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U.S. Teens Take After Their Parents Religiously, Attend Services Together and Enjoy Family Rituals

But American adolescents often participate at parents' behest, and tend to be less religious in more personal, private ways

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How we did this

For this report, we surveyed 1,811 pairs of U.S. teens and their parents – one parent and one teen from each household. The survey was conducted online by Ipsos, from March 29 to April 14, 2019. Ipsos sampled households from its KnowledgePanel, a probability-based web panel recruited through national, random sampling of residential addresses and telephone (landline and cellphone) numbers, designed to be nationally representative.

While many surveys are designed to measure the responses of individuals, this one also was designed to measure the responses of pairs. The goal was to measure the degree of religious alignment between teens and their parents by separately asking them similar questions about their religious affiliations, beliefs and practices.

Parents who qualified for the study – those who had a child ages 13 to 17 living with them – were asked to complete a web survey, with some questions referring specifically to their teenager (or the teen with the next upcoming birthday, if there was more than one in the household). Upon answering the last question, the responding parent was asked to pass the survey to the teen they had been asked about, so the teen could complete their portion; parents were encouraged to allow teens to answer the questions on their own.

While this survey is not meant to be representative of U.S. adults overall, it is weighted to be representative of two different populations: 1) parents with teens ages 13 to 17; and 2) teens ages 13 to 17. It is weighted to be representative by age and gender, race, ethnicity, education, and other categories.

For more information, see the [Methodology](#) for this report. The questions used in this analysis can be found [here](#).

Acknowledgments

This report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals. Find related reports online at pewresearch.org/religion.

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Patricia Snell Herzog of Indiana University and Purdue University in Indianapolis (IUPUI) spent a summer at Pew Research Center researching previous quantitative studies of religion among teens, which helped to guide our own work.

Claudia Deane, vice president of research at Pew Research Center, also gave valuable feedback on this report.

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U.S. Teens Take After Their Parents Religiously, Attend Services Together and Enjoy Family Rituals

But American adolescents often participate at parents' behest, and tend to be less religious in more personal, private ways

When it comes to religion, American teenagers and their parents tend to have a lot in common – though not quite as much as the parents may think, according to a new analysis of Pew Research Center survey data.

To begin with, most U.S. teens (ages 13 to 17) share the religious affiliation of their parents or legal guardians. Protestant parents are likely to have teens who identify as Protestants, while Catholic parents mostly have teens who consider themselves Catholics, and the vast majority of religiously unaffiliated parents have teens who describe themselves as atheists, agnostics or “nothing in particular.”

Within the broad Protestant category, however, there are stark differences. Eight-in-ten parents who affiliate with an evangelical Protestant denomination have a teen who also identifies as an evangelical Protestant. But among parents who belong to mainline Protestant denominations such as the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 55% have a teen who identifies in the same way – and 24% have a teen who is unaffiliated.

On the whole, U.S. teens attend religious services about as often as their parents do: 44% of U.S. teens say they go to religious services at least once a month, almost exactly the same as the share of their parents who say they attend monthly (43%).

Most parents and teens share a religious identity

Among parents of teens in each religious group, % whose teen identifies as ...

PARENT	TEEN			
	Evangelical Protestant	Mainline Protestant	Catholic	Unaffiliated
Evangelical Protestant	80%	6%	1%	12%
Mainline Protestant	12	55	4	24
Catholic	1	1	81	15
Unaffiliated	2	3	5	86

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately. “U.S. Teens Take After Their Parents Religiously, Attend Services Together and Enjoy Family Rituals”

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When there are religious differences between adults and their 13- to 17-year-old children, however, it's usually the teens who are less religious than the parents. For instance, far fewer teens (24%) than parents (43%) say that religion is very important in their lives.

The survey also asked parents and teens about how important they think religion is in the other person's life, and found that, overall, most are on the same page. For instance, 73% of teens give the same answer as their parent about how important religion is to the parent, and 68% of parents give the same answer about how important religion is to their teen.

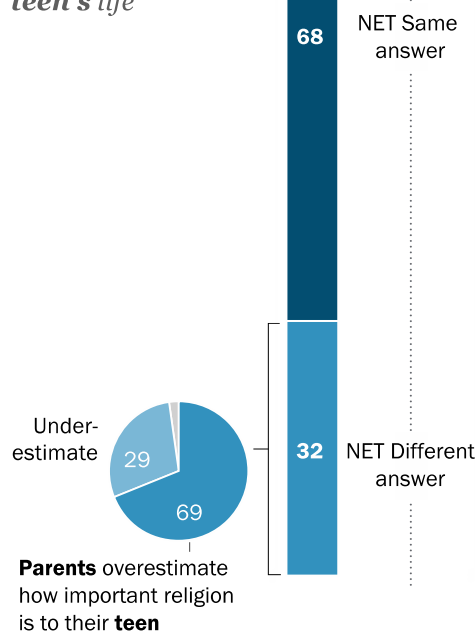
But among those who do not agree, parents are far more likely to overestimate the importance of religion to their teen than to underestimate it. For example, among all parents who give a different answer than their teen does regarding the importance of religion to the teen, 69% think religion is more important in the life of their teen than their teen does, and 29% believe it is less important to their teen than their teens says. Meanwhile, among all teens who give a different

Parents more likely than teens to say religion is very important in their lives

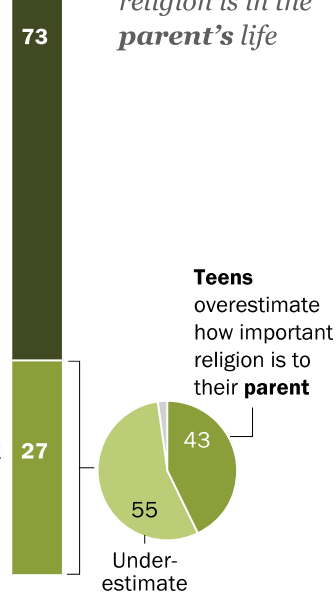
% of U.S. teens/parents of teens who say religion is ____ in their lives

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not too important	Not at all important
In teen's life, according to teen	24%	36%	21%	18%
In parent's life, according to parent	43	30	11	15

% of **parents** who give the same/different answer as their teen about how important religion is in the **teen's** life



% of **teens** who give the same/different answer as their parent about how important religion is in the **parent's** life



Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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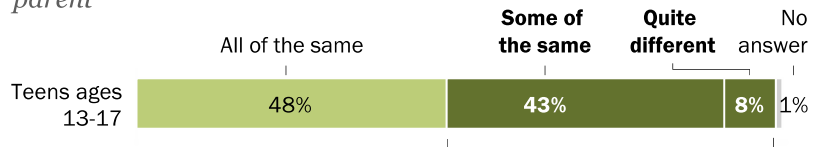
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answer than their parent on the importance of religion in their parents' lives, 43% overestimate how important religion is to their parent, while 55% underestimate it.

And of approximately 1,800 teenagers who were surveyed alongside one of their parents, about half the teens (48%) say they have “all the same” religious beliefs as their parent. But among the other half of all teens – those who say they share “some of the same” beliefs or hold “quite different” beliefs from their parent – about one-third (34%) say their parent doesn't know that they differ religiously. And one-in-six (17%) say this difference causes at least some conflict in their household.

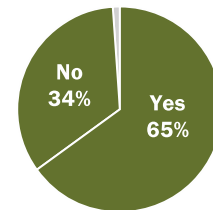
Half of teens say they hold all the same religious beliefs as their parent ...

% of U.S. teens who say they have ____ religious beliefs as their parent



... but among teens who say their beliefs differ, a third say the parent is unaware

Does your parent know you have different religious beliefs from them?



Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

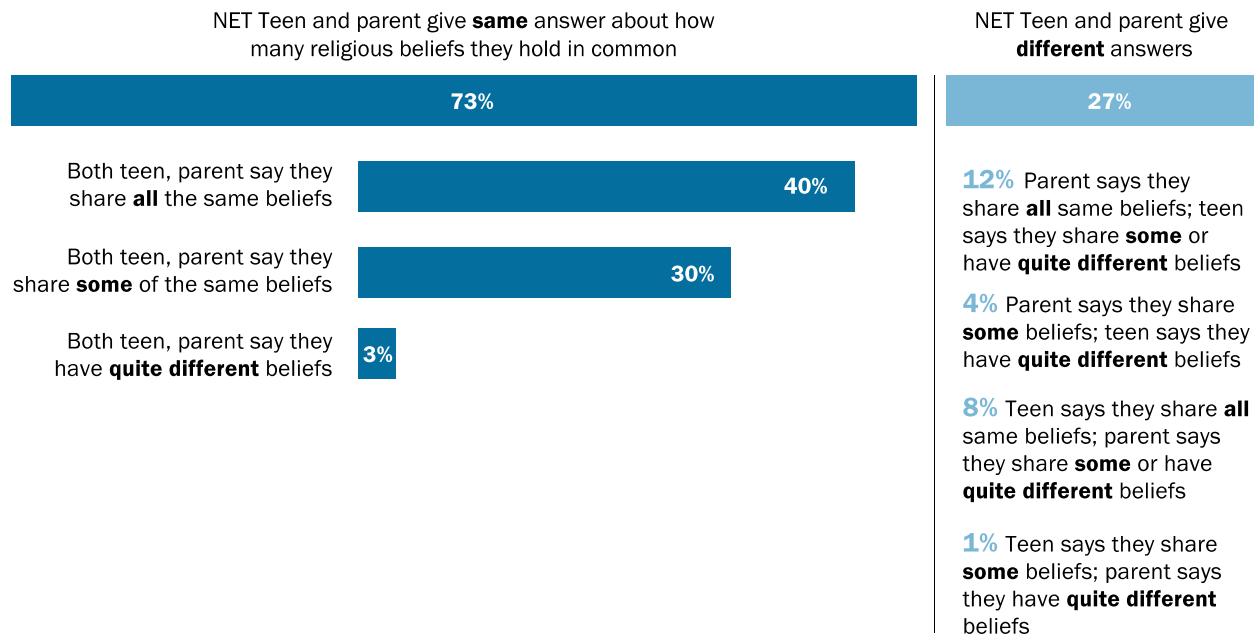
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When asked how many of their religious beliefs they hold in common, most teens and parents give the same answer, including 40% of teen-parent pairs who say they hold “all the same” beliefs and 30% who agree that they hold “some of the same” beliefs. But in roughly a quarter of cases (27%), their responses do not align – and most of those are situations in which the parent assumes a higher level of agreement. For example, 12% of the pairs consist of a parent who says they share *all* the same religious beliefs as their teen, but a teen who disagrees. And another 4% consist of a parent who says they share *some* beliefs with their teen, while the teen says their beliefs are quite different.

Four-in-ten teens say they share all the same religious beliefs as their parent – and their parent agrees

Among U.S. teens who were surveyed alongside one of their parents ...



Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Of course, differences can run in both directions: There are nonreligious parents who have highly religious teens, as well as the other way around. But the survey data suggests that, by some traditional measures of religious observance – religious importance and prayer – highly religious parents are less likely to have teenagers who share their beliefs than nonreligious parents are to have teenagers without strong religious beliefs.¹

For example, 80% of parents who say that religion is either “not too important” or “not at all important” in their life have a teen who feels the same way, while 45% of parents who say religion is “very important” have a teen who takes the same view.

Less-religious parents very likely to have teens who also are less religious

		% whose teen says they attend religious services ...	
Among parents who say they attend religious services ...	Monthly or more	Monthly or more	A few times a year or less
	A few times a year or less	88%	12%
		10	89

		% whose teen says they pray ...			
Among parents who say they pray ...	Daily	Daily	Weekly	A few times a month	Seldom/never
	Seldom/never	45%	26%	13%	16%
		6	5	6	82

		% whose teen says religion is ____ in their life		
Among parents who say religion is ____ in their life	Very important	Very important	Somewhat important	Not too/not at all important
	Not too/not at all important	45%	41%	13%
		4	15	80

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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¹ This comports with findings from recent research that points to intergenerational growth in the likelihood that nonreligious parents raise nonreligious children. See Bengtson, Vern L., R. David Hayward, Phil Zuckerman, and Merril Silverstein. 2018. “Bringing Up Nones: Intergenerational Influences and Cohort Trends.” Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion.

These are among the key findings of a Pew Research Center survey of 1,811 teenagers, each of whom was interviewed along with one parent or legal guardian. To obtain parental consent and put families at ease about the content of the survey, the parent was asked to complete the survey first. Then the parent was encouraged to allow the teenager to take it independently, without coaching or other interference.

The survey was conducted March 29 to April 14, 2019, long before the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted attendance at many churches and other houses of worship. The questions were administered online, using the Ipsos KnowledgePanel. For more information on how this survey was conducted, including margins of sampling error, see the [Methodology](#).

A previous Pew Research Center report, based on the same survey, examined teenagers' experiences with [religion in public schools](#). This report focuses on the religious lives of teens and the family dynamics of religion, including the degree to which parents and teenagers share religious identities, beliefs and practices; how often they talk about religion, pray before meals and read scripture together; the reasons teenagers participate in religious activities; and the relative level of importance that parents ascribe to raising their children in their religion.

The survey included parents and teens from many religious backgrounds, but the sample did not include enough people in many U.S. religious groups to allow their views to be analyzed and reported separately. Among these groups are historically Black Protestant denominations, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Orthodox Christian churches, as well as Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and other non-Christian faiths.

Sidebar: What do findings about teens mean for the future of religion in America?

The adult population in the United States has been [growing less religious](#) in recent decades – a trend driven in large part by young adults, who are much less likely than their elders to identify with a religious group or partake in traditional religious practices. But Pew Research Center’s survey of U.S. teens finds that, religiously, those who are even younger – ages 13 to 17 – resemble their parents in some ways, particularly when it comes to rates of attendance at religious services. In addition, most U.S. teens are affiliated with a religion, and many engage in other family religious practices. This raises the question: Are America’s youths set to halt or reverse the country’s trend toward secularization?

Not necessarily. While it is possible that these adolescents will ultimately be equally or more religious than current young adults, this survey neither supports nor contradicts such a hypothesis. In fact, previous research has suggested that much of the movement away from religion among young adults occurs *after* they come of age, move out of their childhood homes or otherwise gain a measure of independence from their parents.² This pattern fits a psychological model of religious and spiritual development that points to a post-adolescence trend toward autonomy.³ In early adulthood, there seems to be a particularly large decline in the public aspects of religion – such as religious service participation – whereas more private aspects of religion, such as prayer and the personal importance of religion, decline more moderately.⁴

Some findings from the new survey are consistent with this pattern. For one, many teens say their participation in religious activities occurs mainly because of their parents’ desires, not their own. And even though teens may attend religious worship services as often as their parents, they are less likely to say religion is very important in their lives. Moreover, consistent with previous research, the survey shows that religious attendance declines in the final two years of high school.⁵

Teens also look much less religious than their parents by more individual and private measures, such as how often they say they pray and the degree of importance they ascribe to religion in their lives. While private aspects of religion may be expected to decline more moderately than public aspects

² Chan, Melissa, Kim M. Tsai, and Andrew J. Fuligni. 2015. “[Changes in Religiosity Across the Transition to Young Adulthood](#).” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*. Also see Lee, Bo Hyeon, Jane, Lisa D. Pearce, and Kristen M. Schorpp. 2017. “[Religious Pathways from Adolescence to Adulthood](#).” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Also see Bengtson, Vern L., Norella M. Putney, Merril Silverstein, and Susan C. Harris. 2015. “[Does Religiousness Increase with Age? Age Changes and Generational Differences Over 35 Years](#).” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*.

³ Rydz, Elżbieta. 2014. “Development of Religiousness in Young Adults.” In Adamczyk, Katarzyna, and Monika Wysota, eds. “Functioning of Young Adults in a Changing World.” Also see Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen and Lene Arnett Jensen. 2002. “[A Congregation of One: Individualized Religious Beliefs among Emerging Adults](#).” *Journal of Adolescent Research*.

⁴ Uecker, Jeremy E., Mark D. Regnerus, and Margaret L. Vaaler. “[Losing My Religion: The Social Sources of Religion Decline in Early Adulthood](#).” *Social Forces*. Also see Barry, Carolyn McNamara, Larry Nelson, Sahar Davarya, and Shirene Urry. 2010. “[Religiosity and spirituality during the transition to adulthood](#).” *International Journal of Behavioral Development*.

⁵ Regnerus, Mark D., and Jeremy E. Uecker. 2006. “[Finding Faith, Losing Faith: The Prevalence and Context of Religious Transformations during Adolescence](#).” *Review of Religious Research*.

during young adulthood, it is possible that there may still be additional movement away from these individualized elements of religion ahead, after adolescents reach adulthood.⁶

In short, [religion varies across the life course](#), often declining in late adolescence and early adulthood, and then increasing as people age, form new relationships, start their own families and mature into later adulthood.⁷ Thus, the findings from Pew Research Center's survey of teenagers tell us a lot about the religion of contemporary U.S. adolescents, but should be cautiously applied to evaluations of the future of American religion.

⁶ Chan, Melissa, Kim M. Tsai, and Andrew J. Fuligni. 2015. "[Changes in Religiosity Across the Transition to Young Adulthood](#)." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*.

⁷ Chan, Melissa, Kim M. Tsai, and Andrew J. Fuligni. 2015. "[Changes in Religiosity Across the Transition to Young Adulthood](#)." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*. Also see Wink, Paul, and Michele Dillon. 2002. "[Spiritual Development Across the Adult Life Course: Findings From a Longitudinal Study](#)." *Journal of Adult Development*.

Many teens engage in religious practices with their family

Teens may not always align with their parents – and vice versa – but, overall, many *do* engage with religion as a family practice. About six-in-ten teens (59%) say they often or sometimes talk about religion with their family, and roughly half of teens (48%) say they at least sometimes say grace or a blessing before family meals. A smaller share (25%) say they commonly read religious scripture as a family.

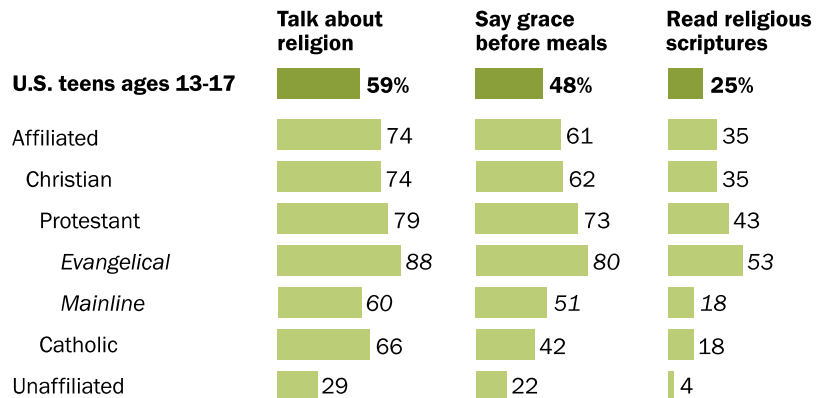
The survey followed up on these practices by asking teens two separate questions. First, how much do they enjoy doing religious things with their

family? And, second, to what extent do they participate in religious activities because their parents want them to? About three-quarters of teens who do religious things with their family say that these activities bring them “a lot” of enjoyment (27%) or “some” enjoyment (51%), while two-thirds say they participate partly or mostly at their parents’ behest. Many teens express *both* sentiments; among teens who say they participate in family practices because their parents want them to, 79% also say that they get at least some enjoyment from it.⁸

Perhaps because attendance at religious services also tends to be a family activity, it’s an area in which parents and teens are largely in sync. Among parents who say they attend religious services on a regular basis (at least once or twice a month), 88% have a teen who also reports attending that often. An almost identical share (89%) of parents who attend services infrequently (a few times a year, seldom or never) have a teen who does the same.

About half of U.S. teens at least sometimes say grace before meals with their family

% of U.S. teens who often or sometimes _____ with their family



Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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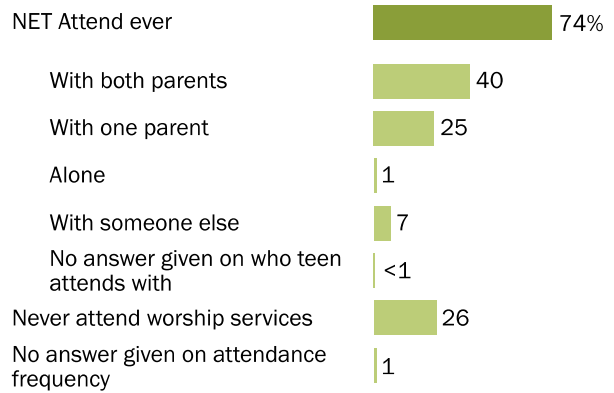
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⁸ Teens who do religious things include those who say grace or read scriptures with their family, or those who say yes to a broader question: “Aside from saying grace and reading scriptures, do you ever do any other religious things with your family?” See [topline](#) for more details.

While this may be an example of teens taking religious cues from their parents, it may also be the result of the limited autonomy of teens who, in most cases, reside with at least one parent or guardian. The vast majority of teens who attend religious services – even just on rare occasions – say they do so with one or both of their parents, and they are about evenly split between saying they do so mainly because they want to (35% of all teens) and mainly because their parents want them to (38%).

Most teens attend religious services with at least one parent

% of U.S. teens who say they attend religious services ...



Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

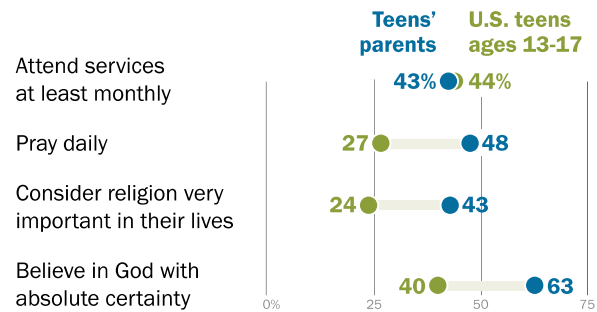
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Teens are more likely to stand out from their parents on measures of individual identity, belief and practice – areas in which they can more easily act independently. Despite similar rates of attendance at religious services, teens are far less likely than their parents to pray daily (27% of teens vs. 48% of parents), to say that religion is very important in their lives (24% vs. 43%) and to believe in God with absolute certainty (40% vs. 63%).

Teens less religious than their parents by some measures, but not worship attendance

% who say they ...



Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately. "U.S. Teens Take After Their Parents Religiously, Attend Services Together and Enjoy Family Rituals"

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Parents more likely than teens to be highly religious on religious commitment index

When taken together, these four measures – religious service attendance, prayer, importance of religion and belief in God – constitute an [index of traditional religious commitment](#).⁹ Among the parents in this study, 48% score high on the religious commitment scale, 28% in the middle and 24% on the low end. By comparison, 34% of teens score high on the scale, 30% are in the middle and 36% are on the low end.

Among parents who score on the high end, roughly six-in-ten (59%) have a teen who also is highly religious, and about a third (32%) have a teen who falls in the medium category. Meanwhile, the vast majority of parents who score low on the commitment index (83%) have a teen who also exhibits low levels of religious commitment; far fewer have teens who fall in the middle (12%) or on the high (5%) end of the scale.

Parents exhibit higher levels of overall religious commitment than teens

% who score ____ on the religious commitment index

	High	Medium	Low
U.S. teens ages 13 to 17	34%	30%	36%
Teens' parents	48	28	24

Have a **teen** who scores ____ on the religious commitment index

		High	Medium	Low
Among parents who score ____ on the religious commitment index	High	59	32	9
	Medium	12	42	46
	Low	5	12	83

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. The religious commitment index includes measure of religious attendance, prayer, belief in God and importance of religions in the respondent's life.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately. "U.S. Teens Take After Their Parents Religiously, Attend Services Together and Enjoy Family Rituals"

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While this analysis focuses primarily on the transmission of religion between one parent and their teen, it also is the case that the parent who took the survey may not be the only source of religion – or nonreligion – in a teen's household. Among parents who have a spouse or partner who shares

⁹ The index is created by combining four individual measures of religious observance: the self-assessed importance of religion in one's life, religious attendance, prayer and belief in God. Respondents are assigned a score of 1 on each of the four measures on which they exhibit a high level of religious observance, a score of 0 on each of the measures on which they exhibit a medium level of religious observance, and a score of -1 on each measure on which they exhibit a low level of religious observance.

High religious observance is defined as saying religion is very important in one's life, attending religious services at least once a week, praying at least once a day, and believing in God with absolute certainty. Medium religious observance is defined as saying religion is somewhat important in one's life, attending religious services once or twice a month or a few times a year, praying between a few times a week and a few times a month, and believing in God with less than absolute certainty. Respondents also are assigned a medium score on any questions they decline to answer. Low religious observance is defined as saying that religion is "not too" or "not at all" important in one's life, seldom or never attending religious services, seldom or never praying, and saying that one does not believe in God.

The scores for each of these four individual items are then summed; respondents who score a 2 or higher are categorized as "high" on the scale (that is, they are "highly religious"), those who score between -1 and 1 are categorized as "medium" on the scale, and those scoring -2 and below are categorized as "low" on the scale.

Cronbach's alpha for the religious commitment scale for parents is 0.862 and is 0.85 for teens and neither scale is improved if any variable is removed.

their religious affiliation, nine-in-ten have a teen who also shares that same religious identity.¹⁰ And among single parents (those not married or living with a partner), 76% have a teen who shares their religion. But interfaith households are less straightforward: Among parents whose spouse or partner does *not* share their religious identity, 56% have a teen who shares their religion, although in these cases it is possible that the teen shares the religion of the spouse or partner instead (see Chapter 5).

Few differences in parent-teen alignment between mothers, fathers who took survey

Among the parents who took the survey, 57% were mothers and 43% were fathers.¹¹ Previous research shows that when one parent is more involved in the [religious upbringing of children](#), it tends to be the mother. As a result, one might expect teens to align more closely, religiously, with their parent if it was their mother who took the survey. But that does not seem to be the case: 47% of teens whose mother took the survey say they share all of her religious beliefs, and 50% of teens whose father took the survey say the same about him.

Teens no more likely to align with mom than dad, religiously

Among teens whose mother/father took the survey, % who say they have ____ religious beliefs as their parent

	All the same	Some of the same	Quite different
Mother who took the survey	47%	44%	8%
Father who took the survey	50	42	8

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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¹⁰ This aligns with international research on the intergenerational transmission of religion. Across nations, people tend to be more religious when they were raised by parents with similar religious beliefs, affiliations and levels of participation. See McPhail, Brian L. 2019. "[Religious Heterogamy and the Intergenerational Transmission of Religion: A Cross-National Analysis](#)." Religions.

¹¹ The majority in each of these groups are biological, adoptive, step or foster mothers and fathers. Just 1% indicated that they were the partner of a biological or adopted parent, a grandparent or other legal guardian.

Two-thirds of teens are affiliated with a religion – and evangelicals are more religious than others by traditional measures

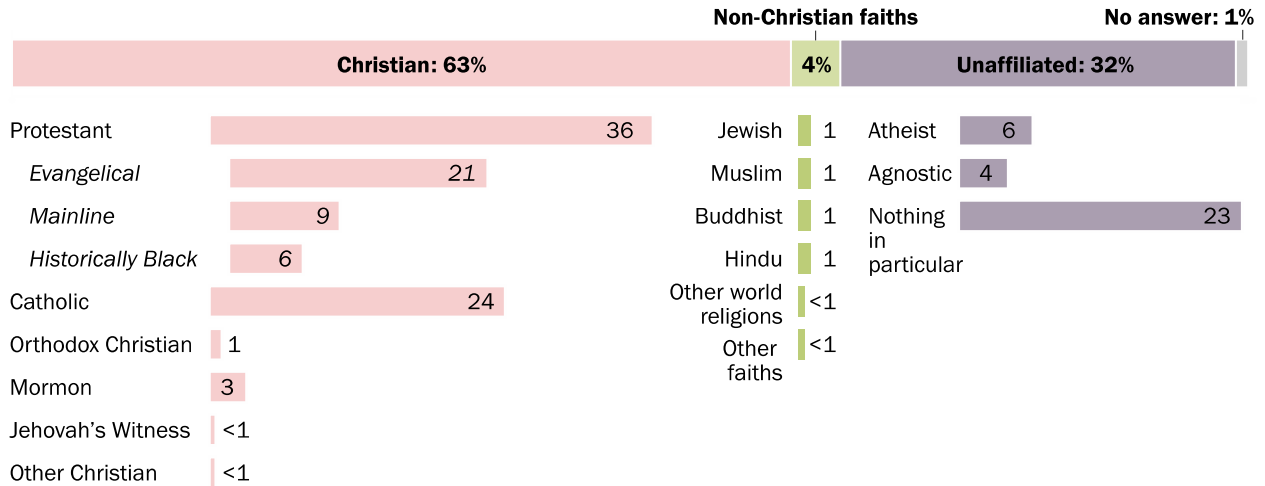
In addition to being able to explore how teens and their parents experience religion together, this survey also allows for comparisons between different groups of teens. There is a plethora of research on religion among adults – including their affiliations, beliefs, practices and what religion they were raised in, if any – and how those religious ties shape social and political views and influence life decisions. There is less data in this field on younger generations, particularly on adolescents who are still forming their identities and gaining agency in their life choices.¹²

If the major Christian traditions are disaggregated and counted separately, “nones” (that is, those who say they are atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular”) make up the single largest religious category among teens (32%). But two-thirds of adolescents are affiliated with a religion. About a quarter self-identify as Catholic, and 21% belong to the evangelical Protestant tradition. The rest are spread across a variety of other traditions – including mainline Protestantism, historically Black Protestantism, Judaism, Islam and others. (See Chapter 1 for more details.)

¹² Sociological data on religion among American teenagers has come primarily from the [National Study of Youth and Religion \(NSYR\)](#), which fielded a national telephone survey of adolescents in 2002 and 2003, as well as three subsequent rounds of follow-up interviews with participants. Pew Research Center’s survey explores several different aspects of adolescent religiosity, including many new questions about the role of religion in the family and teenagers’ experiences with religion in public schools. In addition, there have been considerable changes in the U.S. religious landscape since the original NSYR survey nearly two decades ago. Most notably, contemporary teens are maturing in a context in which [religiously unaffiliated Americans are far more numerous](#).

One-third of teens surveyed are religious ‘nones’

% of U.S. teens who identify as ...



Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

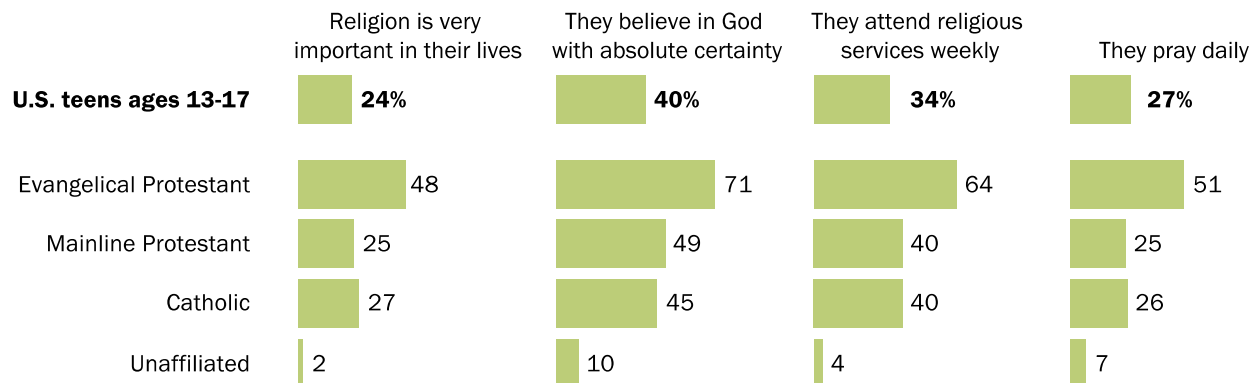
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On each of the traditional religious commitment measures in this survey – religious importance, belief in God, religious service attendance and prayer – evangelical Protestant teens stand out from other adolescents.¹³ About half of evangelical teens (48%) say that religion is very important in their lives, far higher than the share of Catholics (27%), mainline Protestants (25%) and religious “nones” (2%) who say the same. Evangelical teens are similar to those in other Christian traditions in the overall share who believe in God, but they are far more likely to express *absolute certainty* about God’s existence (71%) than are mainline (49%) or Catholic teens (45%).

Evangelical teens stand out on religious beliefs and practices

% of U.S. teens who say ...



Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Furthermore, at least half of evangelical Protestant teens say they attend church weekly or more often (64%) and pray at least daily (51%), while smaller shares of mainline Protestants, Catholics and religiously unaffiliated teens say the same.

Evangelical Protestant teens also stand out from the other groups analyzed in this survey on how they engage in religious practices with their family. Eight-in-ten or more report that they often or sometimes say grace before meals with their family and talk with their family about religion. About half say they at least sometimes read religious scriptures with their family, and about nine-in-ten say they enjoy doing religious things with their family a lot (34%) or some (54%). (See Chapter 4.)

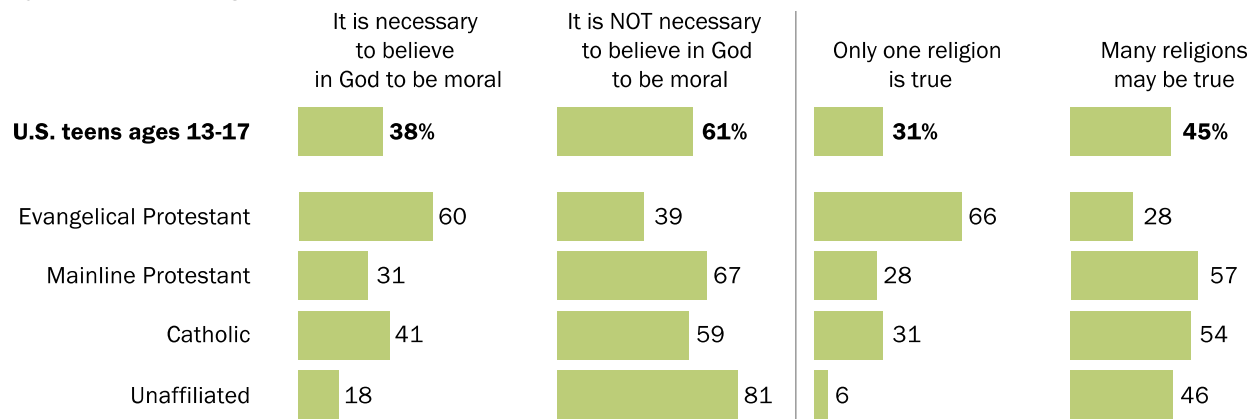
¹³ This aligns with social scientific research by Christian Smith. His work shows that evangelical Protestant adults tend to be more religious than other Americans on most standard measures of Christian religiosity. See Smith, Christian. 1998. “American Evangelicalism Embattled and Thriving.” Smith also found similar patterns among American adolescents using a survey fielded in 2002 and 2003. See Smith, Christian, and Melinda Lundquist Denton. 2005. “Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers.”

U.S. teens tend toward an inclusive view of religion

Teens broadly show an openness to the possibility that there is truth in multiple faiths and that people can be moral without believing in God. [Like American adults](#), most U.S. adolescents say that it is *not* necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values. Majorities of teenage Catholics, mainline Protestants and religious “nones” take this position. By contrast, evangelical Protestant teens tilt in the opposite direction: 60% say that believing in God is necessary for morality.

Most evangelical teens say it is necessary to believe in God to be moral, only one religion is true

% of U.S. teens who say ...



Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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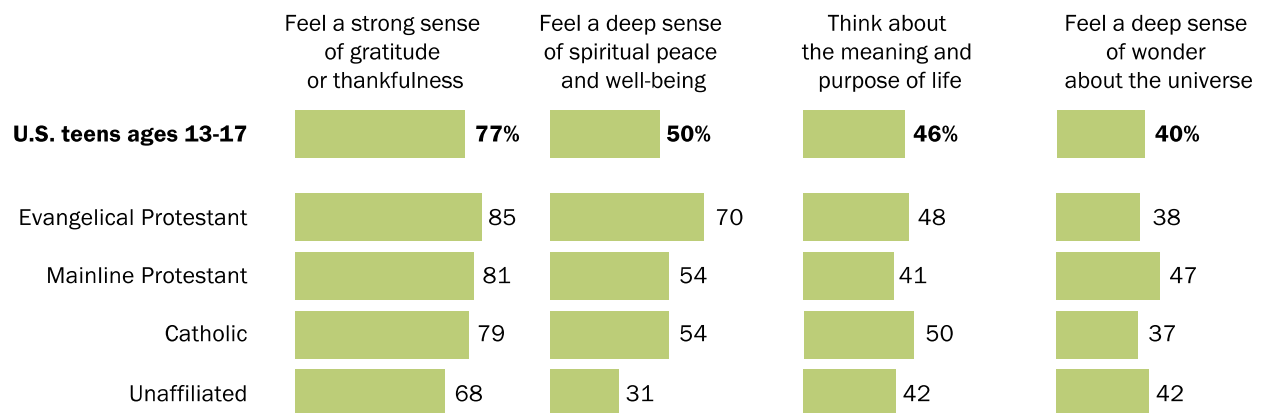
There is a similar pattern on the question of whether truth can be found in just one religion or in many. Two-thirds of evangelical teens in the U.S. hold the view that only one religion is true, while far fewer Catholics (31%), mainline Protestants (28%) and “nones” (6%) share that position. In fact, many teenage “nones” say there is little truth (27%) or no truth (21%) in *any* religion (see Chapter 2).

Teens' engagement with big questions about the world

In addition to measuring traditional religious practices, the survey also sought to explore other possible ways teens may engage with spirituality or big questions about the world – including feeling a strong sense of gratitude, feeling a deep sense of spiritual peace or well-being, thinking about the meaning and purpose of life, and feeling a deep sense of wonder about the universe.

Religious ‘nones’ as likely as other teens to report feeling a deep sense of wonder about the universe

% of U.S. teens who say they _____ at least once or twice a month



Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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About eight-in-ten teens say they feel a strong sense of gratitude at least once or twice a month. Fewer feel a deep sense of spiritual peace and well-being (50%) and say they think about the meaning and purpose of life with the same frequency (46%), while four-in-ten report feeling a deep sense of wonder about the universe at least monthly. (See Chapter 3 for full responses.)

Evangelical teens are considerably more likely than others to say they regularly feel a deep sense of spiritual peace; 70% say they do, compared with 54% of both Catholics and mainline Protestants and 31% of unaffiliated teens who say this. On other measures, differences across religious traditions are smaller. Religious “nones” are not substantially more likely than other teens to report any of these experiences.

Other key findings from the survey include:

- Most U.S. teens (60%) say they have participated in a religious education program, such as Sunday school or Hebrew school, including 29% who say they continue to participate often or sometimes. And about half (51%) say they have been part of a religious youth group. Evangelical Protestant teens are more likely than teens in other religious groups to say they still participate in a religious education program (57%) or religious youth group (64%) at least sometimes. While most religiously unaffiliated teens say they have not participated in these activities, 32% say that they have received religious education at some point, and 27% say that they have participated in a religious youth group, even if they no longer do so (see Chapter 3).
- Among adults, women tend to be more religious than men, but this gap isn't nearly as pronounced among teens. Adolescent boys and girls are equally likely to be religiously affiliated, say religion is very important in their lives, pray daily and say they regularly attend religious services. Furthermore, roughly six-in-ten teenage boys (58%) and girls (61%) say they have ever been in a religious education program. Girls do stand out, however, on religious youth group participation: 57% say they have participated in a religious youth group, compared with 44% of boys who say the same.
- Teens are split on their primary reason for attending religious services: 38% say they attend mainly because their parents want them to, while 35% say they attend mainly because they want to. Roughly a quarter (26%) say they never attend worship services. Unlike Catholics and mainline Protestants,

Teenage girls no more religious than boys, but more likely to attend religious youth group

Among U.S. teens

% who are ...

Religiously affiliated

Boys 67% ● Girls 68%

% who say ...

Religion is very important in their lives

24 ● 25

% who say they ...

Pray daily

24 ● 29

Attend services at least monthly

43 ● 45

Have ever been in a religious education program

58 ● 61

Have ever participated in a religious youth group

44 ● 57

0% 25 50 75

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately. "U.S. Teens Take After Their Parents Religiously, Attend Services Together and Enjoy Family Rituals"

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most evangelical Protestant teens (64%) say they attend services mainly because they want to.

- When making decisions about what is right and wrong, religious “nones” are less likely than religiously affiliated teens to say they rely a lot not only on religious leaders but also on parents and other family members. Evangelical Protestant teens are more likely than other religiously affiliated teens to look to religious leaders or religious teachings and beliefs when making ethical decisions (see Chapter 2).

Affiliated teens more likely than religious ‘nones’ to turn to family, religious leaders for moral guidance

% of U.S. teens who look to the following “a lot” to help make decisions about what is right and wrong

	Parents and other family members	Practical experience, common sense	Friends	Religious teachings and beliefs	Teachers	Religious leaders
Affiliated	64%	57%	24%	30%	17	16
Unaffiliated	53	61	28	2	12	1

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

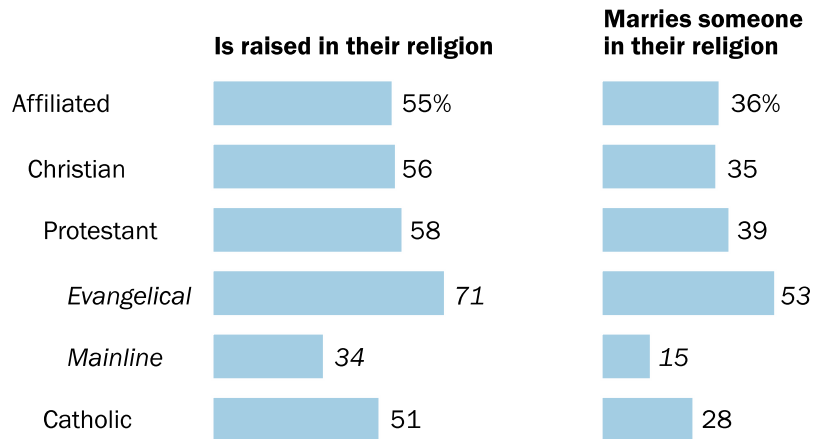
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- Evangelical parents are more likely than other parents of teens to say it is very important that their teen is raised in their religion (71%) and that their teen marries someone in their religion (53%). Overall, 55% of parents with a religious affiliation say it is very important to raise their teen in their religion, while about a third (36%) say it is important that their child eventually marries within their faith. Parents are more likely to prize several other qualities or outcomes – such as financial success – for their children (see Chapter 6).

Evangelical parents more likely than others to say it is very important to raise their child in their religion

% of religiously affiliated parents of teens who say it is very important that teen ...



Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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- On most standard measures of religious commitment, there is no clear pattern of teens becoming less religious as they advance through school. But it does appear that teens in higher grades are somewhat less likely to say they regularly attend religious services. Among teens in 11th or 12th grade, 38% attend services at least once or twice a month; by comparison, fully half of teens in 8th grade or lower attend with the same frequency.
- Teens whose parents identify with or lean toward the Republican Party seem to be more religiously engaged by some measures than those whose parent is a Democrat or Democratic-leaner. Teens with Republican parents are more likely to say they attend religious services weekly or more often, participate in religious education programs often or sometimes, and go to religious youth group at least sometimes. They also are more likely to pray daily, say religion is very important in their lives, and to talk to their family about religion, say grace and read scripture with their family at least sometimes. And these patterns hold even when the analysis is limited to teens who are religiously affiliated.

Roadmap to the report

The rest of this report explores these findings in more detail. Chapter 1 looks at teenagers' and their parents' religious affiliations. Chapter 2 takes a closer look at religious beliefs, while Chapter 3 discusses religious practices. Chapter 4 explores how teens practice religion with their family, and Chapter 5 examines how teens and their parents perceive their beliefs as being similar or different. Finally, Chapter 6 looks at what parents want for their teens – in terms of personal qualities, career success and religion.

1. Religious affiliation among American adolescents

While most U.S. teens identify with a religion, they are modestly less likely than their parents to do so – particularly when it comes to Christianity. The new survey finds that 63% of U.S. teenagers ages 13 to 17 identify as Christian, compared with 72% of the responding parents. Furthermore, teens are more likely than their parents to identify as religious “nones” (32% vs. 24%).¹⁴ Among those in both groups, fewer than one-in-ten identify with non-Christian religions, similar to the [general public overall](#).

Broadly speaking, this pattern of religious affiliation among teens is similar across a wide variety of demographic groups, including boys and girls and older and younger teens. Though there is some variety within each subgroup, teens of different ages and genders are more likely to identify as Christian than as unaffiliated.

This broad pattern also holds across race and ethnicity, as well as geographic region, although in these cases there are greater distinctions. White teens are more likely than their non-White counterparts to be religious “nones,” and teens who live in the Western U.S. stand out from Southern teens in the same way.

¹⁴ Religious affiliation is measured in this survey first by a question that asks: “What is your present religion, if any? Protestant, Roman Catholic, Mormon, Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, atheist, agnostic, something else, or nothing in particular?” Religiously unaffiliated people (“nones”) are defined as those who say they are atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular. Protestant respondents (and those who volunteer that they are Christian, without specifying a tradition) receive follow-up questions regarding their denominational family and specific denomination. See [topline](#) for exact question wording and order. See [this report](#) for more information on how Protestants are subdivided into one of three main traditions – evangelical Protestantism, mainline Protestantism, and historically Black Protestantism.

About a third of U.S. teens identify as religiously unaffiliated, higher than teens' parents

Among U.S. adolescents ages 13 to 17, roughly six-in-ten (63%) identify with Christianity, including one-in-five (21%) who are evangelical Protestant and a quarter (24%) who describe themselves as Catholic. Smaller shares identify with mainline Protestantism (9%), the historically Black Protestant tradition (6%), or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (also known as the Mormon church, 3%). And 1% or fewer say they are Orthodox Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses or members of other Christian faiths.¹⁵

In the survey, 4% of American adolescents identify with non-Christian religions, such as Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism or others.¹⁶

About a third of U.S. teens (32%) say they are religiously unaffiliated, including 6% who describe themselves as atheists, 4% who are agnostics and 23% who say their religion is "nothing in particular."

While most teens identify as Christians, they do not do so at quite the same levels as their parents. Roughly seven-in-ten parents surveyed (72%) named a Christian religion as their own – including 39% who say they are Protestant and

A third of teens are religious 'nones,' compared with a quarter of parents

Religious composition of ...

	U.S. teens ages 13-17	Teens' parents
	%	%
Christian	63	72
Protestant	36	39
<i>Evangelical</i>	21	22
<i>Mainline</i>	9	12
<i>Historically Black</i>	6	5
Catholic	24	29
Orthodox Christian	1	<1
Mormon	3	2
Jehovah's Witness	<1	1
Other Christian	<1	<1
Non-Christian faiths	4	4
Jewish	1	1
Muslim	1	1
Buddhist	1	1
Hindu	1	1
Other world religions	<1	<1
Other faiths	<1	<1
Unaffiliated	32	24
Atheist	6	4
Agnostic	4	4
Nothing in particular	23	16
Don't know/refused	1	<1
	100	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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¹⁵ Respondents are categorized by Protestant tradition based, as much as possible, on the denomination with which they identify. For more details on how Pew Research Center categorizes respondents by Protestant denomination, [see here](#).

¹⁶ Parents and teens in this survey are not representative of the [U.S. public as a whole](#). The parents are somewhat more likely to be Christian than U.S. adults overall, and also less likely to identify with a non-Christian religion. In addition, the Jewish figures represent only people who identify their religion as Jewish ("Jews by religion") and do not include people who identify as Jewish by ancestry or culture but not by religion.

29% who say they are Catholic – compared with 63% of teens who say the same.

Conversely, American teens are more likely than their parents to identify as religiously unaffiliated. About a third of teens say they are religious “nones,” compared with a quarter of responding parents (24%). The differences are primarily in the share who say their religion is “nothing in particular”: Nearly a quarter of teens say this (23%), while 16% of responding parents do.

The survey finds that 17% of U.S. teens have a religious affiliation that is different from the parent who took the survey before them.¹⁷ Among all teens who do not have the same religion as the responding parent, 37% are unaffiliated but have a Protestant parent, and 24% are unaffiliated with a Catholic parent. Smaller shares are Protestant with a parent who is unaffiliated (8%) or Catholic with a parent who is a “none” (7%). In some of these cases, teens may have two parents with different religious affiliations; when teens differ from the parent who took the survey, it is possible that they share their religious affiliation with the parent who did not take the survey.

Boys and girls are about equally likely to share their responding parent’s religious identity, and there are virtually no differences across geographic regions. While there does not seem to be much difference between older and younger teens, there are some small gaps when taking a more fine-grained look at grade level. About a quarter of U.S. teens in 11th or 12th grade (23%) have a different religious affiliation than the parent who took the survey before them, somewhat higher than the share of 9th and 10th graders (13%) and those in 8th grade or lower (16%) who say the same. This suggests that, among teens, there may be greater movement away from their family’s religious tradition later in high school.

Among teens who don’t share their parent’s religious identity, most are ‘nones’ with a Christian parent

Based on U.S. teens who do not have the same religious affiliation as their responding parent (17% of all teens)

	Religious affiliation of responding parent		
	Protestant	Catholic	Unaffiliated
Religious affiliation of teen	%	%	%
Protestant	n/a	4	8
Catholic	3	n/a	7
Unaffiliated	37	24	n/a

Note: The figures in this table do not add to 100% because combinations accounting for small percentages are not shown. For example, 2% of teens who differ from their responding parent are Protestant teens with a Muslim parent, 1% are Jewish teens with a Protestant parent, and 1% are Jewish teens with an unaffiliated parent.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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¹⁷ This estimate does not account for differences between Protestant groups. Instead, if a teen identifies as a mainline Protestant and the parent identifies as an evangelical Protestant, they are coded as having a matching religious affiliation.

Few differences in religious affiliation across gender

Among U.S. adults, [women tend to be more religious than men](#), while men are somewhat more likely to identify as religiously unaffiliated. But among U.S. adolescents, there are virtually no differences in religious composition by gender. Among both boys and girls ages 13 to 17 in the United States, nearly two-thirds identify as Christian in some way (64% and 63%, respectively), including roughly a quarter who are Catholic and one-in-five who are evangelical Protestant.

Boys and girls are about equally likely to identify with non-Christian faiths (3% and 5%, respectively). And about a third in each group are religious “nones.”

Boys, girls equally likely to be unaffiliated

Religious composition of U.S. teens

	Boys %	Girls %
Christian	64	63
Protestant	35	37
<i>Evangelical</i>	21	21
<i>Mainline</i>	8	10
<i>Historically Black</i>	7	6
Catholic	25	22
Orthodox Christian	<1	1
Mormon	3	2
Jehovah's Witness	<1	<1
Other Christian	<1	<1
Non-Christian faiths	3	5
Jewish	1	2
Muslim	1	1
Buddhist	1	1
Hindu	<1	1
Other world religions	<1	0
Other faiths	<1	<1
Unaffiliated	33	32
Atheist	6	5
Agnostic	4	4
Nothing in particular	23	22
Don't know/refused	<u><1</u>	<u><1</u>
	100	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Religious affiliation among teens across racial and ethnic groups

While this survey includes responses from teens of many different races and ethnicities, it does not include *enough* responses to analyze most of these groups separately. Instead, when racial and ethnic comparisons are made, the report uses the aggregated category of non-White adolescents – a category that includes teens who identify as Black, Asian, Hispanic, some other race or multiple races.¹⁸ (Hispanics are included in the broader non-White category, although the survey does sometimes have the statistical power to look at Hispanic teens separately as well.)

Overall, non-White teens are more likely than White teens to identify as Christian, while a higher share of White teens are religious “nones.”

Among White teens, a quarter say they are members of the evangelical Protestant

Hispanic teens more likely to identify as Catholic

Religious composition of U.S. teens

	White, non-Hispanic	NET Non-White	Hispanic
	%	%	%
Christian	60	67	70
Protestant	37	34	21
<i>Evangelical</i>	25	16	15
<i>Mainline</i>	13	5	5
<i>Historically Black</i>	0	14	1
Catholic	17	31	47
Orthodox Christian	1	<1	1
Mormon	5	1	1
Jehovah's Witness	<1	1	1
Other Christian	<1	0	0
Non-Christian faiths	3	4	1
Jewish	2	<1	1
Muslim	1	1	<1
Buddhist	<1	2	<1
Hindu	0	2	0
Other world religions	<1	0	0
Other faiths	<1	<1	<1
Unaffiliated	36	28	29
Atheist	7	4	5
Agnostic	5	3	3
Nothing in particular	24	21	20
Don't know/refused	<u>1</u>	<u><1</u>	<u><1</u>
	100	100	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding. The net non-White category includes teens who identify as Black, Asian, Hispanic, some other race or multiple races; these groups could not all be analyzed separately due to sample size limitations.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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¹⁸ The net non-White category includes teens who identify as Black, Asian, Hispanic, some other race or multiple races. It is the unit of analysis in this survey because the sample sizes for most of the non-White categories are too small to analyze individually. The combined category is used in this report so that broad comparisons can be made to highlight differences between groups. Researchers prefer to break out subgroups when possible to show the differences that may exist between groups of people. The use of a net non-White category is not

tradition, 17% identify as Catholic and 13% are mainline Protestants. About a third (36%) are religious “nones,” including a quarter (24%) who say their religion is “nothing in particular.”

By comparison, non-White teens are somewhat less likely to be evangelical Protestants (16%), but more likely to be Catholic. Three-in-ten non-White teens (31%) are Catholic – including nearly half (47%) of Hispanic teens. This aligns with findings about [Hispanic adults in the U.S.](#), which show that the proportion who identify as Catholic is declining but that roughly half still affiliate with the Catholic Church.

Non-White teens also are less likely than White teens to say that they are religiously unaffiliated (28% vs. 36%). And previous research shows a similar pattern among American adults, with higher shares among those who are White reporting no religious affiliation.¹⁹

intended to obscure the fact that the religious experiences and behaviors of [Black Americans](#), [Hispanic Americans](#), and [Americans of other races and ethnicities](#) may be quite different.

¹⁹ Baker, Joseph O. and Andrew L. Whitehead. 2016. “[Gendering \(Non\)Religion: Politics, Education, and Gender Gaps in Secularity](#).” Social Forces.

No major differences in affiliation across age, grade level

Older teens (ages 15 to 17) are just as likely as younger teens (ages 13 to 14) to identify as Christian (63% and 64%, respectively), and no more likely to identify as religiously unaffiliated. There is similar consistency when looking by grade level: Virtually equal shares of those in 8th grade or lower, 9th and 10th grade, and 11th and 12th grade identify as Christian, some other religion, or religiously unaffiliated.

Older teens no more likely than younger teens to say they are religiously unaffiliated

Religious composition of U.S. teens

	Ages 13-14	Ages 15-17	8th grade and lower	9th-10th grade	11th-12th grade
	%	%	%	%	%
Christian	64	63	65	63	63
Protestant	37	35	40	35	36
<i>Evangelical</i>	24	19	26	20	18
<i>Mainline</i>	8	9	8	10	8
<i>Historically Black</i>	5	7	5	5	9
Catholic	23	24	22	24	24
Orthodox Christian	<1	1	<1	<1	1
Mormon	4	2	3	4	2
Jehovah's Witness	<1	1	<1	1	<1
Other Christian	<1	<1	<1	<1	0
Non-Christian faiths	3	4	4	4	4
Jewish	2	1	2	1	2
Muslim	<1	1	<1	1	1
Buddhist	1	1	1	<1	1
Hindu	1	1	<1	1	1
Other world religions	0	<1	0	<1	0
Other faiths	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1
Unaffiliated	32	33	31	33	32
Atheist	4	7	3	6	6
Agnostic	5	4	5	4	4
Nothing in particular	24	22	23	23	22
Don't know/refused	<u><1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u><1</u>	<u>1</u>
	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Roughly two-thirds of Midwestern and Southern teens identify as Christian

Compared with other demographics, there is somewhat more variability in the religious composition of adolescents across [geographic regions](#).

The South (29%) and Midwest (23%) stand out for having higher shares of evangelical Protestants than either the Northeast (15%) or the West (11%). And the South also stands out as more likely than the West to be home to teenagers who belong to historically Black Protestant churches (10% vs. 3%).

American teenagers who live in the West (32%) are more likely than those in either the Midwest (21%) or the South (19%) to identify as Catholic. A higher share in the West than any other region also are Mormon (7%). Western teens stand out from Southern teens in terms of disaffiliation, too: 37% of teenagers in the West are religious “nones,” compared with 29% in the South.

Teens in Northeast more likely than those in other regions to identify with non-Christian religions

Religious composition of U.S. teens

	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
	%	%	%	%
Christian	58	64	67	60
Protestant	31	40	47	20
<i>Evangelical</i>	15	23	29	11
<i>Mainline</i>	10	12	8	6
<i>Historically Black</i>	6	5	10	3
Catholic	25	21	19	32
Orthodox Christian	2	<1	<1	<1
Mormon	1	2	2	7
Jehovah's Witness	<1	1	<1	1
Other Christian	0	<1	0	0
Non-Christian faiths	10	2	3	2
Jewish	6	1	<1	<1
Muslim	1	<1	1	1
Buddhist	1	<1	<1	1
Hindu	2	<1	1	<1
Other world religions	0	0	0	<1
Other faiths	<1	1	<1	<1
Unaffiliated	31	34	29	37
Atheist	5	5	4	8
Agnostic	4	4	4	5
Nothing in particular	22	25	21	24
Don't know/refused	<u><1</u>	<u><1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u><1</u>
	100	100	100	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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These patterns are similar to those seen among adults. Specifically, evangelical Protestants and members of historically Black Protestant traditions are disproportionately concentrated in the South, and the West has a relatively high share of “nones.”

Teens in the Northeast stand out as being more likely than those in other regions to identify with non-Christian traditions (10%), including 6% who are Jewish.

2. Religious beliefs among American adolescents

Compared with the parent who took the survey before them, U.S. teens are less likely to rate religion as a priority in their lives and to say they believe in God with absolute certainty. Still, a majority of teens say that religion is at least somewhat important in their lives, including one-in-five unaffiliated teens who say this.

In addition, more than eight-in-ten American adolescents say they believe in God or a universal spirit. Teens who identify as religiously affiliated are far more likely to believe in a supreme being than religious “nones,” but even most religiously unaffiliated teens express belief in a higher power – albeit with less certainty than teens who adhere to a particular faith group.

At the same time, many teens also espouse a view of morality that is not God-centric, and have a pluralistic view of religion in general. [Like U.S. adults overall](#), a majority of adolescents say that it is not necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values, and this holds true across most religious groups analyzed in this report – with the exception of evangelical Protestants. Furthermore, teens are more likely to say that “many religions may be true” than they are to say that “only one religion is true,” demonstrating a certain religious open-mindedness. Evangelical teens are again the exception: A majority say that only one religion is true.

The survey also asked teens where they turn for moral and ethical guidance. This chapter shows that while religion is an important source of ethical decision-making for some American adolescents, on the whole they say it is far less important to making ethical decisions than are parents and other family members as well as practical experience and common sense. Evangelical teens are more likely than those in other religious groups analyzed in this study to rely on religious institutions to help them sort out right from wrong.

Teens less likely than parents to say religion is important in their lives

Most U.S. teenagers ages 13 to 17 say that religion is at least somewhat important in their lives, including 24% who say it is “very” important and 36% who say it is “somewhat” important, while 21% say religion is “not too” important in their lives and 18% say it is “not at all” important.

The responding parents in the survey are more likely than teens to say that religion is very important in their lives. About four-in-ten say this (43%), and an additional 30% say religion is somewhat important to them.

Looking at responses together, 44% of teens rate religion’s importance in their life differently than their parents do for themselves. And among all those who don’t align, 54% of these pairings include parents who say religion is very important in their own lives while their teen says it is less important.

Furthermore, the survey asked each teen and parent how important they think religion is in the other person’s life. That is, teens were asked how important they think religion is in the life of the responding parent, and parents were asked the same about the responding teen.

Among teens, 40% say that religion is very important to their parent, compared with 43% among the parents who say the same of themselves. Among parents, 32% say that religion is very important to their teen,

Parents more likely than teens to say religion is ‘very important’ to them

% of U.S. teens and their parents who say religion is ____ in their lives

	U.S. teens ages 13-17	Teens’ parents
	%	%
Very important	24	43
Somewhat important	36	30
Not too important	21	11
Not at all important	18	15
No answer	<u>1</u>	<u><1</u>
	100	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately. “U.S. Teens Take After Their Parents Religiously, Attend Services Together and Enjoy Family Rituals”

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How teens and parents see importance of religion in each other’s lives

	Teen’s life according to ...		Parent’s life according to ...	
	Teen	Parent	Parent	Teen
	%	%	%	%
Very important	24	32	43	40
Somewhat important	36	34	30	33
Not too important	21	22	11	14
Not at all important	18	12	15	13
No answer	<u>1</u>	<u><1</u>	<u><1</u>	<u><1</u>
	100	100	100	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately. “U.S. Teens Take After Their Parents Religiously, Attend Services Together and Enjoy Family Rituals”

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compared with 24% of teens who rank religion that highly in their own lives.

Evangelical teens are far more likely than the other religious groups analyzed to say that religion is very important in their lives. About half (48%) say this, compared with 27% among Catholic teens and 25% of mainline Protestant teens. By contrast, about half of religiously unaffiliated teens (48%) say that religion is not at all important in their lives.

Girls are more likely than boys to say that religion is very or somewhat important in their lives. Nearly two-thirds of girls (64%) say this, compared with 56% of boys.

Most teens say religion is at least somewhat important to them

% of U.S. teens who say religion is ____ important in their life

	Very %	Somewhat %	Not too %	Not at all %	No answer %
U.S. teens ages 13-17	24	36	21	18	1=100
Affiliated	35	44	16	4	<1
Christian	35	45	15	4	<1
Protestant	39	46	11	3	<1
<i>Evangelical</i>	48	43	7	1	<1
<i>Mainline</i>	25	47	24	5	0
Catholic	27	46	22	4	1
Unaffiliated	2	18	30	48	2
Boys	24	33	22	20	1
Girls	25	39	19	17	<1
Northeast	18	35	26	21	0
Midwest	23	34	25	17	0
South	28	41	17	13	<1
West	23	29	20	25	3

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Belief in God or a universal spirit

The vast majority (85%) of U.S. adolescents say they believe in God or a universal spirit, including 40% who are absolutely certain about this belief and 34% who are fairly certain. Just 14% say they do not believe in God, with 4% who say they are absolutely certain that God does not exist and 6% who are fairly certain on this matter.

Among responding parents overall, roughly nine-in-ten express belief in God (89%). Compared with their teens, these parents are far more likely to be absolutely certain about this belief (63% vs. 40%).

Looking at overall belief in God – not accounting for certainty – the vast majority of teens (88%) give the same answer as their responding parent. And where there are mismatches in belief (for example, one person says they believe in God while the other does not), it fits with the broader pattern of lower levels of religiosity among teens. Among all teens who do not share the same beliefs about God as their responding parent, 62% say they do not believe in God, while their parent identifies as a believer – much larger than the share of teens who say that they believe in God and who have a parent who does not (24%). (The remainder include pairings in which either the teen or parent did not answer the question.)

More than nine-in-ten evangelical Protestant (99%), mainline Protestant (96%) and Catholic (94%) teens say they believe in God, but evangelicals stand out for their level of certainty. Seven-in-ten (71%) evangelical Protestant teens say they are absolutely certain that God exists. Far fewer mainline Protestants (49%) and Catholics (45%) say the same.

Among teens who identify as religiously unaffiliated, there is more variation in responses. About six-in-ten (62%) say they believe in God or a universal spirit, but relatively few (10% of all religiously unaffiliated teens) say they are absolutely certain in that belief. An additional one-third

Parents much more likely than teens to believe in God with absolute certainty

% of U.S. teens and their parents who say they ...

	U.S. teens ages 13-17	Teens' parents
	%	%
NET Believe in God	85	89
<i>Absolutely certain</i>	40	63
<i>Fairly certain</i>	34	21
<i>Not too/not at all certain</i>	11	6
<i>No answer</i>	<1	<1
NET Do not believe in God	14	10
<i>Absolutely certain</i>	4	4
<i>Fairly certain</i>	6	5
<i>Not too/not at all certain</i>	4	1
<i>No answer</i>	<1	0
No answer to belief in God	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
	100	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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of teenage “nones” say they are fairly certain that God exists, while one-in-five (19%) say that while they do believe in God, they are not too certain or not at all certain about it.

About a third of religious “nones” ages 13 to 17 (36%) say they do *not* believe in God or a higher power, with most in this group expressing at least a fair amount of certainty in this position. Roughly one-in-ten unaffiliated teens (9%) say they do not believe in God – but are not too or not at all sure about it.

Among teens, roughly eight-in-ten or more across each of the demographic groups analyzed in this study say they believe in God or a universal spirit, but there is some variation in the overall levels of belief and certainty they express. For example, roughly half of all teens who live in the South (47%) say they are absolutely certain about the existence of God, while teens in the Northeast (37%), Midwest (36%) and West (35%) are less likely to share this certainty. Adolescents in the South also stand out specifically from those in the West in terms of *not* believing in God: Just 9% of Southern teens hold this view, while 21% of teens in the West say the same.

Mainline Protestant and Catholic teens less certain than evangelicals about God's existence

% of U.S. teens who say they ...

	NET Believe in God	Absolutely certain	Fairly certain	Not too/not at all certain	No answer	NET Do not believe in God	Absolutely certain	Fairly certain	Not too/not at all certain	No answer	No answer to belief in God
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
U.S. teens ages 13-17	85	40	34	11	<1	14	4	6	4	<1	1=100
Affiliated	96	55	35	6	<1	4	<1	1	2	<1	1
Christian	97	56	35	6	<1	3	<1	1	1	<1	1
Protestant	98	63	31	4	0	1	<1	1	<1	0	1
<i>Evangelical</i>	99	71	26	2	0	<1	0	<1	<1	0	<1
<i>Mainline</i>	96	49	40	7	0	4	<1	2	1	0	1
Catholic	94	45	40	10	<1	5	1	2	2	<1	1
Unaffiliated	62	10	33	19	0	36	12	15	9	0	2
Northeast	84	37	34	14	<1	15	4	5	7	0	1
Midwest	86	36	40	10	0	13	5	5	4	0	1
South	89	47	31	11	<1	9	2	5	2	0	1
West	78	35	34	9	0	21	8	8	6	<1	1

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Most teens say it is NOT necessary to believe in God to be a moral person

Overall, most U.S. teenagers ages 13 to 17 do not see belief in God as a prerequisite for having a moral compass. Six-in-ten adolescents (61%) express the view that it is not necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values, while 38% say it is necessary.

Compared with their responding parents, teens are slightly less likely to cite belief in God as a prerequisite for good values. Among the responding parents, 43% say that it is necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values, while 56% hold the opposite view.

In fact, 20% of teens have an opinion on this question that does not align with that of their responding parent. Among those who misalign, 61% are teens who hold the view that it is not necessary to believe in God to have good values, while their responding parent disagrees. Half as many of teens (31% of those who give a different response from their parent) say it is necessary to believe in God to be moral, while their responding parent thinks it is not.

Most teens say belief in God is not necessary to be moral, have good values

% of U.S. teens and their parents who believe that it is _____ to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values

	U.S. teens ages 13-17	Teens' parents
	%	%
Necessary	38	43
NOT necessary	61	56
No answer	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
	100	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Among the specific religious groups analyzed in this study, evangelical Protestant adolescents stand out. They are the only group for which the balance tilts toward the opinion that it is necessary to believe in God to be moral (60% vs. 39%). By contrast, religiously unaffiliated teens are the most likely to hold the opposite view, that it is *not* necessary to believe in God in order to have good values (81%). And majorities of mainline Protestant (67%) and Catholic teens (59%) say the same.

There also are some distinctions by grade level. Adolescents in high school are more likely than their younger peers to say it is possible to be a good person without believing in God. Roughly two-thirds of teens in 9th and 10th grade (65%) and in 11th or 12th grade (64%) express the opinion that it is not necessary to believe in God to be moral; a smaller majority (56%) of teens in 8th grade or below share this view.

Majority of evangelical teens say belief in God is necessary to have good values

% of U.S. teens who believe that it is ____ to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values

	Necessary	NOT necessary	No answer
	%	%	%
U.S. teens ages 13-17	38	61	1=100
Affiliated	47	52	1
Christian	47	52	1
Protestant	53	46	1
<i>Evangelical</i>	60	39	1
<i>Mainline</i>	31	67	2
Catholic	41	59	1
Unaffiliated	18	81	2
<i>Current grade level</i>			
8th grade or lower	44	56	1
9th-10th grade	34	65	1
11th-12th grade	34	64	2

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Teens turn mostly to parents and other family, practical experience and common sense to determine right and wrong

So where do teens turn when making decisions about what is right and wrong? Family and common sense appear to be most likely. About six-in-ten U.S. teens (61%) say that they look to parents and other family members “a lot” when making decisions about right and wrong. A similar proportion (58%) look to practical experience and common sense a lot. About a quarter (26%) of teens say they look a lot to friends when making decisions about what is right and wrong, and 15% rely on teachers.²⁰

For most American teenagers, religion does not appear to be a primary source for addressing moral questions. About a fifth (21%) of adolescents say they look to religious teachings and beliefs a lot when making decisions about what is right and wrong, and only 11% say they look to religious leaders a lot. The shares of teens who look to religion “not much” or “not at all” when making moral decisions are particularly large relative to the other potential sources mentioned in the survey. Four-in-ten teens use little to no help from religious teachings and beliefs to make decisions about what is right and wrong, and about six-in-ten (61%) say the same about religious leaders.

Teens most often rely on family and common sense for moral guidance

% of U.S. teens who look to each source ____ to help make decisions about what is right and wrong

	A lot %	Some %	Not much/ not at all %	No answer %
Parents and other family members	61	35	4	<1=100
Practical experience and common sense	58	39	3	1
Friends	26	54	20	<1
Religious teachings and beliefs	21	37	41	1
Teachers	15	54	30	<1
Religious leaders	11	28	61	1

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Teens who are religious “nones” rely less on some sources of moral guidance than those who are affiliated with a religion. Not only are they far less likely than affiliated teens to rely a lot on

²⁰ Previous surveys, [most recently in 2017](#), have asked U.S. adults overall a similar question, although the response options differed. In 2017, 74% of U.S. adults said they look “a lot” to practical experience and common sense when making decisions about what is right and wrong, and 31% said they looked a lot to religious teachings and beliefs.

religious teachings and beliefs (2% vs. 30%) or religious leaders (1% vs. 16%), but they also are not as likely to turn to parents and other family members (53% vs. 64%).

Evangelical Protestant teenagers stand out in the opposite way. In particular, they are more likely than most other Christian teens to look to religion to help decide questions of right and wrong. For instance, about four-in-ten evangelical teens (41%) rely on religious teachings and beliefs a lot when deciding what is right and wrong, compared with a quarter of Catholic teens and about one-in-five mainline Protestant teens (19%). Similarly, a quarter of evangelical Protestant teens look to religious leaders a lot when making ethical decisions, while only 13% of Catholics and about one-in-ten mainline Protestants (9%) say the same.

Conversely, evangelical Protestant teens are relatively unlikely to say they look to practical experience and

common sense a lot when deciding what is right and wrong. Half of evangelical Protestants rely on practical experience and common sense in this way, compared with roughly six-in-ten unaffiliated (61%) and mainline Protestant (64%) teens.

In addition to religious affiliation, the importance teens place on religion is linked to how they decide between right and wrong. For example, adolescents who say religion is very important in their lives (62%) are about four times more likely than those who say religion is somewhat important in their lives (15%) to look to religious teachings and beliefs for ethical guidance. Those

Evangelical Protestant teens more likely than other teens to look to religious teachings and religious leaders for ethical guidance

% of U.S. teens who look to ____ a lot to help make decisions about what is right and wrong

	Parents and other family members	Practical experience and common sense	Friends	Religious teachings and beliefs	Teachers	Religious leaders
	%	%	%	%	%	%
U.S. teens ages 13-17	61	58	26	21	15	11
Affiliated	64	57	24	30	17	16
Christian	64	56	24	31	16	16
Protestant	66	55	23	33	15	18
<i>Evangelical</i>	67	50	24	41	12	25
<i>Mainline</i>	60	64	27	19	13	9
Catholic	62	57	25	25	19	13
Unaffiliated	53	61	28	2	12	1
<i>Importance of religion</i>						
Very important	74	59	21	62	23	35
Somewhat important	61	54	26	15	14	6
Not too/not at all important	51	61	28	1	11	<1

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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who say religion is very important in their lives also are more likely than others to rely on religious leaders, parents and other family members, and teachers in this way.

More teens hold a pluralistic view of religion than an exclusivist one

A plurality of American teenagers (45%) express the belief that many religions may be true, while 31% say that only one religion is true. Fewer say that there is little (15%) or no (8%) truth in any religion.

On this question, responding parents express largely similar views. Roughly half (47%) say that many religions may be true, and a third hold the view that only one religion is true.

Plurality of teens, parents say there may be truth in many religions

% of U.S. teens and their parents who say ...

	U.S. teens ages 13-17	Teens' parents
	%	%
Only one religion is true	31	33
Many religions may be true	45	47
There is little truth in any religion	15	13
There is no truth in any religion	8	6
No answer	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>
	100	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Evangelical Protestant adolescents are more likely than other religious groups to take the exclusivist view. Two-thirds (66%) say that only one religion is true, compared with 31% of Catholics and 28% of mainline Protestants who say the same. [Among U.S. adults](#), evangelical Protestants also are especially likely to espouse exclusivist perspectives, possibly due to that community's emphasis on salvation that necessitates adherence to specific beliefs.²¹

Religious “nones” are more likely to say that many religions may be true (46%) than to give any other single response, but a similar share (47%) believe that religion holds either little (27%) or no truth (21%) when those two responses are combined.

Roughly half of religiously unaffiliated teens say there is little or no truth in any religion

% of U.S. teens who say ...

	Only one religion is true	Many religions may be true	There is little truth in any religion	There is no truth in any religion	No answer
	%	%	%	%	%
U.S. teens ages 13-17	31	45	15	8	2=100
Affiliated	43	45	9	2	1
Christian	44	44	8	2	2
Protestant	51	39	7	1	2
<i>Evangelical</i>	66	28	5	<1	1
<i>Mainline</i>	28	57	7	1	7
Catholic	31	54	12	3	1
Unaffiliated	6	46	27	21	2
Northeast	16	61	12	8	3
Midwest	28	51	15	5	1
South	36	41	14	7	1
West	34	37	17	11	2

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Across most demographic groups, U.S. adolescents are more likely to express the opinion that multiple religions may be true than to say that only one religion is true. Some regional distinctions do stand out, however. Teens in the Northeast are more likely than teens in any other region to say that many religions may be true: 61% say this, compared with half or fewer among teens in the Midwest (51%), South (41%) or West (37%).

²¹ Wuthnow, Robert. 2005. “America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity.”

3. Teens' religious practices

The new survey finds that although the majority of teens pray and attend worship services at least occasionally, about four-in-ten say they seldom or never attend services, and a similar proportion report seldom or never praying.

The survey also allows for comparisons between teens and their parents who took the survey before them, finding that teens are about as likely as their responding parents to regularly attend services – but less likely to engage in regular prayer.²² Teens' rates of attendance and prayer also are tied to their parents' religious practices. For example, teens whose responding parent regularly attends religious services are more likely than their counterparts to attend services and to pray frequently.

This chapter also explores *why* teens attend worship services. While some teens may chafe against it, parental control of adolescent behavior is a fact of life for most teenagers. Indeed, the survey shows that teens who attend worship services are about evenly split between attending because they want to and attending because their parent or parents want them to.

Of course, religious practices extend beyond worship service attendance and prayer. For instance, half of teens have been in a religious youth group and six-in-ten have participated in religious education at some point in their lives. These activities vary considerably across Christian subgroups, and the likelihood of participating in them declines as adolescents age.

In addition, a majority of U.S. adolescents report at least occasionally having religious or spiritual experiences, such as feeling a deep sense of spiritual peace and well-being or a strong sense of gratitude or thankfulness. Religiously unaffiliated adolescents are somewhat less likely to report such experiences.

²² Teens and parents were both asked how often they attend religious services, aside from special occasions like weddings and funerals: more than once a week, once a week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, seldom, or never. They were also asked how often they pray: several times a day, once a day, a few times a week, once a week, a few times a month, seldom or never.

Teens and their parents attend worship services at roughly similar rates

About four-in-ten U.S. teenagers say they attend religious services at least once or twice a month, including a third (34%) who say they attend weekly or more often. Just over half report attending services a few times a year or less often, including about a quarter (26%) who say they never attend religious services.²³

There are few differences in attendance patterns between American teenagers and their responding parents in the survey. But that does not mean that teens always give the same response as the parent who took the survey before them to the question about worship attendance.

About a third of U.S. teens (32%) report attending religious services with a frequency that differs from their parent. For example, a teen might say they never attend religious services, while their parent reports going a few times a year.²⁴ Among those in this group, most of these combinations (57%) involve a teen who attends less often than their parent, including a substantial number of cases (25%) in which the teens say they never attend services, while the parents say they go at least on occasion. At the same time, 14% are teens who say they attend weekly or more often, though they have a parent who reports attending less frequently.

Still, adolescents' participation in worship services is strongly tied to their parents' participation. Fully 88% of teens with a responding parent who attends services monthly or more also attend at

About four-in-ten teens, parents say they attend religious services at least monthly

% of U.S. teens and their parents who say they attend worship services ...

	U.S. teens ages 13-17	Teens' parents
	%	%
NET Monthly or more	44	43
Weekly or more	34	33
Once or twice a month	11	10
NET A few times a year or less	55	57
A few times a year	15	18
Seldom	14	18
Never	26	21
No answer	<u>1</u>	<u><1</u>
	100	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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²³ The survey was conducted well before the COVID-19 pandemic reached the United States in 2020. The attendance patterns described here do not reflect any changes that may have occurred because of the pandemic.

²⁴ This analysis only looks at attendance data for teens and the one parent who took the survey before they did. For teens in two-parent households, it is possible that the parents attend religious services at different rates. This analysis compares attendance using six categories: weekly or more, once or twice a month, a few times a year, seldom, never and no answer.

least monthly themselves, and 89% of teens with a parent who attends worship services a few times a year or less say the same about themselves.

There also are distinct differences by religious tradition in how often teens participate in worship services. Evangelical Protestant teens are far more likely than their mainline or Catholic peers to say they attend church once a week or more often; about two-thirds of evangelicals say they attend this often, compared with four-in-ten each among mainline Protestants and Catholics. By comparison, the vast majority of religiously unaffiliated teens (81%) say they seldom or never attend religious services.

Teens appear to attend religious services somewhat less frequently as they advance through school. About four-in-ten teenagers who are still in eighth grade (or below) say they go to services weekly, compared with three-in-ten who are juniors or seniors in high school.

Parents' political party and marital status also are linked with differences in how often teens go to religious services. Adolescents with a Republican parent are particularly likely to attend religious services: Fully 43% of adolescents with a Republican or Republican-leaning parent attend services weekly, compared with a quarter of teens with a Democratic or Democratic-leaning parent. And while one-in-five teens whose responding parent is not married (including those who have never been married, as well as those who are divorced, separated or widowed) say they attend weekly, a much larger share of those whose responding parent is married or living with a partner (36%) say they attend with the same frequency.

Evangelical teens most likely to attend services weekly or more often

% of U.S. teens who say they attend worship services ...

	NET Monthly or more	Weekly or more	Once or twice a month	NET A few times a year or less	A few times a year	Seldom/ never	No answer
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
U.S. teens ages 13-17	44	34	11	55	15	40	1=100
<i>Religious affiliation of teen</i>							
Affiliated	62	48	14	37	17	20	1
Christian	64	50	15	35	16	19	1
Protestant	71	54	18	28	14	14	1
<i>Evangelical</i>	80	64	16	20	12	7	<1
<i>Mainline</i>	62	40	21	37	14	23	2
Catholic	51	40	11	47	20	27	1
Unaffiliated	7	4	3	92	12	81	1
<i>Worship attendance of responding parent</i>							
Monthly or more	88	71	17	12	8	4	<1
A few times a year or less often	10	5	5	89	21	67	1
<i>Current grade level of teen</i>							
8th grade or lower	50	39	12	50	15	34	<1
9th-10th grade	44	34	11	55	15	40	1
11th-12th grade	38	29	9	61	16	44	1
<i>Political party affiliation of responding parent</i>							
Republican/lean Republican	53	43	10	46	13	33	1
Democrat/lean Democrat	36	25	11	63	18	45	1
<i>Marital status of responding parent</i>							
Not married	35	20	14	64	17	47	2
Married or living with a partner	46	36	10	53	15	38	1

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Why do teens attend worship services?

The survey asked teens who attend worship services *why* they attend: Is it mainly because they want to, or mainly because their parents want them to? Similar shares say they attend mainly because they want to (35%) and mainly because their parents want them to (38%).²⁵ But the reason for attending varies considerably across groups of adolescents.

About two-thirds (64%) of evangelical Protestant teens say they attend because they want to. Conversely, 55% of Catholic teens say they attend because their parents want them to, and only a third attend because they want to. About half of mainline Protestant teens say they attend because their parents want them to (48%) and four-in-ten say they attend because they want to (38%). And

unaffiliated teens who attend worship services are about twice as likely to say they do so because their parents want them to (23% of all unaffiliated teens) than to say they attend because they want to (12%). However, 63% of unaffiliated teens say they never attend worship services.

About four-in-ten teens attend religious services mainly because parents want them to

% of U.S. teens who say they attend worship services ...

	--Ever attend worship services--				
	Mainly because they want to	Mainly because parents want them to	No answer given for why they attend	Never attend worship services	No answer given on attendance frequency
	%	%	%	%	%
U.S. teens ages 13-17	35	38	<1	26	1=100
Affiliated	46	45	<1	8	1
Christian	46	46	<1	7	1
Protestant	53	41	<1	6	1
<i>Evangelical</i>	64	33	<1	3	<1
<i>Mainline</i>	38	48	0	12	2
Catholic	34	55	1	9	1
Unaffiliated	12	23	<1	63	1
<i>Worship attendance</i>					
Monthly or more	61	39	0	--	--
A few times a year or less often	15	38	1	46	--
Boys	32	40	<1	26	1
Girls	38	36	<1	25	1
Ages 13-14	30	44	1	24	<1
15-17	37	35	<1	26	1

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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²⁵ Pew Research Center's survey asked the same question of all teens who say they attend religious services, regardless of how many parents they live with: "Which statement comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right? I mainly attend religious services because I want to, or I mainly attend religious services because my parents want me to."

Adolescents who regularly attend worship services are relatively likely to do so because they want to. Six-in-ten of those who attend at least monthly (61%) say they do so mainly because they want to. Conversely, among teens who attend less often (a few times a year or seldom), 70% report attending because their parents want them to.

Teens' reasons for attending worship services also vary by characteristics other than their religion. For instance, girls (38%) are moderately more likely than boys (32%) to attend services because they want to. And younger teens are particularly likely to say they attend because their parents want them to, with 44% of those ages 13 to 14 expressing this sentiment, compared with 35% of teens ages 15 to 17.

Most U.S. teens pray at least occasionally

About four-in-ten U.S. adolescents report seldom or never praying. The majority, however, say they pray at least a few times a month – including about a quarter who say they pray on a daily basis (27%).

But while parents and teens attend religious services at similar rates, there is a wider gap between the two groups when it comes to prayer habits. Parents are about 20 percentage points more likely than teens to say they pray on a daily basis (48% vs. 27%), suggesting that it may be easier for parents to compel worship service attendance than daily prayer. Indeed, roughly half of all teens give a different response than their parent about how often they pray, and the vast majority in this group (82%) are teens who pray less often than their parents.²⁶

Some of this difference may be related to the fact that teens are more likely than their parents to identify as religiously unaffiliated (see Chapter 1) and less likely to believe in God with absolute certainty (see Chapter 2).

Parents far more likely than teens to pray on a regular basis

% of U.S. teens and their parents who say they pray ...

	U.S. teens ages 13-17 %	Teens' parents %
NET Daily	27	48
Several times a day	11	30
Once a day	16	19
NET Weekly	21	17
A few times a week	16	15
Once a week	5	2
A few times a month	13	8
NET Seldom/never	39	26
Seldom	21	14
Never	18	13
No answer	<u>1</u>	<u><1</u>
	100	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately. "U.S. Teens Take After Their Parents Religiously, Attend Services Together and Enjoy Family Rituals"

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²⁶ This analysis compares frequency of prayer using five categories: daily, weekly, a few times a month, seldom or never, and no answer.

Teens who have parents who say religion is very important to them are more likely to report that they pray daily, though some teens with highly religious parents seldom or never pray. For instance, 44% of teens with a parent who says religion is very important report praying daily. But about three-in-ten teens with a parent who says religion is very important pray monthly or less often, which includes 15% who seldom or never pray.

There is less variation in prayer among teens with parents who say religion is not too or not at all important, with three-quarters of those teens seldom or never praying.

Among U.S. teens who live in the South, 32% say they pray daily, as do 26% in the Northeast, 25% in the Midwest and 22% in the West.

Three-quarters of religiously unaffiliated teens seldom or never pray

% of U.S. teens who say they pray ...

	Daily %	Weekly %	A few times a month %	Seldom/ never %	No answer %
U.S. teens ages 13-17	27	21	13	39	1=100
<i>Religious affiliation of teen</i>					
Affiliated	36	26	15	22	1
Christian	37	27	15	20	<1
Protestant	42	29	14	15	<1
<i>Evangelical</i>	51	27	10	12	<1
<i>Mainline</i>	25	35	14	25	<1
Catholic	26	25	19	28	1
Unaffiliated	7	9	8	76	<1
<i>Importance of religion to responding parent</i>					
Very important	44	27	14	15	<1
Somewhat important	21	21	17	40	1
Not too/not at all important	5	10	7	77	1
Northeast	26	14	12	48	0
Midwest	25	26	10	38	1
South	32	23	15	30	1
West	22	16	13	47	1

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Evangelical Protestants most likely to attend religious education programs, youth groups

Religious education is relatively common. Six-in-ten teens say they have participated in religious education at some point in their lives, with about half in this group saying they still participate often or sometimes (29%) and a similar share (31%) saying they rarely participate or used to but no longer do so.²⁷

Somewhat fewer U.S. teens (51%) say they have ever attended a religious youth group, although the percentage who currently do so – at least sometimes – is identical to the share who say they currently participate in religious education programs (29%).

In both cases, evangelical Protestant teens are particularly likely to be engaged in these religious activities. Most evangelical teenagers (57%) often or sometimes participate in a religious education program, compared with 37% of mainline Protestant teens and roughly three-in-ten Catholic teens. And roughly two-thirds of evangelical teens (64%) are engaged in a religious youth group, while about a quarter of Catholics (23%) are engaged in this way.

Majorities of religiously unaffiliated teens, meanwhile, say they have never been involved in religious education programs or youth groups.

Participation in religious education and youth groups is connected with other standard types of religious observance. For instance, teens who attend worship services regularly are more likely than others to also attend religious youth group meetings.

But religious characteristics are not the only traits linked with participation in religious education and youth groups for U.S. teens. For instance, girls are more likely than boys to say they have ever attended a religious youth group. And by both measures, regular participation appears to decline as teens move through high school: While 37% of teens in eighth grade or lower say they often or sometimes participate in religious education programs, and 34% attend youth groups with the same frequency, fewer 11th and 12th graders report doing the same (19% and 26%, respectively).

Some parental attributes also are related to participation in religious extracurriculars. Teens whose responding parent is a Republican or a Republican-leaning independent are more likely than the children of Democrats to say they currently attend a religious education program (36% vs. 23%) or youth group (39% vs. 21%) at least sometimes.

²⁷ Teens were asked, “Have you ever been in a religious education program, such as Sunday school, CCD or Hebrew school?” Those who said yes were asked, “How often do you attend such religious education programs?”

More than half of evangelical Protestant teens attend religious education programs, religious youth groups

	Have you ever been in a religious education program? How often do you attend such programs?				Have you ever been in a religious youth group? How often do you participate?		
	NET Yes, have been in a religious education program	Often/sometimes	Rarely/no longer, but used to		NET Yes, have participated in religious youth group	Often/sometimes	Rarely/no longer, but used to
	%	%	%		%	%	%
U.S. teens ages 13-17	60	29	31		51	29	21
<i>Religious affiliation of teen</i>							
Affiliated	73	41	32		62	42	20
Christian	74	42	32		64	43	20
Protestant	77	49	28		72	55	17
<i>Evangelical</i>	81	57	24		78	64	14
<i>Mainline</i>	74	37	37		63	37	26
Catholic	72	29	43		49	23	26
Unaffiliated	32	4	28		27	4	23
Boys	58	29	29		44	26	18
Girls	61	29	32		57	33	25
<i>Current grade level</i>							
8th grade or lower	60	37	22		49	34	15
9th-10th grade	58	32	27		51	29	22
11th-12th grade	61	19	43		51	26	25
<i>Political party affiliation of responding parent</i>							
Republican/lean Rep.	69	36	33		61	39	22
Democrat/lean Dem.	52	23	29		43	21	21

Note: Those who said they have never participated in these groups or did not answer are not shown. "Rarely/no longer, but used to" category includes teens who said yes to having been in a religious education program or having participated in a religious youth group, but did not indicate how frequently they attended.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Highly religious teens especially likely to feel gratitude, spiritual peace

In addition to measuring several forms of traditional religious practice, the survey also sought to gauge how often teens have spiritual experiences or engage with big questions about the world.

The vast majority of teens say they feel a strong sense of gratitude or thankfulness with some regularity (at least once or twice a month), including about half (48%) who say they feel this way at least once a week. Only 7% of American adolescents report that they seldom or never feel gratitude.

The other survey questions relating to meaning and spirituality measured experiences that are less universal but still relatively common. For instance, half of U.S. teens say they feel a deep sense of spiritual peace and well-being on a regular basis, and nearly as many (46%) say they think about the meaning and purpose of life at least once or twice a month. In both cases, about a quarter report having these feelings or thoughts at least weekly. (See [topline](#) for full results.)

Religiously unaffiliated teens just as likely as others to often feel a deep sense of wonder about the universe

% of U.S. teens who say they _____ at least once or twice a month

	Feel a strong sense of gratitude or thankfulness	Feel a deep sense of spiritual peace and well-being	Think about the meaning and purpose of life	Feel a deep sense of wonder about the universe
	%	%	%	%
U.S. teens ages 13-17	77	50	46	40
Affiliated	82	59	48	39
Christian	82	60	48	39
Protestant	83	63	46	39
<i>Evangelical</i>	85	70	48	38
<i>Mainline</i>	81	54	41	47
Catholic	79	54	50	37
Unaffiliated	68	31	42	42
<i>Worship attendance</i>				
Monthly or more	84	70	51	42
A few times a year or less often	73	35	41	37
<i>Importance of religion</i>				
Very important	90	79	59	44
Somewhat important	80	57	45	39
Not too/not at all important	68	27	38	37

Note: Those who said they have these experiences a few times a year, seldom or never, as well as those who did not answer the question, are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Four-in-ten teenagers report regularly feeling a deep sense of wonder about the universe, although nearly as many (36%) say they seldom or never feel this way.

Evangelical teens are especially likely to say they often feel a sense of spiritual peace and well-being, with seven-in-ten (70%) feeling this way at least once a month. Religiously unaffiliated teens are much less likely to report this sensation (31%) and also are somewhat less likely than those with a religious affiliation to say they regularly feel a sense of gratitude. Unaffiliated teenagers, however, are no less likely than others to say they feel a deep sense of wonder about the universe at least once or twice per month.

As the share of Americans who identify as “[spiritual but not religious](#)” rises, one may wonder whether these spiritual experiences are *replacing* traditional religious observance. But more often, they seem to *complement* other religious behaviors, such as worship attendance. Teens who attend religious services on a regular basis are much more likely than those attend less often to say they often feel a strong sense of spiritual peace and well-being, and they also are more likely to feel gratitude or think about the meaning of life.

Again, there are only modest differences between teens who are more religiously observant and those who are less religious when it comes to the question of feeling a deep sense of wonder about the universe. But teens who attend religious services less often or who say religion is not important in their lives are no *more* likely to report frequently experiencing any of the four sensations mentioned in the survey, mirroring a [pattern seen among adults](#).

4. Family religious practices

Children’s religious practices are tied to their families’ traditions.²⁸ To better understand these links, the survey asked teens a variety of questions about who they attend worship services with, what types of religious activities they participate in with their families and *why* they participate (including whether they enjoy those activities).

Four-in-ten teens attend religious services with two parents. Still, a quarter of teens attend with only one parent. Saying grace – a prayer or blessing before a meal – with the family is relatively common, with about half of teens saying their family does this at least sometimes. Reading religious scripture together as a family is less common, with only a quarter saying they do that at least sometimes (though roughly half of teens who regularly attend services report reading scripture with their families sometimes or often).

Religion plays a central role in many families, with six-in-ten teens reporting that their families often or sometimes talk about religion. Teens who say religion is important in their lives are especially likely to talk with their families about religion, while religiously unaffiliated teens rarely do so. And many teens appear to appreciate religious activities with their families, as half say they enjoy doing religious things with their families “a lot” or “some.” Still, about four-in-ten report that they at least sometimes do religious things mainly because their parents want them to.

²⁸ See Petts, Richard. 2009. “[Trajectories of Religious Participation from Adolescence to Young Adulthood](#).” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Also see Smith, Christian, and Melinda Lundquist Denton. 2005. “Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers.”

A quarter of teens attend religious services with only one parent

The survey finds that most American teenagers at least occasionally attend worship services (see Chapter 3), but it also digs deeper, asking teens who attend religious services even on an infrequent basis (at least “seldom”): When you go, who do you go with? Four-in-ten teens say they attend with both parents, while a quarter report attending with one parent. An additional 7% generally attend with other people, such as grandparents, other family members or friends. Very few teens (1%) attend worship services alone. (The remainder – about a quarter – say they never attend religious services or decline to answer the question.)²⁹

Among evangelical Protestant teens, about six-in-ten attend worship services with both parents, making them the most likely to do so among the religious groups this survey is able to analyze. Fewer Catholic (49%) and mainline Protestant (45%) teens say they attend with both parents. Although relatively few unaffiliated adolescents ever attend services, those who do are about equally likely to report attending with both parents (14% of all unaffiliated teens) or one parent (13%).³⁰

Six-in-ten teens who say religion is very important in their lives attend with both parents. By comparison, 46% of teens who say religion is somewhat important to them and 22% of those who say religion is not too or not at all important attend with both parents; 54% in this latter group say they never attend religious services with anybody.

About half of all teens with a Republican or Republican-leaning parent (48%) report attending worship services with both parents. By comparison, a third of teens with a responding parent who is a Democrat attend with both parents. Children of Democrats are more likely than those of Republicans either to attend with only one parent or never to go to worship services.

²⁹ The survey was conducted well before the COVID-19 pandemic reached the United States in 2020. The attendance patterns described here do not reflect any changes that may have occurred because of the pandemic.

³⁰ Among the groups analyzed here, eight-in-ten or more have a parent who is married or living with a partner, suggesting that the vast majority of teens in this survey live in households with two parental figures. The term “parents” is used to refer to both the responding parent, as well as that parent’s spouse or partner.

Evangelical teens most likely to attend religious services with two parents

% of U.S. teens who say they attend worship services ...

	Attend worship services at least seldom				No answer given on who teens attend with	Never attend worship services	No answer given on attendance frequency
	With both parents	With one parent	Alone	Other			
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
U.S. teens ages 13-17	40	25	1	7	<1	26	1=100
Affiliated	52	32	1	6	<1	8	1
Christian	53	32	1	6	<1	7	1
Protestant	53	32	2	7	<1	6	1
<i>Evangelical</i>	63	28	1	6	<1	3	<1
<i>Mainline</i>	45	29	3	9	<1	12	2
Catholic	49	34	2	5	<1	9	1
Unaffiliated	14	13	1	8	<1	63	1
<i>Importance of religion</i>							
Very important	60	29	1	5	<1	4	1
Somewhat important	46	31	2	10	<1	9	1
Not too/not at all important	22	18	1	5	<1	54	<1
<i>Political party identification of responding parent</i>							
Republican/lean Rep.	48	22	1	6	<1	22	1
Democrat/lean Democrat	33	28	1	8	<1	28	1

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Evangelical teens most likely to engage in religious activities as a family

Social scientists suggest that religion is a social phenomenon that is often enacted with one's family.³¹ With this in mind, the survey asked teens a few questions about whether (and how often) they participate in some religious activities with their family.

Most U.S. teens (59%) say they talk about religion with their family at least "sometimes," including about one-in-five who do this "often." The remainder do so "rarely" (28%) or "never" (12%).

Fewer American adolescents at least sometimes say grace – or a prayer of thanks – before meals with their family (48%).³² But teens are more likely to report that they *often* say grace than that they *often* talk about religion with their family (30% vs. 19%). Teens also are much more likely to indicate that they do *not* say grace than they are to say they never talk about religion with their family (45% vs. 12%). In other words, teens are most likely to

About half of U.S. teens at least sometimes say grace before meals with their family

% of U.S. teens who often/sometimes _____ with their family

	Talk about religion	Say grace before meals	Read religious scriptures
	%	%	%
U.S. teens ages 13-17	59	48	25
Affiliated	74	61	35
Christian	74	62	35
Protestant	79	73	43
<i>Evangelical</i>	88	80	53
<i>Mainline</i>	60	51	18
Catholic	66	42	18
Unaffiliated	29	22	4
<i>Importance of religion</i>			
Very important	92	80	57
Somewhat important	69	56	26
Not too/not at all important	31	22	5
Northeast	47	41	17
Midwest	61	51	20
South	65	56	31
West	55	40	26
<i>Political party affiliation of responding parent</i>			
Republican/lean Republican	65	57	30
Democrat/lean Democrat	54	40	20

Note: Those who said they "rarely" or "never" (or simply "do not") do these things, as well as those who did not answer the questions, are not shown. See topline for full question wording. Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately. "U.S. Teens Take After Their Parents Religiously, Attend Services Together and Enjoy Family Rituals"

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³¹ See Durkheim, Emile. 1915. "The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life." Also see McGuire, Meredith B. 2008. "Religion: The Social Context, Fifth Edition."

³² The full question was, "Do you, as a family, ever say grace or a prayer before family meals?" Respondents who said yes were then asked, "How often does your family say grace or a prayer before family meals?"

say grace with their family either often or not at all, while most talk about religion with their family either sometimes or rarely.

Reading religious scripture together as a family is much less common. A quarter of U.S. adolescents say they do this with their family at least sometimes, while 71% say they do not do this.

Evangelical Protestant teens are much more likely than others to do all three of these things. For instance, eight-in-ten evangelical teens say they at least sometimes say grace before meals with their family (including six-in-ten who report that they often do this). Far fewer mainline Protestant (51%) and Catholic (42%) teens at least sometimes say grace at mealtime.

Religiously unaffiliated teens are especially unlikely to engage in any of these behaviors. Although most unaffiliated teens say they talk about religion with their families at least on rare occasions, large majorities in this group report that they say they do not say grace before meals (72%) or read religious scripture (93%) with their family.

Not surprisingly, teens who describe religion as very important in their lives are much more likely than other teens to talk about religion, say grace before meals and read religious scripture with their family on a regular basis.³³ Still, only a third of those who say religion is very important to them also say they *often* read religious scripture with their family.

There also are clear and consistent patterns on these questions depending on the geographic region where teens live and the political party of their responding parent. Teens in the South are more likely than those in the Northeast in particular to participate in all these family activities. And teens whose responding parent is a Republican (or leans Republican) tend to talk about religion, say grace and read scripture with their families at higher rates than those whose responding parent is a Democrat or leans Democratic.

³³ The causal direction cannot be assessed in this analysis, so it remains an open question whether talking to teens about religion leads them to place more importance on religion, or placing more importance on religion leads teens to talk about it with their families. It is likely that both processes are occurring, as previous research suggests that parent-child religious socialization is a reciprocal process. For example, see Boyatzis, Chris J. and Denise L. Janicki. 2003. "[Parent-Child Communication about Religion: Survey and Diary Data on Unilateral Transmission and Bi-Directional Reciprocity Styles](#)." Review of Religious Research.

Most teens who do religious things with family say they enjoy them at least ‘some,’ but many also say they sometimes participate at parents’ behest

The remaining analyses in this chapter examine how adolescents who do religious things with their families feel about these activities.³⁴ Do they enjoy doing them? Do they do them primarily because their parents want them to?

Most teens who do religious things with their families appear to get at least some enjoyment out of them. About one-in-five U.S. teens (18%) say they enjoy doing religious things with their families “a lot,” and a third enjoy them “some” (34%). Just 14% say they enjoy them “not much” or “not at all,” while the remaining one-third of teens do not do any religious activities with their families.

Evangelical teens particularly likely to enjoy family religious activities

% of U.S. teens who enjoy doing religious things with their family ...

	A lot %	Some %	Not much/ not at all %	No religious activities with family %	No answer %
U.S. teens ages 13-17	18	34	14	34	<1=100
Affiliated	24	43	13	20	<1
Christian	24	43	13	19	<1
Protestant	26	51	10	13	<1
<i>Evangelical</i>	34	54	5	7	<1
<i>Mainline</i>	16	37	18	29	0
Catholic	20	32	17	30	1
Unaffiliated	3	15	18	64	0
<i>Worship attendance</i>					
Monthly or more	33	48	10	9	<1
A few times a year or less	5	23	17	54	<1

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Results based on total. Only teens who do religious activities with their family received the question about how much they enjoy those activities. See topline for details.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Few unaffiliated teens (3%) enjoy doing religious things with their families a lot, and only 15% enjoy doing them some. These low numbers partly reflect the fact that about two-thirds of unaffiliated teens do not do religious things with their families at all. Still, about half of all unaffiliated teens who do participate in religious activities with their families (18% of all unaffiliated teens) say they do not enjoy them much or at all.

Among the major Christian traditions, evangelical Protestant teens are particularly likely to enjoy doing religious things with their families. About nine-in-ten evangelical teens enjoy doing religious

³⁴ Teens who do religious things include those who say grace and read scriptures with their family, as well as those who say yes to a broader question: “Aside from saying grace and reading scriptures, do you ever do any other religious things with your family?” See [topline](#) for more details.

things with their families a lot (34%) or some (54%), while just 5% say they do not enjoy them much or at all. By comparison, larger shares of mainline Protestant and Catholic teens say they participate in religious activities with their family but do not enjoy them (18% and 17%, respectively).

Worship service attendance also is associated with how much adolescents enjoy doing religious things with their families. Among teens who attend religious services once or twice a month or more, 81% say they find at least some enjoyment doing religious things with their families. Conversely, seven-in-ten teens who attend services less often either do not enjoy doing religious things with their families (17%) or do not do religious things with their families (54%).

While most teens who partake in religious activities with family seem to derive at least some enjoyment from them, most in this group also say they participate at least in part because their parents want them to.

One-in-ten teens say they do religious things mainly because their parents want them to “a lot,” while a third do so “some” of the time. Just 23% say they rarely or never do religious things mainly because their parents want them to. (The remaining one-third of teens never participate in religious activities with their families.)

Similar shares of evangelicals, mainline Protestants and Catholics say they do religious things because their parents want them to “a lot.” Mainline Protestants and Catholics, by contrast, are much more likely than evangelicals to say they simply don’t do religious things with their family.

Six-in-ten teens who attend religious services at least monthly say their reason for doing religious things with their family has either a lot (14%) or some (46%) to do with their parents wanting them to. The same is true of roughly half of teens who say religion is very important in their lives (12% and 41%, respectively).

Four-in-ten teens report doing religious things mainly because their parents want them to

% of U.S. teens who do religious things mainly because their parents want them to ...

	A lot %	Some %	Not much/ not at all %	No religious activities %	No answer %
U.S. teens ages 13-17	10	33	23	34	<1=100
Affiliated	12	41	27	20	<1
Christian	12	41	26	19	<1
Protestant	12	46	29	13	<1
<i>Evangelical</i>	10	48	35	7	<1
<i>Mainline</i>	11	37	22	29	1
Catholic	15	32	23	30	1
Unaffiliated	7	16	13	64	0
<i>Worship attendance</i>					
Monthly or more	14	46	31	9	<1
A few times a year or less	8	22	16	54	<1
<i>Importance of religion</i>					
Very important	12	41	42	5	1
Somewhat important	9	45	23	23	<1
Not too/not at all important	10	18	11	62	<1

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Results based on total. Only teens who do religious activities with their family received the question about how much they do them mainly because their parents want them to. See topline for details.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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5. Shared beliefs between parents and teens

Research suggests that parents have a large impact on their children's religious behaviors.³⁵ For example, there is considerable overlap between how often teens and their parents attend religious worship services (see Chapter 3). But what about religious beliefs? Do teens and their parents also tend to be in alignment on that front? For most families, the answer appears to be yes. About half of the parents surveyed say their teen holds "all the same" religious beliefs as they do, and another four-in-ten parents say their teen holds "some" of the same religious beliefs they do.

Do teens agree with this? Indeed, about half of teens ages 13 to 17 say their parent has all the same religious beliefs as they do. And, among teens whose responding parent says they have all the same religious beliefs, 76% give the same response. Additional analyses, however, show that among teens who say they have at least some *different* religious beliefs from their parent, a third report that their parent does not know their religious beliefs are different. And although about half of teens say they have at least some religious beliefs that differ from their parent's, only 9% report that having different religious beliefs causes conflict in their family.

What do adolescents mean when they say their religious beliefs are different from their parent's beliefs? Some common responses from teens are that they question some of the beliefs their parents hold, that they don't like going to worship services as much as their parents want them to, that they are less strict or conservative than their parent, and that they don't believe in God or in religion. Just 8% of teens whose religious beliefs differ from their parents' report that they are *more* religious than their parent.

With increasing religious diversity in the U.S., interfaith marriages are now relatively commonplace. Their prevalence, however, varies considerably. Mainline Protestant and unaffiliated teens are about three times more likely than evangelical Protestant teens to live in an interfaith home. Although many teens follow their parents' lead when it comes to religion, this plays out in various ways for teens whose parents differ in their religious identities. Some of these teens say they make their own decisions about what faith (if any) to follow, while others adopt the religion of the parent who is more interested in religion, and still others have parents who choose for them.

³⁵ See Petts, Richard. 2009. "[Trajectories of Religious Participation from Adolescence to Young Adulthood](#)." Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion. Also see Smith, Christian and Melinda Lundquist Denton. 2005. "Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers."

Half of parents say their teen has all the same religious beliefs as they do

Many parents think that their teen's religious beliefs are similar to their own beliefs. About half (53%) of parents who responded to this survey before handing it off to their teen say that teen has "all the same" religious beliefs as they do. Another four-in-ten (42%) report that their teen has "some of the same" religious beliefs. Few parents (4%) say the teenager slated to take the survey after them has "quite different" religious beliefs.

Mainline Protestant and religiously unaffiliated parents are relatively unlikely to think their teen shares *all* their religious beliefs. Just four-in-ten mainline Protestant and unaffiliated parents say their teen's religious beliefs are completely the same as their own. By comparison, two-thirds of evangelical Protestant parents and 55% of Catholic parents say their teen's religious beliefs are all the same as their own. Still, large majorities of parents across all the large religious groups analyzed in this report say that their teen shares at least some of their beliefs; no more than 7% in any religious tradition say that their teen's beliefs are quite different.

Nearly all parents say their teen has at least some of the same religious beliefs as them

% of U.S. parents with teenagers who think their child has _____ religious beliefs as they do

	All the same %	Some of the same %	Quite different %	No answer %
U.S. parents of teens ages 13-17	53	42	4	1=100
Affiliated	56	40	4	1
Christian	57	39	4	1
Protestant	56	40	3	<1
<i>Evangelical</i>	65	34	2	<1
<i>Mainline</i>	41	52	7	<1
Catholic	55	39	5	1
Unaffiliated	42	51	6	<1
<i>Worship attendance</i>				
Monthly or more	65	33	2	1
A few times a year or less often	44	49	7	<1
<i>Current grade level of responding teen</i>				
8th grade or lower	56	41	3	1
9th-10th grade	55	39	5	1
11th-12th grade	47	47	6	<1
Republican/lean Republican	58	37	4	1
Democrat/lean Democrat	48	46	5	<1
Not married	44	48	7	1
Married or living with a partner	54	41	4	1

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Parents who regularly attend worship services are particularly likely to say their teen's religious beliefs are similar to their own. About two-thirds of parents who attend worship services once or twice a month or more often (65%) say their teen holds all the same religious beliefs they do. By comparison, fewer than half of parents who attend a few times a year or less often (44%) report that their teen has all the same religious beliefs as they do. A similar pattern emerges among parents based on the importance of religion in their lives; those who say religion is very important to them are more likely to report that they and their teen share all the same beliefs.

Whether parents perceive their teens' religious beliefs to be similar to their own also varies by partisanship and marital status. While 58% of Republican and Republican-leaning parents say their teen's religious beliefs are the same as their own, fewer Democratic and Democratic-leaning parents think that's the case (48%). And 54% of married and cohabiting parents say their teen shares all their religious beliefs, compared with 44% of single parents.

Parents of teens in higher grades are less likely than those of younger teens to say they share all the same beliefs. While 55% of parents with teens in 10th grade or lower report that their teen has all the same religious beliefs, fewer parents with teens in 11th and 12th grade (47%) say the same.

About half of teens say they have all the same religious beliefs as their parent

Just because parents believe they have the same religious beliefs as their children does not mean their children necessarily agree.

Consequently, the survey also asked teens how similar they think their religious beliefs are to their parent's (referring to the parent who participated in the survey). About half (48%) of adolescents ages 13 to 17 report that they and their parent share all the same religious beliefs. Nearly as many (43%) say they share some beliefs with their parent, while 8% say their parent has quite different religious beliefs.

Parents and their teenage children are often – but not always – on the same page about whether they share the same religious beliefs. Three-quarters of teens with parents who say they have all the same religious beliefs agree with that assessment; still, one-in-five say they have only “some” of the same religious beliefs.

Teens with no religious affiliation much less likely to say they share all religious beliefs with their parent

% of U.S. teens who think their parent has _____ religious beliefs as they do

	All the same	Some of the same	Quite different	No answer
	%	%	%	%
U.S. teens ages 13-17	48	43	8	1=100
Affiliated	57	39	3	1
Christian	58	38	3	1
Protestant	61	36	2	1
Evangelical	68	31	1	1
Mainline	53	44	2	1
Catholic	52	41	5	1
Unaffiliated	30	53	17	1
Worship attendance				
Monthly or more	64	34	1	1
A few times a year or less often	36	51	13	1
Current grade level				
8th grade or lower	50	44	5	<1
9th-10th grade	54	38	8	1
11th-12th grade	40	48	10	1
Responding parent's view of shared religious beliefs with teen				
All the same beliefs	76	21	2	1
Some same beliefs	18	72	9	1

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. The survey included too few interviews with teens whose parents report having “quite different” religious beliefs to analyze separately. Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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There are large differences across religious traditions in whether teens think they have all the same religious beliefs as their parent. Adolescents with a religious affiliation (57%) are almost twice as likely as unaffiliated adolescents (30%) to say they hold all the same religious beliefs as their

parent, which may reflect the intergenerational growth of the unaffiliated.³⁶ Indeed, as noted in the first chapter, teens are more likely than their responding parent to say they have no religious affiliation, which may reflect different beliefs. Among Christian adolescents, evangelical Protestants stand out in the opposite way. Two-thirds of evangelical teens say they have *all* the same religious beliefs as their parent, compared with 53% of mainline Protestant teens and 52% of Catholic teens who say this.

Whether teens think they have all the same religious beliefs as their parent also varies by their own rate of worship service attendance. Teens who say they attend religious services on a regular basis – that is, once or twice a month or more often – are far more likely than those who attend less often to say they and their parent share all the same religious beliefs (64% vs. 36%). Similarly, teens are more likely to report that they have all the same beliefs as their responding parent when they place a higher importance on religion in their life.

The perception of shared religious beliefs also varies by grade level. Four-in-ten teens in 11th or 12th grade report that their

parent has all the same religious beliefs. By contrast, 54% of 9th and 10th graders and half of teens in 8th grade or lower say their parent has all the same religious beliefs as they do.

Teens who attend worship services with two parents are relatively likely to say their religious beliefs are all the same as the beliefs of the parent who took the survey before them. Six-in-ten adolescents who attend worship services with both parents say they have all the same religious beliefs as their

Teens who attend religious services with both parents more likely to share all the same religious beliefs

% of U.S. teens who think their parent has _____ religious beliefs as they do

	All the same	Some of the same	Quite different	No answer
	%	%	%	%
<i>Among teens who attend worship services ...</i>				
With both parents	61	34	4	1=100
With one parent	45	50	4	1
Never attend	35	48	16	<1
Because they want to	67	30	2	1
Because parent(s) wants them to	40	53	7	1

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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³⁶ See Schwadel, Philip. 2010. “Period and Cohort Effects on Religious Non-Affiliation and Religious Disaffiliation: A Research Note.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Also see, Hout, Michael, and Claude S. Fischer. 2014. “Explaining Why More Americans Have No Religious Preference: Political Backlash and Generational Succession, 1987–2012.” *Sociological Science*.

parent, compared with 45% of those who attend with one parent and 35% of those who do not attend services. Teens who never attend religious services also are more likely than others to say their beliefs are quite different from their parent's (16%).

Why teens attend worship services appears to be similarly important. Among teens who say they attend services mainly because they want to, two-thirds also report that their religious beliefs are all the same as their parent's beliefs. By contrast, among those who say they attend because their parents want them to, just four-in-ten say they hold all the same religious beliefs their parent holds.

Teens who report having some of the same religious beliefs or quite different beliefs than their parent were also asked directly whether their parent is aware of those differences. Overall, most teens say their parent knows, but fully a third (34%) indicate that their parent is unaware of the differences. And teens who are affiliated with a religion are more likely than those who are unaffiliated to say that their parent does not know their beliefs are different (40% vs. 28%).

Unaffiliated teens more likely to say their parent is aware of religious differences

Among teens who say their religious beliefs differ from their parents, % who say their parent knows that they have different religious beliefs

	Yes, parent knows %	No, parent does not know %
Total	65	34
Affiliated	60	40
Unaffiliated	72	28

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown. Based on teens who say they have “some of the same” religious beliefs or “quite different” beliefs from those of the parent who took the survey before them. Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Most teens report little or no conflict over religion with their surveyed parent

What are the consequences of half of American teens saying that at least some of their religious beliefs are different from their parents? Overall, 9% of surveyed teens say their beliefs are different from their parent's beliefs and that this difference causes conflict with their parent, compared with 35% who say it does *not* cause conflict, even though their parent *knows* they have different beliefs. When asked about the conflict caused by having different beliefs, 7% of teens say their parents are unaware of the differences.³⁷ The remaining half of teens say that they share all the same religious beliefs with their parent (48%) or declined to answer the question (1%).

There is relatively little difference between teens from various religious traditions in this regard. Although unaffiliated teens (69%) are far more likely than affiliated teens (42%) to report that their religious beliefs are not all the same as their parent's beliefs, they are not any more likely to report conflicts with their parents over those differences.

Teens who attend services mainly because their parents want them to are slightly more likely than those who attend of their own accord to say they have at least some religious conflict with their parent (13% vs. 7%). Very few teens (5%) who say they never attend religious services report that differences in belief cause conflict with their parent.

³⁷ A separate question asked teens directly, "Does your parent know you have different religious beliefs from them?" In this question, outside the context of causing conflict, 34% of teens who say they share some of the same beliefs with or have quite different beliefs than their parent say their parent does not know they hold different beliefs. This accounts for 17% of all teens surveyed. See Overview for details.

One-in-ten teens report conflict with their parent over different religious beliefs

% of U.S. teens who say differences in belief between them and parent ...

	Cause a lot/some conflict	Do not cause conflict, though parent knows beliefs different	Parent does not know beliefs different	No answer to how much conflict	Share all the same religious beliefs	No answer to shared beliefs
	%	%	%		%	%
U.S. teens ages 13-17	9	35	7	<1	48	1=100
Affiliated	10	25	6	<1	57	1
Christian	10	25	6	<1	58	1
Protestant	9	23	6	<1	61	1
<i>Evangelical</i>	9	19	3	<1	68	1
<i>Mainline</i>	7	29	9	1	53	1
Catholic	11	29	6	<1	52	1
Unaffiliated	7	54	9	<1	30	1
<i>Among teens who attend worship services ...</i>						
With both parents	10	23	4	<1	61	1
With one parent	11	38	5	1	45	1
Never attend	5	47	11	<1	35	<1
Because they want to	7	22	4	<1	67	1
Because parent(s) wants them to	13	39	7	1	40	1

Note: Results based on total. Only teens who said they have "some of the same" religious beliefs as their parent or "quite different" beliefs received the question about whether the differences cause conflict. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Four-in-ten teens with different religious beliefs from parent say they are less religious, less certain of their beliefs

The roughly half of teens who say their religious beliefs are not all the same as their responding parent's beliefs were asked to explain, in their own words, how their beliefs differ from their parent's beliefs. Overall, 14% of the teens who got this question say that questioning or being unsure about their beliefs is what makes them different from their parent. Some of these teens discuss general uncertainty, such as one who said, "She definitely believes in a god and I'm not sure." Others express more specific concerns, such as one teen who said, "Sometimes I just don't believe in anything. Why does God let people die, or bad things happen to good people?"

Uncertainty in belief is particularly relevant to differences between unaffiliated teens and their parents. One-in-five unaffiliated teens who report that their religious beliefs are

One-in-seven teens whose beliefs differ from their parents cite uncertainty as key difference

How are your religious beliefs different from your parent who took the survey before you?

Based on teens who say they have "some of the same" or "quite different" religious beliefs compared with their responding parent

	Teens	Affiliated	Unaffiliated
	%	%	%
NET Teen is less religious	37	34	42
Teen doubts or questions beliefs	14	9	20
Teen doesn't go or like to go to religious services; attends less often than parent	7	9	4
Teen is less strict; less conservative; less devout; less religious (general)	7	10	3
Teen is atheist or agnostic; doesn't believe in God	6	2	9
Teen doesn't think or care about religion; religion is less important to them	3	2	3
Teen prays less than parent; doesn't like to pray	1	1	1
Teen sees religion as unnecessary, bad or irrelevant	<1	<1	1
NET Different views, no more or less religious	16	20	11
Teen/parent have different beliefs or views	5	6	3
Teen/parent have different religion or denomination	4	5	3
Teen is open to mixing religions; open to different religious perspectives, conceptions of god(s)	2	3	2
Teen leans more liberal on social, political, scientific issues (e.g. same-sex marriage, evolution)	2	3	1
Teen was raised in a different religion than parent; raised differently	1	1	2
Teen is similar to one parent but not the other; parents are different from each other	1	2	<1
NET Similar views, still learning, no religion talk	9	10	8
They are the same beliefs; not much difference	4	5	3
Teen is still learning; parent knows more	3	4	2
Don't know what parent believes; don't talk to parent about religion	2	1	3
Teen attends church more; is stricter in religion; is more religious (general)	8	8	7
Other/unclear answer	8	9	6
No answer	22	20	26
Total	100	100	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Based on teens who say their religious beliefs are different than those of the parent who took the survey before them.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately. "U.S. Teens Take After Their Parents Religiously, Attend Services Together and Enjoy Family Rituals"

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different from their responding parent's beliefs talk about uncertainty, compared with 9% of affiliated teens who report that their religious beliefs are different in this way.

Another 7% of teens who say their religious beliefs are different from their parent's indicate that they are just less religious than their parent or that they are less strict or conservative than their parent. These responses include general comments such as, "My dad is probably more religious than I am." Others give more specific answers such as, "My parents believe everything and try to live by God's word. I sometimes don't live by God's word even though my parents think it's not OK." Such responses most often come from religiously affiliated teenagers. One-in-ten affiliated teens who report having beliefs that differ from their parent's beliefs note that they are less conservative than their parent. By comparison, 3% of unaffiliated teens who report having different beliefs say the same.

An additional 7% of teens who report that their beliefs differ from their parent's point to a lack of interest in attending church or other worship services as the key difference between them and their parent. Some of these teens say things like, "I don't like church." Some give more specific responses, questioning whether worship service attendance is necessary for one to be religious. For instance, one teen notes, "I don't feel like I needed to go to church to believe in god or be a part of a religion." Religiously affiliated teens (9%) are somewhat more likely than unaffiliated teens (4%) to focus on worship services as the main difference between them and their parent.

Among teens who say their religious beliefs differ from their parent's, 6% point to lack of belief in God as a key difference. Some of these teens gave definitive statements like, "I don't believe in God." In some cases, they describe conflict between them and their parent(s): "I do not believe in god, and I am forced to go to Sunday School until I am a confirmed Catholic." Or, "I am not as gullible as my mom and don't believe in a God. It's all hogwash."

Importantly, however, 8% of teens who report having different beliefs from their parent say that they are *more* religious than their parent or go to worship services more often than their parent. In some cases, teens point to disagreement over basic beliefs. For example, "I believe that there is a god, and my parent doesn't." Or, "I read the bible." Similarly, one respondent notes, "I believe you go to heaven when you die. My mom doesn't agree with me." Others point to differences in religious participation. For instance, one teen – writing about a father – explains: "I go to church and CCD and help at church. He doesn't go to church." Finally, others give more general responses, such as: "I would say I'm more religious than my parents."

One-in-seven teens live with two parents from different religions

The remainder of this chapter focuses on differences between teens from interfaith homes and those from single-faith homes (see sidebar “Defining interfaith homes” below). The survey finds that seven-in-ten teens live in homes with two parents of same religion (or no religion), 14% in homes with two parents of different religions (including one affiliated parent and one unaffiliated parent), and 16% in single-parent homes.³⁸

Evangelical Protestant teens are the least likely to live in an interfaith home, with just 7% living in this environment. By comparison, 14% of Catholic teens, one-in-five unaffiliated teens, and 22% of mainline Protestant teens live in interfaith homes.

Evangelical teens less likely than others to live in interfaith homes

% of U.S. teens who live in homes with ...

	Two parents, different religion	Two parents, same religion	One parent
	%	%	%
U.S. teens ages 13-17	14	70	16=100
Affiliated	12	73	15
Christian	11	73	15
Protestant	10	71	18
<i>Evangelical</i>	7	83	10
<i>Mainline</i>	22	62	16
Catholic	14	74	12
Unaffiliated	20	63	17

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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³⁸ The estimate of 16% of teens living with just one parent is based on this survey, and not meant to represent a national estimate. A previous [Pew Research Center study](#) found that 23% of U.S. children under the age of 18 live with one parent and no other adult. The previous report also has a much wider age range, as the current survey is limited solely to teens ages 13 to 17.

The term “parent” is used throughout this report to refer to the responding parent of the participating teen. The term “parents” is used to refer to both the responding parent, as well as that parent’s spouse or partner. Fully 99% of the responding parents in this survey who are married or living with a partner say that their spouse/partner is the biological parent, adoptive parent or stepparent of the responding teen.

Looked at from the opposite direction, how do the religious characteristics and behaviors of teens who live in interfaith homes differ from others? Put simply, teens who live in interfaith homes are less religious than those with two parents who have the same religion.

For example, 44% of teens who live in interfaith homes are religiously unaffiliated, compared with 29% in homes where two parents share a religion. Teens in interfaith homes also are less likely than those in homes where two parents share the same religion to attend religious services at least monthly and say religion is very important in their lives.

(Differences between those in religiously mixed households and those in single-parent households are not statistically significant.)

Compared with those whose parents share the same religion, teens in interfaith homes more likely to be unaffiliated, less likely to attend religious services

% of U.S. teens who ...

	Are religiously unaffiliated	Say they attend religious services at least monthly	Say religion is very important in their lives
	%	%	%
U.S. teens ages 13-17	32	44	24
<i>Among those who live with ...</i>			
Two parents, different religion	44	29	12
Two parents, same religion	29	49	28
One parent	35	35	19

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Sidebar: Defining interfaith homes

What does it mean to say an adolescent lives in an interfaith home or that they have interfaith parents? There are a variety of potential ways to define interfaith families. Is interfaith a subjective concept, based on whether members of a family view their religious beliefs and identities as different from one another? Or is it more objective, reflecting differences in family members' formal religious affiliations? Do couples who belong to different sects or denominations of the same world religion (Christianity, for example) count as interfaith couples? Are a Catholic and a Baptist an interfaith couple, or a Methodist and a Presbyterian? Also, is it about the adults that live in an adolescent's home, or is it about an adolescent's biological parents, regardless of who they live with? What about if two parents have the same religious affiliation, but the adolescent is different – does that count? There is no single, correct answer to these questions.

This report focuses on the adults whom teens live with and defines interfaith homes in an objective manner based on the information provided by the responding parent. Each responding parent provided detailed information about their own religious affiliation and, if they are married or cohabiting with a partner, about their spouse or partner's religious affiliation. These religious affiliations were grouped into the following traditions: Protestant, Catholic, Mormon, Orthodox Christian, Jehovah's Witness, other Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, other world religion, other faith and unaffiliated. If the responding parent and their spouse or cohabiting partner are affiliated with different traditions, they are considered interfaith. Given these categories, a Methodist and a Presbyterian (or any other combinations of Protestant denominations) would *not* be considered interfaith, but a Catholic and a Protestant would be. Importantly, this measure of interfaith focuses on an adolescent's home, not on their biological parents. And it does not define differences in belief or religious worldviews between parents as interfaith, only their religious affiliations. It also does not consider a house where a parent and teen have different religious affiliations to be an interfaith home, because the analysis seeks to explore the environment in which a teen lives and the connection that may have with the teen's own religious identity, beliefs and practices.

When parents' religions differ, teens give variety of responses about how they choose which one to follow

When their parents have different religions, how do teens choose which religion (or lack of religion) to follow? The survey asked teens whether their parents – all of their parents, not just the one who took the survey before them or the ones they live with – have the same religion as each other, or different religions. If the teens indicated that their parents' religions were different and that they have the same religion as at least one of the parents, they were then asked to explain, in their own words, how they chose.³⁹

Roughly one-in-five teens (21%) say they made their own decision based on what felt right to them or what made the most sense. Some give general responses such as, "I just chose myself," or "I followed what I felt was best for me." Others provide more context. For example, "I went to church with my mother, who is Baptist and I went to church with my father, who is Catholic and from there I decided."

A similar share (19%) say that one of their parents is more religious than the other, or that one parent cares more about religion than the other, which influenced their choice. For instance, "My dad takes me to church regularly, whereas my mom doesn't do much of anything," or "My dad doesn't have one so I followed my mom's."

When parents' religions differ, religion of teens sometimes chosen by teen, other times by parents

Among U.S. teens who say their parents have different religions and that they have the same religion as one parent, % who say _____ is the reason they chose to follow one parent's religion (or lack thereof) over the other

	Total %
Made own decision based on what felt right or made sense	21
One parent is religious, cares more (e.g. believes, attends church); one isn't, doesn't care as much	19
Parents chose what teen would believe; teen was raised in one religion	16
Lives with one parent; was raised or spent more time with one parent	8
Chose to follow one parent, no specific reason given	6
Hasn't decided yet	3
Follow both; open to either	3
Other/unclear answer	12
No answer	<u>12</u>
Total	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Based on teens who say their parents have different religions and that they have the same religion as at least one parent.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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³⁹ The previous analysis of interfaith homes is based on the responding parent's self-identified religion, and their responses to questions about their spouse or partner's religious tradition. This analysis is from the teen's perspective. Teens were first asked, "As far as you know, do your parents have the same religion as each other, or do they have different religions from each other?" and were not asked to specify a) whether they live with two parents, or b) whether they live with both of the parents they had in mind.

Another 16% of teens whose parents have different religions made it clear that their parent chose for them, or that they were primarily raised in the religion of one of their parents. For instance, “I was baptized as a Catholic and this was agreed upon by both of my parents so it was a mutual decision between my parents.” Similarly, “it’s what [I] was born and raised with.” This is often framed as being out of the teen’s control. Other typical responses include variations on the teen’s mother making the choice. And in some cases, teens acknowledge their lack of commitment with the religion that was chosen for them. For example, “I am Catholic because my mother makes me but I am not interested in any religion.”

Of course, families change. Another common set of responses, accounting for 8% of teens who say their parents have different religions, reflect the changing circumstances in some families by pointing to the fact that some teens were primarily raised by one of their interfaith parents. For example, “I’ve lived with my Mom my whole life, so I follow her faith.” Similarly, “my mom raised me before marrying my stepfather.”

A previous Pew Research Center study that analyzed how adult respondents were raised religiously found that mothers tend to be seen as more responsible for religious upbringing when parents have different religions, and that those from mixed religious backgrounds are more likely to adopt their mother’s religion as their own.

6. What do parents want for their teens?

The survey asked parents of teens ages 13 to 17 about some of their desires for their teen, including the importance of raising their teen in their own religion or with their own views on religion.

Parents also were asked to assess how important it is for their teen to exhibit certain traits, such as being independent, creative or persistent, and reach certain goals, such as going to college or being financially successful.

Religiously affiliated parents are much more likely than religiously unaffiliated parents (those who say their religion is atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular”) to say it is “very important” to them that their teen is raised in their religion or marries someone with their religion (or views on religion). Among unaffiliated parents, no more than about one-in-ten say these things are very important.

However, even affiliated parents generally consider these desires to be less important than their teen being financially successful or going to college, and they also are more likely to place high importance on their teen being hardworking, independent or helpful to others than they are to say it is very important that their teen is raised in their religion. For example, among religiously affiliated parents, 90% say it is very important to them that their teen works hard, 73% say it is very important that their child goes to college, and 55% say it is very important that their teen is raised in their religion.

Among all parents of teens, nine-in-ten or more say each of these traits is at least “somewhat” important for their teen to have – with the exception of the two questions about religion. A substantial minority of parents say it is “not too” or “not at all” important for their child to be raised with their religious beliefs or views on religion (26%), and even more say the same about their child marrying someone from their religious group (42%).

To parents of teens, more say it is important to instill positive personal traits than to impart their religion

% of parents of teens who say it is very important to them that their teen ...

	Total	Religiously affiliated	Religiously unaffiliated
	%	%	%
Works hard	88	90	84
Is independent	86	86	88
Helps others	78	82	68
Is persistent	73	75	68
Goes to college	71	73	65
Is financially successful	69	70	68
Is creative	64	63	65
Is obedient	54	61	30
Is raised in their religion*	44	55	6
Marries someone who shares their religion*	29	36	9

* Religiously unaffiliated parents were asked about the importance of raising their child or having their child marry someone with their views on religion.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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The survey asked religiously affiliated parents of teens how important it is to them to raise their child *in their religion*, while religiously unaffiliated parents were asked about the importance of raising their child *with their views on religion*. Another question used similar phrasing: How important is it for your teen to marry someone who shares your religion (for affiliated parents), or someone who shares your views on religion (for unaffiliated parents)?

Most religiously unaffiliated parents say these things are “not too” or “not at all” important to them. About six-in-ten in this group say raising their child with their views on religion is “not too” (33%) or “not at all” (30%) important to them, and seven-in-ten (33% and 39%, respectively) say the same about their teen eventually marrying someone with their views on religion.

By contrast, slightly more than half of religiously affiliated parents (55%) say it is “very important” to raise their child in their religion, and another three-in-ten say this is “somewhat important.” Affiliated parents do not feel as strongly about the religion of a possible future spouse for their teen, but still, most say it is very (36%) or somewhat (31%) important to them that their teen marry within their faith.

Just over half of religiously affiliated parents say it is very important for child to be raised in their religion

Among parents of teens, how important is it to you that ...

	Total	Among religiously affiliated parents	Among religiously unaffiliated parents	Total	Among religiously affiliated parents	Among religiously unaffiliated parents
	Your teen is raised with your religion/ views on religion	Your teen is raised in your religion	Your teen is raised with your views on religion	Your teen marries someone who shares your religion/ views on religion	Your teen marries someone who shares your religion	Your teen marries someone who shares your views on religion
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Very important	44	55	6	29	36	9
Somewhat important	30	30	29	28	31	18
Not too important	16	11	33	24	21	33
Not at all important	9	3	30	18	12	39
No answer	1	1	2	1	1	1
	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Among all parents, those who did not answer include six respondents who did not receive the appropriate version of the question, based on their final religious tradition after backcoding. Among unaffiliated parents, those who did not answer include two respondents who, based on backcoding, should have received the question, but did not.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Parents who identify as evangelical Protestants are most likely to say it is very important to them to raise their child in their religion. About seven-in-ten (71%) in this group hold this view, compared with about half as many mainline Protestants who say the same (34%). Among Catholic parents, about half (51%) say it is very important to them to raise their child as a Catholic.

There is a similar pattern on the question about who their child may someday marry. About half (53%) of evangelical Protestant parents say it is very important to them that their 13- to 17-year-old child eventually marries someone who shares their religion, compared with 28% of Catholic parents and 15% of mainline Protestant parents who say the same.

Among parents who are affiliated with a religion, those who say religion is very important in their own lives are much more likely than parents who place less importance on religion to prioritize raising their child in their own religion or seeing their child marry within their faith. For instance, 83% of religiously affiliated parents who say religion is very important to them personally also say it is very important to raise their child in their religious faith. Among affiliated parents who consider religion less important, just 21% say it is of paramount importance to raise their child in their religion.

Seven-in-ten evangelical parents say it is very important to raise their child in their religion

% of religiously affiliated parents of teens who say it is _____ important to them that

... their teen is raised in their religion

	Very %	Somewhat %	Not too %	Not at all %	No answer %
Christian	56	30	11	3	<1=100
Protestant	58	28	11	3	<1
<i>Evangelical</i>	71	23	5	1	<1
<i>Mainline</i>	34	39	21	6	0
Catholic	51	32	12	4	1
Religion is very important	83	15	1	<1	1
Religion is less important	21	49	23	6	1

... their teen marries someone in their religion

Christian	35	31	21	12	1=100
Protestant	39	31	18	12	<1
<i>Evangelical</i>	53	29	12	6	<1
<i>Mainline</i>	15	37	24	24	0
Catholic	28	31	26	13	1
Religion is very important	56	30	9	4	<1
Religion is less important	10	32	35	21	1

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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What do parents from different religious groups want for their teens?

Religiously affiliated parents and religious “nones” hold similar opinions about the importance of their child becoming financially successful. Within the Christian groups analyzed, however, Catholic parents are more likely than Protestant parents to say financial success is very important (75% vs. 67%). Similarly, Catholics are more likely than Protestants to say it is very important that their child goes to college (83% vs. 66%). On this question, religiously unaffiliated parents are less likely than parents who identify with a religion to prioritize their child going to college: 65% of unaffiliated parents say this is very important, compared with 73% of religiously affiliated parents.

There is widespread consensus among parents of different religious groups that it is crucial that their teens are hardworking and independent. And while religiously unaffiliated parents are somewhat less likely than parents who belong to a religious faith to say it is very important for their teens to help others and be persistent, majorities among both groups hold these views. For example, about eight-in-ten religiously affiliated parents think it is very important for their teen to help others, compared with 68% of religiously unaffiliated parents who say this.

But a much bigger gap exists on the question of obedience: Religiously affiliated parents are twice as likely as unaffiliated parents to say it is very important for their teen to be obedient (61% vs. 30%). Among Protestants, evangelical parents are much more likely than mainline Protestant parents to say this (65% vs. 44%).

Religiously unaffiliated parents much less likely than affiliated parents to say it is very important for their teen to be obedient

% of parents of teens who say it is very important to them that their teen ...

	Works hard	Is independent	Helps others	Is persistent	Goes to college	Is financially successful	Is creative	Is obedient
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Affiliated	90	86	82	75	73	70	63	61
Christian	89	86	82	76	72	70	62	62
Protestant	91	85	82	72	66	67	59	62
<i>Evangelical</i>	91	83	84	71	63	65	56	65
<i>Mainline</i>	89	88	81	69	67	66	59	44
Catholic	88	87	81	81	83	75	68	62
Unaffiliated	84	88	68	68	65	68	65	30
Religion very important	92	87	88	78	72	69	64	72
Religion less important	85	85	71	70	70	70	63	40

Source: Survey conducted March 29-April 14, 2019, among U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 and one parent of each teen. Teens and parents were instructed to complete the survey separately.

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Methodology

The analysis of adolescents in this report is based on a self-administered web survey conducted from March 29 to April 14, 2019, among a sample of 1,811 dyads, with each dyad – or pair – comprised of one U.S. adolescent ages 13 to 17 and one parent per adolescent. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 1,811 teens is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 1,811 parents also is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points. The survey was conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs in English and Spanish using KnowledgePanel, its nationally representative online research panel.

KnowledgePanel members are recruited through probability sampling methods and include both those with internet access and those who did not have internet access at the time of their recruitment. KnowledgePanel provides internet access for those who do not have it and, if needed, a device to access the internet when they join the panel. KnowledgePanel's recruitment process was originally based exclusively on a national random-digit dialing (RDD) sampling methodology. In 2009, Ipsos migrated to an address-based sampling (ABS) recruitment methodology via the U.S. Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File (DSF). The Delivery Sequence File has been estimated to cover as much as 98% of the population, although some studies suggest that the coverage could be in the low 90% range.⁴⁰

The panel includes households with landlines and cellular phones, including those with only cellphones, as well as households without phones. Both the RDD and ABS samples were provided by Marketing Systems Group. KnowledgePanel continually recruits new panel members throughout the year to offset people who leave the panel.

Panelists were eligible for participation in this survey if they indicated on an earlier profile survey that they were the parent of a teen ages 13 to 17. A random sample of 4,588 eligible panel members were invited to participate in the study. Responding parents were screened and considered qualified for the study if they reconfirmed that they were the parent of at least one child ages 13 to 17 and granted permission for their child to participate in the study. In households with more than one eligible teen, parents were asked to refer to the child with the next birthday. A survey was considered complete if both the parent and sampled child completed their portions of the questionnaire or if the parent did not qualify during the initial screening.

Of the sampled panelists, 2,176 responded to the invitation and 1,819 qualified and completed both the parent and child portions of the survey, yielding a completion rate of 47% and a

⁴⁰ AAPOR Task Force on Address-based Sampling. 2016. "[AAPOR Report: Address-based Sampling](#)."

qualification rate of 84%.⁴¹ The cumulative response rate accounting for nonresponse to the recruitment surveys and attrition is 3.3%. The break-off rate among panelists who logged on to the survey (regardless of whether they completed any items) is 19%.

Weighting

The analysis in this report was performed using separate weights for parents and teens. The parent weight was created in a multistep process that begins with a base design weight for the parent, which was computed to reflect their selection probabilities. Next, an iterative technique was used to align the parent design weights to population benchmarks for parents of teens ages 13 to 17 on the dimensions identified in the accompanying table.

To create the teen weight, an adjustment factor was applied to the final parent weight to reflect each teen's probability of selection out of all eligible teens in their household. Finally, the teen weights were further raked to match the demographic distribution for all teens ages 13 to 17. The teen weights were adjusted on the same dimensions as parents with the exception of education, which was not used in the teen weighting.

Sampling errors and tests of statistical significance take into account the effect of weighting. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

Weighting dimensions

Variable	Benchmark source
Age by gender	2018 March Supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS)
Race/Hispanic origin	
Region by metropolitan status	
Household income	
Household size	
Education (parents only)	2017 American Community Survey (ACS)
Language proficiency	

Note: Estimates from the ACS are based on non-institutionalized adults and teens.

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⁴¹ Eight of the qualified and completed interviews were excluded because respondents did not answer more than a third of the substantive survey questions.

The following tables show the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Teen group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total teen sample	1,811	3.1 percentage points
All religiously affiliated teens	1,246	3.7 percentage points
Christian	1,179	3.9 percentage points
Protestant	680	5.2 percentage points
Evangelical	407	6.6 percentage points
Mainline	208	9.0 percentage points
Catholic	428	6.4 percentage points
Unaffiliated	555	5.7 percentage points

Teen group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...	
Boys	912	4.4 percentage points	
Girls	888	4.5 percentage points	
Ages 13-14	701	5.0 percentage points	
15-17	1,101	4.0 percentage points	
White, non-Hispanic	1,022	4.1 percentage points	
NET Non-White	777	4.8 percentage points	
Current grade level			
8th grade or lower	562	5.7 percentage points	
9th-10th grade	713	5.0 percentage points	
11th-12th grade	515	5.8 percentage points	
Attendance			
Monthly or more often	798	4.7 percentage points	
A few times a year or less	1,000	4.2 percentage points	
Importance of religion			
Very	446	6.3 percentage points	
Somewhat	662	5.2 percentage points	
Not too/not at all	693	5.1 percentage points	
Northeast	289	7.7 percentage points	
Midwest	454	6.3 percentage points	
South	606	5.4 percentage points	
West	462	6.2 percentage points	
	Unweighted sample size	Weighted %	Plus or minus ...
Republican/lean Rep.	776	42	4.8 percentage points
Democrat/lean Dem.	903	51	4.4 percentage points

Responding parent group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...	
Total parent sample	1,811	3.1 percentage points	
All religiously affiliated parents	1,400	3.5 percentage points	
Christian	1,328	3.6 percentage points	
Protestant	758	4.8 percentage points	
Evangelical	441	6.4 percentage points	
Mainline	246	8.1 percentage points	
Catholic	498	5.8 percentage points	
Unaffiliated	404	6.5 percentage points	
<i>Attendance</i>			
Monthly or more often	793	4.7 percentage points	
A few times a year or less	1,009	4.1 percentage points	
<i>Importance of religion</i>			
Very	824	4.6 percentage points	
Somewhat	525	5.6 percentage points	
Not too/not at all	455	6.2 percentage points	
Married/living with a partner	1,468	3.4 percentage points	
Not married	343	7.2 percentage points	
	Unweighted sample size	Weighted %	Plus or minus ...
Republican/lean Rep.	870	46	4.5 percentage points
Democrat/lean Dem.	855	49	4.5 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

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