



GLOBAL  
YOUTH CULTURE

THE  
**GEN Z + LGBTQ+**  
*conversation*

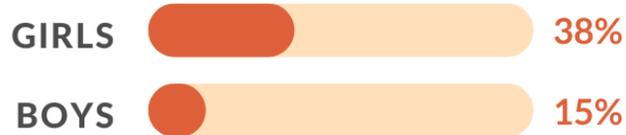


# GEN Z & LGBTQ+ FAST FACTS



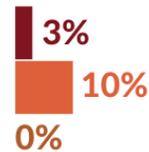
**27%**  
of teens recently experienced same-sex attraction

Recently experienced same-sex attraction

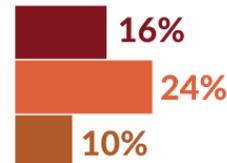


**25%**  
count themselves a member of the LGBTQ+ community

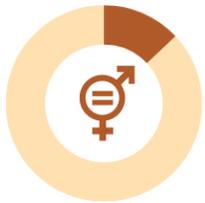
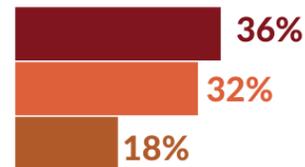
COMMITTED CHRISTIANS\*



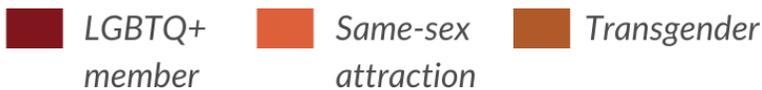
NOMINAL CHRISTIANS



NON CHRISTIANS



**13%**  
of teens identify as transgender



UNITED STATES



419 TEENS



JANUARY 2022



59 QUESTION ONLINE SURVEY



\* Committed Christian teens pray and read their Bible at least weekly, as well as agree to four basic doctrinal statements

# COMMUNITY

My position towards the LGBTQ+ community

Count myself a member



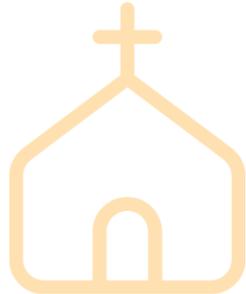
Affirm the community and its members



Disagree with the LGBTQ+ lifestyle



Don't think much about the LGBTQ+ community



My church's stance on LGBTQ+

Affirms these lifestyles



Church is loving but not affirming



LGBTQ+ people don't really come to my church



Don't know my church's position



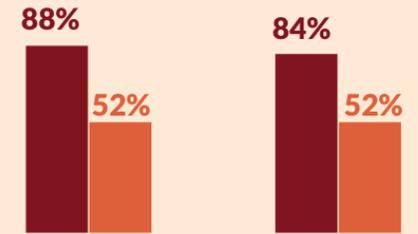
**55%**

of Christian teens who are part of the **LGBTQ+ community** say they have a **home church**

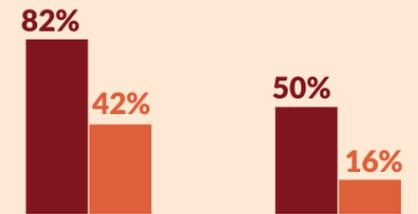


# MENTAL HEALTH

■ LGBTQ+ member ■ Other teens



HIGH ANXIETY LONELINESS



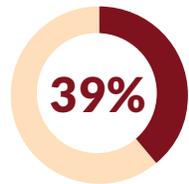
DEPRESSION SUICIDAL THOUGHTS



SUICIDE ATTEMPTS

# GEN Z

*religious nones*



of U.S. teens  
have no religion



## LGBTQ+ is the New Reality

Generation Z is highly diverse not just in race and ethnicity but also in the way they identify their gender and sexual orientation. The conversation grows more complex every day. It is no longer just gay versus straight.

We talked to a girl who is pansexual, a boy who identified as bisexual, and had an entire group where every teen just said they were queer. The acronym has grown too. LGBTQIA+ doesn't exactly roll right off the tongue. But some Gen Z'ers rattle it off in conversation with no problem.

For **religious nones**, inclusivity is their number one value and a critical foundation for all their other priorities.

### “IT’S A PERSONAL THING...”

Some teens said gender is a social construct, others believe it is a sliding scale, but all agreed it is your decision. Generation Z is quite firm on gender identity being subjective and highly individual.

“It’s a personal thing that just happens when it happens,” said a 19-year-old boy. “Other people’s input or views shouldn’t matter.”

Boys and girls we talked to agreed that gender can be fluid and change over time or not change depending on the person. “[My gender identity] has shifted two and a half times at least for me. I’m in a period of questioning again.” said an 18-year-old boy.

“Gender identity and expression isn’t given to you when you’re born,” said a 15-year-old girl. “You just notice it through your social interactions and it can change over

someone's life. I haven't had a shift yet, but I wouldn't be surprised if I did."

## "THIS ISN'T A REBELLION..."

All teens we talked to agreed that LGBTQ+ is a hallmark topic for their generation. But for many, it goes much deeper. It's not just a topic to be talked about, it is their identity and who they are. LGBTQ+ is not an "issue," it's their lives.

"I want people to understand like this is not just me rebelling against society," said a 17-year-old girl. "This is me being a natural human being and being myself."

This perspective on gender was widely reflected across all our conversations with nones. Whether they are a part of the LGBTQ+ community or just friends with those who are, teens agreed you can be anyone you want to be. This is the new reality and it's totally normal to them. The only thing that isn't normal is other people's lack of acceptance.

"All people are socially equal. You shouldn't judge anyone differently based upon what they believe," said a 15-year-old boy. "It's disrespectful and rude to be against [LGBTQ+]."

Other teens acknowledged that opinions can be varied even among their own generation. "Not everyone who's 18 thinks LGBTQ is cool," shared an 18-year-old girl. "Some people hate it. But it's becoming more common, so more people are becoming comfortable with it."

## "PEOPLE ARE IGNORANT..."

As Gen Z broadens its perspective on gender and sexuality, teens are getting selective about who they surround themselves with. Many teens spoke about the importance of like-minded community and said they avoid people who are not accepting of their sexuality or are not open-minded.

"It just seems like a straightforward issue to me that people are people and who they're attracted to has no bearing on anything of importance," said a 19-year-old boy. "If people are ignorant enough to have an issue with that, I try not to associate with them. "

This frustration was shared by teens we talked to both inside and outside the LGBTQ+ community. Teens noted that your family and where you live can have a big impact on whether or not you feel accepted. Older generations, certain regions, and conservative communities, they said, can make you feel like you're the problem. Some teens noted that religion can also be used against them and can be harmful and damaging.

## "IT FEELS SO OBVIOUS..."

Teens said that their generation has brought visibility to the importance of these topics and the need to remain open to all kinds of sexual orientation and gender identification.

"Our generation is normalizing these conversations," said a 17-year-old girl. "A lot of the issues we're still facing—it feels like we should be past this. It feels so obvious...that these issues should be solved."

Many teens agreed that there is still a long way to go to gain full acceptance and equality, either for themselves or those they know in the community. In a way, it's baffling to Gen Z that these conversations need to happen at all.

"It's a social movement and it's just something that needs to be accepted," said an 18-year-old boy. This pretty much sums it up for today's teens. Acceptance is the name of the game. Whoever they are and whoever they are attracted to is really none of your business and if you have a problem with it, then you're the problem.

"The LGBTQIA+ community has been around since basically the beginning of time and you can't just shove it under the

carpet because you don't like two girls kissing each other," said a 17-year-old girl.

Not all teens we talked to are such passionate advocates on this topic, but all teens expressed their supportiveness and the need for equality. In many ways, this generation knows they may not win today's fights, but that time will conquer

all. One college freshman said her 12-year-old sister is her best resource and already so comfortable and well-versed in these conversations.

"The younger generations are going to be the push in the active reprogramming of our minds," she said.

## KNOW YOUR TERMS

### LGBTQ+

Stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (or Questioning) and more. The acronym is ever-growing and can be written in different orders depending on your location.

### Queer

A collective term for all LGBT identities and a concise way of referring to all parts of the community. It is also favored by those who have identities that are difficult to define or who are still exploring and deciding the specifics of their gender.

### SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS



#### Bisexual

Romantic and/or sexual attraction to more than one gender. The term has become a bit controversial because it is seen by some as feeding into the idea of binary gender and not accounting for other gender identities such as transgender or agender.



#### Pansexual

Attraction towards all people regardless of gender. Pansexual people may refer to themselves as gender-blind. This is the newer term that has come out of the bisexual community and is gaining traction among Gen Z as more inclusive and well-defined.

### GENDER IDENTITIES



#### Cisgender

People who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. Shortens to cis male or cis female.



#### Transgender

Expressing a gender identity different from one's assigned sex at birth. This is an umbrella term for all gender identities and expressions that transcend society's rules or concepts of gender.



#### Nonbinary

Any gender identity that is not strictly male or female all the time. This term technically falls within the transgender umbrella, but note that not all nonbinary people consider themselves trans.



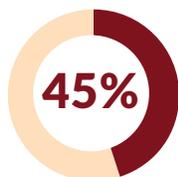
#### Agender

A person who sees themselves neither as a man nor a woman. Also called genderblank, genderfree, genderless, non-gendered, or null gender.

*It can feel like there is a new term to know every day. Here are a few basic definitions to help you keep up with Gen Z.*

# GEN Z

## *nominal Christians*



of U.S. teens are  
nominal Christians\*



\* see definition  
p 13

## LGBTQ+ is Just Normal

Nominal Christians sound a lot like their secular peers when it comes to the topics of LGBTQ+. Most teens we talked to were affirming of people's freedom to choose their sexual orientation and gender identity.

"I care for them and love no matter what. I don't really judge people based on that," said a 15-year-old boy. "Sexual orientation is a mind thing. It's just the way you're born—it's not a choice."

### "A LOT HAS CHANGED..."

Most Nominals start from the culturally-informed position that identity is a completely personal choice. But they have trouble reconciling that with Scripture and their picture of a loving God.

"If God loves everyone there's no reason He should be against LGBTQ people and the way they are because it's not a choice," said an 18-year-old girl. "I also think that even if the Bible said that was a sin, then people should take that with a grain of salt. A lot has changed ever since the Bible was written."

This was a popular opinion among Nominals, who widely agree that the Bible is not an authority on these topics. "I tried to research [in the Bible] on gender identity and it's hard to find anything on it," said a 17-year-old girl.

"If you're discriminating against [LGBTQ+] based on the Bible, you're ignorant because the Bible doesn't even mention those things," said a 19-year-old boy.

Although they are rarely reading Scripture for themselves, some teens confidently said the Bible does not speak to

LGBTQ+ lifestyles. Another popular position was that the Bible has been mistranslated and misinterpreted making the church's understanding of these issues wrong.

"I've tussled with this back and forth because I know there's proof that the Bible has been mistranslated...", said a 19-year-old girl. "If God made LGBTQ people in His image, who are you to say that's a sin?"

### "I TREAT IT LIKE IT'S NORMAL..."

Most Nominals agreed that LGBTQ+ people need more acceptance. Teens embodied this personally by having a casual hands-off attitude.

"My friend came out to me and I didn't care," said a 19-year-old boy. "It's his deal."

Another teen shared his experience being on the other side of the scenario. "It was eating me up inside," said a 19-year-old boy. "But when I came out... it was really no big deal."

Teens expressed that it's important to treat these experiences as normal and accept their peers unquestioningly.

"I've had people come out to me, and I've never necessarily made a big deal out of it," said a 17-year-old girl. "I treat it like it's normal because to me it is. It's nothing they should be ashamed of or feel like they can't tell somebody. It's a part of who they are and that's not going to change me being friends with them."

One 17-year-old boy said his response to a friend coming out to him would be simple:

"Cool, wanna play Minecraft?"

### "IT'S KIND OF HYPOCRITICAL..."

Nominals may be embracing an extraordinarily open posture towards LGBTQ+ individuals as an intentional overcorrection to what they have seen in Christian culture. Some teens spoke on the topic from a place of past hurt.

"It's kind of hypocritical when I hear Christians talk about sins in the Bible," said a 19-year-old girl. "They only talk about being gay and forget every other Bible verse. It's a dangerous narrative because there's people in your church who are gay. How does that make them feel if they're sitting in their chair hearing you call them an abomination on Sundays?"

*"When they teach that being gay is a sin it's like, 'what's wrong with me?'"* said a 16-year-old boy.

There was a range of experiences about how churches approach these topics. Some teens said it is never discussed, while others seemed to be echoing viewpoints they had heard from their pastoral staff. For some, a church's stance on LGBTQ+ can be a defining issue.

"The current church I go to unfortunately seems to be very anti-LGBTQ, so I'm kinda like one foot out the door," said a 19-year-old girl.

Teens were also quite open about calling out perceived homophobia in their Christian communities and families.

"I'm not gonna lie—my friends are homophobic, especially my mom," said an 18-year-old girl. "She talks about it a lot. She says that it's wrong and sinful most of the time."

LGBTQ+ is an issue where the rubber meets the road for this generation. Nominals live against the backdrop of Christian teachings and the overwhelming pull of culture. Encouragingly, some are committed to working through the tension and arriving at a loving and truthful place.

“There’s a lot of passages that say same-sex attraction is a sin. At the same time, culture tells us it’s ok to be that way,” said a 14-year-old girl. “I would tell a friend that I still love them but at the same time it’s not the right thing to do. It takes a lot of trust to introduce them to what the Bible teaches.”

## what it means for ministry

### A VIRAL ARGUMENT



Some Christian teens believe that LGBTQ+ issues are clear-cut in Scripture, but others are not so sure.

“I’ve heard so many things from different people,” said an 18-year-old girl. “People say Christians aren’t allowed to be gay, then other people say it was a mistranslation and gay people aren’t actually talked about in the Bible at all because it was a mistranslation from the word pedophilia.”

This idea came up quite a few times in our conversations. Many teens have been influenced by a sophisticated theological argument that has gone viral on social media. The logic goes that both Paul’s prohibition of homosexual sex (1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:10) as well as the condemnation in Leviticus 20:13 actually refer to pederasty. This was the sexual abuse of boys by men which was a common practice in the Roman world.

Backers of this argument point to translations of the Bible from the 16th-19th centuries as evidence, saying that homosexuality was a modern term introduced by translators in the 20th century as an anti-gay Christian agenda.

Instagram stories and TikTok videos may be short, but they have effectively amplified this attractive message and teens believe it. Many confidently say the Bible’s

prohibitions against homosexuality apply only to these abusive or pedophilic relationships and that times have changed.

One branch of the argument maintains that consensual same-sex relationships were not a cultural concept in biblical times. However, Paul’s specific address of lesbian sexual relations in Romans 1:26 dispels this idea, as lesbian relationships were present and consensual.

It also becomes more difficult to maintain this argument when you examine the fullness of Scripture, including Paul’s condemnations of homosexual acts as sinful (Romans 1:18-32) as well as Jesus’ teachings on marriage (Matthew 19:4-6). But understanding the breadth of what the Bible teaches takes time and intentionality.

Teens don’t need a verse thrown at them to shut down the LGBTQ+ argument. They need thoughtful guidance and someone willing to journey with them through God’s Word so they can get to know God’s heart and values.

This Scriptural debate isn’t going away anytime soon, so take some time to familiarize yourself with the argument and consider how we can have redemptive conversations with this generation on the keystone issue of identity.

#### **Recommended Resource:**



[\*Has “Homosexual” Always Been in the Bible? An Interview with Preston Sprinkle\*](#) from Dr. Sean McDowell on YouTube

# GEN Z

## *committed Christians*



of U.S. teens are  
Committed Christians\*



\* see definition  
p 13

## Loving the LGBTQ+

In what feels like an increasingly confusing landscape, Committed Christians are having to wrestle with how this conversation intersects with Scripture and how they will personally love others with both grace and truth.

### “THE BIBLE DOES SAY MAN AND WOMAN...”

The large majority of Committed Christians believe the Bible does not condone LGBTQ+ lifestyles. “The Bible does say man and woman, not choose your own gender,” said a 15-year-old girl.

These are biblically literate teens, so almost every one had a verse, passage, or Scriptural teaching to back up their ideas.

However, there was an interesting range of approaches when it came to communicating about this. A few teens were quick to speak out with specific verses they felt addressed the topic clearly. “The Bible says it is an abomination, meaning it is not acceptable to be gay or lesbian,” said one 18-year-old boy quoting Leviticus 18:22.

Other teens did not see it as such an open and shut case and selected different passages or referenced principles derived from the whole of Scripture. The command to love your neighbor was frequently mentioned as well as the idea that no sin is greater than another.

“The sin of being in the LGBTQ community shouldn’t be seen as so much bigger than an everyday sin that we might all do,” said a 19-year-old girl. “At the end of the day, it can all get us into hell if we don’t ask for forgiveness.”

There is seeming consensus that the Bible does not support LGBTQ+ lifestyles, but teens used a variety of passages and verses to support their position. In addition, some teens were not afraid to pointedly disagree with one another on issues of biblical interpretation (see A Troubling Argument, p 16).

But not all Committed Christians are keen to jump into the ring on this debate. Some are still working through their thinking in this area and expressed confusion.

“When I read Scripture on this topic I get a little overwhelmed because there’s so many opinions on whether the meaning changes depending on context or if there’s language issues with all of it,” said a 19-year-old girl. “The Bible is my moral compass, but if I don’t understand what I’m reading then I don’t understand how to follow it.”

## “THEY THINK THEY’LL BE JUDGED FOR BEING GAY...”

We observed that teens shifted quickly from debating beliefs to advocating for loving practical actions towards LGBTQ+ individuals. This spoke volumes. Committed Christian teens have a burden to connect people to God and they intuitively know that the church’s response in this area can be a dealbreaker.

“People in the LGBT community are very pushed back from church because they think they’ll be judged for being gay,” said a 16-year-old boy. “They won’t be allowed to be there, they won’t be loved or appreciated, they’ll be told to change or be made fun of.”

Committed Christians love the church, so their emphasis was not to point the finger at the Body of Christ. If anything, they said, their churches are quiet on these issues. Most said this is not a topic of regular conversation and there are few, if any, LGBTQ+ individuals within their congregation.

“From the people I know who identify both as Christian and in the LGBTQ community it’s been hard on them,” said a 19-year-old girl. “They feel like they can’t fully be a part of the queer community or fully part of the church because they’re more likely not to be accepted in either.”

Committed Christian teens resonate with the difficulty on both sides. They love the church and they love their LGBTQ+ friends, but the two seem to repel each other. They’re in a tough spot and with a lack of equipping from their churches, many are having to arrive at their own conclusions about how to journey with their generation through these complex identity issues.

“It’s a hard conversation to have because in this generation it’s very normalized,” said an 18-year-old girl. “But when you identify yourself in God’s image and what He’s made you, it’s such a different ballgame than struggling with trying to find your identity in different things.”

*With the help of Scripture, some Committed Christians are able to cut through the noise and see the issues for what they really are at their core.*

“There are a lot of positive messages in society that you can be trapped in the wrong body or that changing your gender will fulfill what you are missing,” said a 19-year-old boy.

“That’s ultimately the promise of sin. It promises a stronger identity and the thing you’re looking for, but ultimately it’s not. Your happiness is found in God.”

## “IT TAKES TIME...”

All Committed Christians we spoke to emphasized the importance of loving others and not judging them for sin. But the most mature were able to pair empathy with truth

and put practical handles on what loving a friend through these issues really looks like.

“It takes time,” said a 16-year-old girl. “You can’t just expect someone to flip their whole life around after an hour. After you have those hard conversations, it’s really important that you make yourself available.”

Many teens echoed the importance of being available, being encouraging, praying for their friends, and modeling Christ’s love which is ultimately so different from the world’s.

“This generation wants love,” said a 16-year-old boy. “The worst part of it is that now we have a twisted version of love where if you love me, you have to affirm me and agree with everything I do. That’s not what love is.

*Love is honest, love is kind, love absorbs correction.”*

Being able to distinguish unconditional love from its deceptive counterpart of unconditional affirmation is incredibly mature. Committed Christians also spoke about the importance of not using the Bible as a tool for argumentation and trusting God to do His work of transformation in people’s lives.

“No matter how much you try to change LGBTQ people, you can’t change anything because only Jesus can really change their heart,” said an 18-year-old girl. “I speak from experience because for a long time I identified myself as gay... that’s where I thought I could find true love. It led me to a lot of depression and suicide. That’s when I found God.”

The world will know Christians by their love and this generation of Committed Christians is striving to live that love out. Not from far away, but from up close to those who need it most. It isn’t easy work, but you will find them there ministering to their generation and walking with them in love, truth, and grace.



Thank you for taking the time to learn more about Generation Z through this project. We encourage you to read more and access our reports and resources at [www.globalyouthculture.net](http://www.globalyouthculture.net)

## QUESTIONS?

Contact: [research@onehope.net](mailto:research@onehope.net)

## About OneHope

OneHope helps children and youth worldwide engage with God’s Word. Our vision is for every child in every generation to encounter Jesus through His Word.

We believe the life-changing narrative of the Good News brings hope and has the power to affect destinies. We create research-based, contextualized Scripture engagement programs and work alongside the global Church to share them with young people.

Through OneHope’s diverse partnerships, more than 1.8 billion children have received God’s Word since 1987.



# About the Research

## FOCUS GROUPS

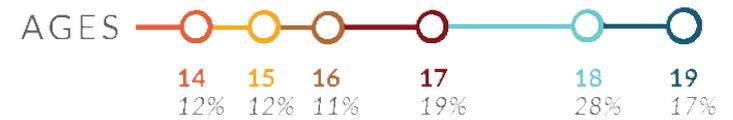
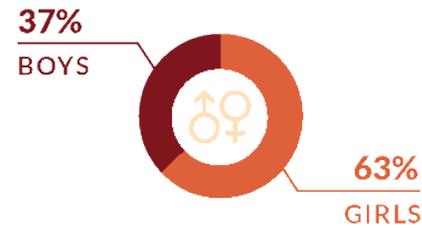
OneHope conducted 15 focus groups talking to 94 teens between April-October 2021. All teens were located in the US and interviewed using Zoom. Teens were divided into religious subgroups for the focus group conversations based on their self-identified religion.

Teens were considered “Nominal Christians” if they identified as Christian, but did not meet the following definition of “Committed Christian” beliefs and behaviors:



- Believe God exists and they can have a personal relationship with Him
- Believe Jesus is the Son of God
- Pray at least weekly
- Believe that forgiveness of sins is only possible through faith in Jesus Christ
- Read Scripture on their own at least weekly
- Believe the Bible is the Word of God

## ABOUT THE TEENS



## PANEL SURVEY

Specific statistics referenced in this report come from a panel survey of 419 U.S. teens conducted online in January 2022. Fifty-nine questions were asked measuring respondent’s beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes.

