



Discord

PROMOTING WELL-BEING THROUGH ONLINE COMMUNITIES:

Understanding User Mental Health

INTRODUCTION

Discord's mission is to be the best place for players to talk and hang out before, during, and after gaming. People deserve a safe and welcoming online space to explore their interests and connect with friends. We're deeply committed to helping bridge the gap between our users and the mental health resources they deserve by meeting them where they are.

From the start, Discord users are in control of their experience: they decide with whom they interact and what communities they join. There's no news feed, no endless scrolling, no counting of likes, and no "going viral". Discord is not a platform designed to maximize engagement. Rather, we emphasize real-time interaction and connection among friends. In addition to our platform's design, we are committed to continuing to evolve and improve so that we can better support our users.

To play our part, Discord has a leading team of experts in research, technology, and mental health policy working together to understand how to ensure our platform supports well-being. Recently, Discord commissioned BSG, a strategic research consultancy, to conduct qualitative and quantitative research among Discord users of all ages across the United States. This research looked to: level set on Discord users' mental health status, understand how users' mental health is impacted by time spent on Discord, and identify the resources and features that help to serve and support mental health.

While the research was conducted among Discord users specifically, the findings of this research are pertinent to our industry and mental health advocacy more widely, as it:

- Reveals the powerful (and positive) relationship between online communities and mental health
- Reiterates the tools users want online platforms to provide to protect their well-being

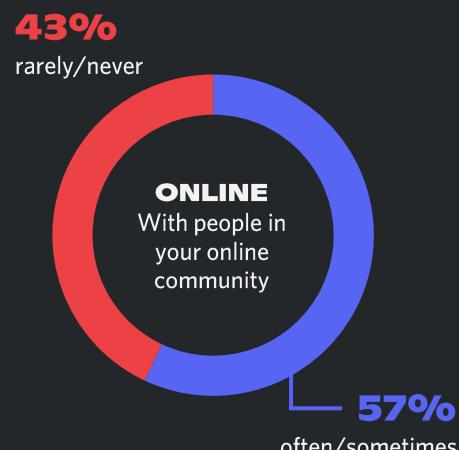
Discussions of the relationship between online life and mental health are often too simplistic and would benefit from a more nuanced perspective; one that acknowledges the ways online experiences can challenge but also support mental well-being.

Our research identifies a positive relationship between online communities and mental health. For many, especially many young people, time spent online – most of all time spent gaming online – positively contributes to their mental health.

Mental health is part of our everyday lives, as is the online world. And now that conversations about mental health take place online as often as they do offline, it's incumbent upon online platforms, like Discord, to consider how we can support positive mental health habits among our users.



How often do you talk about mental health?



The following report explores the enormous opportunity to leverage the many positive ways in which online platforms can support people of all ages, backgrounds, and lived experiences to foster online communities and connections that support their mental health. This research helps us better understand our users and their well-being. We intend to use these findings to inform our policies, product design and development, and to guide us as we establish new, meaningful partnerships in the mental health space.

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METHODOLOGY



Qualitative Online Ethnographic Journals

BSG conducted online journals among 61 Discord users ages 13+ from June 26 – 30, 2024.

Participants were representative of Discord's usership in the United States.

Over the course of a week, Discord users participating in the study were interviewed through a diary-like exercise.

They were probed through an online platform with multi-layered questions that asked them to consider their mental health, online habits and experiences, their Discord habits and experiences, and the types of online tools they think could help support their mental health.

A note on verbiage: References to “online platforms” throughout this report are inclusive of social media platforms.



Quantitative Online Poll

BSG conducted online interviews with 1,200 Discord users ages 13+ from August 19 – 28, 2024.

The sample was weighted to reflect Discord's United States usership based on Discord's internal data, BSG's proprietary data, and publicly available trade and census data.

- Oversamples were collected of LGBTQ+ and non-white Discord users to ensure readable base sizes and that data could be read across subgroups with statistical significance.
- The margin of error for the entire sample is $\pm 2.8\%$ and is higher among subgroups.

ONLINE COMMUNITIES ARE A CRUCIAL SOURCE OF SOCIAL CONNECTION TO MANY WHO SAY THEY SUPPORT THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

THE CONNECTIONS DISCORD USERS MAKE ONLINE CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR WELL-BEING

Online platforms and gaming platforms create community and shared connections that support mental health.

How much of a positive or negative impact do each of the following have on your mental health?

NEGATIVE IMPACT
1-3 out of 7

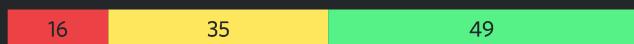
EQUALLY POSITIVE & NEGATIVE
4 out of 7

POSITIVE IMPACT
5-7 out of 7

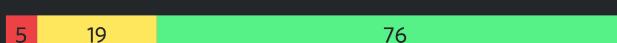
GAMING PLATFORMS



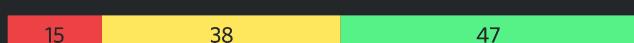
Overall



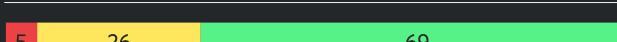
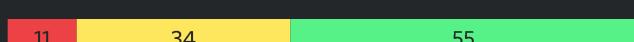
13-17



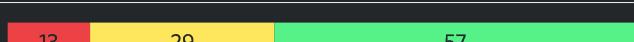
18-24



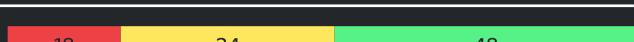
25-34



35+



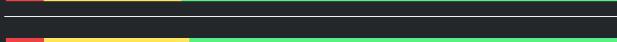
White



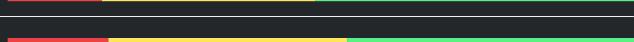
Black



Latino/a



AAPI*



LGBTQ+



* Base sizes <100, and therefore are considered directional

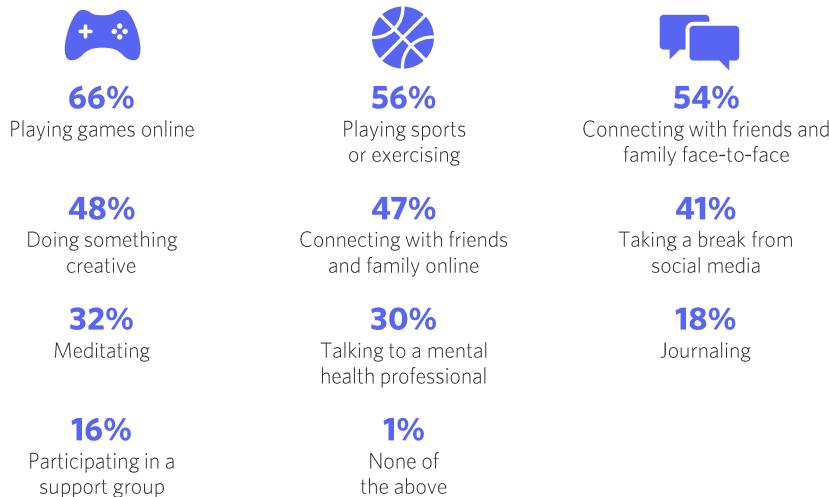
ONLINE COMMUNITIES FORGED THROUGH GAMING OR ONLINE PLATFORMS CREATE STRONG CONNECTIONS THAT SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH IN MANY WAYS

Online gaming provides a place to set the pressures of the world aside for a moment and release stress or anxiety. More than 7-in-10 Discord users say gaming platforms have a positive impact on their mental health.

IN PARTICULAR, PEOPLE SAY THE CAMARADERIE AND FUN OF ONLINE GAMING IS WHAT MAKES THEM FEEL GOOD

Online gaming is an activity that many rely upon to support mental health, and notably, those who game daily rate their mental health even higher than those who don't. Among Discord users, more than 3-in-5 name gaming as the activity that is most important to supporting their mental health.

Which of the following activities are most important to supporting your mental health?



ONLINE PLATFORMS CONNECT PEOPLE WHO SHARE INTERESTS AND BUILD EXISTING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN FRIENDS & FAMILY

More than half of Discord users say online platforms (including social media), have a totally or somewhat positive impact on their mental health.

“THE POSITIVE THINGS THAT HAVE BEEN IMPROVING MY MENTAL HEALTH INCLUDE WORKING OUT AND PLAYING VIDEO GAMES TO HELP ME REDUCE MY STRESS.”

MAN, BLACK, 37

“TO TAKE CARE OF MY MENTAL HEALTH, I’VE BEEN LEANING INTO MY HOBBIES. I PLAY AND WATCH PEOPLE PLAY VIDEO GAMES, TOO. IT’S GREAT TO HAVE THAT SHARED EXPERIENCE WITH OTHERS OVER SOMETHING WE ALL ENJOY.”

WOMAN, BLACK, 26

“SOCIAL MEDIA DEFINITELY HAS A POSITIVE IMPACT ON MY MENTAL HEALTH. IT’S MY PRIMARY WAY OF DESTRESSING AFTER A LONG DAY, HELPS ME STAY CONNECTED WITH MY FRIENDS, WHICH MAKES ME FEEL BETTER.”

WOMAN, WHITE, 18, LGBTQ+

DISCORD IS WIDELY SEEN AS SUPPORTING USERS' MENTAL HEALTH – BOTH IN DIRECT AND INDIRECT WAYS

A majority of users say they believe Discord cares about its users' mental health. The platform is seen as facilitating connections and creating community, and in that way, supporting emotional well-being.

DISCORD CREATES SPACES FOR USERS SEEKING COMMUNITIES THAT SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING

For some, Discord servers that are geared toward discussing or supporting mental health are an important tool and mental health habit.

I am on one server, in particular, that prioritizes mental health. It has a whole section where you can vent and ask for advice or just have someone to talk to and feel heard.

WOMAN, BLACK, 20, LGBTQ+

I primarily am on the social anxiety and the mental health support community servers. It is good for my mental health because of participants listening to what individuals are saying. They offer reassurances.

MAN, LATINO, 55

DISCORD FACILITATES CONNECTIONS & COMMUNITIES THAT MAY NOT BE EXPLICITLY MENTAL HEALTH FOCUSED, BUT FOSTER MENTAL WELL-BEING ALL THE SAME

I would definitely say the social aspect of Discord servers is what helps my mental health the most. I love the versatility. They help form deeper connections with the people they interact with within servers.

WOMAN, WHITE, 18, LGBTQ+

For others, Discord servers provide space to connect to others in ways that improve mental health – even if the server topics aren't specifically or explicitly mental health related.

The private baseball server I'm on is certainly something that helps my mental health, as I've made countless friends through that server, and find loads of people to play with. It's certainly something I love using.

MAN, WHITE, 16

Gaming servers are great for my mental health. I find the focus on the game to be a calming way to center myself. It takes me out of life and isolates my thoughts to a relatively simple task.

WOMAN, BLACK, 26

One of the servers made for the community of one of my favorite games has people constantly checking in with each other and helping others with learning how to do something in the game.

MAN, WHITE, 16

GAMING SERVERS ARE PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT TO CULTIVATE POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH AMONG THE PEOPLE WHO ARE MEMBERS

Gaming servers create community. They're fun and engaging and provide a stress release.

USERS WANT TO BE EMPOWERED TO FOSTER THEIR OWN MENTAL HEALTH AND WANT PLATFORMS TO FOSTER POSITIVE ONLINE ENVIRONMENTS

There's no singular tool or policy that will foster better mental health and well-being online. Users need a range of features and support to meet the different mental health challenges they face from day-to-day.

Users appreciate tools (including some that are commonly available across platforms – blocking, muting, and reporting tools) that empower them to control who they interact with and to what extent they do. But while users want control, they also appreciate action taken by platforms themselves, and resources like engaged human moderators who are there to support users. Indeed, moderators are seen as crucial to fostering an atmosphere that's positive to mental health.

ON MODERATORS

Discord's network of server moderators is seen as a powerful platform feature that protects users' mental health. Users describe the pivotal role moderators can play in fostering positive online communities and how they step in to prevent or address potential harms.

Discord does care a lot about its users because they have moderators to make sure it's a safe space for the users. Moderators do a lot on Discord, and they also offer help when you need it. Moderators play a big part in why I feel good on Discord.

WOMAN, BLACK, 27

Moderators are super important in keeping servers respectful and decent. Discord sets the overall vibe, but moderators have a big say in how the community feels, which can really affect how users feel when using the platform.

MAN, AAPI, 24

I feel like moderators play the role of keeping peoples' mental health safe.
MAN, BLACK, 14

Moderators play a key role to ensure Discord is running respectfully and/or in a positive way. Moderators are the front line and can help a situation from escalating.

MAN, LATINO, 25

The moderators are there in the background. It's kind of like you know the principal is watching.

MAN, BLACK, 16

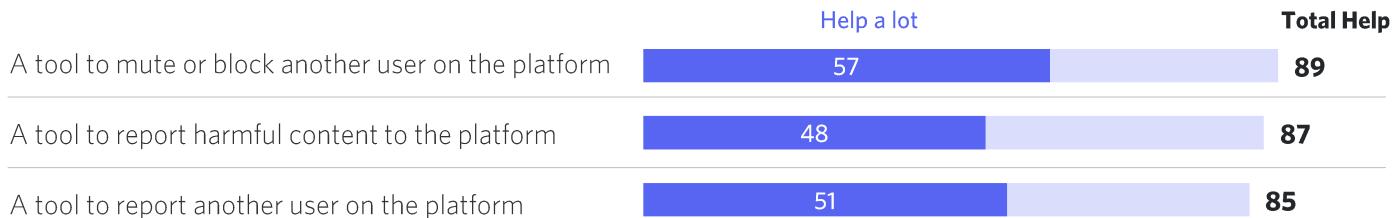
I've been on Discord for years now and I can say they absolutely care about their users. What makes me say this is the notes Discord puts out and the nice things moderators have said in articles and updates.

MAN, WHITE, 17

ON BLOCKING, MUTING, AND REPORTING

Tools to mute, block, or report are said to be the most effective mental health protections

How much would a feature like this help to protect Discord users' mental health?



PREVENTATIVE MENTAL HEALTH TOOLS ARE SEEN AS A POWERFUL MEANS TO PROTECT MENTAL HEALTH – STOPPING HARM BEFORE IT HAS TAKEN PLACE

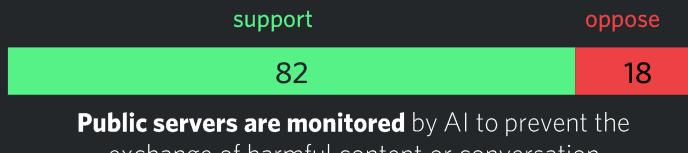
While users value their privacy, many also see a role for platforms to identify risks and intervene to mitigate them. Users are also optimistic about the potential for AI to identify when individuals may be at risk of harm and facilitate actions needed to reduce that danger.

WHILE PREVENTION IS CRUCIAL, THERE IS ALSO AN UNDERSTANDING THAT PLATFORMS WILL NOT ALWAYS BE ABLE TO PREVENT EVERY BAD ACTOR FROM SHARING HARMFUL CONTENT

Nonetheless, users see a need (and an appetite) for platforms to respond when users spread or promote offensive, extreme, or otherwise inappropriate content or conversation.

When it comes to protecting users' mental health, do you support or oppose each of the following?

PREVENTATIVE TOOLS



Public servers are monitored by AI to prevent the exchange of harmful content or conversation

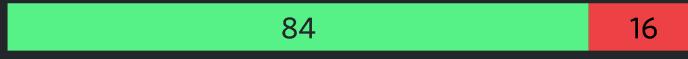


Private chats are monitored by AI to prevent the exchange of harmful content or conversation

DEFENSIVE TOOLS



Users deemed to be spreading content or conversation that is harmful to mental health can be **suspended from the platform**



Content deemed offensive or harmful to mental health can be **taken down**

CONCLUDING SUMMARY There is no one-size-fits-all solution that will foster better mental health and well-being online. Instead, users want a wide variety of features and supports available to meet their differing and unique needs. These include tools that empower users to be proactive in supporting their own mental health online as well as policies and tools provided by the platform that foster an environment that is supportive of individuals' mental well-being. Discord is committed to our users' mental well-being and helping them uplift each other and their communities. With these learnings in mind, we are looking forward to continuing this important work.