



Fuller Youth Institute



THE FYI REPORT ON

GEN ALPHA & FAITH

Part 1: Insights on an Emerging Generation

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WELCOMING GENERATION ALPHA

Just when leaders felt like they finally understood Gen Z in youth ministry, Generation Alpha showed up.

Over the past few years, leaders have been asking us at FYI: *What's different about Gen Alpha—and how should we respond?* To find out, our team launched new research into how today's middle and high school students (born 2010 and later) explore identity, belonging, purpose, faith, and spirituality.

We launched this project to find answers to the questions we hear most from youth workers:

- ✓ How are Gen Alpha's big questions of identity, belonging, and purpose changing—and where are they looking for answers?
- ✓ How do forces like the mental health crisis, new technology, distrust of institutions, pandemic fallout, and polarization shape them?
- ✓ What do they actually believe, who's influencing them, and what does this mean for the church?
- ✓ To effectively reach and disciple today's teenagers, how must leaders, caregivers, and mentors adapt?

One of the strongest themes emerging so far is that teenagers are looking for adults who *listen without judgment*. And as you'll see in this report, we're learning a great deal about this emerging generation by listening to their experiences. **So as you read on, we encourage you to withhold judgment about what young people are reporting, and instead read with curiosity.** To that end, we've included questions throughout the report that you can ask a young person yourself.

This report is the first in a multi-year series. For our first phase, we've talked with dozens of adults and surveyed and interviewed nearly 3,000 teenagers, including an advisory group of teenagers helping us test what we're learning in real time. Next in our research, we'll dive deeper with more young people, youth workers, and parents. We're excited to keep learning about Gen Alpha with you—and we'll keep you updated along the way.

Visit fulleryouthinstitute.org/gen-alpha
to find more resources on Generation Alpha as they are released.

Together with you in ministry,



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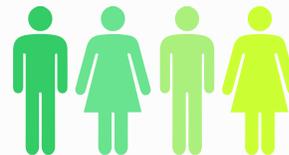
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TOP HIGHLIGHTS

WHO IS GEN ALPHA?



Generation Alpha refers to young people born in **2010 and later** (the oldest turn 16 in 2026).¹



Gen Alpha is the **most diverse generation** in race and ethnicity to date.³ Yet they're coming of age just as adult **polarization** and politicized rhetoric are remarkably high.⁴

Gen Alpha is the first generation to **come of age in our post-pandemic world.**



Lower reading and math scores



Social-emotional gaps



Chronic school absenteeism indicates that educational impact lingers.



Pandemic deepened family bonds for many children who are now becoming teens.²

Big trends in the **national religious landscape** may impact this generation's experiences.



Religious affiliation decline seems to have leveled off in the US.⁵



For the first time, young men are about as religious as young women.⁶

While younger generations of adults are the least religious, they report openness to religion and spirituality, and specifically to Jesus.⁷

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

Based on our national survey of 13-17-year-olds on the generational bubble, the findings in this report represent nearly 3,000 (2,783) validated surveys + 30 interviews so far.

The pandemic is both a distant childhood memory and a present generational marker

- 55%** say the pandemic still affects them regularly.
- 75%** hardly ever talk about the pandemic anymore, despite its deep impact on their lives and world.
- 30%** say they feel relieved or understood when people talk about its effects on their lives or generation.

Teens hang out with each other less in person than in prior generations

- 43%** of teens hang out with friends in person for fun once a week or more.
- 1 in 5** say they “almost never” do.⁸



How often do you hang out with friends in person just for fun?

Several times a week	25%
2-3 times a month	22%
Almost never	21%
Once a week	18%
Once a month	14%

At the same time, other research has found that plenty of teens want to do more with friends in person, and some offline activities (including high school sports) are rebounding significantly post-pandemic.⁹

They worry about being judged by adults

- ✓ What makes an adult trustworthy? Across the board in our data, it's **someone who listens without judging.**
- ✓ What could faith communities do to better connect with teens? Young people resoundingly said: **Be more welcoming and less judgmental.**

Most young people are open to faith

12% say they're not interested in faith or religion at all.

41% of teens with no religious affiliation ("Nones") aren't interested, which means **over half of nonreligious young people may be open to faith.**

They know what matters to them

75% say it's mostly or totally true that "I know what's important to me in life."

Digital space can be sacred space

- ✓ 1 in 4 say it's mostly or totally true that "My faith has changed because of things I've learned or people I've met online," and 1 in 3 say they learn about faith or spiritual topics online more than in person.

40% struggle a lot with their mental health

- ✓ 1 in 4 say social media negatively impacts their mental health.
- ✓ Older teenagers are most likely to struggle.
- ✓ When analyzing by race, Multiracial and White young people are most likely to say they struggle a lot.

ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

2,783 survey participants ages 13-17

Age



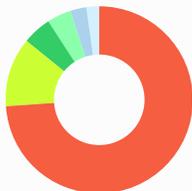
13-15	52%
16-17	48%

Gender Identification



Female	50%
Male	45%
Non-binary	2%
Prefer not to say	2%
Prefer to self-describe	1%

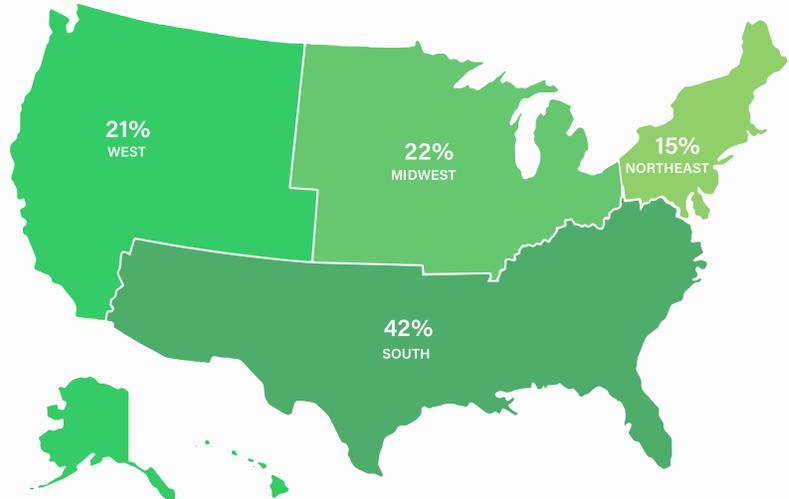
Sexual Orientation



Straight	74%
Bisexual	12%
Gay or lesbian	4%
Something else	4%
I don't know	3%
Prefer not to say	2%

Which of the following best represents how you think of yourself?

Geographic Regions

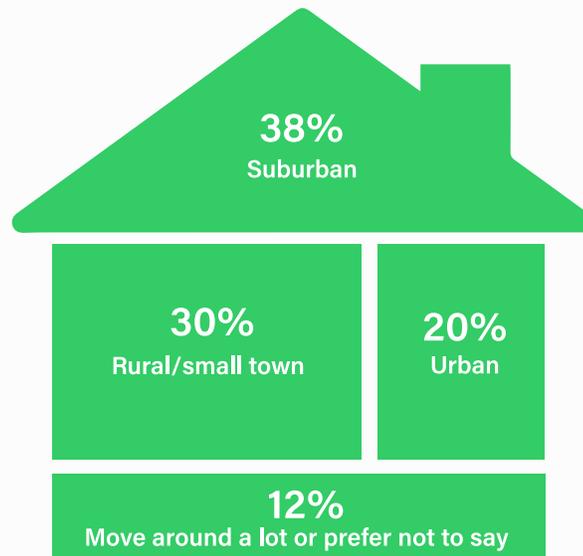


Participants spanned 48 states and the District of Columbia

Top 5 States (in order):

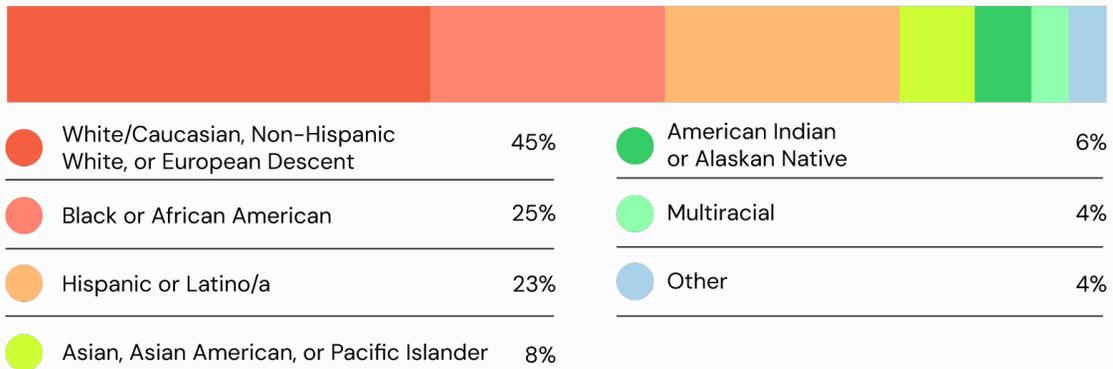
Texas, California, Florida, New York, Georgia

Community Type



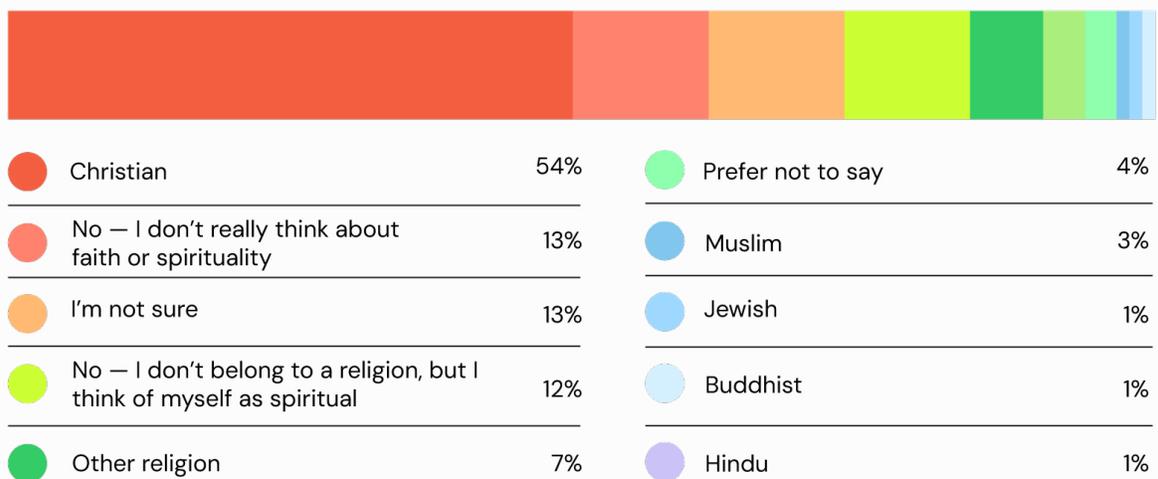
Primary caretakers: While the vast majority of participants live with one or both parents (which could also mean stepparents), 19% say their primary caretakers are grandparents, other family members, foster family, or other adults. Many live in multigenerational households.

Race



Participants could choose more than one option¹⁰

Religion



We asked, "Do you consider yourself part of a religion or spiritual tradition?" Participants could choose more than one option. We combined the two "No" responses into a "Nones" group for analysis, which represents 25% of the overall sample.

INSIGHT 1

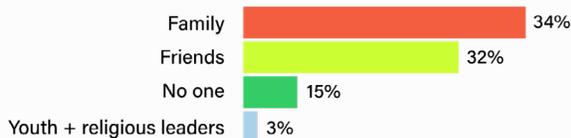
FAMILY MATTERS

FYI research has long affirmed that family is a top influence on young people. Now Gen Alpha is saying it too.

In our survey, we asked a number of questions that included different options for “family,” including parents or caregivers, grandparents, siblings, or other extended family members. Time after time, category after category, *family* emerged as a top influence.

When we say “family,” we mean all kinds of families. *Overall in our sample, 19% say their primary caretakers are grandparents, other family members, foster family, or other adults.*

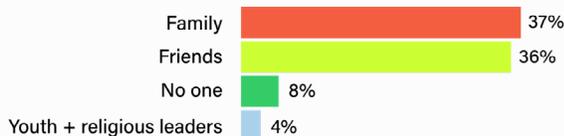
Who do you trust most to talk to when figuring something out about yourself?



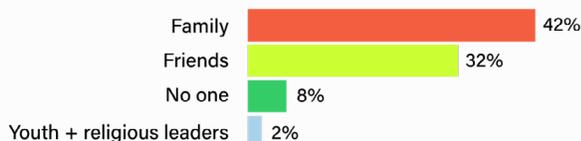
Respondents could choose 1 among 10 options. Youth leaders and religious leaders were separate choices, but we've combined them here and in most other places in this report.

5x more young people say they have “no one” they trust to talk to than say they trust talking to a faith leader

Who most helps you feel like or remember that you belong?



Who do you trust most to talk about your future dreams and goals?



Are there differences by race?

Multiracial young people are significantly more likely to trust friends when figuring out something about their identity (at 46%), followed by “no one” (21%) and family (18%). Multiracial, Asian American, and White young people are more likely to choose friends as their top source of belonging, followed by family, while Black, Latina/o, and Native teens are more likely to choose family, followed by friends. Multiracial teens are the only group significantly more likely to choose friends over family when talking about future dreams and goals.¹¹

What about age?

Across responses that explore how young people pursue identity, belonging, and purpose, family remains the top influence for both 13-15-year-olds and 16-17-year-olds. **While adults might expect the influence of family to wane and that of friends to grow in the older teen years, we're not seeing the trend in this sample.**

Faith influences

Who or what has influenced your spiritual beliefs the most?



The same pattern is true for faith. When we asked teens to name the top influences on their spiritual beliefs, we divided "family" into more specific options, and 3 appeared in the top 5. Parents or caregivers are also the top-reported faith influence across all racial groups.

The power of grandparents

Grandparents show up prominently in several areas, often cited by teens as more influential than people outside the family. Black young people are significantly more likely to cite grandparents' influence on their faith. Grandparent influence on faith seems strongest in multigenerational households. Teens whose primary caregivers are non-parental adults are significantly more likely to say their beliefs have been influenced most by grandparents or other extended family members.

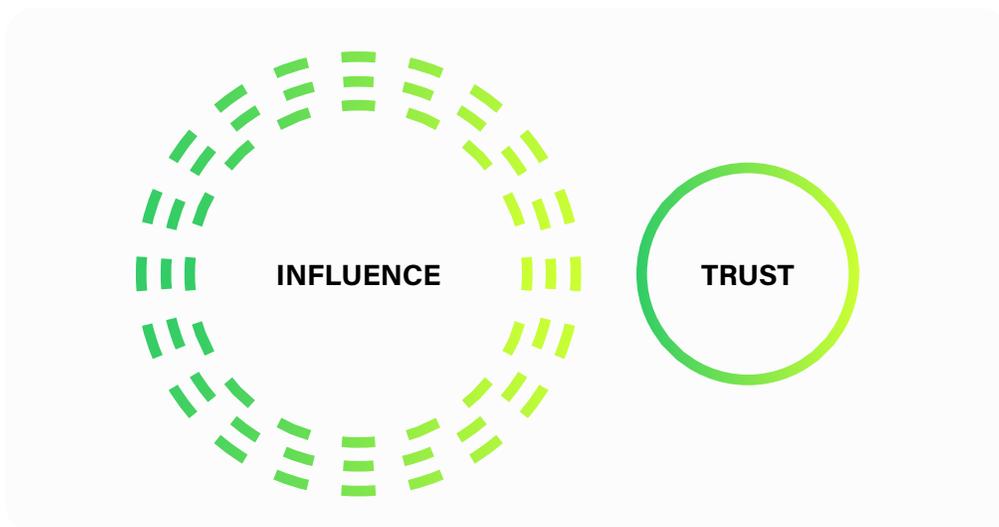


"I'm pretty close with my grandparents, and I feel like that's really important for me because they have, like, really unique perspectives. They all immigrated from different countries. So that gives me more perspectives on other parts of the world, too."

What's going on in this data?

Research has affirmed for several decades that the greatest influence on kids' and teens' faith is the family system.¹² What seems different for Gen Alpha? **Now, teens are the ones to say it.** At least in part because of the pandemic, this generation spent more time at home with their families in childhood, which could contribute to family closeness. Many are likely to still have one or more caregivers working from home or on a flexible schedule. What's more, approximately 2.5 million US children are being raised in kinship or grandfamilies.¹³

In the United States, the current decade is also marked by high polarization and a general decline in trust.¹⁴ As a result, anyone outside a young person's family system might inherently seem less trustworthy. What's more, a majority of Gen Alpha is parented by Millennials, whose parenting styles tend to emphasize attachment, emotional attunement, and empowerment. It's possible that all these factors, as well as others, are contributing to the stronger influence of parental figures and family members. We wonder if today's young people have an ever-**expanding** circle of influence but a **shrinking** circle of trust. Who they trust most is in the family circle.



PUTTING INSIGHT INTO PRACTICE

Support and prioritize families

Resource families

Evaluate how your ministry is supporting and partnering with families. Send caregivers recommendations of articles, books, podcasts, or even video messages from you.

Create shared experiences

Turn one of your regular youth gatherings into a family event. Rather than separating parents and students, curate intentional conversations among family members and across different families.

Encourage parents

Catch parents—or their teenagers—doing something good and tell them about it!



Ask a young person

- Who in your life understands you the most? What is it that shows they really get you?
- Which person in your family has most shaped what you believe or how you think about God? How have they done that?
- Who do you go to most with questions about faith or life?

INSIGHT 2

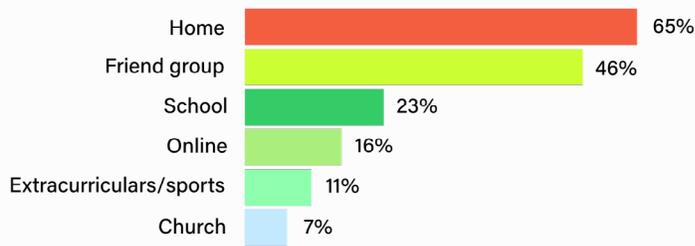
THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

What Gen Alpha wants and what they're doing

While they've grown up very connected online (some started school entirely on screens, and the screens never went away) and spending a lot of time at home, post-pandemic research shows Gen Alpha increasingly wants in-person connection. Almost half of young people say they prefer unstructured, in-person time with friends over organized activities.¹⁵

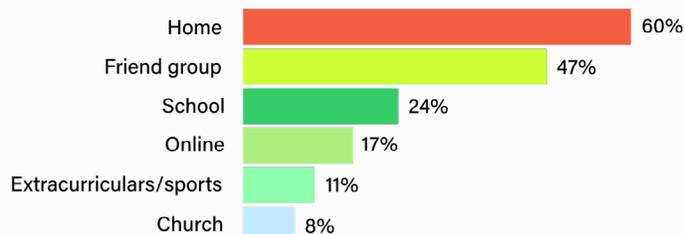
But it seems as though a lot of young people aren't getting out of the house much.¹⁶ For most of the young people in our study, **home itself is a significant place.**

Where do you feel the most like yourself?



Each of these questions offered 11 options, including "Church or place of worship" (listed as "Church" here) and "Religious or spiritual group," which did not make the top 6 in any category.

Where do you most fit in or belong?



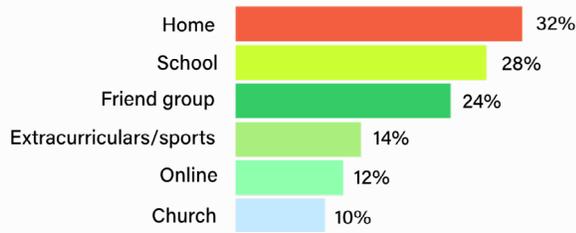
Q: Describe a place or space where you feel most like you belong.

A: Is it cheating to say 'home'?



We offer caution here: Home and family aren't safe for every young person. We realize that instability or relationship strain can make home uncomfortable, while abuse or neglect can make home terrifying. At the same time, home was so prominent among responses that we feel compelled to emphasize this trend.

Where do you most often find purpose?



Where do you feel most comfortable practicing or exploring your faith or spirituality?



When it comes to practicing and exploring faith, our hunch is that home still tops the list, considering “alone” often also means “at home” (especially since “in nature or outdoor spaces” was only chosen by 6% of respondents).

Are there differences by race?

When asked where young people most feel like themselves, home is the top choice across all groups, but Latinos are significantly more likely to choose home. When it comes to belonging, home is the top choice across groups, except among Multiracial teens, who are most likely to choose “friend group” (slightly higher than home) and are significantly more likely to say “nowhere.” When it comes to belonging, too, Latinos are significantly more likely to choose home.

Asian and Latina/o young people are significantly more likely to find purpose at school, while Black teens are significantly more likely to find purpose at home. Multiracial teens are most likely to find purpose in their friend group.

What about age?

Across questions of identity, belonging, and purpose, home remains the top location for both 13-15-year-olds and 16-17-year-olds. The main difference is in school: for the older age group, school drops significantly as a space to find identity, belonging, and purpose. Instead, online and extracurricular activities and sports rise in importance.

AI is not just for homework

Increasingly, teens spending time at home are also using AI for conversation and companionship. A recent Common Sense Media study found that 72% of teens have used an AI companion; 52% do so regularly. Also, nearly one-third of teens find AI conversations as satisfying or more satisfying than human conversations.¹⁷

PUTTING INSIGHT INTO PRACTICE

Find out why home matters ... and help teens get out of the house

Ask about what makes home "home."

Ask students to share pictures or bring something that represents home and describe how home makes them feel.

Make youth group feel more like home

Consider adjusting seating or lighting to make your space feel warmer. Invite students to decorate with artwork and display photos from group experiences.

Help them find faith & purpose beyond home

Today's teenagers may need convincing that practicing faith with others is worth it. Giving them meaningful roles in your ministry could make all the difference.



Ask a young person

- What makes your home important to you?
- What do you wish other people understood about your home?
- Do you wish you could hang out at home more, less, or about the same amount? Tell me more about why.

INSIGHT 3

WANTED: NONJUDGMENTAL ADULTS

Gen Alpha craves relationships with consistent adults who listen and follow through

You might be discouraged by how low youth leaders, pastors, and churches are showing up in these statistics so far. Here's good news: Gen Alpha wants more connection with adults.

We asked young people what they're looking for and learned that they'd love more **mentors and guides** who are **trustworthy**. This is defined most powerfully by young people as **listening without judging**.

Looking for mentors

40% say having a mentor, guide, or elder they can talk to regularly would help them grow in their faith. From our interviews, here are a few examples of what teenagers are looking for:

- ✓ "Someone who expresses that they want to spend time with you and actually does spend time with you."
- ✓ "A mentor who sets aside time for you, goes and does something with you, checks in, and remembers what's going on in your life."
- ✓ "Someone who listens to you talk about things and then responds with wisdom."

What makes an adult trustworthy?

We asked, "What makes an adult trustworthy to you?" Here are the top 5 responses.

1



They **listen without judging** me

2



They **respect my views** even if they disagree

3



They **follow through** on what they say

4



Their **actions match** their values

5



They **know me well**

"Listen without judging" was the top response across every racial subgroup.

Does this change with age?

“They listen without judging me” was the most frequently chosen among every age group. But some differences emerged.

For 13-15 year olds, “they know me well” was the second most important. Around half value “they consistently make time for me,” but this drops for 16-17 year-olds. The older group prioritizes “they respect my views even if they disagree,” “they follow through on what they say,” and “their actions match their values.”

In other words, **making time to really get to know them** matters more in establishing trust with younger teens. **Showing respect and living with integrity** matter more to establishing trust with older high schoolers.

What could faith communities do more of to connect better with teens?



Recent research from Future of Faith found that when a young person feels *heard*, it is a direct catalyst for *belief*. Two-thirds of teenagers report spiritual growth when they share their beliefs and are received with listening rather than judgment, compared to only one-third who report the same after listening to a sermon. In other words, listening itself is an act of faith formation.¹⁸

This top 3 list is consistent across Christians, Nones (those unaffiliated with any religious tradition), older teens, younger teens, race, and family types. **Every way we looked at this, young people want faith communities that welcome more and judge less**—even if they aren't part of one right now.

Similarly, when we asked what would make it easier to talk to adults about faith or life questions, the top two responses were **“Less pressure to have the right answer”** and **“Not worrying about being judged!”**



“Church leaders should engage more with young people. Be active, open, and approachable. They should talk with us, not down to us.”

PUTTING INSIGHT INTO PRACTICE

Intentionally build trust with Gen Alpha

Get Curious

When you hear something you don't understand, say, "Tell me more." Then practice active, nonjudgmental listening.

Follow up

When a student shares something important (like a test or a big game coming up) make a note to ask how it went the next time you see them. Follow-up is a big trust builder.

Be Dependable

If you say you're going to show up, show up. Never promise to make a performance or game that you don't actually mean to attend.



Ask a young person

- Tell me about a time when you felt like an adult listened without judging you. Who was listening, and what were they doing to make you feel that way?
- What's one question you wish an adult would ask you? What's one question you wish they'd stop asking you?
- If you could change one thing about our church community to make it more welcoming, what would it be?

INSIGHT 4

HYBRID TEENS PRACTICE HYBRID SPIRITUALITY

Faith looks fluid for Gen Alpha across online and in-person spaces

While our survey sample spanned religious traditions and nonpracticing young people, a few highlights emerged when looking across the group as a whole:

- 1/4** of participants consider themselves very or extremely **spiritual**.
- 1/3** say they're **deeply committed** to their faith or religion and want to grow.
- 1/3** **attend a religious service** or gathering in person **once a week or more**.
- 2/5** say faith or religion is very important in **shaping how they live** their daily lives.

Digital space can be sacred space

It can also be a space for curiosity about the sacred, especially for young people who don't identify with a particular religious tradition.

Top 3 places teens learn about faith & spirituality

Christians



Church



Home



Social Media

Religious Nones



Social Media



Home



Friends



"I have a Bible app, but I feel like most of my faith things are in person. I don't like being on technology a lot because it just feels artificial, you know? It doesn't feel the same as, like, actual human connection. And I feel like the human connection between people in my community is way more important to my faith."

How are teens engaging faith in the digital world?

- ✓ 30% have recently used a Bible or sacred text app.
- ✓ 24% have recently used a meditation, mindfulness, or prayer app.
- ✓ 23% have recently watched a worship service or sermon online.
- ✓ But some are opting out or uninterested. 40% said "none of these" when asked about a list of 9 online spiritual activities.

We know teens are online a lot, and according to recent findings from Pew Research, 1 in 5 teens say they are on TikTok and YouTube "almost constantly," and about 3 in 10 use AI chatbots daily.¹⁹ In our research, we learned that:



1 in 3

say "I learn about faith or spiritual topics online more than in person."



1 in 4

say "My faith has changed because of things I've learned or people I've met online."

Personal and relational faith

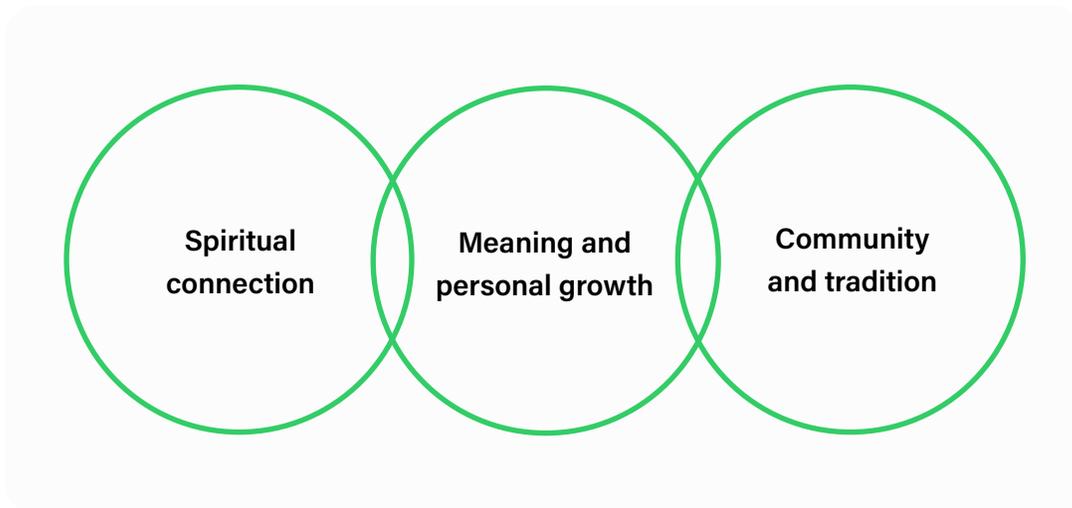
In interviews, we're hearing that faith language is deeply personal, relational, and experiential (as opposed to distant or doctrinal). Teens describe God as companion, teacher, and guide, and church as family.



“My faith ties me all together and makes me feel whole. It helps me believe in myself and reminds me that I can do things for good.”

When we asked an open-ended question about why young people practice faith (of any kind), these themes stood out:

1. **Spiritual connection:** The desire to develop and deepen a personal relationship with God through belief, love, and closeness, and for some, an emphasis on seeking eternal life.
2. **Meaning and personal growth:** Using faith as a framework for finding meaning and purpose, navigating life’s challenges, finding peace, and for some, self-improvement.
3. **Community and tradition:** Drawing on family affiliation and religious practice to find a sense of belonging that provides stability and support.



PUTTING INSIGHT INTO PRACTICE

Influence how teenagers curate their discipleship both online and offline

Pay attention when teenagers say they heard something about God on TikTok

Ask them who's influencing their faith on social platforms, and help them integrate their online and offline faith.

Recommend Bible and prayer apps

As well as content creators you're familiar with who are people of integrity and align with your theological tradition.

Offer offline alternatives

While respecting the role digital media plays in their lives, encourage breaks and tech sabbaths. Recommend prayer and devotional practices teens can easily do on their own without a device.



Ask a young person

- Tell me about a time recently when your faith impacted a decision you made or an interaction you had with someone.
- What makes you want to come to church? What makes you want to stay home or do something else instead?
- How does what you see and hear online impact your faith? What do you wish more adults understood about that?

INSIGHT 5

A CLOSER LOOK AT FAITH-FORWARD TEENS

Unique insights about highly committed and engaged Christians

What about young people who identify as Christian and also report high engagement in discipleship practices? Our research team wondered: Do active Christians report that youth leaders and pastors have more influence in their lives? Do they experience more belonging at church?

A profile began to emerge after combining religious importance (How important is faith or religion in shaping how you live your daily life?) with self-reported frequency of the following behaviors:

- ✓ Attend a religious service or gathering
- ✓ Watch, read, or listen to faith-based content
- ✓ Pray or meditate
- ✓ Do service or volunteer work as part of your faith
- ✓ Read religious or sacred texts
- ✓ Spend time thinking about your beliefs
- ✓ Talk with someone about faith or spirituality

93% say faith is very important in shaping how they live their daily lives, and 90% think faith will matter to them as they get older. **Prayer** is the highest-frequency faith practice reported, while service or volunteer work is the lowest-reported frequency. Highly committed and engaged Christians say they attend church or some other gathering weekly.²⁰

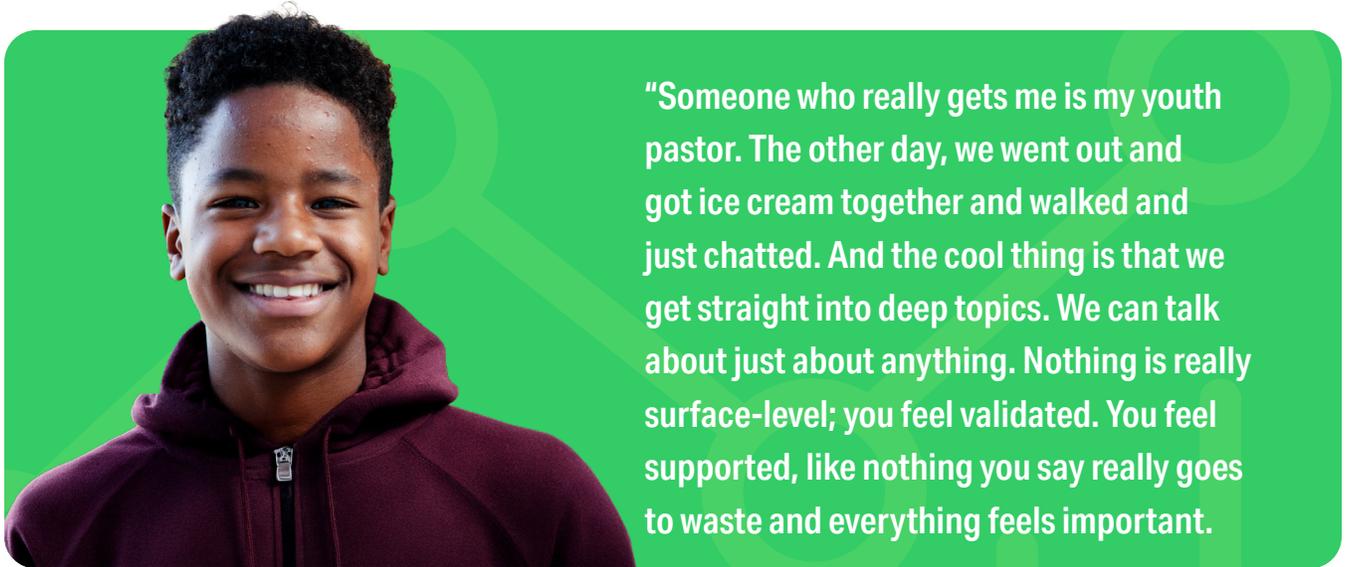
Where and how they grow in faith

Where do you feel most comfortable practicing or exploring your faith or spirituality?

Highly committed and engaged Christians



Understandably, this is the only group where church and youth group emerge on top. The good news is that these spaces feel comfortable for engaged young people.



Highly engaged students say their faith would grow most through **small group discussions** with peers and **having a mentor** they can talk with regularly. They’re also much more likely to watch or listen to faith-based content and find ways to connect faith to everyday life. Interestingly, “more opportunities to serve” and “help learning how to pray” rarely show up as top choices for this group—or for any group, for that matter.

At the same time, this group is the one most likely to say that if they felt **less pressure to have the “right” answer**, it would be easier to talk with adults. For every other group, the biggest barrier to conversations is the fear of being judged.

Who is influencing their faith

Who or what has influenced your spiritual beliefs the most?

Highly committed and engaged Christians



● Parents	71%	● Friends	22%
● Religious leaders	32%	● Youth leaders	13%
● Grandparents	22%	● Siblings	11%

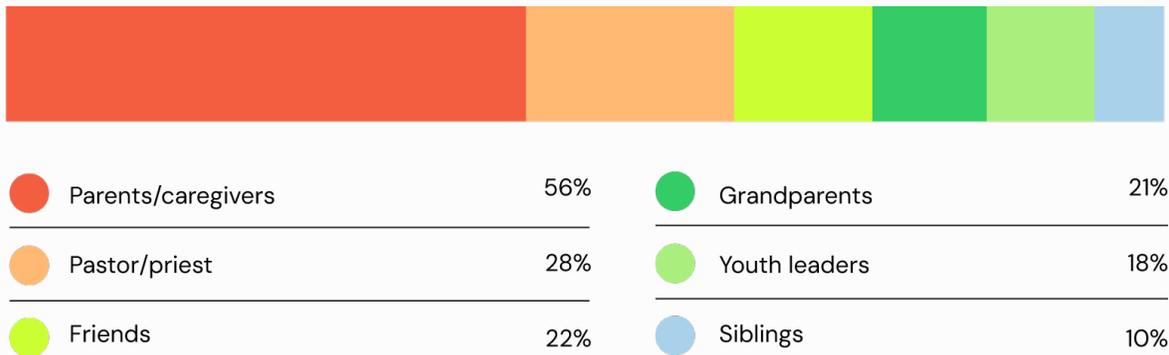
“Pastor, priest, or religious leader” and youth leaders rise in influence here, but parent/caregiver influence is even stronger than in the overall sample (71% vs. 65%).

Where do these teens **learn the most about faith or spirituality?** The highly engaged group is consistent with the overall Christian sample: Church, home, and social media. Church rises to 87%, but home is still high at 77%. However, in every other measure of identity and belonging, family and home still come out on top, with friends also ranking above pastors or youth leaders.

For example, when we asked, **“When you’ve had questions or doubts about your faith, who has helped you the most?”** pastors and youth leaders rise in support, but parents are still first, and other family members show up prominently.

When you’ve had questions or doubts about your faith, who has helped you the most?

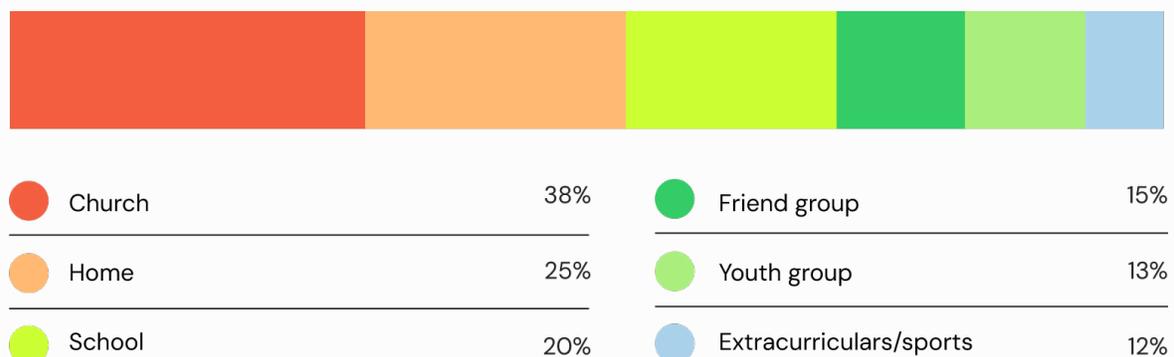
Highly committed and engaged Christians



Purpose is an exception. When we asked, “Where do you most often find purpose?” the engaged group **chose church most often**, followed by home and school.

Where do you most often find purpose?

Highly committed and engaged Christians



Adults at church understand them

Highly engaged young people rate adults in their churches very positively overall, with over 2/3 saying each of these statements is mostly or totally true:

- ✓ I feel like adults there really get what I'm going through
- ✓ Adults there talk about the stuff I care about
- ✓ Adults there ask questions instead of just giving answers
- ✓ We talk regularly about real-life topics

They desire digital faith and in-person discipleship

When it comes to digital faith practices, this group also stands out:

- ✓ 61% have recently used a Bible or sacred text app.
- ✓ 51% have recently watched a worship service or sermon online.
- ✓ 39% have followed a faith-based social media account.
- ✓ 34% have recently used a meditation, mindfulness, or prayer app.
- ✓ 33% have created or listened to a spiritual playlist.

However, when asked about their preferences, they say they *prefer to both learn about and practice faith more in person* than online.

"I try not to get a lot of my theology from the internet. I like to be able to talk to people and, like, have full conversations about faith and all that."



PUTTING INSIGHT INTO PRACTICE

Your influence still makes an impact

Maximize the influence you have

Young people say they want more connection with adults, and many are open to spiritual conversations. Make the most of opportunities to connect with students within your care.

Create a culture of mentoring

Boost mentoring relationships in your ministry, either by pairing teens with carefully vetted adults or setting up small groups. Give mentors simple questions that prompt open spiritual conversations.

Prioritize connection in your ministry gatherings

Plan intentional opportunities for students to hang out with each other, perhaps over food and games. Explore topics and Bible passages that affirm why friendship is important and what only humans, not AI, can provide in relationships.



Ask a young person

- If we stopped meeting as a youth group (or small group) tomorrow, what would you miss most? Why?
- Has there been a time you held back what you really thought at church? What made you hesitate?
- When does church feel like a place where you can be yourself? When does it feel like you can't be totally real?

INSIGHT 6

WHAT ABOUT THE "NONES"?

What we're learning from those who aren't coming to youth group

Nones, or those who choose no religious affiliation, have been a curiosity of researchers and leaders as their numbers have grown dramatically and, more recently, leveled off.²¹ Research has focused primarily on adults, so we wanted to better understand this group of teenagers.

We defined Nones as those who selected one of two options when asked, "Do you consider yourself part of a religion or spiritual tradition?"

- ✓ No — I don't belong to a religion, but I think of myself as spiritual
- ✓ No — I don't really think about faith or spirituality

This combined group represented 25% of our overall sample.

Key differences in support

One overall pattern we observed with Nones is that friends **rise in importance** as trusted sources of support for identity, belonging, and purpose. Across the board, Nones are more likely to find belonging outside the home.

Nones are also more likely to find support **online and through social media**. They're more likely to learn about faith and spirituality online than from family or friends, and are most comfortable **exploring spirituality alone**.

Nones are significantly more likely to say they **struggle with their mental health**. They're also more likely to say they have no one who helps them feel like they belong and no one they trust to talk to when figuring something out about themselves. On a separate relational support scale, they're significantly less likely to say they have adults in their lives who they trust to show up for them, who give them space to be themselves, or who take their thoughts and feelings seriously.

A note about gender:

We found that males and females are about equally likely to be Christians or Nones, and saw no stand-out differences in their faith practices. While the percentages of non-binary teens and those who prefer to self-describe are very small in our study (and findings should be interpreted with caution), the overwhelming majority do not affiliate with a religion and do not regularly participate in religious or spiritual practices. In other words, most are represented in this report section.

What’s going on in this data?

We can’t say for sure where to attribute these differences in social support. None of these findings are significantly different by family type, and Nones are no less likely to report parents as primary caregivers.

Other research has found similar patterns. For example, Young Life’s *Relate* study learned that Nones report a much lower sense of familial belonging overall, and about half report they don’t have someone they can talk to about religious questions or doubts.²² Springtide Research Institute found a connection between religion, spirituality, and human flourishing among Gen Alpha 13-year-olds. Even those who consider themselves just slightly religious report greater life satisfaction, belonging, and purpose.²³



“I finally came to the realization that I have not felt the presence of religion in my life. I’ve done things like going to church and youth group with my family, but I haven’t felt any religious connection to that. I have not had any moments with God. I’ve not felt any faith in a divine being.”

Some Nones are open to faith

41% of Nones say they aren’t interested in religion at all.
That means over half are potentially spiritually open.

21% say they are “still figuring it out.”

18% say “I’m spiritual but not really religious.”

We asked those who don’t practice any faith an open-ended question about why, and no top reason emerged. Young people mentioned **lack of interest** in religion, **lack of experience**, or that they just **don’t believe** in any particular religion. Some are **unsure** or **don’t know where to start**.

Few sound antagonistic, and just 2% mention negative experiences with religion or religious trauma. For many Nones, faith either isn’t on their radar or they may be open, but it’s not something they are actively opposing.

PUTTING INSIGHT INTO PRACTICE

Non-religious teenagers need us to listen, not assume

Never assume unchurched means uninterested in God

Some teens may never have set foot in a church, but that doesn't mean they aren't asking questions and seeking faith. Since many trust a friend first, help your students talk about faith in ways that keep conversations open and curious.

Never assume a churchgoing teenager is all-in on Jesus

Nones aren't just "out there," they're also probably in your youth room. Your posture toward questions and doubts can help young people stay open to experiencing God regardless of their level of commitment.

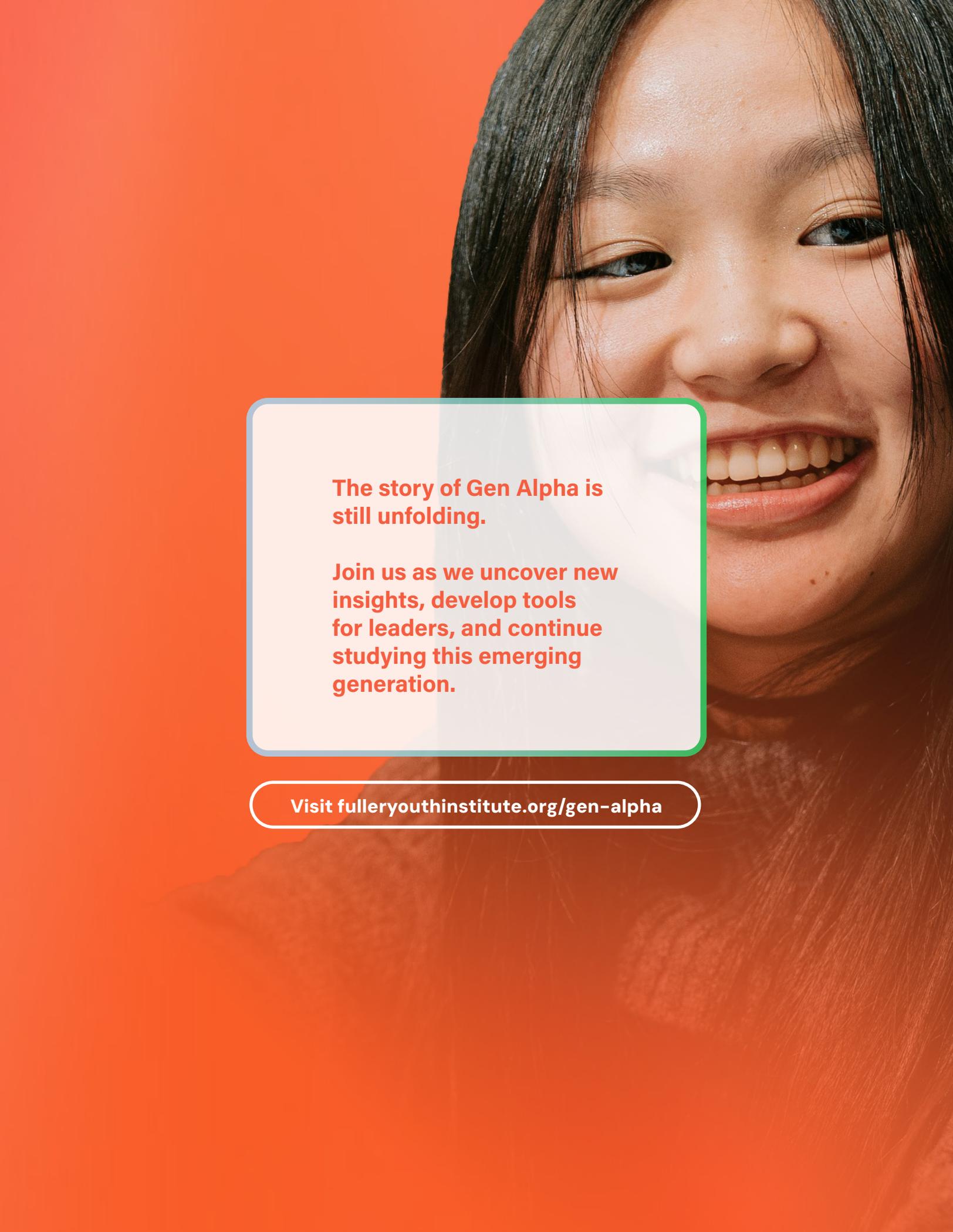
Get outside of your ministry

Go to where teenagers are. If you're in a church-based role, spend time each week in the community or at local schools where you can encounter or even just observe teenagers and pray about what God may be doing in their lives.



Ask a young person

- What would make a church feel genuinely welcoming to someone who isn't sure what they believe?
- Why is it sometimes easier to search online for answers about spirituality and religion than to talk to someone you know?
- What is sacred to you?



The story of Gen Alpha is still unfolding.

Join us as we uncover new insights, develop tools for leaders, and continue studying this emerging generation.

Visit fulleryouthinstitute.org/gen-alpha

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

FYI's Gen Alpha Project (GAP) is investigating teenagers' experiences of identity, belonging, purpose, faith, and spirituality, focused on today's Gen Alpha middle and high school students (defined as adolescents born 2010 and later, with emphasis on those ages 13 and older). This study employs a mixed-methods approach incorporating surveys, interviews, and nontraditional data collection methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of how young people engage with religious and spiritual identity in contemporary contexts. Initial exploration involved gathering stakeholder input from dozens of leaders and parents, and a preliminary literature review of over 100 sources related to young people's identity, belonging, purpose, and religion/spirituality, with preference for sources published 2020-2025 and featuring US-based adolescent participants born 2010 or later.

In the summer of 2025, we constructed, piloted, and conducted the National Survey on Teen Spirituality & Religion, designed by the Fuller Youth Institute in consultation with Future of Faith. It was administered in July 2025 on Qualtrics via both a purchased Centiment panel and a nationally-recruited sample through FYI and Alpha Youth USA networks. Following thorough data validation, cleaning, and analysis, we ultimately chose to discontinue our nationally-recruited panel due to contamination concerns and solicited another Centiment panel in November 2025. These efforts combined yielded a total usable sample of 2,783 participants.

Racial demographics of our combined sample included 45% White/Caucasian, non-Hispanic White, or European descent, 25% Black or African American, 23% Hispanic or Latino, 8% Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander, 6% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 4% Multiracial, 5% Other (Note: respondents could choose more than one option).

Survey data were analyzed using the statistical software programs SPSS and DisplayR to conduct inferential statistics (e.g., exception tests, regression analysis) to explore relationships between several variables. We first performed basic descriptive analyses using summary tables and visualizations on Display-R. We then performed cross-tabulations using various key demographic variables. Next, we used latent class analysis to identify meaningful profiles and compared results across these profiles. Finally, we conducted follow-up analyses to investigate emergent questions.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain qualitative insights into young people's experiences, focusing on identity, belonging, purpose, trust, adult mentors, faith, and religious community. Interviews were conducted via video conferencing and lasted approximately 45 minutes each. All interviews were recorded, deidentified, transcribed, and cleaned for analysis.

Due to our ongoing commitment to increasing the diversity of both participants and interviewers, we view this qualitative work as iterative and expanding. We will continue conducting interviews to ensure broader representation and a richer understanding of young people's perspectives. The study faces several limitations, including potential response bias in self-reported surveys, unweighted sample data, and the limited generalizability of qualitative findings due to the smaller sample size of interviews in comparison to survey data. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the survey data does not allow for causal inferences.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Generational theory is not exact, and existing ranges vary from 2010-2015. We're opting to start with those on the generational bubble so we can keep learning as this generation evolves. "Generation Alpha" was coined by Mark McCrindle; see Mark McCrindle, Mark and Ashley Fell, *Generation Alpha: Understanding Our Children and Helping Them Thrive* (Hachette Australia, 2021).

² Luona Lin, Kim Parker, and Juliana Horowitz, "What's It Like to Be a Teacher in America Today?" Pew Research Center, April 4, 2024, https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2024/04/ST_24.04.04_teacher-survey_report.pdf; "Chronic Absenteeism," U.S. Department of Education, January 20, 2025, <http://www.ed.gov/teaching-and-administration/supporting-students/chronic-absenteeism>.

³ The Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Population by Birth Cohort Generation and Race and Ethnicity," KIDS COUNT Data Center, July 2024, <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/11504-population-by-birth-cohort-generation-and-race-and-ethnicity?loc=1&loct=1>.

⁴ "Americans' Dismal Views of the Nation's Politics," Pew Research Center, September 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/09/19/americans-dismal-views-of-the-nations-politics/>.

⁵ Gregory A. Smith, "Religion Holds Steady in America," Pew Research Center, December 8, 2025, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/12/08/religion-holds-steady-in-america/>; Gregory A. Smith et al., "Decline of Christianity in the U.S. Has Slowed, May Have Leveled Off," Pew Research Center, February 26, 2025, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/02/26/decline-of-christianity-in-the-us-has-slowed-may-have-leveled-off/>.

⁶ Gregory A. Smith, "Religion Holds Steady in America," and Daniel A. Cox and Kelsey Eyre Hammond, "Young Women Are Leaving Church in Unprecedented Numbers - The Survey Center on American Life," American Survey Center, April 4, 2024, <https://www.americansurveycenter.org/newsletter/young-women-are-leaving-church-in-unprecedented-numbers/>.

⁷ Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z: Volume 3*, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2024.

⁸ High schoolers socialize in person much less than they used to. Data from the Monitoring the Future survey from 1995-2022 shows that the percentage of 12th graders who socialize with their friends no more than once a week has been rising since 2010. Even before the pandemic hit, it was just above 40%—nearly double the 1995 figure. Smartphones and social media are likely part of this story, especially since 2012. Covid caused a 5% bump. See Ryan Burge, "High School Students Are Growing Incredibly Anti-Social," *Graphs About Religion*, April 14, 2025, <https://www.graphsaboutreligion.com/p/high-school-students-are-growing>.

⁹ Georgie Walsh, "7 Gen Alpha Characteristics To Know For 2025," *GWI*, 2023, <https://www.gwi.com/blog/gen-alpha-characteristics>. "Participation in High School Sports Hits Record High with Sizable Increase in 2024-25," *NFHS*, September 9, 2025, <https://nfhs.org/stories/participation-in-high-school-sports-hits-record-high-with-sizable-increase-in-2024-25>.

¹⁰ The racial and ethnic diversity in this sample closely approximates the current makeup of people under age 18 in the US, with a larger proportion of Black young people and a smaller proportion of Latinos. Population estimates for adolescents ages 12-17 are as follows: White (non-Hispanic): 47%, Hispanic/Latino: 27%, Black: 16%, Asian and Pacific Islander: 7%, Multiracial: 6%, American Indian/Alaska Native: 2%. Source: The Annie E.

Casey Foundation, “Population by Birth Cohort Generation and Race and Ethnicity,” KIDS COUNT Data Center, September 2025, <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/11504-population-by-birth-cohort-generation-and-race-and-ethnicity?loc=1&loct=1>.

¹¹ Note: We found that Multiracial youth in our sample are twice as likely to identify as nonreligious, so some of this may be a “Nones effect” since these patterns are similar (see Insight 6, “What about the ‘Nones,’” above). At the same time, literature on multiracial identity also offers insights into this pattern. While both familial and peer support are important for forming ethnic-racial identity, multiracial young people can experience a sense of “cultural homelessness” and struggle to find a clear social reference point. See Tatiana Zamora and Amado M. Padilla, “Making Sense of Conflicting Messages of Multiracial Identity: A Systematic Review,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 15 (April 2024), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1307624>.

¹² See FYI’s Sticky Faith research (fulleryouthinstitute.org/stickyfaith) as well as Megan Gale, Justin J. Hendricks, David C. Dollahite, and Loren D. Marks, “Perspectives on Lifespan Religious and Spiritual Development from Scholars across the Lifespan.” *Religions* 14:3 (2023): 362, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030362>; Christian Smith and Amy Adamczyk, eds., “Parent Religiousness, Parenting Styles, and Intergenerational Religious Transmission,” in *Handing Down the Faith: How Parents Pass Their Religion on to the Next Generation* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

¹³ Data based on US Census Bureau statistics as calculated by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. “Kinship care” means grandchildren being raised by grandparents, other relatives, and close family friends with no parents in the home. See “Kinship/Grandfamilies Data,” Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network, September, 2025, <https://www.gksnetwork.org/kinship-data/>.

¹⁴ Americans’ trust in institutions is at an all-time low, and only 31% say they trust the church or organized religion. Two thirds of Americans believe that our trust in each other is shrinking. Young adults (18-29) show the lowest percentages of personal trust across the board—nearly half report low levels of trust. Jeffrey M. Jones, “Confidence in U.S. Institutions Down; Average at New Low,” Gallup, July 5, 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/394283/confidence-institutions-down-average-new-low.aspx>. Lee Rainie and Andrew Perrin, “Key findings about Americans’ declining trust in government and each other,” Pew Research Center, July 22, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/07/22/key-findings-about-americans-declining-trust-in-government-and-each-other/>.

¹⁵ Based on Harris Poll data in early 2025. Lenore Skenazy, Zach Rausch, and Jonathan Haidt, “What Kids Told Us About How to Get Them Off Their Phones,” *The Atlantic*, August 4, 2025.

¹⁶ This is especially true related to school. Chronic absenteeism from school skyrocketed since the pandemic, with many American families renegotiating their relationships with school and more kids and teenagers missing school for physical or mental health reasons, opting out, or refusing. The net result is that many young people spend less time around their peers at school than in the past. According to 2024 data, rates were still 57 percent higher than they were pre-pandemic and only 2 percentage points lower than they were in 2023. Nat Malkus, “Lingering Absence in Public Schools: Tracking Post-Pandemic Chronic Absenteeism into 2024,” American Enterprise Institute, July 12, 2025, <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/lingering-absence-in-public-schools-tracking-post-pandemic-chronic-absenteeism-into-2024/>.

¹⁷ From a nationally representative survey of 1,060 teens conducted in April and May 2025. M.B. Robb and S. Mann, “Talk, trust, and trade-offs: How and why teens use AI companions,” *Common Sense Media* (2025).

Endnotes

¹⁸ Future of Faith, “Sacred listening, deeper faith: A research-driven approach,” white paper, 2025. <https://www.futureoffaith.org/sacredlisteningstudy>.

¹⁹ Michelle Faverio and Olivia Sidoti, “Teens, Social Media and AI Chatbots 2025,” Pew Research Center, December 9, 2025, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2025/12/09/teens-social-media-and-ai-chatbots-2025/>.

²⁰ Male and female respondents were roughly as equally represented in this highly committed and engaged group as in the overall sample.

²¹ Gregory A. Smith, et al., “Decline of Christianity in the U.S. Has Slowed, May Have Levelled Off,” 2025.

²² “Relate: Knowing and Believing in the Next Generation,” Young Life, 2024, <https://relate.younglife.org/>.

²³ Tricia Bruce, Jaclyn Doherty, and Angela Patterson, “Thirteen: A First Look at Gen Alpha,” Springtide Research Institute, 2024, <https://springtideresearch.org/thirteen-a-first-look-at-gen-alpha>. And Ryan Burge, “Flourishing or Floundering? How Young People See Their Lives,” Graphs About Religion, May 1, 2025, <https://www.graphsaboutreligion.com/p/flourishing-or-floundering-how-young>. Data from J. Doherty, N. Tueme, and T. Bruce, “Springtide Survey of Young People and Civic Life,” The ARDA, 2025, <https://thearda.com/data-archive?fid=EXPLTSAC24>.