



# THE MENTAL HEALTH ODYSSEY OF GENERATION Z

## Navigating Mental Health in Generation Z

In recent years, mental health has become a prominent topic of discussion, particularly among Generation Z, those born between 1997 and 2012. The experiences and challenges are distinct within this generation, largely due to the rapid societal changes, evolving psychological insights, and philosophical shifts they've witnessed. While their experiences are distinct and often challenging, understanding how these factors intersect is crucial to appreciating the immense strength and potential within this generation.

### The Societal Influence

#### *The Digital Age and Its Toll*

The constant presence of social media can lead to comparison culture, where individuals measure their self-worth against curated versions of others' lives. Influencers dedicate their life to creating the picture perfect life while also hinting at some struggles. This creates the illusion that they relate to everyone when in reality most Gen Z kids are struggling to get by.

As an older member of Gen Z, I didn't get my first smartphone until I was sixteen. I grew up with a GameBoy and played PS2 in the basement while my parents dealt with the 2008 recession. Now, I see the immense stress my peers face as they navigate the job market, rising taxes, and stagnant incomes. Many of my friends can't afford to pay rent alone and have to live with partners or friends. In addition to navigating the job market, rising taxes, and reduced income rates. The economic reality is a far cry from the ideals we were sold.

We are told that by the time we hit our early and late twenties we should live alone, go travel the world, build our career, curate our hobbies, spend time with friends and discover who we truly are. In reality, most of us can't afford to do any of those things, nor do we have the time or mental energy after clocking out of a toxic job that barely pays enough to survive. This leads to an extensive amount of debt right at the start of adulthood. To put it in perspective, the average amount of credit card debt for older Gen Z (ages 18-27) is around \$3,400. This number, updated in early 2025, will likely increase significantly in the coming months with rising taxes and inflation. This figure doesn't even include student debt, car loans, or personal loans.

In contrast, younger Gen Z members have always known life with a smartphone and probably had one at the age of ten. This has led to lower attention spans and high anxiety due to fast media and entertainment. Knowing events and news updates about places all over the world is not how the human brain is wired. Humans are designed to succeed in small communities with collectivism as the focus.

The digital age is creating a whole generation of anxious, depressed, socially aware, angry, motivated, and dedicated kids who want to improve society but are seeing no progress. Many cope by doomscrolling through funny videos to distract themselves from the harsh reality.

### *Social Justice and Activism*

This generation is also characterized by its deep engagement with social justice issues. Gen Z is more likely than previous generations to advocate for equality and environmental sustainability. While these efforts are commendable, the emotional toll of confronting systemic issues and the pressure to enact change can be overwhelming. Society's response to these challenges will shape how Gen Z balances activism with self-care.

## Psychological Insights

### *Increased Awareness and Acceptance*

Psychologically, there is a greater awareness and acceptance of mental health issues among Gen Z. This openness reduces stigma, encouraging individuals to seek help and discuss their experiences. However, the increased prevalence of mental health diagnoses in this age group also raises questions about the role of environmental factors and whether current diagnostic criteria adequately capture the nuances of modern stressors.

### *The Role of Resilience*

Psychologists emphasize the importance of resilience in maintaining mental health. For Gen Z, fostering resilience involves developing coping strategies to handle stress, building supportive networks, and nurturing a mindset that embraces challenges as opportunities for growth. Educational institutions and communities play a pivotal role in providing resources that bolster these skills. Gen Z has turned to the internet for a sense of community, finding validation by connecting with others who feel the same way. The mindset for embracing challenges varies widely among individuals and depends on their environment.

Some individuals strive for equality by attending rallies and signing petitions, while others embrace challenges by continuing to go to work and showing up for their loved ones. Still others might completely dissociate and minimize their reality. There is no right or wrong way for a person to cope when their personal rights feel threatened.

So, disregard how others portray themselves and how they may seem to be thriving. Instead, focus on yourself. This could be as simple as taking a break from the news, taking a bath, reading a book, starting a new hobby, or taking a nap.

When life (and the government) feel out of your control and it seems like everything is working against you, take a deep breath. Hug your partner, pet, friend, or family member and know that you will get through it one day at a time.

# Philosophical Reflections

## *The Search for Meaning*

Philosophically, Generation Z is often in pursuit of meaning and authenticity. The existential questions—"Who am I?" and "What is my purpose?"—are profound and can either ground individuals or lead to existential anxiety. Unfortunately, this pursuit is often met with stress from older generations who had a different path in their twenties and now judge our every move, telling us we need to find a significant purpose by a certain timeframe. On the bright side, Gen Z has a higher emotional intelligence and overall intelligence than any generation before. That is known as the Flynn Effect.

Encouraging philosophical exploration through education and dialogue can help Gen Z find personal significance and existential fulfillment. While the modern economy and society can be stressing and overwhelming, working to find what is fulfilling to you drastically reduces anxiety in individuals.

This is why I believe in the power of philosophical exploration to help individuals look deeper inside themselves to find their place within society, psychology, and philosophy.

## *Ethical Considerations*

Gen Z faces ethical dilemmas unique to their generation, such as privacy concerns and the impact of artificial intelligence. These challenges require a philosophical understanding of ethics and morality, prompting Gen Z to question not only how they interact with technology but also how society should evolve to protect individual rights. A recent cause for concern is the rise of AI video technology. While Gen Z can often tell what is AI, older generations may not be able to. As these videos become more realistic over the next few years, there may come a time when they are used for harassment against individuals.

# The Reciprocal Impact

It's important to note that Gen Z's approach to mental health also influences broader societal, psychological, and philosophical landscapes. Their advocacy for mental health awareness drives policy changes and influences therapeutic practices. Furthermore, their philosophical inquiries challenge traditional norms, prompting society to reconsider what it means to lead a fulfilling life. Gen Z may be known as the digital, anxious, and "sensitive" generation, but they are also dedicated to standing up for what is right, no matter the consequences. The strength and resilience of this generation are truly remarkable and speaks for itself.

# Contact Information

Thank you for reading this exploration of Generation Z in modern society. If you would like to discuss these ideas further or have any questions, please feel free to reach out.

I welcome feedback and diverse perspectives as I continually seek opportunities for growth and new insights. Please ensure all comments are respectful, particularly when offering critiques or dissenting opinions.

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