

# WANTED: MORE ASKABLE ADULTS

A SURVEY OF VERMONT'S YOUTH

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**October 2018**



Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence



Thank you to...

- The Youth of Vermont
- Vermont Network Youth Advocacy Task Force members
- Our Community Partners

**A copy of the full-length report can be found here:**

**<https://vtnetwork.org/publications/>**

**For support about domestic, dating, and sexual violence, please find your local Vermont Network Program [here](#):**

<https://vtnetwork.org/get-help/>

**FOR STATEWIDE HOTLINES:**

**Domestic Violence Hotline**

800-228-7395

**Sexual Violence Hotline**

800-489-7273

**For support, advocacy, and celebration of young queer people in Vermont:**

**[Outright Vermont](#)**

<http://www.outrightvt.org/>

802-865-9677

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# HISTORY AND SURVEY DESIGN

**In November 2017**, The Youth Advocacy Task Force (YATF)<sup>1</sup> of the [Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence](#) designed and launched an informal online survey for Vermont youth up to age 24. The YATF's purpose in creating this survey was to better inform their advocacy and outreach work by listening to Vermont youth about their concerns and ideas for solutions.

## The six questions

1. Please rank your level of worry or concern about these issues in your school and/or community.
2. If you or any other young people you know have personally experienced any of these issues or concerns in school and/or your community, please check which ones. Check all that apply.
3. Rank the actions that you think would help change your school and/or community concerns.
4. Please rank the issues that you are concerned about at home.
5. Rank the actions that you think would help your concerns at home get better.
6. In what ways would you consider taking action to help make any of your concerns get better! Check all that apply.

# DEMOGRAPHICS

**Five-hundred-eighty-four Vermont youth** participated in the survey with a 68% completion rate. Fifty-three percent of youth identified as female, 39% as male, and five percent with nonbinary/genderqueer identities. The largest age group to respond were 15-16 year-olds at 37%, followed by 13-14 year-olds at 27%. Twenty-one percent of respondents were ages 17-18, eight percent were ages 19-24, and seven percent were ages 11-12. Two incomplete responses came from youth 10 and younger. Regionally, nearly 70% of participants came from Washington and Orange Counties and the greater Hardwick area. Rural areas were much better represented than urban areas. Chittenden and Rutland Counties combined made up less than six percent of the responses.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Youth Advocacy Task Force (YATF) is a statewide coalition of advocates, educators and partners who are champions for children and Youth. We acknowledge the specific injustices experienced by young people and are dedicated to holding their integrity and human rights as paramount in our commitment to promoting healthy sexuality and safe and respectful relationships for all people.*

# SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

## Vermont Youth's Big Concerns

### In school and communities

- Drug use
- Alcohol use
- Sexism (body shaming and harassment)
- Personal emotional safety (above physical or sexual safety)
- Bullying and body shaming experienced at high levels

### **For nonbinary/genderqueer youth, add:**

- Homophobia and transphobia

### **For nonbinary/genderqueer and 19-24 year-old youth, add:**

- Family poverty and having few resources

### At home

- Stress
- Mental health of self and household members
- Emotional safety

## What Helps

### In schools and communities

- Having more askable/supportive adults
- Support for youth initiatives and leadership
- Training of school staff and adults in the community
- Counseling and support groups
- School policy changes

### **Additionally**

- More text and chat lines
- Change dress code policies, decrease homework load, increase diversity training



- Less awareness campaigns, school workshops, conversations, and hotlines

### **At home**

- Money
- Counseling and support groups
- Having more askable/supportive adults

### **Additionally**

- More access to mental health support
- Less hotlines, systems' interventions, people leaving home

## **How Would Youth Consider *Taking Action*?**

- Reaching out to a friend
- Taking a leadership role
- Reaching out for support for myself

### **For nonbinary/genderqueer youth and 17-24 year-old youth, add:**

- Working to make policy/law changes

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **More to explore**

The results of this youth survey provide a solid foundation from which to engage in more conversations with young people in Vermont. A deeper dive with youth from more diverse and populated areas in Vermont as well as specific age groups and gender identities would provide a more realistic picture of the experiences of all Vermont youth. Further exploration of how youth define issues like *sexism* and solutions like *having more askable adults* would elevate the survey outcomes and increase understanding. Finally, it would be most valuable to hear stories from Vermont youth about times when they felt supported by *askable adults* and situations when *youth leadership* was supported in ways that felt empowering and genuine.

# Recommendations

## **Be an askable/supportive adult**

- Ask young people what makes an *askable/supportive adult* and become one.
- Listen and be available.
- Ask youth about their concerns and offer support.
- Find and share information and resources with youth about their concerns including: drug and alcohol use, sexism, and gender identity and sexual orientation related concerns.

## **Step up, get trained, and change policies that address the concerns of youth**

- Learn what you need to know to support all youth – including understanding gender identity issues, homophobia, transphobia, sexism (including harassment and body shaming), and emotional wellbeing.
- Use your power to assist youth to change policies that address their concerns. For instance: dress codes, sexism, racism, diversity issues, less stressful homework loads, and bullying.

## **Less stress and more emotional support for youth**

- Consider the emotional well-being of young people as a priority.
- Ask young people about their stress. Ask how things are at home and in school. Help them find mental health support when they ask for it.
- Advocate with systems to lessen the load and support youth to manage school work and make space for free time to create a healthy balance.

## **Support youth to reach out to their peers**

- Offer guidance and resources to support the strong inclination for youth to reach out and offer support to their friends.
- Create and support peer counseling and support options in your environments.

## **Support youth as leaders and youth powered initiatives**

- Ask and listen to what youth are passionate about.
- Support their ideas, decisions, power, and leadership.
- Notice where young people are in their development and life circumstances to help them find their path of involvement.