



The State of Gen Z: On-Demand Presentation

DISCUSSION GUIDE



We Are Springtide

Anyone already familiar with Springtide Research Institute, whether through our previous reports and resources or from spotting our work in the news or on-air, knows that our research explores the inner and outer lives of people ages 13 to 25. But for those encountering us for the first time, we invite you to learn more about our vision and promise on the “About Us” page on our website, springtideresearch.org/about-us. On this page, you can also learn more about our approach to research, hear from our Springtide Ambassadors, learn about our Research Advisory Board, and more.

Our Mission

Compelled by the urgent desire to listen and attend to the lives of young people (ages 13 to 25), Springtide Research Institute is committed to understanding the distinct ways new generations experience and express community, identity, and meaning.

We exist at the intersection of human and religious experience in the lives of young people. And we’re here to listen.

We combine quantitative and qualitative research to reflect and amplify the lived realities of young people as they navigate shifting social, cultural, and religious landscapes. Delivering fresh data and actionable insights, we equip those who care about young people to care better.

MAKE THIS GUIDE YOUR OWN

This guide is designed to accompany the pre-recorded presentation that showcases what Springtide has learned about the inner and outer lives of Gen Z. The presentation is divided into sections, each sharing Springtide data and insights about how Gen Z thinks, feels, believes and acts in regard to their religion and spirituality, their relationships, and their mental health.

This guide is intended to help you reflect on and apply insights from the presentation in a way that translates to meaningful and effective support for the young people around you. This guide follows the order of the presentation, so you can choose specific sections of the guide to focus on, or you can work through the entire guide.

Whether you choose to use this guide on your own or in a group, we hope it is a useful tool for understanding the needs of young people, for reflecting on your community’s practices and perspectives, and for charting a new path forward.

You’ll find space for writing and reflecting throughout this guide, but if it helps to use a journal or notebook to work through the questions, feel free to do so.



Scan the QR codes or click the links to find the reports referenced in this discussion guide, or visit springtideresearch.org/shop.

GEN Z PROFILE

The presentation begins by showcasing a few of the distinct collective characteristics of Gen Z. The prompts in this guide allow you to further explore the concept of authenticity.

Authenticity Invites Authenticity

The importance of being real is something young people want to not only practice themselves but also see modeled and embraced by those with influence of any kind. Young people know that authenticity invites authenticity. When one person starts to take down their walls, it encourages others to do the same.

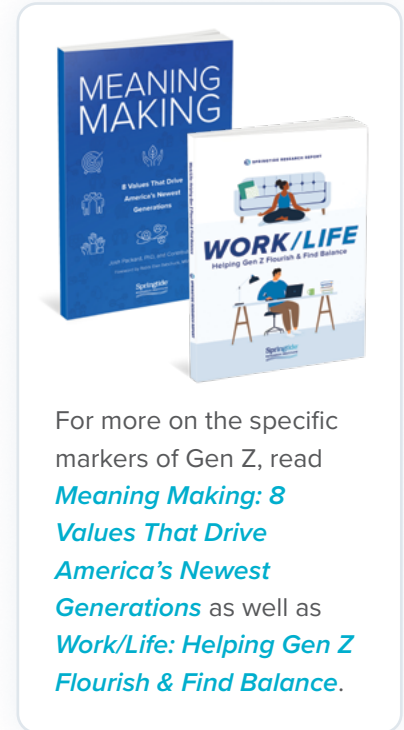
If you lead young people in the context of an intergenerational setting, try to understand their social context, upbringing, and expectations. Allow yourself to be a little vulnerable, and maybe encourage other older members to do the same. It might be difficult, but authenticity is not just for young people. It's a value that when practiced by many can encourage deeper understanding, empathy, and connection.

Act on the Data

Take a cue from young people: Take a selfie! But think bigger than your phone. Think about the value of authenticity as a call for sincere self-expression, which permits and invites others to do the same. Is there a poem, song, or work of art that reflects you? How can you invite creative self-expression into your organization so that everyone can participate in and model the value of authenticity for young people?

TIME TO REFLECT

What contexts come to mind when you think of the term *authentic*? In what ways does your organization already embody *authenticity*, and in what ways could it improve?



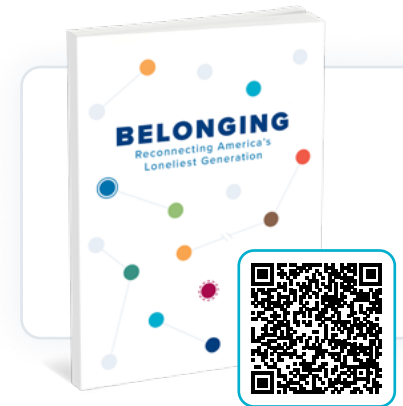
For more on the specific markers of Gen Z, read [Meaning Making: 8 Values That Drive America's Newest Generations](#) as well as [Work/Life: Helping Gen Z Flourish & Find Balance](#).

GEN Z'S RELIGIOUS / SPIRITUAL LIVES

The presentation continues by examining markers of Gen Z's religious and spiritual lives. The prompts in this guide allow you to further explore the concepts of Belonging, Faith Unbundled, and Relational Authority.

Belonging Precedes Believing

In *Belonging: Reconnecting America's Loneliest Generation*, Springtide shares a pattern we call the Belongingness Process. In this process, a young person begins with feeling *noticed*, moves to being *named*, and eventually experiences a real sense of belonging at a point they often describe as feeling *known*. These steps are crucial to fostering an environment for young people that is mental-health friendly.



TIME TO REFLECT

- 1 Think about the relationships, groups, and organizations where you feel *noticed*, *named*, or *known*. What is it about those places that make you feel like you belong? How might you translate these practices into other areas and environments to foster a sense of belonging for the young people with whom you interact?

- 2 Share ways you demonstrate to young people that they are welcome to be wholly themselves in your presence. If nothing comes to mind, consider how you could implement the Belongingness Process (*noticed*, *named*, and *known*) in your own community or setting.

- 3** Brainstorm ideas to strengthen the Belongingness Process in your organization, and identify ways to address any cultural, historical, or social factors that might hinder these efforts.

Brainstorm ideas

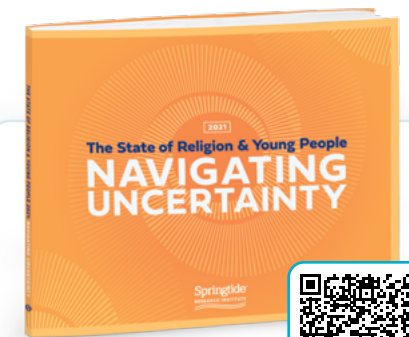
How to overcome obstacles

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Faith Unbundled

Faith Unbundled is a term that describes the way young people increasingly construct their faith by combining elements such as beliefs, identity, practices, and community from a variety of religious and nonreligious sources, rather than receiving all these things from a single, intact system or tradition.

Whether this is surprising or already resonates with your experience; whether it's comfortable (or not!) to think about young people approaching their faith this way; whether this seems scary, exciting, or something in between—the reality is that this trend toward unbundling faith from a single religious system is on the rise.



TIME TO REFLECT

- 1** Living in a plural, globalized, and interconnected world, it's nearly impossible to imagine not being exposed to or influenced by people, cultures, and traditions other than our own. Sometimes we aren't even aware of the ways we are impacted.

Do you turn to anything outside your primary tradition to add meaning, foster community, forge identity, or encourage practices in your own life?

Perhaps you engage in physical exercise, practice mindful breathing, participate in a book club that promotes ecumenical or interreligious dialogue, or have a hobby that helps make you feel “whole.” Maybe you play music, make art, go to protests and rallies, or volunteer.

- 2** Take time to share (if you’re in a group) or journal about (if you’re reflecting on your own) how these aspects of your life contribute to, rather than detract from, the faith you profess. How are these things integrated for you?

- 3** In your work with young people, in your family, or even in your personal life, have you observed growing interest in a broad range of religious or spiritual traditions, rather than the one tradition a person is typically raised within? Tell a story about this observation.

If the story is about someone other than yourself, try to refrain from using judgmental language to tell it. Focus instead on what the person might be gaining (a positive community, a strong sense of self, rich conversations around meaning, etc.) from this type of exploration.

Relational Authority

Relational Authority is a framework for connecting with others in light of changing social, cultural, and religious dynamics at work in the world. It is a response to the reality that in a society increasingly connected by impersonal bonds, we often need deep, familiar connection before we can feel receptive to the influence or guidance of others. This has clear implications for religious leaders, advocates, ministers, educators, and anyone else caring for the inner and outer lives of young people.

Listening, transparency, integrity, care, and expertise are the five dimensions of Relational Authority.

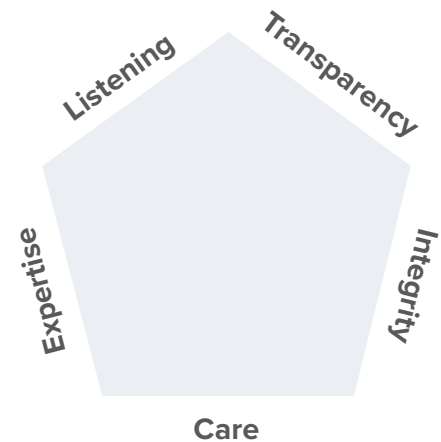
Listening is being curious about, engaged in, and remembering what another person said.

Transparency is sharing experiences, seeking commonalities, and being open with information that impacts others.

Integrity is following up, following through, being accountable, and being authentic.

Care is a commitment to the patient and careful work of supporting young people as they navigate questions of identity, community, and meaning.

Expertise is specialized wisdom and a skill that when combined with listening, transparency, integrity, and care is the foundation for meaningful relationships.

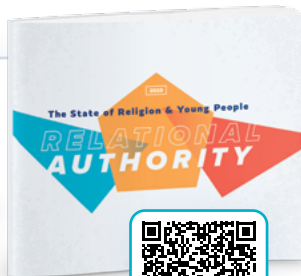


TIME TO REFLECT

- 1 What are you doing as an individual or as a team to build trust with the young people in your care?

- 2 Being a trusted adult might sound intimidating at first. What support or training do adults in your setting need in order to feel more comfortable with the idea of being a trusted adult?

Does your institution offer any resources, training, or opportunities toward these efforts? How can your organization or community better support you in this process?



Trust is something you can build, and we have data on the qualities young people value when they're forming bonds with adults and mentors in their lives. Read about the five qualities of Relational Authority in [The State of Religion & Young People 2020](#).

- 3 Spend time sharing these with your group or jotting down a sentence or two as a way to confront some of your assumptions about young people and some of your instincts about their religious and spiritual lives. Step back from this list and these reflections and think about how they might change your approach to ministry, advocacy, care, or outreach tomorrow. What changes would you make next month? next year?

- 4 Jot down three concrete ways to make presence a bigger part of your current work with young people. What will it look like tomorrow? this week? this month?

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2.

3.

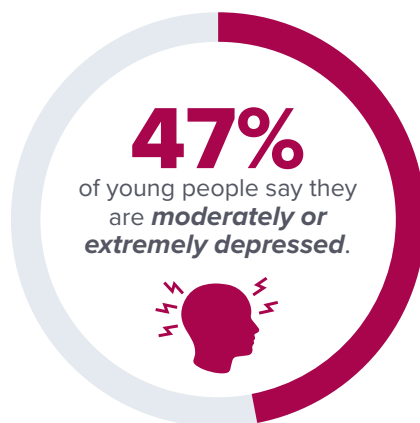


GEN Z & MENTAL HEALTH

What the Data Say

Before you can make changes to better support young people in your community, it's important to understand them better. Work through the following prompts to review our data and analyze what the findings might suggest about young people in your community.

Nearly half or more of the young people we surveyed in 2022 say they are moderately or extremely depressed (47%), anxious (55%), stressed (57%), or lonely (45%). More than 60% of young people say, "The adults in my life don't truly know how much I am struggling with my mental health."



TIME TO REFLECT

Consider your experiences with families and young people, especially since the pandemic began. Think of two or three young people who have been struggling, and answer the following questions:

What are or were their particular struggles?

How has your community responded to young people in distress?

What new strategies could your community implement to help young people with similar struggles?

Navigating Injustice

The construction of social identities is a normal part of the developmental process, typically beginning in childhood and increasing in complexity during adolescence. A young person's social identities are developed by a wide range of factors, including parental or peer socialization, experiences of social inclusion or exclusion, and cultural messages about the bounds of belonging within and between different social groups. For young BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color), their ethnic-racial identity is a central and meaningful part of their lives.



Navigating Injustice: A Closer Look at Race, Faith, and Mental Health is more than research: it is a guide for creating empowerment, belonging, justice, and hope in the young BIPOC you serve.



TIME TO REFLECT

- 1 What are some experiences or identities that are central to who you are?
Can you think of a time when those experiences or identities were acknowledged?

- 2 Can you think of a time when those experiences or identities were celebrated?
How did that make you feel? What are some small steps you could take to celebrate the important experiences or identities of the young people in your life?

Historically, mental-health issues were often seen as spiritual problems for which the solution was prayer. These days, we know more about how the human brain works. We've learned that just like heart disease or cancer, mental-health issues are medically treatable. While religious or spiritual resources may help people cope with mental-health challenges, they are not a substitute for professional clinical care. Some religious concepts and sayings—such as “Give it to God!” or “Just have faith!”—may even prevent some people from seeking the help they need.

- 3** Write down some of the statements you've heard about mental health and religion, or statements said to people who are struggling with their mental health. Note how these statements were helpful or harmful, and write alternative statements you could use when supporting someone who is struggling with their mental health.

Final Takeaways

TIME TO REFLECT

Take time to review the data throughout the presentation. Find a statistic that stands out from each of the sections. Maybe a statistic stands out because it's confusing, it resonates, or it's altogether surprising. Either using the space below or in conversation with others, reflect on these data points to write about or discuss the overall profile of Gen Z, their religious/spiritual lives, and/or their mental-health experiences. See what thoughts and ideas emerge.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Five Actions for Impact on the Lives of Gen Z

- 1 Intentionally focus on building and deepening belonging.
- 2 Increase the number of trusted adults in a young person's life.
- 3 Create spaces where young people feel safe to explore and discover their spiritual yearnings and curiosities, judgment-free zones where they can express themselves openly and honestly—authentically.
- 4 Invest in young people's mental health through a pastoral framework and ongoing presence.
- 5 Acknowledge and embrace the ethnic-racial identity of young BIPOC. They don't leave their ethnic-racial identity at the door when they walk into their places of worship.

TIME TO REFLECT

- 1 What are immediate steps you and your team can take to address some or all of these five actions for impact on the lives of Gen Z? What are the long-term goals you and your team have to impact the youth and young adults you serve?

- 2 How can these immediate steps set you up for success with your long-term goals?



YOU CARE ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE

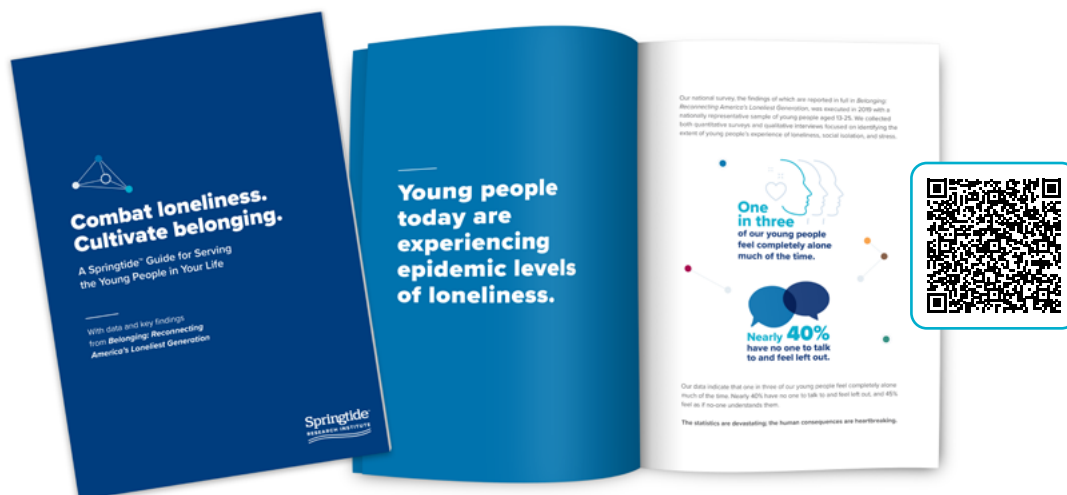
SO DO WE.

We invite you to subscribe to our email newsletter, for fresh insights and research on the inner lives of the young people you care deeply about. Together, we'll turn the tide: springtideresearch.com/subscribe

BELONGINGNESS CHALLENGE

Six Weeks to More Engaged Young People

Put our research and insights into action and get young people more deeply involved and engaged in your community. Every week for six weeks, you'll get one simple task via email, as well as free resources to help you implement it! At the end, you'll get a special offer, as a thank-you for participating in the challenge.



THE VOICES OF YOUNG PEOPLE PODCAST

Season 7: Mental Health & Gen Z

Season 7 features 16 young people in dialogue with Marte Aboagye, Springtide's Head of Community Engagement, and with one another. The season consists of eight episodes released in summer 2022 as part of *The Springtide Series on Mental Health*.

EPISODE 1



George, 23, FL

Joe, 21, CA

EPISODE 2



Grace, 16, MA

Mercer, 17, NC

EPISODE 3



Camden, 19, PA

Kaiya, 19, NY

EPISODE 4



Ivan, 21, NY

Sam, 19, OR

EPISODE 5



Camila, 18, LA

Ellington, 15, NY

EPISODE 6



Chris, 20, GA

Zineb, 24, OH

EPISODE 7



Julianna, 14, MN

Talia, 16, CA

EPISODE 8



Adiam, 25, DC

Daniel, 24, NV



The Voices of
Young People

PODCAST

Guests in this season range in age from 14 to 25. The youngest is a ninth grader, and the oldest are young professionals. The guests represent different regions, ethnicities, faith identities, and more. And they're all spending time talking to Springtide—and to you—about Gen Z and mental health.

Find the latest episodes of this powerful season on our website by scanning the QR code, or find us on Google Podcasts, Anchor, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify.

