

Research: Young People in Cyprus, Emotions and Relationships

1. Why is it sometimes difficult for young people to express their feelings?

For many young people in Cyprus, expressing emotions can be difficult because emotional openness is still influenced by social expectations, family culture, fear of judgment, and mental health stigma. Some young people may worry that talking about sadness, anxiety, stress, insecurity, or relationship problems will make them look weak, dramatic, or unable to cope. This can lead them to hide their feelings, especially in front of peers or family members.

Recent research on youth mental health in Cyprus shows that emotional well-being is a growing concern. The UNICEF and Ministry of Health policy brief *Young Minds Matter: Mental Health Support for Youth and Children in Cyprus* highlights that adolescent mental health has become a priority in Europe and Cyprus, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, which intensified existing challenges. It also notes that many mental health difficulties begin early: up to 50% of mental disorders start before age 14, and 75% of major mental health disorders begin before age 25.

The 2021/22 HBSC Cyprus survey also shows that older adolescents, especially 15-year-olds, report higher levels of anxiety, nervousness, and feeling overwhelmed compared with younger students. This suggests that as young people grow older, academic pressure, social expectations, identity questions, and future uncertainty may make emotional expression more difficult.

Another important factor is that young people often do not immediately seek professional help. In the Cyprus Youth Barometer, 38% of young people said they felt a need for psychological support. Among them, 64% turned to acquaintances or friends, 43% turned to family or parents, and only about 2 out of 10 were referred to mental health professionals. This shows that young people often rely first on informal support networks rather than formal services.

2. Main reasons young people may hide their emotions

Young people may avoid expressing their feelings because they are afraid of being misunderstood, rejected, judged, or not taken seriously. Some may also not have the vocabulary to explain what they feel. For example, they may say they are “tired,” “angry,” or “fine,” even when they are actually anxious, lonely, stressed, jealous, ashamed, or overwhelmed.

In Cyprus, as in many Mediterranean societies, family and community relationships can be strong, but this can sometimes create pressure to “be okay,” avoid conflict, or not disappoint others. Young people may feel they should respect family expectations, succeed at school, behave maturely, and not burden others with their problems. This can make emotional honesty more complicated.

Digital life also plays a role. Social media can make young people compare themselves with others and feel pressure to appear happy, confident, attractive, and successful. This can create a gap between how they feel inside and how they present themselves online.

3. What role do emotions play in friendships and relationships?

Emotions are central to friendships and relationships because they help people build trust, empathy, connection, and understanding. When young people can express how they feel, they are more likely to solve conflicts, ask for support, set boundaries, and build healthier relationships.

Friendships are especially important during adolescence. The HBSC international report on adolescent social contexts found that adolescents who reported strong support from both family and peers had better mental health and well-being outcomes. It also found that perceived support from both family and peers decreases with age, while lack of support increases from age 11 to 15. In Cyprus specifically, the Youth Barometer shows that friends are often the first source of psychological support for young people. This means that emotions play a very practical role in

friendships: young people often depend on friends to listen, understand, comfort, advise, and help them cope.

4. Positive and negative sides of emotions in relationships

Emotions can strengthen relationships when they are expressed in a respectful way. For example, sharing fear, sadness, excitement, or insecurity can help friends understand each other better. Saying “I felt hurt when this happened” can prevent misunderstandings and create more honest communication.

However, emotions can also create difficulties when they are hidden, ignored, or expressed aggressively. Unspoken jealousy, anger, sadness, or insecurity can lead to conflict, distance, gossip, or broken trust. If young people do not learn how to express emotions safely, they may either suppress them or express them through shouting, withdrawal, passive-aggressive behaviour, or online conflict.

5. Why this topic matters in Cyprus

This topic is important in Cyprus because young people are facing emotional and social pressure linked to school, family expectations, peer relationships, the future, and the effects of the pandemic. The HBSC Cyprus survey reports that many adolescents felt the pandemic negatively affected their mental health, academic performance, sleep, nutrition, and social life.

At the same time, the fact that many young people turn to friends before professionals shows that youth work, schools, peer groups, and non-formal education can play an important role. Activities that help young people name emotions, listen actively, communicate needs, and support each other can contribute to healthier friendships and stronger emotional well-being.

Conclusion

Young people in Cyprus may find it difficult to express feelings because of stigma, fear of judgment, social expectations, lack of emotional vocabulary, and pressure from school, family, relationships, and digital life. Emotions play a major role in friendships and relationships because they shape trust, communication, empathy, conflict resolution, and support. When young people learn to express emotions in healthy ways, they can build stronger relationships, feel less alone, and become more confident in asking for help when they need it.