

Dear Gen Z,

The other day I was sitting with my friends, and we were all talking and laughing, but the conversation never went deeper than homework, movies, music, or books. There are definitely times when I want and need those hangouts. But I also want to be able to talk to my friends about the problems I have. I want real conversations—the kind where you can talk about the meaning of life and actually say what you're thinking and feeling.

Somewhere along the way, it has become surprisingly awkward to sit down and talk face-to-face. Is it because there's not much to talk about anymore? Or is it because we've grown so used to being comfortable all the time that we don't know how to deal with feeling uncomfortable?

When conversations get difficult—for example, breakups, disagreements, addressing a problem, or genuinely trying to get to know someone—it often feels easier to avoid them, ignore them, disappear behind a screen, or withdraw altogether instead of working through them together and trying to understand one another.

And I think that's sad. I bet you agree.

I've caught myself wanting to start a real conversation but not knowing how. I think it's because I'm scared. You might be too. Real conversations require something that can be intimidating: allowing another person to see who we really are. And once we do that, we can't control how they will respond.

But are we really going to let fear get in the way of the connections we really want in our lives?

I know that a lot of us feel anxious, lonely, stressed, or overwhelmed. Don't you want to feel better? To be happy? We want lives that are meaningful and connected. So connect with

others! Research from Stanford shows that real social connection matters more than we sometimes realize. Spending time with friends, helping others, opening up about struggles, and simply being present with people in real life increases happiness, reduces stress, and can even ease depression. These are real, proven benefits—not just a “what if.”

I will admit that it takes courage to start a real conversation. It can feel awkward. It will probably be uncomfortable at first.

We crave connection, yet we avoid the very conversations that create it. Maybe it's time we stop doing that.

Try it out for yourself by taking a small leap of faith. Say hello to someone new. Put your phone face-down and give someone your full attention. Ask someone how they're really doing. Have the conversation you've been avoiding.

As New York Times writer Sherry Turkle encourages us: “Look up, look at one another, and let's start the conversation.”

Real connection isn't always easy. But it might just be one of the most important things we ever choose to pursue.

Thanks for hearing me out.

Your friend

I chose this topic because I want to have more real conversations with people. I'm tired of the small talk that usually happens when I spend time with my friends, and I want something deeper than that.

I chose Gen Z as my audience because I see this same pattern everywhere I go. Many people seem to crave real connection, but we don't go deeper.

I tried to choose a tone that is encouraging and relatable because I don't want the essay to sound accusatory or make people defensive. Instead, I hope readers will recognize themselves in the situation and feel inspired to change it.

To research my topic, I looked for articles online and subscribed to *The New York Times* for a week so I could read more about conversations and social connection.

The most challenging part of writing this piece was being willing to open up, even just a little bit. It is much easier for me to write in a general way. It's ironic, though, haha based on the topic I chose for my essay—being real and vulnerable with others.

Citations:

De Witte, Melissa. "Why Is Social Connection So Hard for Gen Z?" *Stanford Report*, 20 Mar. 2025, <https://news.stanford.edu/stories/2025/03/social-connections-gen-z-research-jamil-zaki>

Turkle, Sherry. "The Flight from Conversation." *The New York Times*, 22 Apr. 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/22/opinion/sunday/the-flight-from-conversation.html>