

**Methodological Design and Procedures  
for the  
National Survey of Youth and Religion (NSYR)  
Personal Interviews**

Christian Smith & Melinda Lundquist Denton  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
Chapel Hill, NC

The second phase of the data collection of the National Study of Youth and Religion involved in-depth personal interviews with 267 teens. The purpose of the interviews was to provide extended follow-up discussions about teens' religious, spiritual, family, and social lives. The questionnaire followed closely and expanded upon the topics that were included on the NSYR telephone survey [see below for the Interview Questionnaire Guide]. Interviews were conducted in person and were digitally recorded.<sup>1</sup> They lasted an average of two hours each and ranged from about 1.5 to 3 hours long. Teens were given a \$30 cash incentive to complete the interviews. The majority of the in-person interviews were conducted between March 2003 and August 2003, with a final few completed as late as January 2004. All interview subjects were selected from among the 3,370 teens who completed the NSYR telephone survey. At the conclusion of that survey, teens were asked if we could contact them again in the future. More than 98 percent of the survey respondents agreed to be contacted again in the future.

The interviewees were selected from the telephone survey respondents using a stratified quota sample. Rather than a nationally representative sample, we wanted interviewed teens to represent a range of demographic and religious characteristics in order for us to be able to draw substantive conclusions about the variety of teen experiences in the U.S. Therefore, the interview sample was drawn taking into account the following demographic characteristics: region, urban/suburban/rural, age, sex, race, household income, religion and school type. We attempted to achieve a balance in each of the areas listed above. We also oversampled homeschooled teens and those who attend private school because these are relatively under-studied portions of the teen population, given that many surveys of teens are conducted in public school settings. The original telephone survey was conducted with teens between the ages of 13 and 17. The time lapse between a teen completing the telephone survey and completing a personal interview could range from 3 months to more than a year. Therefore, the personal interviews included teens between the ages of 13 and 18. The ages listed in the table below reflect the age of the teen at the time of the personal interview.

Seventeen different interviewers conducted interviews in 45 U.S. states, each interviewer conducting between 10 and 20 interviews. Preliminary research and consultation with other youth scholars suggested the importance of matching whenever possible interviewers and interviewees on race. The majority of the 267 NSYR interviews conducted were matched on gender and race. All of the black teens in the sample were interviewed by black interviewers.

Because of the sensitive nature of the interview questions asked of teens, prior to interview data collection, the NSYR obtained a Certificate of Confidentiality from the U.S. NICHD to protect the data from subpoena.

All 17 interviewers participated in a two-day training meeting. The training covered the logistics of the interview process, procedural requirements, IRB concerns, the protection of human participants, safety and liability concerns, a review and discussion of the interview questionnaire, keys to interview success and the proper use of the digital recording equipment. In addition to that training, all interviewers were required to obtain a Human Participants Training Certificate through the U.S. NIH website.

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<sup>1</sup> In three cases, the interview ran long and because of schedule constraints had to be completed over the phone. Two interviews were conducted over the phone in their entirety.

The 17 project interviewers were assigned to sets of specific geographic locations around the U.S. Each interviewer was provided with groups of Contact Sheets for teens in their assigned geographic areas. The contact sheets included teen name, teen nickname (if known), parent name, address, phone number, date of telephone survey, teen age, teen gender, teen race, household income, school type, religious affiliation and religious denomination or tradition. Also included on the Contact Sheet was a place to note any changes to the contact information provided (new phone number, additional email address, etc.) and a call record. Interviewers recorded each household contact, noting the date, time, who they talked with and the outcome of each contact. Along with the Contact Sheets, interviewers received instruction sheets indicating which of the teens were considered high priority contacts. High priority contacts were those with characteristics that were more difficult to complete, such as minority religions, lower incomes, non-public school types, minority race, etc. As the project progressed through the interviews, the priorities shifted somewhat according to what types of teen interviews were still needed. In this way, we filled in the cells of the quota sample.

In addition to the demographic information on the Contact Sheet, interviewers were also provided with a Survey Information Sheet for each teen. This sheet contained a list of answers to selected questions from the telephone survey. It included information from the parent about the family background, parent religion, family stress and parent education and work status. It also included answers from the teen about importance of faith, moral beliefs, youth group participation and some risk behaviors. These answers were not referred to specifically in the interviews, but were often useful in providing interviewers some little background about the teens they were interviewing.

Using a standard call script provided by NSYR, interviewers made contact with potential interviewee households. Interviewers identified themselves as researchers with the “National Youth Study.” The full name of the research project was not used because we did not want to introduce any bias by identifying religion as a key focus of the study. It was often helpful for interviewers to explain their connection with the project such as graduate student, co-investigator, etc. When possible, interviewers also tried to establish a personal connection to the geographic area. For example, an interviewer might have mentioned that they grew up or went to school in the area. This seemed to help put some people at ease and reduced the sense that interviewers were total strangers from a far-away university. However, since much of the interview was about religion and we did not want to bias the answers of the teens, interviewers were instructed to avoid divulging revealing information about our own personal beliefs and commitments (about which there was considerable diversity on the interviewing team).

Interviewers were required to obtain verbal consent to conduct the interview from both a parent and the teen. If parents or teens seemed hesitant about participating, an additional script provided more information about the project and offered the phone number for the principal investigator, whom they could (and sometimes did) call with questions or concerns. In addition, interviewers offered to mail to hesitant respondents written information about the project and then call back in a few days. Interviewers worked hard to obtain consent from the parents. In a few cases when a teen seemed reluctant to participate or was hesitant about the time commitment, an additional incentive was offered. However, in cases when teens refused to participate even after being offered additional information, interviewers made no further attempts to convert those who refused.

Upon receiving verbal consent from both parent and teen and scheduling an interview time, interviewers mailed packets of information to households. The packet contained a cover letter from the principle investigator, multiple copies of the parent and teen written consent form and an appointment card including a portrait photo of the interviewer. Teens were required to bring the copies of the written consent form with them to their interviews, signed by both the teen and parent. Interviewers also called the teens at least one week prior to the interview and

again the day before the interview to confirm that they were still planning to participate in the interview.

Interviews were conducted in public settings that nevertheless provided confidentiality for the teen. The ideal location for these interviews was in study rooms at local libraries. However, when they were not available, interviews were also conducted in restaurants, coffee shops, mall food courts, public parks and school cafeterias, classrooms or libraries. Interviewers were given guidelines for how to present themselves during the interviews as well as appropriate attire to be worn in order to ensure consistency in the presentation of interviewers across the interviews. Specifically, interviewers did not attempt to “relate” to teens by dressing down or dressing in a more “trendy” fashion. Instead, we built rapport by presenting ourselves as professional researchers with a sincere interest in teenagers’ lives.

At the close of the interview, teens were given a \$30 cash incentive for their participation and in appreciation of their time and effort. Interviewers also followed up interviews with handwritten thank-you notes mailed to teens.

Since these interviews were dealing with a protected population, minors, it was particularly crucial that all interviewers were aware of their responsibilities and obligations concerning the protection of interview participants and mindful of the potential safety and liability issues involved. There were three main Human Participant protection concerns with these interviews:

#### I. Handling sensitive information divulged by teens

Given the personal nature of the interviews, it was necessary to be prepared for the possibility of troubled teens revealing information about personal crises and dangers during the interviews. All interviewers were instructed about mandatory reporting and how properly to handle cases of abuse, harm to self or others or other serious issues. In addition, all interviewers had in their possession at all times copies of a Teen Hotlines resource sheet. This sheet was prepared by NSYR staff and contained national phone numbers for a wide range of potential teen crises. It included toll-free hotlines for suicide, mental health problems, eating disorders, family violence and other issues that might have arisen during interviews. Interviewers provided this resource sheet to any teen who appeared to be struggling with any of these issues, even cases that did not technically require mandatory reporting.

#### II. Informed Consent of both parent and teen

Interviewers were required to obtain verbal and written informed consent from both parent and teen before conducting interviews. In the initial phone contact to set up the interview, interviewers obtained verbal consent from both parent and teen. Both parents and teens were also informed that the teen would have the right to skip any question they would rather not answer and terminate the interview at anytime for whatever reason. Prior to actually conducting interviews, interviewers had to collect written consent forms signed by both parents and teens; in cases where teens were 18 years old or older, parental written consent was not required. All teens were also reminded at the start of interviews and again in the middle of interviews that they were free to skip any question they were not comfortable answering.

#### III. Protecting Confidentiality, which involved two aspects.

##### A. Protecting confidentiality of teens’ answers with respect to parents.

Some parents were interested in what the interviewers were discussing with their teens. In addition, it seemed that for some teens the presence of parents or an environment that triggered concerns about their parents could have had the effect of making them more reserved and less candid in their responses during interviews. To ensure that teens were able to speak openly and honestly, interviewers took a number

of precautions. First, interviewers made sure to be very clear with parents ahead of time in letting them know that they may not listen to the interview or be in close proximity while an interview is taking place. Often the parents brought the teens to the interview location and planned to wait for their teen to finish the interview. In these cases, interviewers made sure that the parents were well out of earshot and out of the teen's line of vision during the interviews. In restaurants, this meant choosing a table as far away from the parents as possible. In libraries, this involved trying to conduct interviews in a separate room or on a separate floor from where parents were waiting.

B. Protecting confidentiality of teens with respect to unknown others.

During interviews, it was important to protect teens from having other people listening to their responses. Interviewers did their best to select locations that were confidential settings yet in public places. Interviewers also remained aware of potential eavesdroppers when locating interviews and throughout the process of interviews. Interviewers were also trained to rearrange question orderings or postpone sensitive questions if and when there were other people nearby who may overhear them.

Before and after actual interviews, interviewers followed strict procedures for handling all data and paperwork related to the interviews. The protocol was designed to prevent any of the data files from being linked to the contact information of the teen participants. Interviewers were trained to treat all documentation and audio files as confidential and to handle them so as to minimize any risk of teens having their interview responses identified by others.

In addition to concerns about the protection of human research participants, other basic safety and liability concerns related to the conduct of interviews with teens. Interviewers took steps to ensure their own safety during interviews, to not take unnecessary risks. It was also important to keep interviewers from getting into situations where they could be held responsible for harm (real or fabricated) to the teenager. Given these concerns, interviewers were provided with the following guidelines: 1. Always conduct interviews in a public place; 2. NEVER conduct interviews inside a teenager's home (very rare exceptions had to be arranged with the principle investigator, who talked with parents about particular situations beforehand); 3. Behave in such a way as to not invite suspicion or leave open the possibility of misinterpreted intentions or actions; 4. When unsure about a given neighborhood in which one may be traveling, research ahead of time the area to assess the safety factors; 4. Always let someone know where one is going and when one expects to return, as well as cell phone or other contact number; 5. Interviewers were asked to consider carrying a safety device to interviews (e.g., whistle, pepper spray). These were optional, but were not provided by the project; 6. Interviewers were allowed on an optional basis to have a partner accompany them to a particular interview location. No accompanying person was allowed to "sit in" on an interview or sit within earshot of the conversation. If a companion was visible in a car or other setting, the interviewer needed to explain who they were and what they are doing to anyone who might be curious or nervous about them; 7. There were some cases where teens seemed to need transportation to or from an interview. Interviewers were not obligated to provide this, but were allowed to choose to provide such transportation if they were comfortable doing so.

The demographic breakdown of the 267 NSYR personal interviews conducted is shown in the table following. With the exception of age, the table reflects the demographic information that was collected at the time of the telephone survey. The age listed is the age of the teen at the time of the personal interview.

**Table 1**  
**NSYR Personal Interview Demographics**

| <b>GENDER</b>                   | <b>N</b> | <b>RELIGION</b>              |            |
|---------------------------------|----------|------------------------------|------------|
| Male                            | 142      | Protestant                   | 131        |
| Female                          | 125      | Adventist                    | 3          |
|                                 |          | Assemblies Of God            | 1          |
|                                 |          | Baptist                      | 41         |
| <b>AGE</b>                      |          | Bible Church                 | 1          |
| 13                              | 17       | Brethren                     | 1          |
| 14                              | 53       | Christian Or Just Christian  | 36         |
| 15                              | 54       | Church Of Christ             | 2          |
| 16                              | 54       | Church Of The Nazarene       | 1          |
| 17                              | 58       | Congregationalist            | 3          |
| 18                              | 31       | Episcopalian                 | 1          |
|                                 |          | Evangelical                  | 1          |
| <b>RACE</b>                     |          | Lutheran                     | 8          |
| White                           | 174      | Methodist                    | 14         |
| Hispanic                        | 39       | Non-Denominational           | 6          |
| Black                           | 37       | Pentecostal                  | 3          |
| Asian                           | 8        | Presbyterian                 | 9          |
| Native American                 | 3        | Catholic                     | 41         |
| Islander                        | 1        | Mormon                       | 21         |
| Mixed                           | 2        | Jewish                       | 18         |
| Other                           | 3        | Buddhist                     | 3          |
|                                 |          | Muslim                       | 2          |
| <b>SCHOOL TYPE</b>              |          | Jehovah's Witness            | 2          |
| Public                          | 196      | Hindu                        | 2          |
| Private                         | 47       | Christian Science            | 1          |
| Home Schooled                   | 20       | Eastern Orthodox             | 1          |
| Magnet Or Charter School        | 2        | Native American              | 1          |
| Not Going To School/Dropped Out | 2        | Pagan Or Wiccan              | 1          |
|                                 |          | Don't Know                   | 4          |
| <b>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</b>         |          | Not Religious                | 39         |
| Less than \$10,000              | 6        |                              |            |
| \$10,000-\$20,000               | 15       | <b>LANGUAGE OF INTERVIEW</b> |            |
| \$20,000-\$30,000               | 19       | English                      | 263        |
| \$30,000-\$40,000               | 28       | Spanish                      | 4          |
| \$40,000-\$50,000               | 41       |                              |            |
| \$50,000-\$60,000               | 25       |                              |            |
| \$60,000-\$70,000               | 32       |                              |            |
| \$70,000-\$80,000               | 19       |                              |            |
| \$80,000-\$90,000               | 15       |                              |            |
| \$90,000-\$100,000              | 13       |                              |            |
| More than \$100,000             | 42       |                              |            |
| Don't Know                      | 5        |                              |            |
| Refused                         | 7        |                              |            |
|                                 |          |                              |            |
| <b>REGION</b>                   | <b>N</b> |                              |            |
| West                            | 87       |                              |            |
| South                           | 81       |                              |            |
| Northeast                       | 44       |                              |            |
| Midwest                         | 55       | <b>TOTAL INTERVIEWS</b>      | <b>267</b> |

## National Study of Youth and Religion Personal Interview Questionnaire Guide

### Notes:

1. IF statements indicate questions that are to be asked only if interviewer determines that the teen meets the criteria for these questions.
2. Terms in bracket in the questions indicate that the interviewer should insert the term appropriate for the teen. For example, [church] is code for religious congregation type of respondent and interviewer should substitute church, synagogue, temple, mosque, etc. as appropriate. [parent] functions similarly, requiring substituting of parents, mother, father, step-mother, etc. as appropriate per case.
3. Home school teens were asked additional questions about their home school experience. Those questions appear in italics.

### Introduction

- ◆ Thanks for agreeing to do this interview. I appreciate your taking the time to talk with me.
- ◆ Some of what we may talk about is pretty personal.
- ◆ Doing this interview will really help us understand the lives of teenagers today.
- ◆ In the next few hours, I would like to just have a conversation with you about your life, your experiences, your beliefs, your feelings, your hopes, your problems, whatever is important to you. I really want you to just feel at ease to talk freely and honestly with me.
- ◆ **Everything you say is totally confidential, nobody will ever find out what you told me (unless you tell me you're going to badly hurt someone else or yourself, or that an adult is badly hurting you). Otherwise, nobody will tell anything you say to your parents or teachers or anyone else.**
- ◆ This is a chance for you to talk openly about whatever you want to say, to express whatever ideas or feelings you have, to talk about things that might be too uncomfortable to tell other people.
- ◆ There are no right or wrong answers, I just want to know whatever you honestly think or feel.
- ◆ **You may decline to answer any questions you don't want to talk about. That is fine. Just let me know.**

### Household Inventory

\*First, can you tell me who lives with you in your household?

- Do you have any other immediate family members who do not live with you (siblings, parents, etc)?

### Friends

\* What kind of people are your good friends?

- Who do you hang out with?
- Where did you meet them?
- Why are you friends with them?
- In what ways are you similar or different from your friends?
  - Are most of your friends your age, or older or younger?
  - Are most of your friends male or female?
  - Does being homeschooled affect who your good friends are? How or in what ways?

\* Who are you not friends with, and why?

- \* How well do your [parents] know your friends?
  - Do your [parents] and your friends' parents know each other?
  - How do they know each other? Do they communicate with each other? When? Where? [through school activities, clubs, church, family or neighborhood gatherings, etc?]

## **Family Relationships**

- \***[IF PARENTS DIVORCED]** When did your parents get divorced? How old were you?
  - How do you think their divorce affected your life? [Probe]
- \* Tell me about your relationship with your mother.
  - How well do you get along with your [mother]?
  - How close do you feel to your [mother]?
  - Are there things that you would NOT talk about with your mother?
- \* Tell me about your relationship with your father.
  - How well do you get along with your [father]?
  - How close do you feel to your [father]?
  - Are there things that you would NOT talk about with your father?
- \* How well do your [parents] get along with each other?
- \* What about other members of your household?
  - Other adults (stepparent, grandparent, etc.)?
    - How close are you to them?
    - How well do you get along with them?
  - Siblings, other children or teens?
    - What is your relationship to them?
    - How close are you to them?
    - How well do you get along with them?
- \* *Is there anything about homeschooling that you think explains how you relate to your parents or siblings?*
  - *What is that?*
  - *Do you have examples of this?*
- \* In general, how well do the members of your household get along with each other? [general atmosphere of home life?]
- \* How good are you and your [parents] at resolving conflicts together? Can you give some examples?
- \* How supportive and understanding are your parents of you?
- \* Have there been any turning points in how well you have gotten along with your parents in recent years?
  - What do you think caused those changes?
- \* If you could change anything about your relationship with your [parents], what would it be? Why?
- \* Can you tell me about how you were raised religiously?
  - [IF not mentioned] In what religious tradition were you raised?
- \* How similar or different are your religious beliefs from your [mother] and [father]?
  - Is religion a source of conflict or of sharing [solidarity] with them, or not?
- \* [IF religious] Do you think there is anything else about religious faith or spiritual outlook that affects the quality of relationships within your family? Do you think your family relationships are affected by religious or faith or spiritual factors at all? [IF yes] How?

## **Adult Involvements**

\*Do you have any particularly positive or negative relationships with other adults (other than parents) in your life?

- [IF yes] Who are they? How do you know them? How do they affect you?
- [IF not yet mentioned] What about other adult family members, such as grandparents or aunts and uncles?
- [IF in school] How do you view your teachers? How do you get along with them? Are they a good influence in your life or bad?
- [IF religiously active] What about people in your [church] or any other religious group you are a part of? Are there any adults who are a positive or negative influence in your life?

\* Who are the people you most admire? Who do you wish to be like?

- What is it about these people that you find admirable or appealing? Why?

\*How do you think adults in this society view teenagers in general?

- Do you think adults have an accurate or mistaken view of teenagers and their lives? In what ways? Why?
- How do you think adults in your life view you, in particular?

\*Some people say that many parents are really clueless about the realities of teenage life today, that they don't realize what it is really like, what really goes on or that there is an "underworld" of teenage life (or "hidden teenage life") that they know nothing about. Do you agree or disagree? In what ways?

- Can you tell me any examples from your own life or those of your friends?
- What about teachers or other adults? Are they aware of these things?

\* Some people say that parents often care less about their teenagers' actual wellbeing and more about the family reputation or their own comfort and convenience? Have you ever seen this? Describe.

## **Morality**

\* Has there ever been a time when you were unsure of what was right and wrong in a particular situation?

- How did you decide what to do?

\* Would you say that, in general, people these days have lost a sense of right and wrong, or do you think what is right and wrong is still pretty clear today?

- How? In what ways?

\* Some people say that there really are no final rights and wrongs in life, that everything is relative, that morality is nothing but what people make it. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

\*Where do your own views of right and wrong come from?

- What do you think it is that makes something right or wrong?
- How do you decide or know what is good and bad, right and wrong in life?
- Can you give me some specific examples?

\* In recent years, have you been involved in any things that you think are wrong? What things?

- Why did you do that?
- How do you feel about that?

\* Have you ever opposed your friends who you thought were doing something wrong? Have they ever opposed you? Can you tell me about that?

\*Are there things in your life that make you feel guilty?

- What makes you feel guilty?
- Where does that guilt come from?
- How do you deal with your feelings of guilt? What helps you? What doesn't?

\* Do you think it is wrong to cheat on assignments or tests at school, or not? Why? When?

\* Do you think it is wrong to lie to parents, or not? [IF YES] Is it ever okay? Why? When?

\*Do you drink alcohol, or smoke pot, or do other drugs?

- [IF yes] How much and often? When and why did you start? Why do you?
- [IF no] Is there any particular reason that you don't do these things?
- Do you have any concerns or worries about these things? What about that?

\* Do you think that [drinking/pot/drugs] is morally wrong or not? What is it that makes it okay/wrong?

- **[IF wrong and they do these things]** What do you think or how do you feel about doing something you believe is wrong?

\* Do you feel there are any expectations for you or your friends to be involved in drinking, smoking or drugs?

- What is that like? How do you deal with it?
- How much opportunity is there for you to be involved in drinking, smoking or drugs?

\* How consistently do your [parents] discipline you when they find out you've done something wrong?

- How do they discipline you? In what ways?
- Do your [parents] monitor or supervise your behaviors closely or not? In what ways?
- Or are you able to do what you want without much adult interference? Or are you too closely supervised?
- *Do you think that the fact that you are homeschooled affects your parents discipline and supervision of you?*
  - *Do you see that as a good or bad thing? Why?*

\* What kinds of things do you and your peers do for fun? Can you tell me a little about your social life?

- How aware are parents of these activities?
- What about parties?
  - Is that something that is common among your peers?
  - Do you attend many parties?
  - Can you tell me what a typical party would be like?

\* Do you ever feel the need to take risks or push things to the limit? Are there thing you do just for the thrill?

- What things? Why?

\* Are there any things your parents or other adults could do better to help take better care of you or keep you out of trouble?

## **Wellbeing**

\* What are some good and bad things about your life (as a teenager)?

- What things would you change about your life if you could?

\*What are the things in life that get you most excited? What things are you most enthusiastic about?

\*What do you think is the purpose of life? What things do you definitely want to accomplish with your life?

\* Do you ever feel like you are treated differently from other teens your age? Why? In what ways?

- \* What do you think are some of the biggest problems or pressures facing teenagers these days?
  - Have you yourself faced this? How have you dealt with that?
- \* Do you ever feel sad or depressed?
  - Are there particular things make you feel that way?
  - How often do you usually feel this way? How long?
  - Can you give me an example of a time you felt that way? How did you deal with it?
- \* Do you ever feel alone, invisible or neglected by others (adults or peers)? When? By whom? Why?
  - What do you do about that? Are there any things that help you to feel better?
- \* *Do you think that homeschooling has anything to do with your feelings about your life as a teenager?*
  - *How so? What are some examples of this?*
- \* In general, how happy or unhappy are you with your body and physical appearance?
  - What specifically makes you happy/unhappy? Why do you think you feel that way?
  - Is there anything you would change about your physical appearance if you could?
  - How much of an issue is this (physical appearance) for you?
  - How much of an issue is this for other teens your age?
- \* When you get upset or have a problem, what do you do about it?
  - Are there any particular people you go to talk to about it?
  - Why them?

### **Religion:**

- \* Do you think of yourself as a religious or spiritual person?
  - In what ways?
  - What does that mean to you?
- \* Do you believe in God?
 

[USE **HIGHER POWER OR SUPREME BEING** IF THAT IS THEIR LANGUAGE]

  - [IF yes] When you think about God, what do you think of? Who or what is God to you?
  - [IF yes] Do you tend think of God as personal or impersonal? Active or removed from human life?
  - [IF yes] Do you think of God as more loving and forgiving, or demanding and judging, or something else?
  - [IF yes] How did you get these ideas about God?
- \* [IF religious] What religion, if any, do you consider yourself to be now?
- \* [IF NOT religious] Do you consider yourself to be any particular religion, or not?
- \* What are your own religious beliefs? Can you tell me the beliefs of your own personal faith?
  - What have been the important influences on you when it comes to religion, faith, belief or spirituality?
- \* [IF NOT CLEAR FROM PREVIOUS QUESTIONS] Have your religious beliefs changed over time?
  - [IF yes] Why do you think your religious views or practices changed?
  - [IF yes] What caused those changes?
- \* How involved or active would you say you are in religion or spirituality?
  - How important or central do you think your religion or spirituality is in your life?
  - What are some ways, if any, you would say your faith influences you?
- \* *Does homeschooling have any affect on your religion or spirituality? How so?*

- \*What, if anything, do you think is valuable or important in religion?
  - Do you think other people who don't practice religious faith should? Why or Why not?
  - [IF yes] Why does that matter? Does it matter which religious faith?
- \* Do you ever have doubts about your (non-)religious beliefs? Which? Why? When?
- \* Are you involved in any religious youth group? Tell me a little about that.
  - How often do you attend? Where do you attend?
  - Do you enjoy it? What do you get out of it?
  - How important in your life is this youth group? What are some of the most important things about this youth group to you?
  - How, if at all, do you think your life would be different if you were not in this youth group?
- \* How different or similar do you feel from other teens your age because of your own (non-)religious faith and practices? Why?
  - Are you ever pressured or made fun of? Can you describe that?
- \* Tell me about the religious lives of your friends. Is this something you know much about?
  - Do your friends have the same religious beliefs and practices as you?
  - Do you go to the same religious services or youth groups?
  - Do you discuss religious things?
  - How would you compare yourself to them when it comes religion?
  - How much do you think religion influences their lives?
  - Do you see any differences between your religious and non-religious peers?

### **Religious Experience**

- \* Have you personally had any significant "religious experiences?"
  - What was it like? How did you feel about it?
  - Did that religious experience(s) change you in any way? How?
- \* Would you say that you feel close to God or not? In what ways or not?
  - What does it mean to you to feel close or not close to God?
  - What are some examples from your life of feeling this way?
- \* Have you ever experienced anything that seemed truly supernatural? A miracle? An experience of angels or demons? What did you think about that?
- \* Different people have different ideas about what they believe about things like angels, demons, divine miracles, life after death and so on. What do you think about these things?
  - Do you believe in them? Do you think they might be real? Why or why not?
  - What about things like astrology, communicating with the dead, reincarnation and psychics?
- \* Do you think that there is any kind of punishment after death for bad things people have done in life?

### **Religious Practices**

- \* [IF RELIGIOUS] Different kinds of religious and spiritual people "do" different kinds of things to express their faith. Are there any kinds of religious or spiritual things that you "do," any practices or habits or regular things that are part of your religious faith or beliefs?
  - Do you have habits or regular things you do to feel more connected to God?
  - Do you have habits or regular things you do to feel more connected to other [people of their religious faith, eg. Christians/Jews/etc]?

\* [IF RELIGIOUS] Are there any things you do because you are a [religion, eg, Christian/Jew/etc.] that are different from your friends or other people who are non-religious or of a different religion? I am thinking of things like maybe the way you may use music, take care of yourself, use your time and money, express yourself, relate to others; as well as things like worship, studying your faith, praying, fasting, giving money or service, etc.

\* [IF RELIGIOUS] Are there any things you DON'T do because you are a [religion]? Describe.

\* [IF NOT RELIGIOUS] Different people "do" different kinds of things to express spirituality or religious faith. Are there any kinds of that you "do," any practices or habits or regular things that you would consider to be religious or spiritual?

[USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS TO PROBE FURTHER ON THE THINGS MENTIONED ABOVE AND TO ASK ABOUT ANYTHING NOT MENTIONED ABOVE]

\* Do you pray?

- What do you think prayer is? How often do you pray (alone, w/family, etc.)? What kinds of things do you pray for? What do your prayers sound like? Are your prayers answered?
- How do you feel about praying?

\* Do you read the Bible [or other sacred text] regularly?

- Why or why not? Do you like that? How does that affect you?
- Any other religious stuff you read?

\* Do you try to take one day a week to rest, to worship, to take a break from normal routines?

- Describe. Why do you do this or not?
- How does that effect you?

\* Do you go to religious services regularly?

- How do you feel about that? Are there things you like or not like about it?
- What does attending services do for your faith?
- Why do you go (or not)? What influence do your parents have in whether or not you attend church?

\* Do you have a regular way to help others? Describe. Why or why don't you do this? (Motive?)

\* Do you stick up for people who aren't dealt with fairly? Describe. Why or why don't you do this? (Motive?)

\* Would you say you spend money or time any differently than other people because of your [religious, spiritual or] moral beliefs? Describe. (Motive?)

\* Do you take good care of yourself? Describe. Why or why don't you do this? (Motive?)

\* Do you try to take good care of the world around you? Describe. Why or why don't you do this? (Motive?)

\* Would you say you approach social problems or world events differently than other people because of your [religious, spiritual or] moral beliefs? Describe.

\* Are there any OTHER things you do on a regular basis that have some religious or spiritual meaning for you? What? Describe.

\* How important are your religious practices to you?

\* How, if at all, do these religious practices affect your life?

- What do they do for you?
- How do they influence how you think or live or believe or whatever?

\* How, if at all, have these practices or habits changed over time in your life? Why? To what effect?

\* *How has homeschooling affected your religious practices and how these affect your life?*

\* How hard would you say you have to work at your religious faith, or being the kind of religious person you want to be? Is it a struggle? Is it easy and natural?

\* Have you ever been to a religious summer camp? A religious youth retreat or conference? A religious service project or missions trip?

- How was that? Did that affect your life in any way? How?

**→ [FOR NON-RELIGIOUS/NON-ATTENDERS:]**

\* Was there ever a time in your life when you were attending religious services more often, or not?

- [IF yes] Is there any particular reason why you stopped attending religious services regularly?

\* In the last 2 years has anyone invited you to attend religious services or a religious youth group with them, or not? Did you go? Why or why not?

\* Generally, how positive or negative do you feel about religion in this country? In what ways? Why?

**Individualization/De-Institutionalization**

\* If it were totally up to you, how often would you attend religious services?

- Where would you attend? Why?
- [IF different from current] Why don't you do that now?

\* Some people say that in order for a person to be truly religious and spiritual, they need to be involved in a [church] and not just lone individuals. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

\* Some people think that it is okay for people to pick and choose their religious beliefs however they want to without having to accept their religion's teachings as a whole. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

\* Do you think there is a difference between being "religious" and being "spiritual?" What is it?

- Some teenagers say that they "are very spiritual but are not religious." Are you familiar with this phrase?
- How true or not would you say that is of you?
- What do you think people who say this mean by it?

\* Do you include in your own spirituality any practices from any other religions? Which? What?

- [IF yes] Why do you do that? What does it mean to you?
- Do you know other people who do this, or not? Why do they?

\* Do you think it is okay for someone of one religion to also practice other religions, or should people only practice one religion? Why or why not?

\* Some people say that only one religion is true, others think many religions may be true, and still others say that there is very little truth in any religion. How do you tend to think about these things?

- What do you mean by this?

\* Have you yourself ever looked into practicing or becoming a different religion?

[IF looked/shopped around]:

- What other religions did you look into?
- Why did you look around religiously?
- What were you looking for? Why was that?
- What, if anything, did you do about it?

**Evaluation of [church] [IF ATTENDING RELIGIOUS SERVICES]**

\* Do you ever get actively involved in the meetings or services of your [church] (IF NEED TO CLARIFY: not just mentally or emotionally or praying silently, but physical/verbal participation)?

- How? Why?
- What does that mean to you?

- \* How much do you like or dislike your [church]? Why? In what ways?
- \* How do you view your [church]?
  - Is your [church] boring to you?
  - Interesting? Thought provoking?
  - Warm and welcoming?
  - How? In what ways?
- \* What has your experience been with adults in your [church] other than family members?
  - Have you found them to be helpful to you, interested in you, distant from you, misunderstanding you?
- \* What has your experience been with the [pastor] or other leaders in your [church]?
  - Have you found them to be helpful to you, interested in you, distant from you, misunderstanding you?
- \* How good or not good a job does your [church] do to help you learn what you want to know about your faith?
- \* How good or not good a place is your [church] to go if you wanted to talk about serious issues like family problems, alcohol, or troubles at school? How? In what ways? Why do you think?
- \* If you could change anything at all about your [church], what would it be? Why?

### **School [IF ATTENDS SCHOOL]**

- \* How do you see yourself fitting in at school? How would other people at school define your group of friends? How does your group of friends relate to other groups at school?
- \* Do you personally identify much with your school? School spirit?
  - Are you much involved with your school? Why?
- \* What kind of grades are you getting?
  - How much do you care or not about doing well at school? Why or why not?
  - [IF religious] Do you think your religious faith has anything to do with your feelings about grades and achievement?
  - How so? Do you have examples of this?
- \* [IF religious] What do you think it means to be a good [Christian] at school?
  - Does that require doing anything in particular?
  - Are there things that you yourself do at school because you are a [Christian]?
- \* How much, if at all, do you openly express your [religious beliefs / beliefs about religion] at school?
  - Do you feel you can be completely honest about your [religious faith / beliefs about religion] at your school? Why or why not?
  - [IF religious] Have you ever told other kids at school about your faith, or encouraged them to join your faith, or come to [church] with you?
    - What was your experience doing that?
- \* Do you think that school has a positive or negative effect on your [religious faith / beliefs about religion], or neither?

### **Home School [IF CURRENTLY HOME SCHOOLED]**

- \* *Do you like being homeschooled? Why and why not?*
- \* *For how long have you been homeschooling?*
  - *Did you leave school to do homeschooling? Why?*
  - *[IF left school] Did you like school? Did you have troubles there?*

- *[IF left school] Was it uncomfortable being a [religion] in school in any way?*
- \* *How are you doing in your subjects in homeschool?*
  - *How much do you care or not about doing well in your education? Why?*
  - *Do you think that your religious faith has anything to do with your feelings about learning and education How so? Examples?*
- \* *Do you think it is easier or more difficult to be a good [religion] when you are homeschooled?*
  - *Why or why not? In what ways?*
  - *Do you think that your education has a positive or negative effect on your own religious faith, or neither? How? Do you have examples?*
- \* *Do you make friends with other kids who are also homeschooled or kids in school? Why?*
  - *Is it easier or more difficult to make close friends because you are homeschooled? Or with kids in school? Why? How so?*
  - *Do you ever feel isolated? What do you think of that?*
- \* *Do you think it is easier or more difficult to be a teenager these days as a homeschooler? How so? Examples?*
- \* *Do you think homeschooling makes it easier or harder to stay out of trouble?*
  - *How about getting involved in volunteering for the local community? How so? Examples?*

**➔ IF NOT IN SCHOOL ONLY:**

- \* *Why did you stop going to school?*
  - *What would have had to have been different for you to have continued in school?*
  - *How much was school work and grades a factor? Or feeling like you didn't fit into school? Or the influence of friends?*
  - *[IF did not fit in] Did your religion have anything to do with not fitting into school or with not identifying with your school? How so?*
- \* *What did/does your family think about your not going to school?*
  - *[IF attends church] What about people in your [church]? Did anyone there have anything to say about your schooling?*
- \* *How do you feel about not going to school?*
  - *How has this affected your life? Has it been good or not?*
  - *Has it changed your religious life in any way?*
- \* *Do you think you might return to school?*
  - *What would it take to get you to do that? What would have to be different?*
  - *Do you think you would be more likely to go back to a religious school instead of a public school? Why or why not?*
- \* *How much do you care or not care about getting a good education?*
  - *[IF religious] Do you think your religious faith has anything to do with you feelings about education? How so?*

**Volunteering & Organized Activities**

- \* *Are you involved in any volunteer work or community service? (IF yes, ask to describe)*
  - *[IF volunteers] How did you get involved in that? What motivated you?*
  - *[IF volunteers] What effect on your life do you think your volunteering or community service has had? How has it affected you?*
  - *How has homeschooling affected your involvement in these things, if at all?*

- \* Do you think people have any obligation to help others or not? Why?
  - [IF indicate that helping is a good thing] Why is helping others a good thing?
  - Do you think teenagers should be involved in volunteer work or community service?
    - Why or why not? Why does it matter?
- \* Do you think your [religious faith or] moral beliefs have anything to do with how you think or act when it comes to volunteering and community service? In what ways?
- \* Besides volunteering, are you involved in any organized activities or programs or clubs or groups?
  - [IF yes] Which? Why? What do you get from that?
  - [IF not] Are there any particular reasons why you don't do more activities or have more group involvements?
- \* Do you work a paid job? How does that affect your life? (probe for effects on family, religious or social life)
  - What do you do with the money you earn?

## Dating

- \* Are you currently dating or going out with anyone?
- \* [IF dating] Tell me about your dating relationships? Who? How long?
  - What is relationship like?
  - What initially attracted you to them?
- \* [IF NOT dating] Have you ever dated anyone?
  - Are you interested in dating or going out with anyone now?
- \* Are there any particular things about dating that do or don't appeal to you?
  - What about dating appeals to you?
  - What about dating does not appeal to you?
- \* How do you define dating? What does that term mean to you?
- \* Why do you think teenagers today date? What do they want from such relationships? What do they get out of dating?
  - How is dating different from friendship? What do teens get from dating that they don't get from other friendships?
  - Is it expected among your peers that most teens your age should be dating? Do you feel you should be dating?
- \* Do you think dating is good thing or a problem for people your age, or both? Why? How?
- \* Some people find dating and romance to be really enjoyable, others end up feeling a lot of pressure and sometimes get very hurt in dating. What has your experience or observation of this been like?
  - [IF ever dated] What have been some of your best and worst experience or moments in dating?
  - What have you observed in the lives of your friends or other people you know?
- \* What about your friends? Do they date? Are their experiences with dating positive or negative or?
- \* Thinking about your own life and your friends and peers, do you think that people's religious faith affects their dating in any way? Does religion shape people's dating relationships?

## Sexuality

**Introduction:** Now I am going to ask you a few questions about physical involvements or sex with others that may seem a little sensitive. Please remember that:

- All of your answers are totally confidential
- You are free to not answer any question in this interview you don't want to.

- If you do not understand a question, just tell me that you don't know the answer.
- Please try to be honest in all of the answers that you do give.

\* An issue that is a big concern to a lot of teenagers and adults is teenage physical involvements and sexual activity: like what kinds of physical intimacy or sexual activities are good or bad, safe and unsafe, right or wrong for teenagers to do. Different people have different ideas about this. What are your thoughts about teenagers and physical involvements and sex?

\* When or under what conditions do you think it is appropriate and not appropriate for teenagers to be physically involved with each other? Why?

- Does this depend on different kinds or levels of physical intimacy? What things do you think are okay and what things, if any, are not? Why?

**[Ask the following only if R seems adequately comfortable discussing:]**

\* Do you think young people should wait to have sex until they are married or not? Why?

- What do you mean when you refer to sex? What is included and what is not?
- Are there different kinds of sex (ie, oral, intercourse, etc.)? [IF yes] Does the type of sex make a difference in whether it is okay for young people, or not?
- [IF they should wait] Might it be okay for teenagers to have sex if they are “emotionally ready for it” or not?
- [IF they don't need to wait] Under what conditions is it okay for teens to have sex? Do you think it matters how “emotionally ready” someone is?
  - [IF “emotionally ready” matters] What do you think it means to be “emotionally ready for sex?” When is that? How would somebody know that they were “ready?”

\* How much have you had to deal with questions about physical involvement and sex in your own personal life?

\* Are your friends having sex?

- What kind(s) of sex?
- What do you think motivates them (physical pleasure? desire for social acceptance? social status? pressure? feeling grown up? or what?)?

\* Have you yourself ever been physically involved with another person, more than just holding hands or light kissing?

- [IF yes] How physically involved have you gotten? In what ways?
- [IF R didn't say explicitly] Have you yourself ever had sex?
- [IF yes] You mean intercourse, or oral sex, or? What were/are the circumstances?
  - How do you feel about that?
  - Do your parents know? How would (or do) they feel about that if they knew?
  - Do your friends know? How do/would your friends feel?

\* [IF physically intimate or sexually active] Are there any things that you wish you would have known earlier about sex – anything you would do differently knowing whatever you know now? What? Why?

- Do you have any regrets?

\* Have you ever had a negative or unhappy sexual experience?

- [IF yes] Is that something you would be willing to talk about?
- [IF yes] What were the circumstances? Why was it negative or unhappy for you?
- How did you deal with it? How do you think it has affected you? [be prepared here to provide help information to respondents in need]

\* Do you ever feel pressure now to have sex? By friends, dates, other influences?

- What do you do with those pressures? Have they influenced you?

\* How much is pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases a concern for teens thinking about sexual activity?

- Have you personally had to deal with issues of pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases?

\* What do you think have been the most important influences (ie, people, experiences) on how you think about sex? How have they influenced you? In what ways?

- [IF religious or spiritual] Does your religion have any particular teaching or morality when it comes to sex? If so, what is it?
  - Do you agree with it? Why or why not?
  - How do you think that has worked out in your own life?

## **The Media**

\* How much TV do you watch?

- What kind of programs do you watch, what are your favorite shows? Why do you like those?
- What kind of programs do you really not like? Why?

\* Do you listen to music?

- What are your favorite music groups? Why?
- Is there any kind of music you really don't like? Why?

\* Do you watch many movies and videos?

- What kind of movies? What specific recent movies have you most enjoyed? Why?
- Are there any kinds of movies or videos that you avoid? Why?

\* Do your parents put any kind of restrictions on the TV or movies you are allowed to watch?

- [IF yes] What are those restrictions? How do you feel about that?

\* Do you subscribe to or regularly read any magazines? Which? Why do you read those in particular?

\* *Does homeschooling affect your watching and listening in any way?*

\* Do you think your [religious or spiritual or] moral beliefs or practices affect how you think about TV, music, movies, etc.? In what ways?

\* [IF religious] Do you think your religion has teachings that might shape the kind of TV, music, movies, and magazines you consume? What are they?

\* Do you have a cell phone? Do you use email or Instant Messaging?

\* Many movies and TV programs have a lot of violence and sex and adult situations and what some people think is bad language in them. Does any of this bother you, or not really?

- Do you think you would be any different if you had never watched these types of programs? [IF so] How? In what ways?
- Do you think viewing this type of material affects how you think or how you relate to people, or not? [IF so] How?
- Do you think these types of movies and TV programs desensitize you in any way? Do they shape your views of what is normal or acceptable behavior for people?

\* Is there anything else in the media that you don't like or that bothers you? What? Why?

\* Some teenagers watch or view X-rated, pornographic videos, programs or internet sites. How do you yourself feel about pornography?

- Do you or have you ever viewed pornographic websites or movies?
- [only if R seems comfortable] What was your experience? Where or with whom was it?
- How do you think viewing pornography affected(s) you, if at all?
- Do you think you will continue to watch or view X-rated websites or programs or videos?

## **Future Prospects**

- \* How much do you think about your future?
  - [IF any] What do you think about when you do think about the future? What do you imagine you will do with your life when you are an adult?
- \* *Do you think that homeschooling affects your ideas about your future? How so?*
- \* What are your future education plans?
- \* How do you think your life is going to turn out? Do you look to the future with hope or fear? Or?
- \* Do you want to get married someday? What do you want out of marriage? What do you expect?
- \* In the future, would you ever consider living with a romantic partner that you were not married to, or not? Why or why not?
  - [if inconsistent with views on pre-marital sex, then probe this further]
- \* What do you think you will be like religiously when you are 25 or 30 years old?
  - Will you attend [church]?
  - How similar or different do you think you will be then, compared to now? Why?

## **Conclusion**

That's all the questions I have. Is there anything we have not yet talked about that you think is important for understanding your life as a teenager or teenagers in general? Is there anything else you would like to say?

Thank you so much for talking with me today. I really enjoyed hearing about your experiences as a teenager. Be assured that everything we talked about today will remain totally confidential. Do you have any other questions?