



Nearly Half of Americans Say Fear of an Unwanted Viral Moment Keeps Them from Being Themselves in Public, LifeStance Survey Finds

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Nearly 3 in 4 Gen Zers Say Fear of an Unwanted Viral Moment Affects Their Mental Health, Self-Expression and Social Participation

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz., Sept. 30, 2026 /PRNewswire/ -- A [LifeStance Health survey](#) released today finds that the possibility of spontaneous, authentic moments going viral on social media is affecting people's mental well-being and reshaping behavior, self-expression and participation in everyday life.



LifeStance conducted the survey to understand how the fear of becoming someone else's social media content affects mental health, influencing everything from a person's ability to relax and be themselves in public to their willingness to attend events and engage socially. Many respondents experience weekly effects on their mood, anxiety and self-esteem.

The impact is particularly pronounced among Gen Z. Nearly 3 in 4 Gen Z respondents say concerns about being recorded and shared online affect their ability to enjoy the present moment (74%) or their desire to leave the house or attend an event (72%).

More than 4 in 10 Gen Z respondents also report negative effects on indicators of mental well-being on a weekly basis, including mood (47%), self-esteem (44%), sleep (43%) and anxiety (42%).

The findings also suggest that mental health care can play an important role in addressing these concerns: One in five respondents believe therapy can help address this kind of social anxiety, and 19% would consider therapy if these concerns began affecting their daily life.

Dr. Jennifer Park, Vice President, Clinical Excellence and Innovation, LifeStance Health, said: "Our findings suggest an interesting shift in the role social media plays in everyday life. While it was once associated with 'FOMO,' or the fear of missing out, social media is now contributing to a different concern: the fear that everyday behaviors and experiences may be captured and shared online. This fear can make it more difficult for individuals to be fully present or even feel comfortable leaving the house. Over time, these concerns can create barriers to social connection and belonging and increase feelings of isolation and loneliness, which can contribute to poorer mental health outcomes."

LifeStance delivers personalized mental healthcare tailored to an individual's needs through online and in-person visits designed to meet people where they are – helping them manage this new, distinctly modern source of anxiety, build resilience against the pressure of constant visibility and reclaim their ability to be present, in public without fear.

Key findings:

The fear of becoming someone else's social media content is changing ordinary behavior.

- Nearly half (47%) of respondents agree the possibility of becoming online content has reduced their ability to relax and be themselves in public.
- Nearly one-third (31%) avoid showing strong emotions or opinions, dancing (30%) or acting silly or telling a joke (29%) because of this concern.
- Avoidance is more common among Gen Z respondents: 43% hold back emotion, 49% skip dancing and 38% avoid acting silly or telling a joke.

Concerns about potentially having an unwanted viral moment affect well-being weekly, especially among Gen Z respondents.

- Respondents said this concern negatively affects their mood (27%), anxiety (26%), ability to enjoy the present moment (26%), confidence and self-esteem (25%) and sleep (23%) on a weekly basis.
- The weekly impact is significantly higher among Gen Z respondents; nearly half say it affects their mood (47%) and ability to enjoy the present moment (46%) weekly, while more than 4 in 10 report weekly effects on confidence and self-esteem (44%), sleep (43%) and anxiety levels (42%).

The fear of going viral is influencing social participation across generations, with the greatest impact among Gen Z.

- Nearly 3 in 4 Gen Z respondents say the potential of going viral affects their desire to leave the house or attend events (72%) and their ability to focus on and enjoy the present moment (74%), compared to 48% and 52% across all respondents.

- Across generations, one in five (20%) have avoided a social gathering with friends, while 19% have avoided bars or nightlife.

Methodology

The data is based on a survey conducted by Dynata on behalf of LifeStance Health in July 2026. The survey analyzed responses from 1,000 U.S. adults ages 18 and up to better understand how anxiety from online judgment, public recording, and fear of becoming social media content impacts an individual's mental well-being, social participation, and freedom of self-expression.

ABOUT LIFESTANCE HEALTH

Founded in 2017, [LifeStance](#) (NASDAQ: LFST) is reimagining mental health. We are one of the nation's largest providers of virtual and in-person outpatient mental healthcare for children, adolescents and adults experiencing a variety of mental health conditions. Our mission is to help people lead healthier, more fulfilling lives by improving access to trusted, affordable and personalized mental healthcare. LifeStance and its supported practices employ approximately 8,500 psychiatrists, advanced practice nurses, psychologists and therapists and operate across 34 states and more than 550 centers. To learn more, please visit www.LifeStance.com.

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