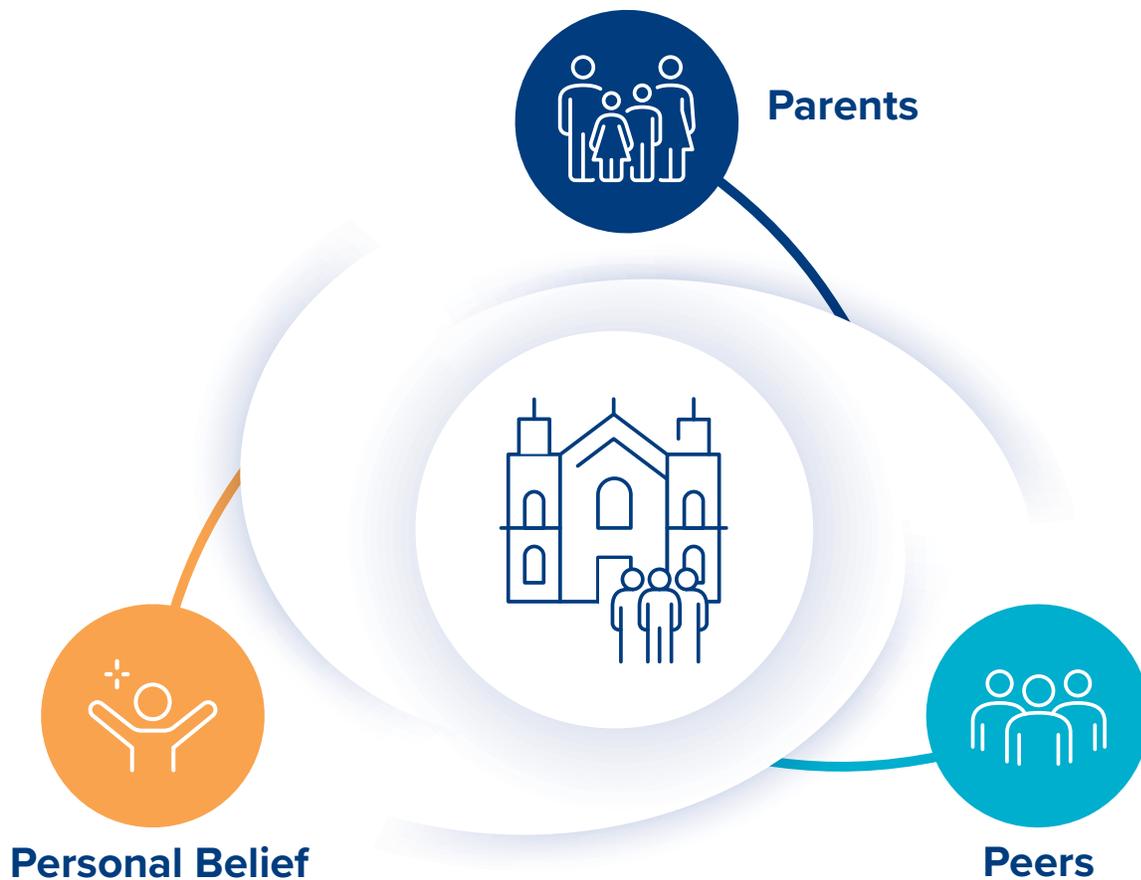


Parents, Peers, & Personal Belief

A Framework for Young People's Religious Involvement



Through 51 in-depth interviews and 2,977 survey responses from young people, ages 13 to 25, Springtide Research Institute examined why some young people remain involved in religious or spiritual organizations.

Across our study, three factors consistently emerge as anchors: **parents**, who often provide a young person's first introduction to faith; **peers**, who transform religious spaces into communities of belonging and joy; and **personal belief**, which motivates young people through prayer, worship, spiritual growth, and a sense of purpose rooted in their relationship with a higher power. Taken together, these three dimensions offer a framework for understanding why some young people remain connected to religious communities and what sustains their involvement over time.

See the study methodology and topline results at springtideresearch.org/organizational



Parents

Family members, particularly **parents and grandparents**, play an essential role in the development of religious identity and involvement for young people. Almost two-thirds (60%) of the young people in our study continue to identify with the religious tradition in which their caregivers raised them. These quotes show how, for many young people, parents and grandparents often serve as a first introduction to faith—they talk with their children about religion, bring them to religious services, and model what religious involvement can look like. For others, however, this influence is experienced more as an obligation—something expected of them but not something they often understand or feel connected to.

Support, Modeling, & Structure

1. “If my parents weren’t Catholic, I probably wouldn’t be going to church. And if my mom hadn’t signed me up for [soccer club] when I was five, I probably wouldn’t be playing soccer. And so, I feel like if you don’t have a strong family, then it’s easy to look other places that aren’t communities for filling up your time.” – **Isaac, age 15, Catholic**
2. “[My parents] became Christians [in their early twenties,] and they wanted to raise us in the church as well. My mom would read the Bible to us every night before bed and in the mornings, so it was very much a part of our lives.” – **Leah, age 24, Evangelical Protestant**
3. “Family history is a big thing, and where your family joined the religion, and did they migrate to Utah back when a lot of people who were joining this religion were migrating to Utah. That’s a pretty big focus in our church.” – **Violet, age 23, LDS**
4. “[When I do go to church,] it’s an activity I can do with my grandparents, like, something that we can both go out and [do]. I enjoy it, they enjoy it, it’s fun, and we just go get, like, lunch together [after] or something like that. . . . I can tell [being involved in church] made me a lot nicer of a person than I would’ve been if I didn’t spend as much time as I did with my grandma and grandpa when I was younger. Because they’re very religious, but they’re not, like, mean religious, they’re very accepting to everybody.” – **Sean, age 21, Catholic**
5. “Because I like visiting my grandfather, a lot of times Sunday is the best day that will work . . . and it kind of just makes sense for me to go in the morning and just go to church with him. It’s not that bad to be there. I mean sometimes the pastor gives interesting readings or [sermons] . . . so sometimes it’s interesting to listen in because a lot of times there’s a life lesson in there somewhere.” – **Charlie, age 14, agnostic**

Obligation & Expectation

1. “I feel like [most people my age are] just not super involved with [religion]. It’s just something that they learned from their parents.” – **Theo, age 17, spiritual but not religious**
2. “I feel like if your family didn’t go to church growing up, you definitely didn’t go. No kid in their right mind was saying, ‘I want to go to church, I’m going by myself.’ It wasn’t happening. It was definitely family.” – **Carlos, age 19, Catholic**
3. “Honestly, I would say I’m very disconnected from [my faith]. My mom is super Catholic, but my dad is not religious, so we’d go [to Mass] with my mom, which would be, like, every other month. We were baptized, and I had Communion and was confirmed and all that. But . . . I think I was more like, not forced to go, but like you have to go so you can get confirmed.” – **Andrea, 19, Catholic**
4. “I went to church as a child, not by choice, but just because I had to go with my parents. A lot of the time, I just, like, did not pay attention at all and just read a book or something. But recently, I’ve been going to church with my grandfather, and I’ve paid some attention, but I mainly go there just to do mowing for money. Sometimes it gets somewhat interesting, but some of it at the same time feels [too] farfetched to be true.” – **Charlie, 14, agnostic**
5. “I would say I just don’t really believe in a god. My whole family’s pretty Christian; we go to church on Easter and Christmas, and my mom works at a Christian preschool. So, there was just one day where I just couldn’t really comprehend the concept of God. And I tried to believe, but it just didn’t really click. I wish I did, but I can’t really fake it.” – **Quinn, 18, atheist**
6. “I think the reason why young people are less involved in church is because a lot of times growing up they feel forced to go, and it’s not something that they want to do. Once they get older where they can make their own decisions, they decide, ‘Well I was forced to do this, so I’m not going to do it.’ So it’s a little act of rebellion against their parents.” – **Jack, age 24, LDS**



Peers

While family often introduces young people to religious and spiritual communities, **peers** play a central role in helping young people feel belonging in these spaces. Having friends in religious groups can turn participation into something joyful and meaningful, creating opportunities for belonging and shared experiences. At the same time, when peers are absent, transient, or at a different life stage, young people can feel isolated, disconnected, or unsure how to get more involved.

Belonging & Joy

1. “We grew up with a bunch of church kids. We had, like, a community of our own. We would have events outside of church, and it was good to be surrounded by other kids that were in the same religion as us.” – **Lucy, age 22, Protestant**
2. “My favorite group wasn’t [run by] an adult, technically it was [run by] teenagers. Some were over 18, but none were past 20. So, I think it felt a lot easier to connect with them because it felt like they were kind of at our stages in life as well. And we were in the same age group, which I think is really important, especially for a youth group to feel like you’re not judged by an adult or that you just have other peers that are similar to you that you can connect with. So, I definitely preferred the one where we had younger leaders.” – **Ronnie, age 16, spiritual but not religious**
3. “I have been going [to church] since I was young. I remember in fourth and fifth grade my parents would take me to the elementary school where they would do Bible lessons, and we’d play games and songs and stuff for kids. And then in middle school, some of my friends and I would go on Wednesday nights all the time. . . . I have been going [there] a long time.” – **Diana, age 23, Protestant**
4. “There was a group of girls that I hung out with a lot, and we had the same leader for a couple of years, and we’d get together in our leader’s house every week. . . . It was just a lot of fun activities, which was cool because then you could invite friends, and it was really easy for people to get involved in.” – **Leah, age 24, Evangelical Protestant**
5. “I was able to really get a big community when I was younger, like in youth group and everything else. I had the best time. Now that I’m thinking about it, I had a better time than I thought when I was there. Before it was like, ‘All right, this is just something you do as a kid.’ You go through Sunday school, you go to church two or three times a month with the same group of friends. But it was just fun.” – **Sierra, age 22, Evangelical Protestant**
6. “My interest in [religion] is seeing all these videos of communities and churches getting together and actually enjoying each other’s company. And that’s important for me, having someone to talk to. . . . When you join a church, you get to experience that a lot, and they have these fun little cookouts and stuff, and I was like, ‘Hmm, maybe I really wanna join something in the future.’” – **Avery, age 14, unsure of her religious affiliation**

Missing Connections

1. “My Bible study is a lot of women in their twenties and then some in their forties, maybe a little bit older also. But I think everyone in the group is married except me, and they all have kids, which is fun but, also, I’m not in the same stage as them. They’re almost like a step ahead that I can learn from them, which is cool. But it’s also sometimes harder to connect with them just because we are at different stages right now. It’s not like I want to have kids right now, but sometimes it feels like it would be easier to connect with people if we had that in common.” – **Leah, age 24, Evangelical Protestant**
2. “I don’t understand some of the processes within the church. Like, I know there’s a bunch of subgroups that meet and whatnot. . . . I feel like sometimes the [service] ends and then people immediately go into their group, which is like, there’s nothing wrong with that. It totally makes sense. You go every Sunday, and you see a group, someone you want to talk to, and you fall into these groups. But it’s been kind of hard to figure out how to get more involved and meet people.” – **Matt, age 24, Protestant**
3. “Other people have come and gone from [our] church, so it’s not that many people there anymore. But whenever me and my brother and my sister do go, we always hang out downstairs. . . . Some kids will go to that church for maybe two or three years, and then move to a different church. So it’s mainly me, my brother, and my sister.” – **Brianna, age 14, Protestant**
4. “I’m still trying to get to know people. It’s just so fluid because everybody’s moving in and out so much, so it’s hard to really get to know people. And then there’s always the fear, once you get to know them, how long are they gonna stay? How long are you going to stay? And so, I’d say most of the people that I consider friends that I know from my church, it’s very superficial.” – **Conrad, age 22, LDS**
5. “My parents are friends with a lot of [parish members], so we know them, and we’ll have dinner with them sometimes. [But] there’s not a lot of kids there. And so, I can’t really find community with the older people, even though my family is friends with them.” – **Isaac, age 15, Catholic**
6. “Everyone at church was very nice, and I never had a bad experience with anyone being rude to me or anything like that. But we were the only Indian people there. . . . My social anxiety was so high. And I think just being there, it was not good for me.” – **Aadhya, age 25, atheist**
7. “I don’t know if I would say [my church is] a community that I turn to a lot necessarily, especially since now the church community is more so, like, adults, and my friends aren’t there anymore.” – **Iseul, age 21, Evangelical Protestant**



Personal Belief

When asked about how important religion is in their lives, almost half (47%) of respondents say it is among the most important things or the most important thing in their life. For many, this commitment is rooted in **personal belief**. Young people describe going to religious services or praying as ways to feel fulfilled, stay “on the right track,” or build their relationship with a higher power. Others point to the comfort that faith provides, the chance to learn and grow spiritually, or the sense of responsibility and purpose that comes with being part of a tradition. Personal belief and practice—not just family or peers—anchor many young people in their religious communities.

Connection to a Higher Power

1. “There’s the social aspect for sure, but for me it’s just the personal side. Like, you’re gonna go and just get right with the Lord, go feel the spirit, go more [for] Jesus Christ and stuff. And that, for me, is important in my life that I wanna keep doing, that I wanna keep up with. And so, I do make an effort to go. . . . I just feel good afterwards. I don’t know how to explain it. But I just feel fulfilled, like I’m on the right track for my life. I’m following through with what I want my life to look like.” – **Conrad, age 22, LDS**
2. “[I keep going to church] to build my relationship with God.” – **Diana, age 23**
3. “I’m not a big believer in church. But one thing I do believe in is when I am called, and I feel it, I will go [to church] because I would feel like there’s a message . . . the message that was being told was, like, it was directed to me.” – **Salma, age 20, spiritual but not religious**
4. “As long as you know you’re protected by God and your faith is there for God, that’s all that matters. You’re not praying to the pastor, you’re not praying to the [priest] . . . God is using this vessel, whether good or bad, to preach to you. And that’s it. The priest doesn’t make it all holy. At the end of the day, my father is God, not the priest.” – **Salma, age 20, spiritual but not religious**
5. “With youth group, everyone is a young follower of Jesus, and everyone wants to share in their faith with other young followers of Jesus. Having something that can kind of tie everyone together is really important. It does a good job of giving intentionality to the time that you’re spending together, [and] it gives everyone something to circle back to. It gives everyone a lens at which they’re looking through the world and looking through their relationships at.” – **Chris, age 25, agnostic**

Practices & Habits

1. “If you’re drinking soda, and you slowly stop drinking soda, and then you stop drinking it [completely], and then you forget about it. And then soda’s not even in your life anymore. I don’t want [my faith] to not be there for me anymore. I want it to be something that I keep. So, I try to pray before every meal or pray with my family, go [to church] on Sunday, keep my Bible in my personal space, you know, stuff like that.” – **Carter, age 19, Protestant**

2. “[I wanted to learn] more than I did back at my other [parish] and learning more of what Jesus did for us. . . . Because when I was living back in Illinois, I wasn’t understanding a lot. But now since the pastor at our church is explaining it more, I can understand easier.” – **Addison, age 16, Protestant**
3. “[Church] is not a bad place [to go] because it’s fun to go and learn more about your religion and learn more about God.” – **Brianna, age 14, Protestant**
4. “It’s all about the intention. When I was little, I would just go to Mass and just go through the motions. I would never really think about what was actually happening or I would just go with my family. It was just part of my life, but it wasn’t really super significant to me in any way. And then I realized, like, ‘Wow, this is what this means, and this is why I do this.’ It was like, I’m doing this for me, not just because those around me are doing it.” – **Grace, age 18, Catholic**
5. “I’m trying to walk closely with God. So I spend time with him every day and reading the Bible and in prayer, and I try to have a community of people who are also Christians and also trying to walk with God.” – **Leah, age 24, Evangelical Protestant**

Responsibility, Purpose, & Meaning

1. “I used to go [to church] a lot. . . . I was in the teens group, and I would be really involved there and help a lot with the kids and even the babies. . . . I wanted more responsibilities in a sense. Like I know some people try to avoid that, but it seems more fun to—not ‘fun’, I don’t know the specific word I’m trying to use. Not ‘fun’. . . . It was just more meaningful to me to have a reason to be there and step up and have a reason to do something.” – **Nia, age 18, Protestant**
2. “Organized religion provides all of these things . . . you have a sense of community with people that are like-minded, with people that are working towards a common goal, specifically things like actual practices, showing up to church, reading your Bible, sharing in worship and music, and studying and learning together. . . . And me spending time with my friends at soccer, trying to win a soccer game, it meets the same need of, ‘Hey, we’re all working together for a common good.’ We all share the same beliefs: that we want to win. But it’s a lot smaller scale. It’s a lot less important, it’s a lot less impactful. It’s a lot less meaningful than, ‘All of us were created for this purpose.’” – **Chris, age 25, agnostic**
3. “The reasons I stay [in the LDS Church] are cultural. It’s ‘cause I was raised with it, it was because I grew with it. But when I got to that point where I was making my own decision about whether I was going to stay religious into my adult life, a lot of it had to do with a sense of comfort and security that I get from a religion and the community, and it’s fulfilling. I think it does feel good to believe that and to be able to assign meaning to our lives and to be able to believe in my religion. We believe that there’s an afterlife and all of that is really optimistic and contributes to my life positively.” – **Violet, age 23, LDS**
4. “From religion, I’ve learned about working to serve others. That’s something that I’ve really internalized and that’s the reason I wanna pursue the careers that I’m looking to pursue—working to serve my neighbors, the community around me, [and] the less fortunate. I’d say that religion has definitely given and continues to give me purpose and drive throughout life.” – **Iseul, age 21, Evangelical Protestant**

About This Study

The Study of Young People's Organizational Involvement is a mixed-methods research study conducted by Springtide Research Institute between November 2024 and April 2025. The study explores young people's organizational involvement using two primary data sources.

First, Springtide conducted in-depth interviews with 51 residents of the United States, ages 13 to 25. To recruit interviewees, Springtide sent a mailer to a randomly selected sample of 6,000 US households of teens and young adults. Second, Springtide surveyed a sample of 2,977 young people residing in the US between the ages of 13 and 25. The survey was administered by an online panel provider, Alchemer, using a recruitment strategy guided by quotas for age, gender, region, and race/ethnicity. To improve data quality from Alchemer's opt-in sample, Springtide eliminated all identifiable phony and inattentive responses from the resulting dataset.

To see study methodology and full top-line results visit springtideresearch.org/organizational

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