



Supporting Young Adult Formation

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Young adulthood is a crucial time for identity formation. Their sense of self is developing rapidly. People are meaning-makers. Messages from their family, culture, and social media all play a role in the narratives they hold deeply inside. Young adults may seem perfectly fine and adjusted on the outside, while their inner dialogue hides a constant stream of fear and anxiety. They may have an internalized sense of shame or being not enough – “I am unworthy” or “I am unlovable” – which often leads to endless scrolling or posting for the dopamine hit of likes and followers. The church and caregivers can play an influential role in helping young adults discover why they are strategizing so hard to feel less anxious.

Without careful examination, people’s sense of identity can be unconsciously shaped by harmful experiences, words, or the absence of positive connections growing up. As caregivers, we can create space for them to process the messages they are taking in while providing a corrective experience that shows who God is through our presence, words, and actions. This Toolkit shares guidance on facilitating thoughtful conversations with young adults that build connection and encourage self-discovery.

1

Help them understand who their influencers are.

Young adults are on a journey that will shape them into the person they will be. This journey is affected by their choices as well as by the messages from a myriad of influential figures telling them who to be. Influencers can be peers, parents, grandparents, spiritual leaders in their community, and social media. Without judgment, help young adults critically examine the voices associated with these influencers and pay attention to how those voices intertwine with their sense of self.

Social media influences the minds, emotions, and young adults' decisions daily. Public figures have their own version of a gospel and are literally seeking followers. Ask questions to help them think through who is influencing them.

- Who are your influencers?
- What limits do you put on yourself with your phone?
- How often do you critically re-evaluate your relationship with technology?
- What are the messages that these voices are giving about God?

2

Explore young adults' experiences growing up in their families to make sense of them.

People either unconsciously replicate what they are familiar with or intentionally choose

what to hold onto from their past and what new paths to take. Being curious about young adults' experiences growing up can help them be more thoughtful.

As social beings, people internalize the messages we implicitly receive from others, especially our first caregivers: biological, adoptive, or foster parents.

The following questions can help young adults reflect on their upbringing and the messages they received.

- Did you feel safe and known with your parents? Grandparents? Teachers? Your church leaders?
- In a moment of crisis, how would you call for help? Who responded when you needed help?
- When painful moments happened, how did your family address them?

Have them consider their family of origin's power and control dynamics.

- Who held power in your family? How did you know?
- When was this power used for good? For ill?
- Do you notice your own need for power and control now? In what ways?
- What do you imagine God is like as an all-powerful being?

Avoid replicating certain dynamics they experienced in their family of origin. For example, if they have a strongly opinionated parent, they may constantly seek your opinion. Instead of giving the sought-after opinion, hold back and encourage them to make the choice they believe is right.

3

Provide safety and love as young adults explore their identity questions.

As emerging young adults face questions about their identity, their insecurities surface. Self-reflection alone is not enough for them to make sense of themselves and what they are going through. They are looking for connection or a witness as they uncover their stories. As they start to see you as a trusted source for guidance, they will start to feel less alone. Encourage them to reflect on their values, worldviews, and meaning in life.

- What are your passions and gifts? When did you first know this about yourself?
- What are you thinking of studying or majoring in? In what ways do you want to contribute meaningfully to society and the world?
- What dreams do you hold that you wish to see fulfilled in your lifetime?
- Can you imagine how God could use you in a particular sector to bring his kingdom and justice more fully to earth?

4

Come alongside as they clarify and personalize a spiritual identity as their own.

So far, we have helped young adults explore their internalized view of self. Helping them explore their internalized view of God—their spiritual identity—is also important. When the time is right, take a critical look at how their upbringing and support systems also play a

role in shaping their faith. As young adults thoughtfully share their personal spiritual journey narrative, they will have a greater opportunity to own their faith.

Many heard explicit truths about God that their own experiences seemed to contradict.

For example, they heard, “God is forgiving,” from their Christian mother who held grudges against them and others. Carefully facilitate a corrective experience and help them process the disconnection.

- How did your experiences shape your sense of God’s justice or His nearness during suffering?
- Did you hear a lot of teachings about God but not always in a loving way? How do you think these experiences shape your faith now?
- In light of these experiences, how would you describe God’s feelings toward you?
- What is unique to your journey of faith? How have you experienced God in a way that perhaps your parents and grandparents have not (yet)?

Hebrews 12 reminds us of the great cloud of witnesses, whose stories encourage us as we follow Jesus. As people who care deeply about young adults’ journeys, we can be part of that great cloud on earth. We can be their witnesses. We can walk beside young adults as they discern and throw off the unhelpful messages bombarding them. Rather than being shaped by the unexamined implicit messages that cause an undercurrent of insecurity, young adults can choose the truth of who God says they are and find peace. As caregivers, we can help this generation bring their unique expressions of God to transform the current culture of anxiety.