

Discovering Spirituality: A Guide for Teens¹

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Who am I? What is my purpose? Have you ever asked yourself these questions? You're not alone. Every teenager at one time or another has asked these questions. It's the answers that are hard to figure out. Searching for a sense of meaning and purpose in life is not easy. However, you can do a few things that will help you discover the answers. One of the most important is discovering your spirituality.

Spirituality can be defined in a variety of ways. Most definitions agree that spirituality is a connection to something that is greater than the self and inspires respect and admiration.¹ This can be a connection to a religious being such as a deity or spirit. It can also be a connection to individuals, objects, or a set of beliefs that inspire both wonder and humility. In either case, spirituality refers to the activity of fostering a connection to what is sacred and meaningful in life.

People often think of spirituality in terms of religious beliefs and practices; however, one can be spiritual but not very religious. Religion focuses on the beliefs and practices of a religious organization or creed, while spirituality focuses on inspiration, self-reflection, and personal connection. One can be both spiritual and religious or neither spiritual nor religious. However, researchers are beginning to discover the importance of being a spiritual person,

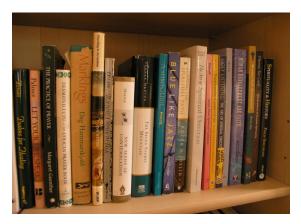


Figure 1. Spirituality Collection by Megan Ross (Used with permission under Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-ND 2.0) Credits:

especially for teens.^{1,2} The benefits of spirituality include the following:^{3,4}

- Higher self-esteem and self-worth
- More positive relationships
- Lower alcohol and drug use
- Greater sense that life has meaning and purpose
- Greater sense of belonging and connectedness

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- Lower anxiety and stress
- A stronger relationship with parents
- · More friends who are positive influences
- More respect for yourself and others
- Greater success in life
- Experiencing a feeling of hope, even during hardships

All of these benefits can help you find the answers to the important questions in life because they help you develop better relationships with others and lead you to make healthy choices.

How can you promote spirituality in your life?

- Don't be afraid to discuss spiritual questions with your parents or other trusted adults.⁴ Open up to someone whom you believe you can talk to and who will not judge you for asking some of the "tough" questions.
- Express your spirituality through journals, music, and other forms of self-expression.⁴ Spirituality really flows through self-discovery.
- Surround yourself with positive friends who strengthen your spiritual growth.⁴ Your values are influenced by those around you, so pick your friends wisely.

If you already attend a church, synagogue, temple, or mosque:

- Learn more about your own religious beliefs by reading sacred books, praying or meditating, or attending religious activities.
- Ask questions of your religious or spiritual leaders and share personal experiences with adults you trust.⁴
- Get involved in religious activities just for teens. Participation in these activities will give you the opportunity to develop friendships with people who share similar values.

Whether you are religious or not, anyone can develop spirituality. Developing spirituality promotes

self-discovery so that you can better understand your own values, competencies, and strengths. It helps to establish meaningful relationships with others you can count on to be there when times get tough. And it allows you to see the "big picture" and to make decisions in life that will benefit you in the long run. Spirituality can be formed and practiced in a variety of different ways. No matter which path you choose, a positive and healthy spirituality will provide you with a sense of meaning and purpose and help you to navigate the obstacles in life.

For additional information

The Center for Spiritual Development: http://www.search-institute.org/spiritual-development

Youth Spirituality: http://youthspirituality.com/

National Study of Youth and Religion: http://www.youthandreligion.org/

You can also visit your religious organization's website.

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