

The Emotion Revolution: What We Learned from the Young People

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On a Saturday in late October, the [Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence](#) and [Born This Way Foundation](#) had the immense pleasure of welcoming almost 200 high school students to the Yale University campus for the Emotion Revolution Summit.

The Emotion Revolution was launched on the basic belief - supported by a growing body of scientific research - that emotions are fundamental to a young person's decision making, academic achievement, and overall well-being. It was also grounded in a commitment to make young people a part of the conversation about how to better integrate tools and tactics to support emotional wellness into their schools and communities.

That's why - before the Summit began - we conducted an unprecedented online survey of teens nationwide. Drawing responses from approximately 22,000 high schoolers, we collected data on how young people currently feel and how they want to feel in school, and the possible reasons for these emotions. This research is straightforward but crucial to strengthening our understanding of current school climates and the factors that affect those environments.

The results were clear. When asked how they currently feel in school, approximately 75% of the words the students used were negative. Just 23% were positive. Furthermore, the top three emotions the students reported were tired (used by 39% of the respondents), stressed (29%), and bored (26%). In contrast, the top three emotions students said they want to feel in school are happy, excited, and energized.

We also asked the students about their experiences in school, revealing several notable correlations. For instance, students who said their peers had been mean or cruel to them were more likely to feel negative emotions such as loneliness, fear, and hopelessness. Meanwhile, respondents who said that what they were learning is relevant and meaningful were more likely to feel positive emotions such as interest, respect, and happiness. Similarly, students who reported that their teachers delivered engaging lessons experienced less boredom and greater respect and happiness.

These results clearly demonstrate the need to close the gap between what students are currently feeling in school and how they want to be feeling. We must start by empowering the young people themselves by giving them tangible support, practical tools and tactics, and a voice in the conversation.

The Emotion Revolution Summit was a first step in that process, bringing together young people with teachers and education leaders such as Yale University President Dr. Peter Salovey and New York City Department of Education Chancellor Carmen Fariña, passionate speakers including journalist Soledad O'Brien, Life is Good Co-Founder Bert Jacobs, and poet Azure Antoinette, and advocates like Lady Gaga.

At the Summit, our partner Facebook unveiled [InspirED](#), a set of online resources for teachers and teens focused on building emotional intelligence in schools. It aims to connect high school students and educators across the country with tools and inspiration in social and emotional learning, so they can work together to create more positive learning environments and lead healthier, more fulfilled lives.

The day was also an opportunity to hear from students directly. We were blown away by their bravery in sharing their stories and honesty in discussing the role emotions play in their lives. Here are just a few of their reflections we think are worth remembering:

1. If you are struggling with anxiety, depression, self-doubt, or other negative emotions, it is difficult to be a positive force for change in the world. So before you can help anyone else, you need to be able to help yourself.
2. Regardless of background and personal history, everyone struggles at times with their emotions. Speaking up honestly about those experiences can help the person doing the sharing but it can also serve as a comfort and inspiration to others navigating their own obstacles.
3. Risking judgement for expressing emotions is far outweighed by the dangers of concealing emotions. Don't keep everything bottled inside - and be supportive of others who are brave enough to speak up.
4. In order for real change to take place, conversations like this need to have everyone involved - from students and parents to educators and policy makers. Everyone needs to be able to voice their opinions freely so that we can work together to come up with meaningful solutions.
5. Talking about emotional wellness is crucial, but real change will take empowering young people with practical tools and real change. Whether it's changing policies that

affect school climate or online resources like InspirED, building kinder and braver schools will take more than just words.

The Emotion Revolution Summit was the beginning of an important conversation. Now it's time for everyone to take the lessons from that day and start a dialogue in their own communities. As organization leaders, educators, and parents, we need to give young people - and the adults in their lives - the support they need to create environments where emotions matter.

The Emotion Revolution Summit was hosted in partnership with Facebook and The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and was made possible by the generous support of Microsoft, Mattel, Monster High, Life is Good, HopeLab, WWE, U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, Flawless Foundation, and The Faas Foundation.

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Cynthia Germanotta is the co-founder and president of Born This Way Foundation, which she founded with her daughter, Lady Gaga, to "empower youth" and "inspire bravery."

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