

Editorial

The New Generations: Challenges for School Psychology and Psychological Counseling

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Abstract

In a rapidly evolving global landscape marked by technological innovations, cultural transformations, and socio-political shifts, the developmental contexts of children and adolescents are undergoing profound changes. This paper explores the unique psychological profiles, learning preferences, and mental health needs of Generation Z (born ~1997–2012) and Generation Alpha (born 2013 onward), highlighting the growing challenges faced by professionals in school psychology and psychological counseling. As digital natives, these generations exhibit heightened digital literacy, a preference for visual and interactive learning, and an increased awareness of mental health issues. However, they also face increased vulnerability to anxiety, depression, and social comparison – primarily due to excessive digital exposure. School psychologists and counselors must navigate an increasingly complex landscape involving diverse family structures, evolving educational needs, and resistance to traditional therapeutic models. This paper underscores the need for adaptive, culturally competent, and technology-integrated practices to effectively engage with Gen Z and Alpha. The April 2025 issue of *Psychological Thought* aimed to put together practical solutions and multidisciplinary perspectives, and offer evidence-based recommendations for practice and future research to support the mental health and learning needs of these new generations.

Keywords: Generation Z; Generation Alpha; school psychology; psychological counseling.

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If anything can be said for certain about the modern society, that is the rapid change driven by technological advancements (e.g., the evolution of artificial intelligence - AI), cultural shifts (e.g., the new adulthood models, or the growing nationalist movements), and global events (e.g., the recent armed conflicts worldwide, or the energy crisis). All these have significantly transformed the developmental context of children and adolescents. As such, school psychology and psychological counseling are now faced with an evolving array of challenges associated with these "new generations," namely Generation Z (Gen-Z) and Generation Alpha (Gen Alpha). These cohorts exhibit unique psychological profiles, communication patterns, and learning preferences, which necessitate adaptive and innovative strategies in educational and counseling contexts ([Drugaş, 2022](#); [Prensky, 2001](#)).

The rationale of this call for papers

There is a growing interest in studying the psychological characteristics of the new generations, driven by the fact that some of them started working or will start soon (Gen-Z) and the others are today's preschoolers or young pupils (Gen Alpha). The number of published papers on the topic of the new generations more than doubled in the last 3 years. [Drugaş \(2022\)](#) conducted a search in the Web of Science database (March) for the keywords "Generation Z", returning 845 results that included the inquiry in the title; 449 of them (more than half!) have been published after 2019. A search conducted in April 2025, using the same keywords, returned 1.839 documents containing "Generation Z" inside the title. Out of these, 771 were published between 2023 and 2025.

The professionals in school psychology and psychological counseling are currently facing new challenges posed by the members of the new generations. For example, new learning styles are developed, emphasizing visual cues, using technology and AI, not only in school but also in everyday life ([McCrinkle, 2020](#)).

However, they are also narcissistic ([Nguyen et al., 2025](#)), easily bored, stubborn, sometimes lacking critical thinking, and exposed to numerous vulnerabilities such as alcohol and drug consumption ([Bonchiş, 2021](#)). They are more susceptible to anxiety, depression, and social comparison due to social media use ([Keles et al., 2020](#)). The good news is that they

demonstrate greater awareness of mental health issues and are more likely to seek help than their predecessors (Rideout & Fox, 2018).

As such, multiple perspectives on these challenges should bring practical value to professionals, but also for teachers and parents. The call for papers for the April 2025 issue of *Psychological Thought* aimed to gather different points of view on these generations and offer evidence-based recommendations for practice and future research.

The new generations

Generations Z (born approximately 1997–2012) and Alpha (born from 2013 onward, hence their name – the first generation born entirely in the 3rd millennium) differ markedly from previous generations in terms of their psychological, social, and cognitive development. They are "digital natives", growing up with constant exposure to the internet, social media, and smart technology (Twenge, 2017). This makes them two of the most technologically immersed cohorts in history, but exposure to technology has implications on attention span, cognitive development, emotional regulation, and social interaction patterns.

The new generations share enhanced digital literacy, a preference for multimedia learning, and rapid information processing (Twenge, 2017). They also display strong orientation to inclusivity, environmental awareness, climate change, and global connectivity, probably influenced by online access to diverse perspectives (McCrinkle & Fell, 2020). Both generations are ambitious and self-confident, entrepreneurial, motivated to expand their skills, creative, pragmatic, and independent (Benítez-Márquez, 2022).

On the other hand, despite shared technological exposure, Gen Alpha is growing up in an even more saturated digital ecosystem, characterized by the spectacular development of artificial intelligence, voice-activated assistants, and personalized algorithms for providing social media content, potentially shaping more fragmented attention spans and preferences for visual over textual content (McCrinkle & Fell, 2020). Gen Z, in contrast, came of age during the rise of social media, but also experienced pre-digital childhood phases, granting them a unique hybrid perspective on online and offline interaction (Twenge, 2017).

Cognitively, Gen Alpha showed earlier development in multitasking and adaptability, likely due to more immersive technology experiences (Swargiary, 2024). However, concerns about reduced empathy, shorter attention spans, and overreliance on instant gratification tools are more pronounced for Gen Alpha than Gen Z (Radesky et al., 2020). *Emotionally*, there is a

growing concern on Gen Alpha's impulsivity and risk-taking behavior (Jha, 2020), or the lack of empathy, loyalty and compassion (Selvi et al., 2022), with even higher levels than Gen Z. Their egocentric behaviors are well-described by GITMOE (*Give It To Me Or Else*), which led some authors to a suggestive name for Gen Alpha: *screamagers* (Druguş, 2022). *Socially*, Gen Z has been characterized by heightened anxiety and mental health concerns linked to social media use during adolescence, often preferring digital communication to face-to-face interactions (Twenge et al., 2018), whereas Gen Alpha's long-term psychological profiles are still a subject for future studies.

Challenges for school psychology and psychological counseling

As new generations emerge, the role of school psychologists and counselors becomes increasingly complex. Professionals are often forced to use adaptive strategies and innovative approaches to support the mental well-being of their clients (pupils, students, or young adults), but not all of them are prepared to embrace change in their practice, as the COVID-19 pandemic showed (Druguş, 2020). Some specific challenges and possible strategies were identified, based on personal and shared experience, as well as literature research.

1. Increased mental health awareness and concerns

Generation Z has been described as the most anxious generation, with elevated rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation (Twenge, 2017). Generation Alpha faces a similarly stressful environment, with early exposure to screen time and social media. For both cohorts (and for adults too, we might add), the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated anxiety, depression, and behavioral disorders, associated with higher stress and learning gaps (Golberstein et al., 2020). School psychologists and counselors must manage greater number of clients requiring mental health support, with or without clinical significance, often with limited resources and time, having to prioritize cases – all of which often leading to occupational stress (Pike & Floyd, 2024). Professionals should take this risk seriously, create and maintain peer connections that will allow them to share the burden, try to balance work, rest, and play, develop realistic expectations about workload, and take regular vacations (American Psychological Association, 2008).

2. Technology and social media influence

Both Gen Z and Gen Alpha are digital natives. Technology might enhance learning and (digital) connectivity, but it is also a vehicle for cyberbullying, social comparison, and reduced

face-to-face social skills. Counselors must understand the digital culture and its psychological effects to provide relevant support (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020). In school, the new generations prefer interactive, technology-based learning environments and tend to be more self-directed in acquiring knowledge (Prensky, 2001). School psychologists must collaborate with educators to develop inclusive educational plans that accommodate diverse learning styles.

3. Evolving family dynamics and diversity

Professionals have to deal with increasing number of young clients coming from diverse family structures, including single-parent homes, blended families, and even same-sex parents in some countries. Students are more open about their identities (American Psychological Association, 2018). Additionally, legal migration led to increased cultural and linguistic diversity, which requires culturally competent approaches from school psychologists and counselors (Sue et al., 2019). Professionals must also deal with the varied values and expectations of different households. Often, parents lack the digital literacy to understand their children's online experiences. Family-based counseling approaches are needed to engage all stakeholders in the therapeutic process (Kaslow et al., 2012), as well as parent-school collaborations.

4. Academic and performance pressures

High-stakes testing and final exams, high-school and college admission anxiety, and the desire to perform well in extracurricular activities contribute to stress. Counselors must provide effective academic and emotional support, while advocating for balanced educational approaches (Conley et al., 2014). In school, active learning strategies should be promoted (e.g., project-based learning) to enhance engagement and autonomy in Gen Z and Alpha. The controlled integration of AI technologies could support self-regulated learning, by offering personalized learning paths and real-time feedback (Chardonens, 2025).

5. Resistance to traditional counseling models

The new generations tend to favor informal, peer-based support systems and may be skeptical of traditional authority figures, although they are more likely to seek psychological support from specialists (Rideout & Fox, 2018). However, building rapport with digital-native clients might pose a real challenge for traditional psychologists. They must rely on client-centered and collaborative approaches, incorporating technology and interactive methods into their interventions (Rickwood et al., 2015). Digital natives may be more comfortable with texting or online interactions than face-to-face conversations. Counselors must develop skills

in teletherapy and online counseling, while maintaining ethical standards and ensuring confidentiality (Wright et al., 2021).

Conclusions

The work of school psychologists and counselors is becoming more complex as the members of Generation Z and Generation Alpha express different needs, compared to the older generations. These professionals must adapt by integrating new technologies and social media platforms into their work, adopting culturally competent practices, recognizing the increasing concerns for mental health, and respond with proactive and inclusive strategies. By focusing on student / client-centered approaches and being open to new experiences, professionals in the field of psychology can continue to support the flourishing of young people in a dynamic world.

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