

Gen Z's Religious Lives Are More Complex Than “Affiliated” or “Unaffiliated”

Springtide™ Research Institute Data Show Nuance, Complexity, and Diversity in the Ways Young People Understand and Express Their Religious and Spiritual Lives

A forthcoming report from Springtide Research Institute explores and unpacks key findings from over 10,000 surveys and over 150 interviews with young people ages 13 to 25 about their inner and outer lives. Concerned with the intersection of identity, belief, and behavior, *The State of Religion & Young People 2020: Relational Authority* reveals the complexity and nuance of young people's religious lives today—which are far more diverse and rich than labels like “affiliated” and “unaffiliated” can possibly represent.

Affiliated, But . . .

In the past, it was common to assume that if someone claimed “affiliation” with a particular tradition, there was a corresponding set of practices, beliefs, and identities that came along with that designation. Springtide data reveal that this is no longer necessarily the case.



52%

of affiliated young people have **little to no trust in organized religion.**

Nearly one-third

of affiliated young people told us they **do not think it's important to have a faith community.**



Over 1 in 5





young people who tell us they are affiliated with a religious tradition also tell us they **don't try to live out their religious beliefs in their daily lives.**

For the 61% of young people who consider themselves affiliated with a religion, what it means to be affiliated for them is complicated.

Unaffiliated, But . . .

The opposite is true as well: the unaffiliated are not uninterested in questions of God and meaning. In some cases, they may even be attending religious services or describing themselves as practicing religious values.

19% 
of unaffiliated young people
say that they **attend religious
gatherings at least once a month.**

38% 
of unaffiliated young people
say that they **are religious.**



60% of unaffiliated young people
say that **they are at least slightly spiritual.**

The data aren't contradictory; they are complex. But amid this complexity and diversity, Springtide found one consistency: the importance of relationships. Trusted adults in general and religious leaders in particular have an opportunity to meet young people—whether affiliated, unaffiliated, or in-between—outside the spaces traditionally associated with spiritual and religious formation, where young people are nonetheless navigating questions of identity, community, and meaning.

“For years now, religious leaders have been paying attention to the wrong things when it comes to understanding young people. The old categories just aren't useful. We have to start looking at who they really are, what they believe, and how they form their identities, not just paying attention to which box they check on one question of a survey,” notes Dr. Josh Packard, Executive Director of Springtide Research Institute.



This 120-page report presents sociological context and terms, key findings, and Tide-Turning Tips for putting frameworks into action. It releases mid-October and, thanks to a generous donation, will be made available for free in a digital format and at a reduced rate in print. For comments, conversation, or interviews with Dr. Packard, or to get access to infographics or our data set, email media@springtideresearch.org.

More details about this important study can be found on Springtide Research Institute's website: www.springtideresearch.org.

Springtide Research Institute is a sociological research institute listening to the inner and outer lives of young people ages 13 to 25. Amplifying young people's lived experiences through unbiased research and the generation of evidence-based actionable insights, we seek to help those who care about young people, care better.