

Teen's religious commitment springs from relationships, study shows

May 20 2011



For the 12,000 teens who participate each year, EFY is a time for game nights, dances, and cheer-offs, and now a study at BYU illustrates the program's secrets to success.

In a new study, Brigham Young University professor David Dollahite and graduate student Emily Layton identified seven anchors of religious commitment for teens. Through in-depth interviews of 80 adolescents and their families belonging to different faiths, they recognized an overarching theme of teens building relationships.

“Relationships matter to youth,” Layton said. “Relationships are critical to how youth are experiencing their religion—relationships within the

family, church leaders and members of the faith community.”

The study, published in the Journal of Adolescent Research, draws upon interviews Dollahite conducted with teens in New England and the San Francisco Bay area. They asked a variety of religious leaders to recommend families of their faith that showed an engaged level of activity. The entire family was interviewed and recorded, but the researchers focused on the adolescents. Layton then analyzed the information for her master’s thesis.

After reviewing the recordings, Dollahite and Layton coded each interview to identify seven anchors of religious commitment:

Traditions

God

Faith denominations

Faith community members

Parents

Scriptures

Religious leaders

“The good news for parents and religious leaders is there are many avenues to religious commitment, or we use the word anchors,” Dollahite said. “We use the metaphor of a tent held down by seven different stakes.”

From their interview with a 16-year-old Presbyterian boy mentioned in the study, the reason his faith was more than just a crutch was the friendship he felt at church.

“Religion has sort of taken on a new role in my life from being something just to turn to in a time of need to something that I really care about and I participate in just for the joy of connecting to the people I’m

worshipping with,” he said.

It’s that “joy of connecting” that is critical, and it happens through these various anchors.

“Teens feel connected to their faith communities in a variety of ways,” Dollahite said, “and those connections make a difference.”

Maybe it’s the boys escorting the girls to dinner, or the nightly devotionals in small groups. It could be the teamwork games or testimony meetings.

Either way, EFY programs give youth a number of social and spiritual ways to build friendships in the faith. Those friendships become anchors that support a personal reason to stay religious.

“Just like a tent is held down by many stakes, likewise our commitments in our religion are anchored by relationships, beliefs and behaviors that may seem different but all serve to give life to our religion,” Layton said. “The ‘small and simple things’ that foster relationships and make religion fun are important to our youth.”

Provided by Brigham Young University

Citation: Teen's religious commitment springs from relationships, study shows (2011, May 20) retrieved 17 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2011-05-teen-religious-commitment-relationships.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.