# GROWING UP IN AUSTRALIA




What life is like for kids in Australia today

UNICEF Australia and ARACY acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands and communities in which we and our partners work throughout Australia, and recognise their connection to their lands, waters, and communities. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures, and to Elders past and present, and to the children of today who are the Elders of the future.

As you explore this resource, we invite you to learn with curiosity, listen with respect, and appreciate the diverse First Nations cultures and histories that have shaped Australia for generations and continue to thrive today.

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SUPPORTED BY MINDEROO FOUNDATION

# HELLO!

And thank you for picking up *Growing Up in Australia – Our Story, Our Voice!* This reference and activity book is about the lives of children and young people across Australia – from the ocean to the desert, from the tropics to the snow. We've put the latest data and stories about children all together in one place just for you! It's packed with fun activities to help you learn about the important facts and think about how we can work together to make life better for all Australian kids.

## What is this book about?

This book includes information and activities about:

- Being healthy
- Learning
- Having the things we need
- Feeling loved and safe
- Identities and cultures
- Joining in with the world around us

## What you'll need:

- 15–30 minutes
- Something to draw and write with (like pens or pencils if you have a printed copy)
- Your thinking cap and an open mind!

So get ready to explore and discover what life is like for Aussie kids just like you!

**Chelsea and Peter,**
Growing Up in Australia Youth Advisors

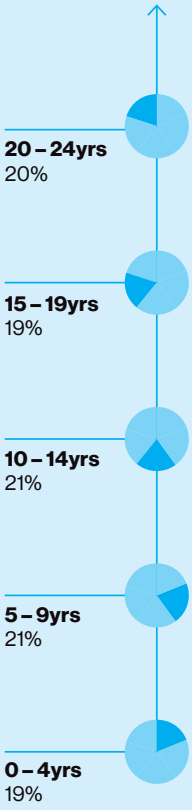
P.S. If you have a printed copy of this book, you can also find a digital version at **unicef.org.au/our-story-our-voice**. This will make it easier to access all the links in the book.

**Where did the info come from?**
The information in this book comes from the State of Australia's Children 2025 report, which helps governments, communities and leaders to understand what life is like for children and young people all across Australia. The report helps shine a light on what's going well for children, and what we need to do better. By learning about these different experiences, leaders can create better laws and programs to help all kids grow up healthy, happy, and safe – no matter where they live or what their life is like. It's a way of making sure every child's voice and experience matters.

# 1 WHO ARE AUSTRALIA'S CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE?

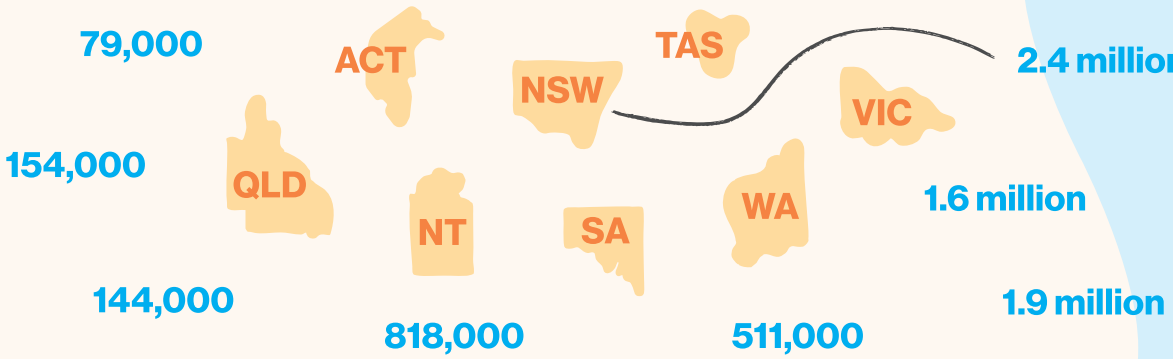


**How old are we?**




There are nearly **7.7 million** children and young people (**0–24 years old**) in Australia. That's **30%** of all people across the country – enough people to fill the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) stadium **77 times**!

Can you match the state and territory with the number of children and young people who live there?




You can find the answers on page 18.

**12%**

Nearly **1 million** children and young people have a disability or health issue.



Nearly 1 in 3 **(27%)** of us speak a language other than English at home. Can you guess how many languages we speak around Australia?

**>9%**

of us take care of other people, like parents or family members who have a disability or health issue.





While most of us were born in Australia, **13%** of us were born overseas. Can you guess the most common countries we come from?









The latest Census* says just under half **(49%)** of us identify as female and just over half **(51%)** as male. Our transgender, gender diverse and non-binary peers did not appear in big numbers in the Census (for all ages) but could make up **2–3%** of us. What does non-binary mean? Hear from Arlo here about coming out as non-binary and what it means.

***What is the Census?*** It's a national survey of every household in Australia that happens every five years.

**5%**

About **5%** of us connect directly to the world's oldest continuous cultures as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Can you guess how long First Nations cultures have existed?

**47%**

**Almost half** of all young people say they have a religion.

**You can find the answers to the questions above on page 18.**



Most of us live in big cities **(73%)**, one quarter of us live in regional areas **(nearly 25%)** and just **2%** of us live in remote areas.

What does **regional** and **remote** mean? In regional areas, people usually have a town nearby with schools, shops and most of the things they need. In remote areas, the nearest town can be quite small and might be a few hours' drive away.



**Where does the information in this report come from?**

The information in this report comes from a lot of factual documents and surveys. To find the full list, see page 18. Feel free to fact check us!

We believe in an Australia where every child and young person has the things they need to live a happy and healthy life, and to reach their potential!

But what would that take?

What do you think kids and young people need to live their best lives? **Draw or write your ideas here:**



**Children's rights**
Protecting your rights and making sure you have the things you need in life is everyone's responsibility – from parents and caregivers to teachers, police, health workers and the government.

**Did you know?**
Back in 1990, leaders from around the world made 54 promises to keep all children safe, and to give us the things we need to live, learn, play, get involved in our communities, and grow up healthy and strong. These promises are written down in something called the *Convention on the Rights of the Child.*

Find out more here:
unicef.org.au/unicef-youth/what-are-child-rights

# 2 HEALTHY

**Did you know?**
A recent survey of 12–17 year old young people found being healthy is one of the top things that makes us feel satisfied in life – right after friends, free time and hobbies.

**Did you know?**
Australia has one of the highest life expectancies in the world! That means babies born here today are expected to live longer than in most other countries.

The Closing the Gap Report shows that Australia still needs to do more work so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can reach these same life expectancies.

In Australia, most children grow up pretty healthy, with good doctors, hospitals, and vaccines to protect us from serious diseases.

But while most of us are healthy and well, there are some challenges for lots of us too.

## Fruit and vegetables

Less than 5% of 2–17-year-olds eat the recommended amount of fruit and vegetables each day.

At our age, we should eat **two serves of fruit and between 5 and 5½ serves of vegetables** each day to stay healthy and feeling well. But getting enough fruit and veg in your diet isn't always easy.



**Can you pick one meal or snack you eat regularly, and make it healthier by adding fruit or vegetables?**



## Food, movement and health

**1 in 3** of us (aged 5–24) is considered overweight or obese. Being surrounded by lots of junk food, not having healthy food, not sleeping enough and spending too much time sitting can all make it hard to stay healthy.

## The health challenge!

Which of these things can you do today?

- ☐ Do 1 hour of hard physical activity like running, push ups or skipping

**OR**

- ☐ More than 1 hour of light physical activity like yoga or walking in the bush, or swimming in the river or beach
- ☐ Get 9–11 hours of uninterrupted sleep
- ☐ Spend less than 2 hours on screen time when not at school
- ☐ Eat your recommended serving of fruit and veg

## Mental health matters

Mental health and wellbeing is one of the biggest challenges children and young people face, according to teenagers.

Mental health is about how we think, feel and behave. When your mental health is good, it's easier to handle stress, talk about your feelings, and get along with others. When it's not, you might stop enjoying things, feel overwhelmed, or want to be alone more.

**Is your mental health worrying you?**

**You aren't alone.** Many children and young people choose to talk to friends, parents or a doctor or counsellor when they feel this way.

You can also speak to someone confidentially and for free by calling **Kids helpline** on 1800 55 1800, any time of the day or night. They also have some great resources, like this one on coping strategies others have tried: Coping strategies: As told by you!

**"I ALSO HOPE THAT MENTAL HEALTH BECOMES A REAL GLOBAL PRIORITY – TREATED WITH THE SAME SERIOUSNESS AS PHYSICAL HEALTH. IF MORE PEOPLE HAD ACCESS TO SUPPORT, FELT SAFE TALKING ABOUT WHAT THEY'RE GOING THROUGH, AND WERE MET WITH COMPASSION INSTEAD OF SHAME."**

– Person aged 12–17 years

## Children with disabilities

More than **946,300** children in Australia have a disability – and the number is growing. That's partly because we are getting better at understanding disabilities. Children with disabilities may face extra challenges, like being bullied, or feeling they don't belong.

Children and young people with disabilities are also passionate change-makers. The National Youth Disability Summit 2024 brought young people with a disability together and you can find out more about it here.



## Self-care!

Self-care is about doing things to look after your physical and mental health. **Can you think of two things you could do take better care of yourself?**

1 .....

2 .....

You can find some tips here:
**Self-Care Tips for Teens | Healthy Living | Kids Helpline**

# 3 LEARNING

**Did you know?**
Learning doesn't just happen in the classroom.

- When we play sport, we learn teamwork and new skills.
- When we spend time with friends and family, we learn about different perspectives and how to listen.
- When we explore nature or visit new places, we learn about the world around us.

Learning helps us understand the world, build skills and grow our confidence so we can thrive and reach our potential! Everyone learns in different ways. Let's look at what school is like for different kids around Australia.

## Before school

Almost all children (**89%**) go to preschool or kindergarten the year before they start primary school. But it's harder for some kids to go – especially if they have a disability, speak a different language at home, or live a long way from a town or city.

## First day of school

Starting school is a bit like a running race. While many kids start at the starting line – with all the knowledge and tools they need to start school – lots of kids (**47%**) start further back. That's because they haven't had the same chances to build some of those skills or knowledge. This can make school harder, because they are already behind before the race even begins. They might not have the same reading, counting or social skills as other kids, and it's hard to catch up.



## In school

Most kids feel happy and connected at school, but some don't. A recent survey of 12 to 17-year-olds found nearly **1 in 3 people** feel like they didn't belong in school all or most of the time.

**Can you think of three things your school could do to make kids feel like they belong?** Jot down your ideas on the postcard on the back page. If you want, you can share it with your principal or teacher.

**"I HAVE JUST MOVED FROM PRIMARY SCHOOL TO HIGH SCHOOL SO I FEEL LESS BELONGING HERE. I MISS MY OLD SCHOOL AND FRIENDS, MAYBE AFTER SOME TIME I WILL FEEL BETTER."** – Person aged 12–17 years

## Finishing school

There are a growing number of teens graduating from Year 12 or getting their Certificate III! Certificate III courses are designed to help people start a career. Some people choose to do these instead of graduating high school.

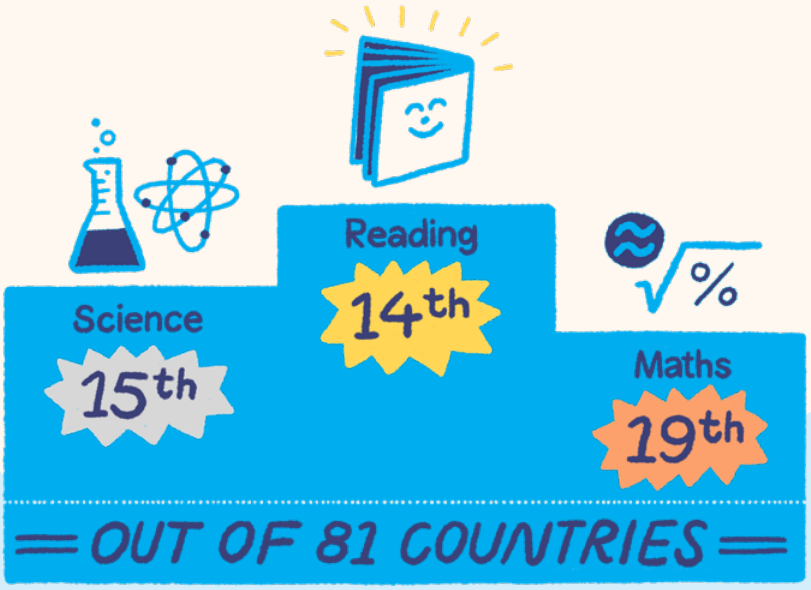
**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young peoples' self determination to contribute to the future of First Nations Education is supported by the National Indigenous Youth Education Coalition (NIYEC). You can find out more by visiting niyec.com.**

**If school was in the Olympics, how would Australia do?**

Have you ever wondered how Australia would go if school was a sport in an international competition – like the Olympics? Let's look at the results for 15-year-olds in Australia in three subjects. This will give context to how Australia is performing in science, maths and reading compared to 81 other countries.

No gold medals for us this time, but that's OK. We passed!

What do you think schools could do to help Australia win gold?




# 4 IDENTITY AND CULTURE

Our identity is about who we are and what we believe. Culture is how we celebrate and share our identity with others. Having a strong and positive sense of our identity and culture helps us feel proud, connected and like we belong.

Everyone's identity is different – that's what makes our communities interesting!

Most teenagers in Australia – **nearly 7 in 10** – feel they belong in their communities most of the time.

But some don't. Sometimes that's because they feel their identity isn't accepted, or they have been treated unfairly. That's called discrimination – where someone is treated differently because of who they are, what they believe or where they come from.

Some children, including children with disabilities or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, are more likely to tell us they have experienced discrimination and feel like they don't belong.

**Everyone deserves to feel safe, included and respected – just as they are.**

If this information brings up any uncomfortable feelings for you, there are support services listed for you on page 19.

**Religion is one type of identity.** Did you know nearly half (**47%**) of all 15–25-year-olds say they are religious?

Engaging with traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages can help First Nations children and young peoples feel connected to their culture and identity.

Did you know there are many First Language Groups across approximately 250 First Nations within Australia? These languages told stories, sang songs and shared traditions and histories through generations, but now only around 150 are spoken daily. Through self-determination and resilience, First Nations peoples are revitalising and speaking First Languages. Check out First Languages Australia, who have some great resources for young people to support local language engagement and revitalisation.

**How many First Language Groups do you think span across the continent?**
*Find the answer on page 18.*

**"ONE THING THAT MIGHT HELP TO IMPROVE MY OVERALL FEELINGS OF BELONGING IS BEING ACCEPTED AND VALUED FOR WHO I TRULY AM, WITHOUT NEEDING TO CHANGE TO FIT IN. WHEN PEOPLE TAKE THE TIME TO UNDERSTAND ME, LISTEN TO MY IDEAS, AND INCLUDE ME IN CONVERSATIONS OR GROUP ACTIVITIES, I FEEL MORE CONNECTED AND CONFIDENT."** – Person aged 12–17 years

**How can we build a kinder Australia** where all children feel they can be themselves and celebrate their culture?

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**Pick three positive words** that describe you and your identity and write them in the affirmations jar. There are some ideas below you can use or come up with your own.



# 5 FEELING LOVED AND SAFE

It's important that we feel valued, loved and safe. This includes having loving, trusting relationships with friends and family, being cared for, and feeling safe at home, in our community and online.




## Loving, trusting relationships

Positive relationships with friends and family help us feel safe, valued and connected, and help us stay resilient.

Recently, some teenagers were asked about the people in their lives they can turn to when they are faced with problems, or to celebrate success.

Can you guess which people teenagers are most likely to reach out to:

- **when dealing with problems?***
- **to celebrate successes?***

Not all children have a safe home or environment, and others aren't living with their parents or families. Showing kindness and caring for those around you can change a person's day and how they feel about themselves.

*answers on page 18

**"[I TALK TO] MY FRIEND BECAUSE WE ALWAYS MEET EACH OTHER AND CALL EACH OTHER AND WE ALWAYS TALK ABOUT STUFF WE'RE WORRIED ABOUT."**

– Person aged 12–17 years

## Take the kindness challenge!

Small actions can help people in our lives feel safe, valued and connected. How many of these things can you do today?



Spend time hanging out with a friend




Say something supportive to someone



Talk to someone who is sad or on their own



Message someone to ask about their day




## Let's talk about bullying

Sadly, bullying is a problem for lots of children and young people in Australia.

- **More than half** of 12–17 year old young people say they've been bullied.
- Nearly **70%** of kids with a disability say they have been bullied.
- **Cyberbullying** is common too. More than half of 10–17 year old young people have experienced it. Cyberbullying is where someone uses the internet, social media or messaging apps to repeatedly hurt, embarrass or threaten someone else.

**What would you do if you:**

- Saw a mean comment on a friend's social media post?
- Noticed someone kept teasing another student at lunch?
- Were bullied online?

If you are being bullied, know someone who is, or have bullied someone yourself, you can find some tips on what you can do here: **kidshelpline.com.au/teens/issues/bullying**. For tips about preventing cyberbullying: **unicef.org.au/unicef-youth/staying-safe-online/cyberbullying**.

# 6 THE THINGS WE NEED

There are some important basics that all children and young people need – like...



**Clean water and air**



**Healthy food**



**Warm clothes**



**A safe place to live in**



**Books and internet for learning**

Most Australian children and young people have these things. Most of us wake up in warm beds, have three meals a day, and use the internet to do our homework. In fact, over **98%** of children have access to the internet at home. But not all of us do.

In a recent survey, **17%** of teenagers said they sometimes don't have the things they need, like clothes and shoes that fit, the internet or enough food to eat.

Today, one in six children in Australia live in poverty, which means they don't have the money or resources they need – like housing, food or healthcare.

This is something children and young people care about. In a recent survey, teenagers were asked what they would do if they were put in charge of Australia. They said:

1. **Make housing cheaper and more affordable.**
2. **Give money to struggling families.**

**"I HOPE EVERYONE GETS ON BETTER AND CAN HAVE ENOUGH MONEY TO HAVE THE LIFE THEY WANT"**

– Person aged 8–11 years

## Gratitude journal

Gratitude is about being thankful for the things you have in your life – like people, objects or experiences. What things are you grateful for? What would you do if you didn't have these things? How can we help those who don't have these things?

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.....

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# 7 JOINING IN

Joining in can help us feel happy and improve our wellbeing. There are lots of ways to join in – like playing sports, joining clubs or volunteering. It's also about having a voice on things that are important to you.

**How do you get involved in your community? Where do you do that?**

## Have a say!

One important way we can get involved in our communities is by having a say about things that are important to us and our peers. When we do have a say, it's important that people listen to us.

In a recent survey of 12–17 year old young people, most of us said we felt heard by our families (**85%**) and our friends (**64%**). And more young people (**over 31%**) feel they have a say in their community.

There are lots of ways we can share our opinions with others like:

- Having a conversation with a friend about something that is bothering you
- Writing a letter or email to a teacher about an idea for the classroom
- Making an artwork for an exhibition or writing a song about a topic you care about.

Want to know more about how you can make your voice count? UNICEF has some ideas here: unicef.org.au/unicef-youth/making-your-voice-count.





**Can you research someone your age who is making a difference in their community or the world?**

What are they trying to achieve? How have they gone about it? What could you do to change one thing that's important to you?

Have a chat with a friend or family member about this person and your idea.

**Did you know?** Sport is a popular way of getting involved in our communities. Most 0–14 year old children play sport weekly, but the number has dropped. Today, **51%** of us play sport weekly, when **59%** of us did in 2019.

# 8 WHAT COULD THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE?

This is what life is like for children and young people in Australia today – but what about tomorrow?

No one knows exactly what the future will bring, but we can make some good guesses based on what's happening in the world right now.

In the future, our homes and schools might all be solar powered and more of us could be travelling to school in electric buses that don't pollute the air. Technology will keep changing too – things like artificial intelligence and smart computers might help us learn in new ways, solve big problems, and stay connected with family and friends and new people all over the world.

When we asked young people how they feel about the future, **3 in 10** said they feel excited and hopeful about the next five years. More than half (**55%**) said they feel unsure – and that's okay.

The future can feel uncertain, but it also gives us the chance to imagine, create and shape a world that works better for everyone.



**Here are some of the things other children and young people told us they'd like to see in the future...**

"For my future, I want more beaches and more parks and green spaces and more people socialising and a little bit less cars and more colours.

I hope [the world when I grow up] is peaceful.

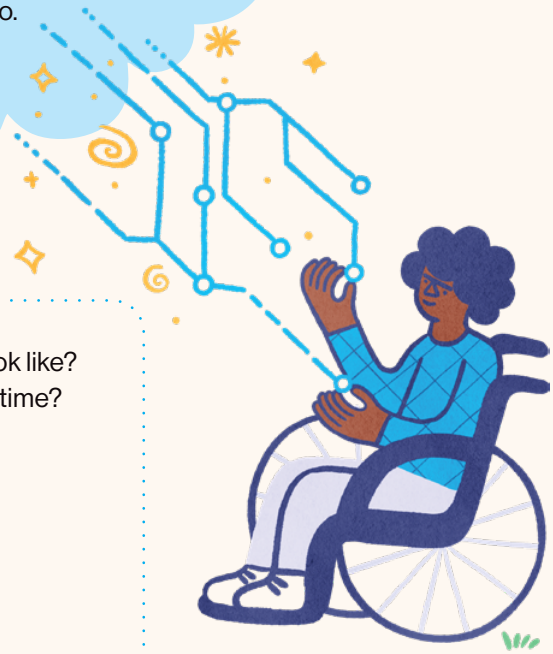
Housing becomes affordable for everyone.

## What next?

Now that you've read this book, what's one thing you'd change to make the future better for children and young people?

Ask a friend what they think too.





What do you think the future will look like? Can you draw yourself in 5 years' time?



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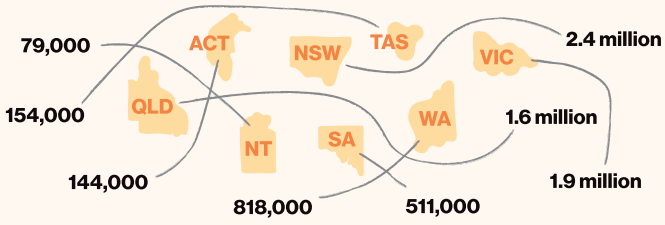
# Answers

**Page 4**

- *Can you match the state and territory with the number of children and young people who live there?*
  **Answer in the diagram.**




**Page 5**

- *Can you guess how many languages we speak around Australia?*
  **Answer:** In 2016, Australians spoke more than 300 languages at home – many of these are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. Check out Gambay, an interactive map of over 700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. Today, fewer than 150 First Nations languages remain in daily use.
- *Can you guess the most common countries we come from?*
  **Answer:** The most common countries we come from are: India, New Zealand, England, China and the Philippines.
- *Can you guess how long First Nations cultures have existed?*
  **Answer:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and traditions have continued for over 65,000 years.

**Page 10**

- *How many First Language Groups do you think span across the continent?* **Answer:** Over 700 First Language Groups.

**Page 12**

- *Can you guess which people teenagers are most likely to reach out to:*

– *when dealing with problems?*
**Answer**: Teenagers were more likely to turn to parents/carers and then friends with problems. Other sources of support included siblings, teachers, other relatives and mental health professionals.

– *to celebrate successes?*
**Answer:** Teenagers were more likely to turn to parents/carers and then friends to celebrate successes.

## Share a postcard with your school!

Can you think of three things your school could do to make kids feel like they belong? Jot down your ideas on the postcard below. If you want, you can share it with your principal or teacher.



**Kids Helpline** **1800 55 1800** **kidshelpline.com.au**
*> free, confidential online and phone counselling. Available 24/7*

**Headspace** **1800 650 890** **headspace.org.au**
*> free support and information on mental health for 12–25 year olds*

**Qlife** **1800 184 527** **qlife.org.au**
*> free and anonymous LGBTIQ+ peer support and referrals*

**13yarn** **13 92 76** **13yarn.org.au**
*> free and confidential Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support service*

**Reach Out** **au.reachout.com**
*> free, and anonymous online mental health service supporting young people aged 12 to 25 and their parents*

**Ask Izzy** **askizzy.org.au**
*> free, anonymous website that connects people in crisis with over 370,000 support services and works without phone credit or Wi-Fi on major networks*

**BRAVE online self-help program** **brave-online.com**
*> free support for people with anxiety*



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