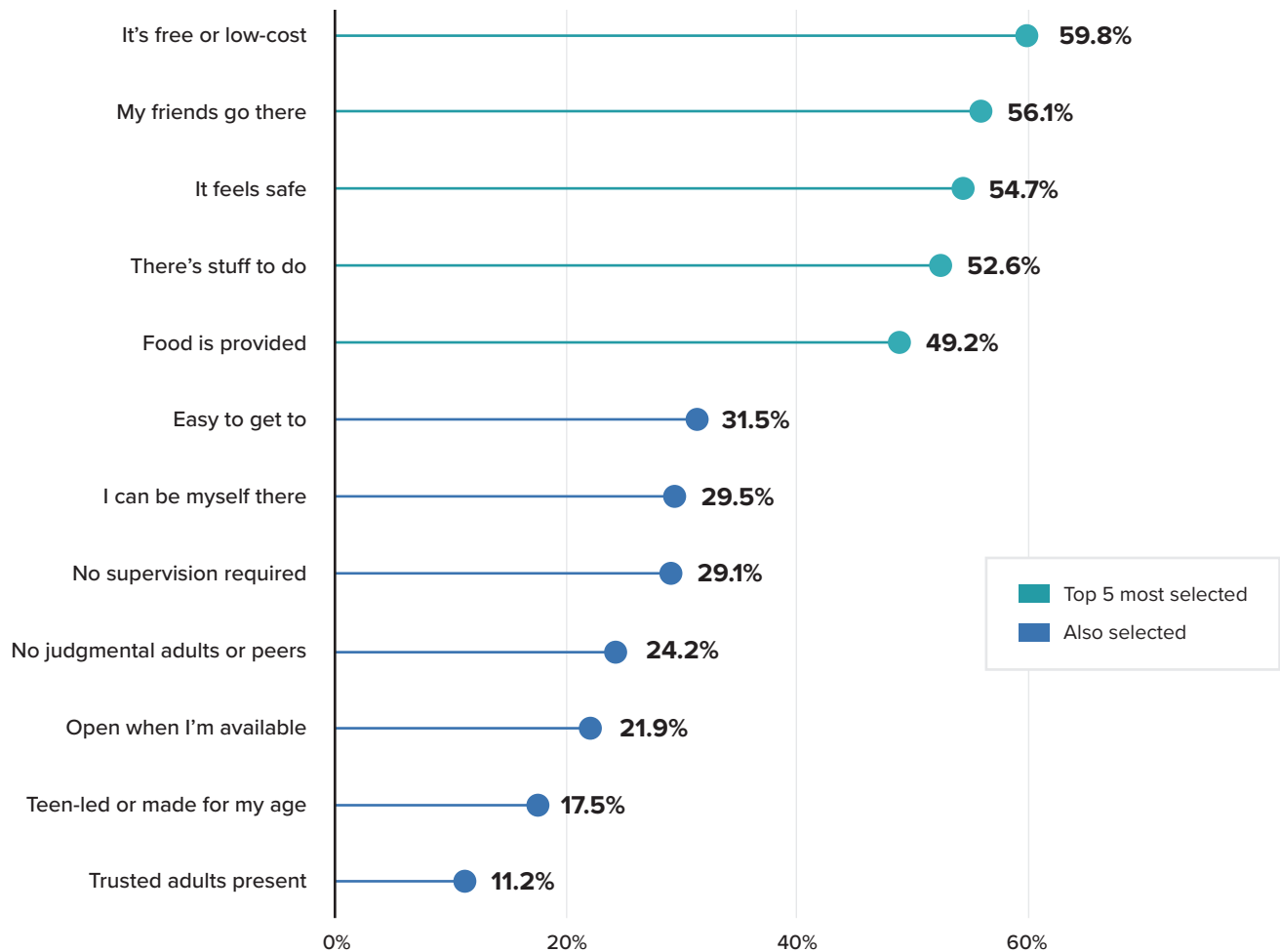
Which places are available near where you live — and which have you spent time at in the past month?



Note: "Not available nearby" includes teens who did not select either "places near me" or "places I've been in the past month" for a given place type (n=776-1,015). Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

Which of the following are most important for making a place feel like it is for teens?

% of teens age 13-18 – select up to 5



Note: Percentages do not sum to 100%. n=1,077; excludes 11 blank entries.

Voices From Teens

“ **Teen spaces have a tendency to be unwelcoming** when they are too structured and adult-led—it shouldn’t feel like summer camp. That’s why malls are so appealing!

– Teen girl, age 18

“ **It would take a lot of work and funding,** but I think a designated teen center in every town would really change some core habits or social traits of us teenagers, and it fills a void of social connection that everyone craves but can’t really seem to find.

– Teen boy, age 14

“ **There aren’t many safe and fun spots for teens to meet up in my area.** Most places close early and are meant for adults, so I don’t have many options.

– Teen boy, age 18

“ **Food is a must because we get hungry all the time after school,** and most teens don’t eat a lot, so we are very hungry.

– Teen boy, age 13

“ **It feels like a teen space when adults respect our space** and trust us to hang out responsibly. Having fun activities and a relaxed vibe helps too.”

– Teen girl, age 18

“ **[If I could design the ultimate hangout spot, it would have]** an area where you can just chill and talk without it being overwhelming.

– Teen girl, age 16

“ **Some teens feel left out because everything costs money.** Free or low cost spaces matter.

– Teen girl, age 17

What It Means

When third places are free or low-cost, informal, and welcoming, teens report using them. The presence of friends matters nearly as much as cost—a reminder that place and belonging are inseparable. Cost functions as both a practical and a cultural barrier—teens’ own words suggest that even when it doesn’t prevent teens from socializing, the expectation of spending money can make third places feel less accessible than they are. When cost is a barrier, teens can get the message that public spaces weren’t designed for them, while low-cost spaces with food available send the opposite signal.

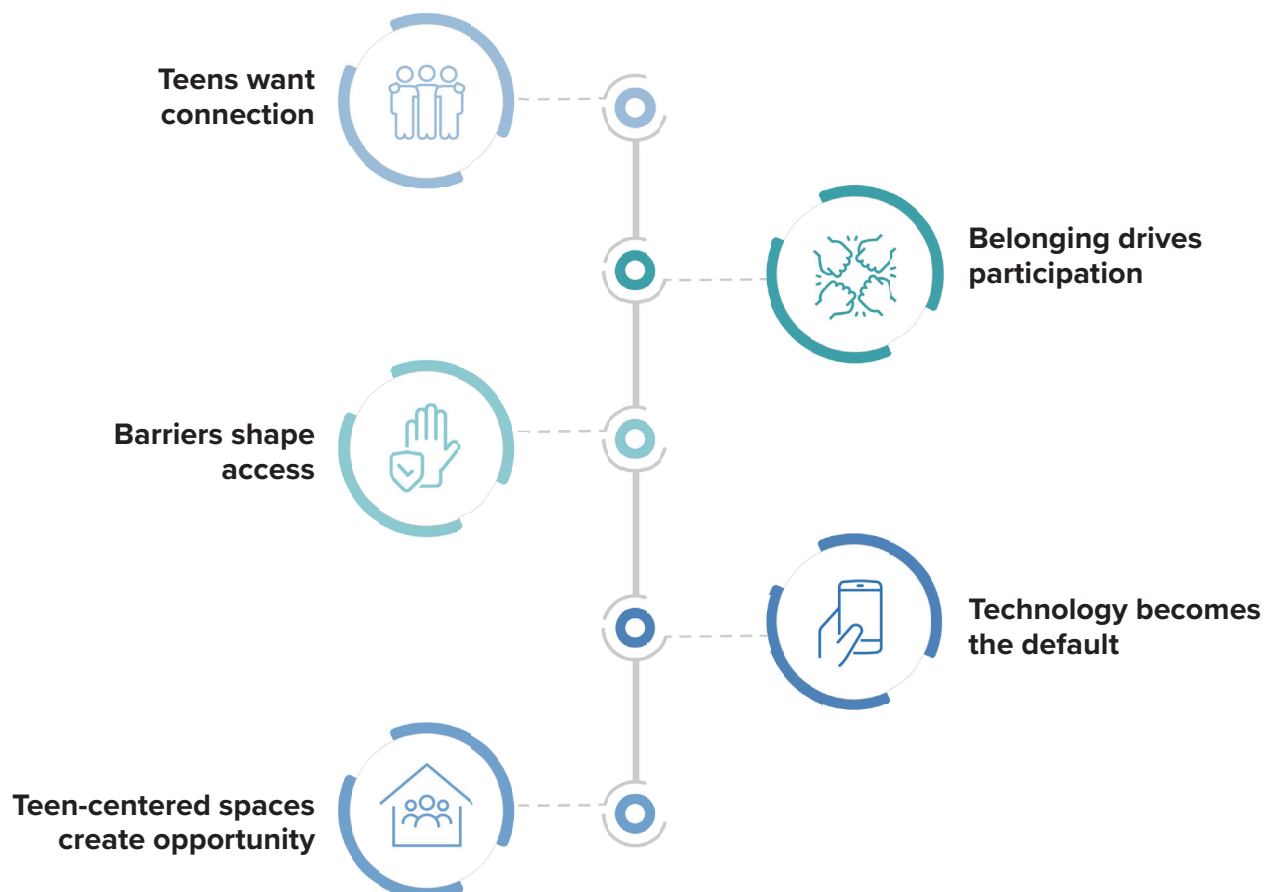
What the Findings Reveal

Teens want real-world connection—and the data show they're hungry for more. When casual, youth-centered spaces exist, teens tell us they use them enthusiastically, often socializing spontaneously. But those opportunities aren't evenly available. Cost, transportation, and places that feel unwelcoming or overly controlled can all limit when and where young people gather, a pattern teens describe as shaping whether they choose in-person connection or default to what's always available online.

Teens and caregivers are often responding rationally to the same constrained environment, but experiencing its tradeoffs differently. Caregivers are managing real concerns about safety and independence. Teens are navigating spaces that may not be designed with them in mind. Both are doing their best within systems that are ripe for reinvention in a digital age.

The question isn't whether teens want connection—they clearly do. The question is whether communities are providing the environments where **connection**, **safety**, and **independence** can coexist. When those conditions are in place, teens participate. Third places can offer something that devices and screens structurally cannot: genuine autonomy, unmediated social experience, and freedom from algorithmic curation and constant surveillance.

The following recommendations outline how leaders, investors, practitioners, and families can help build those conditions.



Recommendations

FOR POLICYMAKERS AND INVESTORS

- **Invest in social infrastructure as a public health strategy.** With growing concerns about youth mental health and technology, third places are not discretionary amenities—they are a meaningful alternative for teens who might otherwise turn to AI chatbots or experience isolation.
- **Prioritize transportation access and free programming.** Nearly 40% of teens cite transportation as a barrier and cost is the most widely reported constraint. Addressing both would reduce two of the barriers teens most commonly describe.
- **Fund belonging, not just buildings—and require youth co-design.** Teens who report not feeling safe or welcome use AI companions at significantly higher rates than teens whose main barrier is a lack of nearby options. Investment criteria should include standards for inclusive environments and meaningful youth collaboration at every stage—from planning through programming—not as an add-on, but as a condition of funding.

FOR PRACTITIONERS AND YOUTH-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

- **Create drop-in, unstructured time—and provide food.** Nearly 70% of teens prefer informal hangouts over organized activities, and food consistently ranks among the top elements teens say make a space feel like it's for them. Over-scheduling, requiring registration, or expectations for teens to spend money may inadvertently reduce the connection teens value most.
- **Treat belonging as an operational priority.** Nearly 3 in 10 teens have stopped going somewhere because it didn't feel safe or welcoming. How staff engage and whether social dynamics feel inclusive matters as much as whether the place exists.
- **Build trust with families, not just teens.** More than 1 in 4 teens say a parent or caregiver won't let them go out. Consistent communication, introductory visits, and family engagement strategies can help caregivers feel confident enough to say yes, and keep saying yes.
- **Involve teens in shaping the places they use.** When teens help design programming, set norms, and have a voice in how a space operates, they are more likely to show up and more likely to bring others. Co-design isn't just good practice—it's what makes belonging possible.
- **Recognize AI chatbot use as a signal.** Teens who feel emotionally safer talking to an AI than a person are telling us something. Youth workers are well-positioned to offer the low-stakes, non-judgmental relationships that can help in-person connection feel less risky over time.

FOR PARENTS AND FAMILIES

- **Make space for unstructured time with friends.** Casual time at home, outside, or in the community is how most teens prefer to build relationships. Saying yes to hangouts—even last-minute ones—is one of the most straightforward ways caregivers can support their teen’s social life.
- **Know that loneliness can be hard to see.** More than half of teens report some loneliness in the past month, and most were still spending time with friends. Asking how teens feel in their social environments, not just whether they’re getting out, opens more honest conversations.
- **Approach AI use with curiosity.** Many teens use AI chatbots when they feel emotionally safer or when no one is available. These moments are worth understanding—they can spark conversations about what teens need from the people in their lives.
- **Use your voice in the community.** Families have real influence over local decisions. Showing up to planning meetings, supporting library hours, and advocating for free youth programming helps build the kinds of places teens are asking for.

Methodology

YOUTH SURVEY

The youth survey was designed and analyzed in partnership with Aura, with data collection conducted from September to November 2025. The online survey was administered in English and included responses from 1,125 adolescents ages 13–18 across California. After removing incomplete or invalid responses, the final analytical sample consisted of 1,088 respondents.

Participants were recruited through California Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs (67%) and additional community organizations, schools, and youth networks (33%). An oversample ensured representation from diverse communities and geographic regions across the state.

The survey examined teens’ experiences with community connection, third places, loneliness, barriers to in-person interaction, and AI chatbot use for social connection.

Sample demographics:

- **Age:** 13 (19%); 14 (13%); 15 (18%); 16 (22%); 17 (20%); 18 (7%); No response (1%)
- **Gender:** Girl/woman (51%); Boy/man (44%); Non-binary/other identities (4%)
- **Race/Ethnicity:** Hispanic/Latino/a/x (31%); White (22%); Multiracial (17%); Asian/Asian American (12%); Black/African American (12%); American Indian/Alaska Native (2%); Prefer not to say/Other (4%)
- **Location:** Urban (41%); Suburban (33%); Rural (6%); Prefer not to say/other (20%)
- **School type:** Public (76%); Private (9%); Charter (7%); Other (8%)
- **Identity characteristics:** LGBTQIA+ (12%); Bilingual/Multilingual (23%); Immigrant/First Generation (11.7%); Neurodivergent (6%)

YOUTH-ENGAGED RESEARCH DESIGN

Prior to fielding the survey, the research team collaborated with 24 youth advisors, ages 15–25, from 22 ZIP codes across California to co-design the survey instrument. These youth advisors provided feedback on question clarity, relevance, and emerging issues affecting teen life.

Following data collection, the same cohort participated in collaborative sessions to review early findings and help contextualize results, ensuring the analysis reflected teens’ lived experiences and perspectives.

CAREGIVER FOCUS GROUPS

In October and November 2025, CPP hosted six virtual focus groups (60 minutes each) engaging 36 caregivers from 20 unique ZIP codes across California, including participants from the Bay Area, Central and South Los Angeles, East Fresno, Orange County, and the Middletown Rancheria of Pomo Indians in Northern California.

Participants were recruited through community partners including [California Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs](#), [Stanford Center for Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing](#), [Breaking Barriers](#), and [Pause 4 Peace](#).

Discussions followed a semi-structured facilitation guide exploring parenting across generations, access to third places, barriers to in-person connection, family dynamics, and the role of technology. Data sources included audio recordings, transcripts, moderator notes, and optional post-session surveys.

DATA ANALYSIS NOTES

All survey questions were optional. Percentages for each question are based on teens who answered that question. Responses of 'Not sure' and 'Prefer not to answer' are included as valid responses; blank entries are excluded. For the AI chatbot use question, 'Prefer not to answer' responses are excluded from the denominator, as this is a skip-logic question where non-substantive responses do not indicate AI use behavior. For analyses comparing subgroups, only teens who answered all relevant questions are included. Selected differences between subgroups were tested for statistical significance at $p < .05$. The survey and focus groups are part of a broader mixed-methods research initiative examining teens, technology, and third places across California.



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