

A Parent's Guide to
2024

SUMMER EDITION

axis

"When did the future switch from being a promise to being a threat?"

— **Chuck Palahniuk, *Invisible Monsters***

"To do well in 2024 you gotta ask yourself: am I being stubborn in my authenticity or am I actively trying to evolve and move up dimensions?"

— **HaeJun Jeon, social media psychic and influencer**

"The past is gone, and cannot harm you anymore. And while the future is fast coming for you, it always flinches first and settles in as the gentle present."

— **Cecil Palmer, *Welcome to Nightvale***

"I said to the man at the gate of the year, 'Give me a light that I might walk safely into the unknown.' And he said to me, 'Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the hand of God. It shall be to you safer than the light and better than the known.'"

— **King George VI**

"Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards."

— **Søren Kierkegaard**

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Start Here

When a hamster first begins to run in a wheel, it must feel like a dream come true. What is a hamster's calling if not to scurry, and the wheel offers an opportunity to scurry endlessly. But at some point, the wheel begins to turn a little faster than the hamster can run. As it tries to catch up, it begins the pendulum swing of alternately outpacing the wheel's turn and being outpaced. Eventually the wheel spins so fast the hamster just can't keep up, and it begins to be dragged up the back wall of the wheel, desperately scrabbling for impossible equilibrium. And then, the worst happens: the hamster slips but the wheel keeps spinning, faster than ever. The hamster is held in place by the speed of the wheel, flattened against the wall in a horrible hamster centrifuge nightmare that, for all it knows, will never end.

We might not be running on a literal wheel, but the speed at which culture changes might have us feeling a bit like we are. The fact that many people who remember greeting the guy who delivered coal for their furnaces may have to discern the meaning of the phrase "sticking out your gyatt for the rizzler" feels like something out of a fever dream. But all is not lost.

Think of this guide as a cultural glossary for Christian parents, with each section giving you research about the last year and some thoughts on where the world might be headed. You can read it front to back, start in the middle, or jump into sections as they become relevant. Each section also has a suggestion for another Axis resource that will give you tools to push deeper on the topic. Our hope is that you continue to find useful information that will help you have ongoing conversations with the teens in your life.

Screen time

As of now...

- » The current average time teens spend on screens is [7 hours per day](#). It's a big number, but it's important to note that it includes time scrolling on socials as well as texting, calling, music, navigation, watching videos, etc. That said, 7 hours a day is still more than a full-time work week each week.
- » More than [nine-in-ten](#) teens report using the internet every day. Again, this includes the task-oriented ways they might use the internet (like for school), but [nearly half](#) of teens would say they use the internet "almost constantly."
- » A majority of teens [conduct their friendships online](#). 24% say they see their friends *in person every day*, while 60% say they hang out with their friends *online every day* (even though they may also run into them at school or in extracurricular activities). Additionally, 88% of teens say they spend at least *one day* with their friends online, so even those who are making time to intentionally see each other in person are likely still meeting up on internet platforms.

Moving forward...

The time teens spend on screens is not likely to decrease (unless countries take Jonathan Haidt's [recommendation](#) (*some language and sexual references*) seriously and start enforcing 16 as the legal age of "internet adulthood"). In fact, as Gen Z begins to hand the teenage years off to Gen Alpha (whom some members of Gen Z disparagingly refer to as "[iPad kids](#)"), the amount of average screen time might increase exponentially.

In terms of Gen Alpha's relationship with tech, Vice reporter Eloise Hendy [tells this story](#): "One day, my housemate saw her god-daughter spot a butterfly fluttering outside the window. Her tiny toddler hand reached out, and her thumb and forefinger made a sort of pincer movement. At first my housemate was

baffled, but then she realised. Her god-daughter was trying to zoom in on the butterfly.” TikTok user @gabesco, a Gen Zer himself, [begged his peers](#) to start thinking now about what kind of children they want to raise: “Your kids can’t read...they’re bizarre and terribly behaved.”

Of course, it’s possible that there could be a major shift. (Maybe you’ve heard the phrase, “What one generation accepts, the next generation assumes, and the next generation rejects.”) But based on how Gen Alpha and Gen Z already seem to be interacting with their devices, it’s more likely that the trending uptick in screentime will continue, and increase sharply as Gen Alpha reaches an age where more parents are willing to buy them smartphones.

For more on this topic, check out our [Culture Translator Roundtable Podcast on iPad Kids!](#)



Smartphones

As of now...

- » [95% of teens](#) have access to a smartphone. This includes phones owned by the teens, as well as phones owned by family or friends that they are allowed to use. Some of these smartphones are also made available to teens through school or extracurricular activities.
- » According to research from [October of 2023](#), 42% of kids receive access to their own smartphone by age 10. By 14, that number climbs to 92%. Most of these phones are mainline devices like Apple or Android phones, rather than kid-specific smartphones. The majority have unrestricted access to the internet.
- » Smartphone use continues to be linked with emotional issues like [social isolation](#) and anxiety related to [being away from your phone](#), but also with physical problems like decreased [amount and quality of sleep](#).
- » By 2020, [80% of pornography](#) was being viewed on smartphones, and according to a survey published in 2023, [73% of teens](#) had viewed pornography. 40% of students said that they were exposed to it at least weekly during school hours, and largely on school-issued devices like smartphones.

Moving forward...

As things stand now, refusing to get our kids a smartphone by the time they turn 14 means going against the tide of our culture in a massive way. On the other hand, as more and more studies link smartphones, social media, and unrestricted internet access with numerous negative side effects, some parents and teens are saying that alternative “dumbphones” (like [Pinwheel](#), [Gabb](#), and the [Wisephone](#)) are starting to become a little bit less stigmatized. It’s possible that this trend could continue in 2024.

Teens today understand the sorts of negative effects their phones can have on their lives, and more and more of them seem to want to do something about it. Many are limiting screen time, and even getting off of social media altogether. Anecdotally, a teacher friend of Axis noted that since his school banned phone use during school hours, his students have seemed happier overall, and are talking with each other more at lunch. Teen groups like the [NYC Teen Luddite Club](#) are springing up as well, which encourage participants to use as little tech as possible.

At the same time, given how steeply smartphone use in teens has risen even in the last few years, it wouldn't be surprising if the age at which children receive smartphones continued to get lower and the number of children who had them increased. Alongside this, the already widespread integration of smartphones with daily tasks like ordering food and drinks, navigation, and completing transactions at any establishment with "tap to pay" (remember when people paid with checks?) will likely make it not just inconvenient but potentially difficult to live without a smartphone.

Sometimes it has seemed easy to imagine the future as a deeper and deeper spiral into easier and easier access to greater and greater levels of depravity. And in some ways, that could be argued. But alongside that, there are some tech companies who are genuinely trying to add new levels of protection to mainline smartphones, enhancing things like parental controls. Internet filtering software is also becoming increasingly available, easy to use, comprehensive, and—most importantly—screenager-proof. As time goes on and the issues of bullying, porn use, and the many negative impacts of social media become more serious and widespread, the companies dedicated to helping keep kids safe and giving them space to just be kids will, God willing, continue to grow and get better at what they do.

Still, even if teens do want the newest smartphone and an account on every app there is, that doesn't make them unintelligent or unaware of how their phones are affecting their generation. There's a very real chance that lots of Gen Z parents will, in the near future, do a u-turn on their digital childhood and raise their own families in an environment much freer from screens. We're very much at a fork in the road, and only time will tell whether the coin flip will land screen up or screen down.

For more on this topic, check out our [Parent's Guide to Smartphones!](#)

Artificial Intelligence

As of now...

- » Gen AI, or [Generative AI](#) (artificial intelligence that “creates” content like images and text) is quickly becoming the most popular kind of AI. Unlike in previous years, where AI was primarily used in engineering and computing spaces, the availability of things like ChatGPT and DALL-E have made Generative AI more widely recognized.
- » Even though a lot of Gen AI tools haven’t even been publicly available for very long (ChatGPT celebrated its first birthday at the end of November), [a third of survey respondents](#) say they use the tech daily.
- » [Companies are reporting](#) that they expect AI integration to require more than 20% of the workforce to be reskilled, and that it will replace 10% of human jobs in the next three years.
- » [52% of Americans](#) say they’re more concerned than excited about AI. A majority of people say they would be very uncomfortable with AI being a part of subjective decisions like job hiring or medical diagnostics, as well as AI being used for things that feel invasive like monitoring their movements and activity at work or being surveilled in public spaces.
- » AI stands to impact teachers quickly and significantly, with [69% of students](#) saying it’s okay to use ChatGPT to do research and almost half saying it’s okay to use it to write essays.
- » [67% of Americans](#) say they worry any government regulation on AI will not go far enough to protect people from its potential harms, and 62% say they feel AI will significantly change the employment landscape for the worse.
- » [57% of Americans](#) are excited for AI to do their household chores.

Moving forward...

Trying to guess what's coming next for AI is a shot in the dark—but it will almost certainly become a bigger and bigger part of our culture in 2024, and something the church needs to be prepared to reckon with. For example: what does it mean to be human—to bear the image of God—in a world with AI? In the past, some Christians tried to answer that question by saying that we are the only created beings with consciousness and the ability to reason—but sometimes AI sure looks like it can reason too!

It definitely feels like AI is entering our world in a brand new way. But AI has already been at work choosing videos for us in our social media algorithms, and to some extent with household robots like Alexa, Siri, and Google. In addition, TikTok and its partner app CapCut have already been using AI to allow users to create innumerable filters that show us what we would look like in our favorite Netflix show, as a Pixar character, in a 1950s high school yearbook, etc. etc.

One positive spin on AI might be that now that it's possible to use AI as a kind of grunt-work “research assistant,” the next generation might be more able to major in things that only human beings are capable of majoring in. Having said that, teachers are already having to re-imagine how to teach (as if teaching wasn't already hard enough) because technology like ChatGPT enables students to find answers and write essays. But 2024 may also be the year that teens begin to rely more on AI for help navigating relational issues, such as [“how to break up with someone.”](#) Even more sobering, many more average, totally normal families may have to learn how to help their sons and daughters deal with fake, AI-generated pictures and videos of them doing and saying things that they have not done or said. As we have written in the Culture Translator, this may [include](#) AI-generated sexually explicit content.

It's sobering to realize that as soon as we got our hands on artificial intelligence we started figuring out how to use it in sinful ways. Part of the call on Jesus-followers is to figure out how to redeem the things that enter into our world—to take what could have been used for evil and to use it for good.

For more on this topic, check out our [7 Minute Video on AI!](#)

Social Media

As of now...

- » Though TikTok has soared to dominance above most of the popular social media apps with [63% of teens](#) reporting using the app, YouTube still reigns supreme, with 93% of teens saying they use it frequently.
- » [Almost 77% of teens](#) report spending two or more hours per day on social media, while only 29% say they spend the same amount of time on homework. [55% of teens](#) believe that they spend a healthy amount of time on social media, although 2+ hours is about half of most teens' average daily screentime ([4.8 hours](#)).
- » The more time teens spend on social media, [the lower they'd rate themselves](#) on general conscientiousness.
- » Social media use is [directly correlated](#) with having mental health issues. The more teens report using social media, the lower they rate their overall mental health. This has been particularly evident since the Covid-19 pandemic, during and after which teen social media use and rates of teen anxiety, depression, and suicidality spiked significantly.
- » As mistrust in traditional news sources rises, [48% of Americans](#) say their main source of news is social media, despite the unsourced and deeply biased information offered by creators appealing to specific audiences. The [algorithmic function of social media](#) apps has also created increasingly monolithic, niche, unnuanced, and extreme interest groups.

Moving forward...

The statistics surrounding social media use and mental health should not be shocking. Five minutes on almost any social app reveals a deluge of beautiful people with perfect lives showcasing their attractively

relatable trouble, comments so vitriolic they almost make your ears ring, and propaganda of a sort that makes George Orwell's *1984* seem just a little too plausible.

Unfortunately, because many teens (and many adults) are creating the bulk of their worldviews based on what they see on their feeds, their ability to identify and critically understand biased and even completely false information is plummeting. Much of the extremism in politics and other social issues that has developed since 2020 can be attributed to these algorithmic echo chambers, and with that very extremism driving a lot of social media interaction, it's not likely to get better.

There's a chance that in 2024 tech lobby groups like the [Center for Humane Technology](#) will finally find a real audience in Silicon Valley. We pray that they do. But at the end of 2023, in many ways their voice still seems like a cultural outlier. In terms of trends, the addictive design of social media—infinite doomscrolling, perfectly tailored bespoke content, and the ever-present fear of being left behind by the culture that lives online—is probably more likely to only increase. TikTok and YouTube will likely continue to share the throne for most-used platforms [due to the ease with which](#) teens can both consume and create content on both. That said, apps on death's door like [Facebook](#) and [Twitter X](#) (which is setting the gold standard for *not* going gentle into that good night) may still show up in people's lists of accounts they let linger.

When it comes to teens' ongoing use of social media, there's definitely cause for concern due to its direct link with poor mental health. We'll unpack that more below, but we as parents should definitely take these statistics as an encouragement to be active and present in conversations about how our teens use social media, and whether they use it at all. There are definitely some parts of life that become more difficult without social media, like keeping up with pop culture trends or being in on the latest jokes and memes, but it's still worth it to very carefully consider if, when, and how our teens spend their time online.

For more on this topic, check out our [Conversation Kit on Social Media!](#)

Movies and TV

As of now...

- » Streaming giants like Netflix, Hulu, and Max (formally HBO...Max) [continue to dominate the entertainment industry](#), with 17% of the global population using at least one subscription service. That number is expected to rise above 20% within four years.
- » Despite the hard hit to movie theaters caused by the pandemic and inflation, [ticket sales have risen](#) steadily in the years since, helped in large part by groundbreaking box-office hits like this year's *Barbie*.
- » The Writers Guild of America and Screen Actors Guild [went on history-making strikes](#), attempting to secure better pay and updated royalties policies that take streaming into account, and specific policies regarding AI in creative spaces. The strikes have raised not only questions about how AI could affect the writing processes for visual entertainment, but [the ethics of AI replicas](#) being used to give actors roles that they may not have even known about.

Moving forward...

Most people agree that the “second golden age of television” is over. Between the showrunners who decided to plow ahead with production despite the lack of professional writers and actors during this summer’s strike, and the seemingly endless reboots, sequels, prequels, and [full-on rehashes](#) of media that’s [hardly a decade old](#), it seems that TV and movies are kind of just...bad now.

This isn’t something that’s likely to change in 2024 either, unfortunately. This year’s writers and actors strikes are going to have a big impact on the landscape of movies and TV for the next several years. Several highly-anticipated releases, like the next seasons of *Stranger Things*, *The Last of Us*, and *Wednesday*, and

films like *Dune: Part Two* and *Spider-Man: Beyond the Spideverse*, have been pushed back a year or more, and some have been delayed indefinitely.

In spite of that, there *will* continue to be, as there always are, shows and films that are truly interesting, thoughtful, clever, and good. Quantity hasn't quite canceled out quality, and the coming months will certainly bring [at least some releases](#) that have the potential to start deep conversations with our teens, or even just give us time to enjoy the ways that human creativity stubbornly continues to trump the almighty dollar.

For more on this topic, check out our [Deep Dive Podcast on Barbenheimer](#) and our [Axis Culture Calendar](#) to keep up with upcoming media releases!



Video Games

As of now...

- » 2021 and 2022 saw several much-anticipated games being delayed. [Their release this year](#) alongside the games already slated for 2023 made it one of the most exciting years for gaming in a decade.
- » [Games like](#) *Hogwarts Legacy*, *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom*, and *Baldur's Gate 3* were not only a hit among longtime gamers but drew first-timers interested in the subject matter and franchises. But players often stayed true to the games they *were already playing* with games like [Minecraft](#), Counter-Strike, and [Fortnite](#) maintaining large player bases.
- » Movies and TV shows [based on video games](#) also saw a lot of success last year, with *The Last of Us*, *The Super Mario Bros. Movie*, and *Five Nights at Freddy's* all gaining significant traction on social media and two out of three receiving critical praise (the film about [a haunted Chuck E. Cheese](#) wasn't a smash hit, shockingly).
- » Streaming giant Twitch [faced competition](#) amid issues regarding paying streamers and trying to create content guidelines that keep as many creators active as possible. Alternative streaming platforms like Rumble and Kick offer better revenue splits and fewer restrictions on adult content like gambling and streamers like Andrew Tate, [whose content is decidedly controversial](#).
- » [3.26 billion people worldwide](#)—41% of the world's population—play video games. In 2022 US gamers spent \$55.5 billion on video games.
- » 38% of gamers are between the ages of 18 and 34. 69% of US households have at least one member who plays video games over an hour a week, and [77% of parents](#) with a child who games make an effort to play with them.

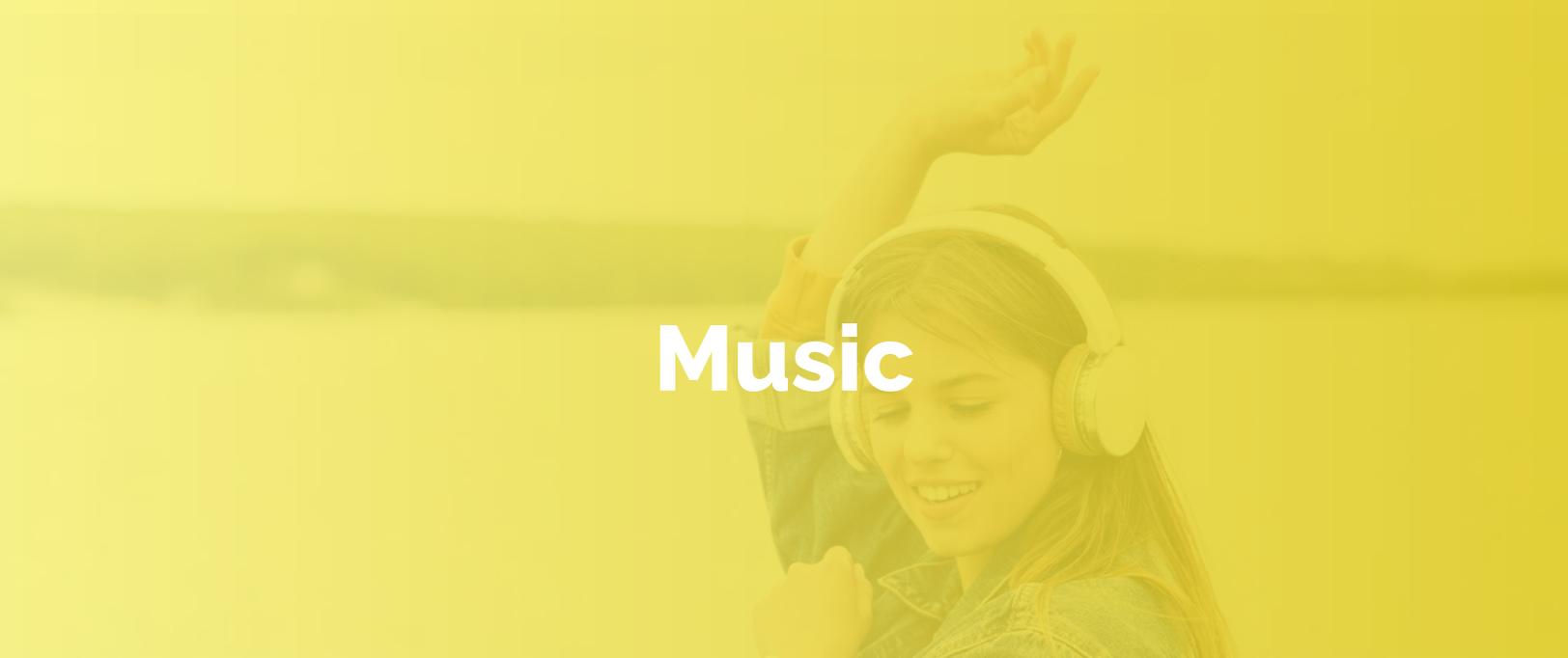
Moving forward...

Predicting the future of gaming isn't totally different from predicting the future of movies and TV—there will be standouts, there will be duds, and there will be surprises all around as to which turns out to be which. What is different is that while visual media is in a bit of a rocky place at the moment, video games are looking at no such future. Not only do the games themselves make money for those creating them (by 2025 the United States PC and mobile gaming sectors will accumulate a combined \$184.7 billion), but for those who play them professionally, like [esports competitors](#) and [Twitch streamers](#). Video games exist in arenas that simply aren't available to other media.

Given this, it's likely that 2024 will ride the wave of 2023's releases, with many games from this year offering hours and hours of playtime that might very well take players through to next Christmas. And given that the lineup for 2024 game releases already includes over 100 titles, next year might be even more exciting than this one.

With that said, it's also worth pointing out something else that makes video games a more stable industry than Hollywood, and that's the longevity of gameplay. Unlike TV shows and movies, which are only rewatched by a portion of the population, video games can take months, even years to play all the way through. Furthermore, the most popular games are ones in the MMO (massive multiplayer online game) and battle royale space like *Fortnite*, *Roblox*, and *World of Warcraft*. Since these games are always live, players can spend as much time playing them as they'd like, and continue creating revenue for the game companies with in-game purchases. Though new games coming out will always be exciting, the bedrock of the industry lies in the hands of games like *Fortnite*.

For more on this topic, check out our [Conversation Kit on Video Games!](#)



Music

As of now...

- » This year's [Spotify Wrapped](#) revealed users' love for bespoke musical experiences. While listen-throughs of albums and faithful revisits of favorite artists' discography remain foundational, the number of hyper-niche playlists like "coastal cowgirl," "pickleball-core," and "tomato girl summer," were created and replayed thousands of times. These playlists also mirrored social media trends, with "girl dinner" and "Roman Empire" themed playlists numbering in the tens of thousands.
- » 2023 was [the year of Taylor Swift](#), as the artist wrapped up her Eras tour, released the concert film, and dropped two re-recorded albums (plus "from the vault" unreleased songs, follow-up deluxe versions, remix EPs, and several singles). She rounded out the year as [Spotify's](#) and [Apple Music's](#) top artist and accumulated [six nominations for the 2024 Grammys](#), including Record of the Year, Album of the Year, and her seventh nomination for Song of the Year.
- » Latin music remains a cornerstone of global listening, with Puerto Rican rapper and singer [Bad Bunny](#) coming in barely behind Taylor Swift on the global charts, and his album *Un Verano Sin Ti* beating out *Midnights* for most-streamed. He also [hosted an episode of Saturday Night Live](#)—only the second Latino person to do so, and the first since 1977—making it the first episode to feature [as much Spanish as English](#) and reflecting the growing diversity of the American media audience.
- » Spotify doesn't release the total listening minutes across the platform each year, but estimates are that the average Spotify user [streams almost 62 hours](#) of music per year, or a little over two days. That said, some users sharing their Wrapped statistics on social media are revealing over 300k minutes, or 200+ days, of listening time.

Moving forward...

Since humans have been making music for at least 60,000 years (if [this ancient flute](#) is any indication), it's an extremely safe bet to say 2024 will continue the tradition. But there are some marked changes in today's music landscape: the availability of personal listening devices, unlimited music streaming on services like Spotify and Apple Music, and the ease with which anyone can upload their own music to YouTube, TikTok, or SoundCloud and potentially make it big has definitely changed the way we engage with artists and their songs.

The biggest recent impact on music has almost certainly been the king of short-form social media content: TikTok. Short earwormy videos aren't new; superstar [Shawn Mendes](#) got his start on the now-defunct 6-second video platform Vine ([gone but not forgotten](#)). But TikTok is significantly bigger than Vine ever was, and the likelihood that someone's ditty could go massively viral is not just high, it's got significant precedent.

Big names like Lil Nas X, Megan Thee Stallion, Olivia Rodrigo, Doja Cat, and Jack Harlow may not have [established their fame on TikTok](#), but their celebrity status was certainly cemented by clips of their songs being used in TikTok trends. Other artists owe their success to TikTok more directly, as a chorus or verse of their unreleased music struck a chord with users for one reason or another and suddenly became the backing track to hundreds of thousands, sometimes millions, of videos. The releases for songs like "[Pink Pony Club](#)" by Chappell Roan, "[We'll Never Have Sex](#)" by Leith Ross, "labor" by Paris Paloma, and "[complex](#)" by Katie Gregson-MacLeod all became almost as anticipated as the latest album from an established artist (note: several of these songs have sexual themes). Probably most famously, Jaclyn Cole Miskanic, who performs under the name Jax, wrote a scathing pop critique of women's beauty standards called "[Victoria's Secret](#)" that was so popular [she performed it on a float](#) in this year's Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

Given this, we can expect 2024 to continue this trend, with social media becoming even more of a determining factor in what music does and does not become popular. The increasingly insular ways we listen to music—with headphones on, in the car, or on a personal speaker—make social media key to music's shareability and dissemination. On algorithm and recommendation-driven streaming services, what you listen to already is what you'll have suggested to you. But social media creates a space where songs can reach anyone, regardless of whether it's their favorite genre or not. All you have to do is hop on the trend.

For more on this topic, check out our [Culture Translator newsletter](#), where we often cover current trends in music!



Mental Health

As of now...

- » Much of the best and most thorough information about youth mental health is from 2020, as broad surveys on that topic are not always conducted annually and youth psychiatry is more fluid than adult psychiatry due to children's mental development. [According to the latest research](#), 5.6 million teens have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder and 2.4 million with depression. That said, several more recent (if smaller) studies have made it clear that both issues [are definitively on the rise](#).
- » As of this year 42.5 million [adults in the U.S. are diagnosed](#) with an anxiety disorder and 21 million with depression.
- » In 2021, [42% of teens](#) reported feeling constantly hopeless, 22% seriously considered attempting suicide, and 10% attempted suicide.
- » Suicide deaths have increased by [48% in adults and 39% in teens](#) in the last ten years.
- » Suicide is the second [leading cause of death](#) for 10-14 year olds and 25-34 year olds, and the third leading cause in in 15-24 year olds. It is the [twelfth leading cause](#) of death in the U.S. overall, and in 2020 there were [twice as many suicides](#) as homicides.

Moving forward...

In a recent Huberman Lab [podcast](#), Dr. Andrew Huberman talks through what he calls the "Big 6" core pillars of mood and mental health:

- 1 getting 6-8 hours of sleep every night
- 2 sunlight exposure during the day and total darkness at night/while sleeping

- 3 getting regular exercise
- 4 eating healthy foods
- 5 maintaining rewarding relationships
- 6 learning how to control our own stress levels.

Although there are other factors that he discusses (like learning how to become assertive and how to articulate traumatic experiences), the trajectory of mental health issues in 2024 very well may have a lot to do with how well we prioritize these 6 pillars. And of course, the addictive nature of social media (as has been written about 1 million times) works against these pillars in all sorts of ways.

People have blamed social media, the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change concerns, global tumult, social justice issues, political conflict, the glamorization of mental health problems, and increasingly nebulous cultural norms and standards for the rise in mental health issues. But these are all things that happen outside of us. Summarizing research from Dr. Gabor Maté, Jay Stringer says that trauma is not something that happens *to* us, it's what "happens inside of us in the absence of an empathetic witness." In other words, how we internalize what happens in our lives, and whether we're able to process it with someone who cares, can arguably be the most powerful factors when it comes to our mental health.

Having said that, it's also very plausible that more events could happen in the next year which are hard to process, and which could cause these numbers to spike for one reason or another. The things that have had contributed to issues with teens' mental health, from TikTok to the pandemic, haven't been predicted by the public at large and were therefore harder to mitigate the impact of.

Even if we can't perfectly predict what will happen in the future that will harm teens' health, we can be aware of the trends, stay on top of the research, and be proactive about our presence in our teens' lives. It's essential that we establish a relationship with our teens that, no matter how uncertain and unsafe the world is, is infinitely more safe and more certain. And above all, to remind them that they have a place to rest in the arms of a God who is the source of safety and certainty Himself.

*For more on this topic, check out our [Parent's Guide to Anxiety](#)
and our [Conversation Kit on Mental Health!](#)*



Gender and Sexuality

As of now...

- » [A quarter of teens](#) self-identify as something other than straight or are questioning their sexuality. Of those, 12% identify as bisexual, roughly 3% as gay or lesbian, and 9% responded “other,” which included labels like asexual, queer, and pansexual, as well as “questioning.”
- » The [overall number of adults in the U.S.](#) who identify as something other than straight is 7.2%, double what it was ten years ago. This number rose steadily from 2012-2017, slightly more steeply from 2017-2020, and spiked significantly from 2020-2021. Since then it’s returned to a more gradual increase.
- » [LGBTQ+ advocates argue](#) that the actual number of people who identify as something other than heterosexual or who do not identify with their biological sex is much larger than statistics reflect and has likely not changed at all throughout history. They argue that statistics simply reflect the number of people who feel comfortable expressing their affiliated identity.
- » 10% of Gen Zers who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community [specifically identify as transgender](#). This number continues a steady generational climb, as 9% of LGBTQ+ Millennials and Gen Xers, 7% of LGBTQ+ Baby Boomers, and 6% of LGBTQ+ members of the Silent Generation identify as trans.
- » Roughly [1.6 million teens in the U.S.](#) identify as transgender: 1.4% of 13-17 year olds and 1.3% of 18-24 year olds. In contrast, only 0.5% of all U.S. adults identify as transgender.

Moving forward...

Perhaps more than anything else, the trends regarding teen gender and sexuality are inextricably linked to larger socio-cultural ideas about morality, identity, and personhood. It’s nearly impossible to discuss LGBTQ+ issues without talking about social media, religious affiliation, politics, celebrities, philosophy,

and history. In fact, a comprehensive conversation about LGBTQ+ issues should probably include Sigmund Freud, the Enlightenment, and Ancient Greece, so suffice it to say the subject is as deep as it is broad and complex all the way down.

Perhaps the clearest way to understand current LGBTQ+ issues and project the direction they're headed, especially when it comes to teens, is to identify a few things the younger generations really value. Like all postmodernists, they want to be right. Like all Americans, they want to be free. And like all teenagers, they want to fit in.

The LGBTQ+ community offers a chance to do all three. Queer individuals and groups emphasize the uniqueness of each person, but couch it in an emphasis on community, creating a space where people feel special personally as well as special in the context of a favored group. Common phrases used in LGBTQ+ spaces include things like "you're valid," "you have a right to be yourself," and of course, the use of the word "identify" when referring to sexual orientation and gender. These words imply that once queerness is who you are, then you get to be "one of us."

"Traditional American values" and LGBTQ+ tenets seem inherently opposite when considered from a conservative standpoint. And that's not entirely false; trying to explain to even the most worldly, deistic founding father what a xe/xir masculine-presenting nonbinary pansexual lesbian is might decimate them on impact. But if you zoom out to the ideas that our country has long prided itself on upholding—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all—the core values of the LGBTQ+ community sound extremely similar. The entire modern Western mindset, and especially the American mindset, has hinged on the idea of total personal independence since before our nation was formed. The difference is that while "total personal independence" had much more to do with religious liberty and freedom from tyranny for much of our history, its current evolution is easily identifiable in trends surrounding sex and gender today.

What brings these ideas together and will make LGBTQ+ issues increasingly intense and polarizing as time goes on is the postmodernist argument of the 21st century that reality is subjective and everyone can believe what they want so long as they don't hurt anyone. The only problem is that the extremism and aggression created by social media niches like we mentioned earlier has significantly narrowed what it means to hurt someone. At this point in time, disagreement with someone's chosen gender expression or sexual orientation is considered a very real harm.

Our culture's morality and philosophy is in constant flux, but if we take the current state of affairs and overlay it onto the trajectory of technology, mental health, and social media that we talked about earlier, we can get a pretty clear picture of how these things will work together to continue to isolate people and make them more lonely, and thus more desperate for communities that make them feel special and seen. The good news is that no matter what change the future brings, the truth and love of Christ is constant, consistent, and always relevant.

For more on this topic, check out our [course on How to Talk With Gen Z About Gender and Sexuality!](#)



Social Issues

As of now...

- » Gen Z and Millennials will soon comprise [the majority of the American voting population](#). The youngest voters in the last election were [overwhelmingly registered as Democrats](#).
- » Social activism [sits solidly in the hands of the youth](#), with teens, 20-somethings, and 30-somethings comprising the vast bulk of activist groups.
- » The [top ten issues teens care about](#) as of 2023 are mental healthcare, racism, poverty and homelessness, abortion, the economy, gun violence, animal rights, sexual harassment and abuse, gender equality, and education. The 2022 list included LGBTQ+ rights, climate change, and marijuana legalization, issues that are still front-of-mind for many teens.
- » Celebrities, influencers, and online content creators are [increasingly being looked to](#) and pressured for their opinions on social issues. Celebrities are [publicly contributing financially](#) to specific political candidates, either galvanizing or ostracizing many of their fans, and at the end of 2023 creators who hadn't spoken in support of one or another position in the [Gaza Strip conflict](#) are finding their careers in jeopardy, a situation reminiscent of the [2020 Black Lives Matter movement](#).

Moving forward...

Today's teens love a cause. And not in a passive or trendy way, either. There are always those whose passion for social issues begins and ends with an Instagram story post to "spread awareness," but a large number of Gen Zers genuinely think about and are concerned for the future. And to be honest, there's a lot to be concerned about.

For some teens, back-to-school supply lists [include bulletproof backpack inserts](#). [Companies responsible for massive amounts of pollution](#) pretend that individuals recycling their tin cans is the key to saving the

environment. During the pandemic, celebrities sat in their very large houses [singing John Lennon's "Imagine"](#) to remind us that we're all "in the same boat." And amidst all this danger and hypocrisy, teens still have to deal with crushes, pop quizzes, and acne like every generation before them.

Although, like crushes and acne, corruption and out-of-touch famous people aren't new, this generation sees it all happening live in the palm of their hands. Many teens go to school, hang out with friends, and try to relax alone with a quiet sense of worry about the world they're growing up in constantly in the background, the doom and despair sent directly to them via push notification. For many teens, there's a sense of fear that for one reason or another there might not be a world for them to grow up in at all.

But young people aren't letting these difficulties dissuade them. A recent survey found that when teens were asked whether they believed their generation could change the world for the better, [75% said yes](#). Though we might expect overwhelming amounts of cynicism and resignation, that's not where most teens actually are. They're aware of the world they're inheriting, and they're not content to sit by and let it pass unaided to the next generation. While much social activism is politically affiliated and some is truly contrary to Christian values, like abortion or LGBTQ+ issues, many things young people want to see happen are things that we as believers should also fight for. Care for the poor, the orphans and widows, the outsiders and foreigners; stewardship of God's creation that seeks to respect and honor the gift of nature and life; an end to meaningless and mindless violence and defense of the innocent—these are all things Jesus taught us.

For more on this topic, check out our [Parent's Guide to Talking about Politics](#) and our [7 Minute Video on Politics!](#)

Faith and Religion

As of now...

- » 30% of American adults [identify as “nones.”](#) These are people who may or may not have a personal faith life of some kind but dislike organized religion. 43% of people ages 14-29 identify as nones, while 52% of that same group identify as Christians.
- » Separation from organized religion [does not necessarily indicate a lack of faith overall](#); 43% of those who identify as nones believe in God or a higher power, and 79% of American adults believe in God.
- » [In 2022](#) only 45% of Americans said religion is very important in their lives, a decrease from 61% near the turn of the millennium. In 1948, 69% of Americans identified as Protestant (Christian was not a selection choice); current polling data reveals that the combined categories of Protestant and Christian (nonspecific) only comprise 45%. Of these, only 32% describe themselves as “born again.”
- » [75% of Americans](#) say they believe religion is losing its influence in the U.S. 77% say they have no interest in exploring religion personally in the future.
- » Social media influencers and hashtags have developed followings [around spiritual and occult practices](#), like crystals, manifesting, tarot, and spells. [#witchtok](#) and [#witchcore](#) are both extremely popular on TikTok, with videos under those hashtags accumulating 50.2 billion and 165.5 million views respectively.
- » Despite being the least religiously affiliated group, Gen Zers also have the highest number of individuals who express faith in God—[about a third of 18-25 year olds](#) say they have some kind of personal relationship with God or a higher power.
- » Gen Zers who don't identify as religious are more likely to engage in demonstrative social justice initiatives like protests and boycotts, but [less likely to identify community engagement as significant](#). Roughly half of religiously affiliated Gen Zers say they regularly participate in community service

and volunteer work and give charitably, as opposed to 16% of nonreligious Gen Zers. When asked if these activities were essential, nonreligious Gen Zers identified these activities as important, while religious Gen Zers said they are critical.

Moving forward...

When all is said and done, there is nothing in this world that is more important to understand about our teens than what they believe about God. Every other issue, no matter how trivial or serious or simple or overwhelming, comes second to discipling our teens in what it means to know and love and walk with Jesus.

The statistics about religion in America, especially among young people, can sound discouraging. But there are a few things that are important to remember. First is that religion is simply the word we use to refer to the category of organized belief, traditions, and morality that includes Christianity, but also encompasses Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism (most of the -isms, actually). A relationship with the God of the Bible is just that; a relationship. There are lots of teens who understand that, even if they're still working through what that means.

Just because a teen doesn't want to go to church every week or call themselves "evangelical" doesn't mean they're lost, just as going to church every week and calling ourselves evangelical doesn't make us saved. Adolescence is a time of self-discovery, and for teens who understand that their selfhood is also bound up in Christ, that means it's a time for figuring out who Christ has made them to be and how they're designed to live that out.

On the other hand, while church attendance in young people is dropping and fewer and fewer are identifying as religious, the kids who know what and why they are Christ followers are some of the most passionate and devout believers in the church. When cultures are traditionally Christian and things like church attendance, praying at dinner, and reading the Bible are an expected norm, there can be the temptation to let our faith be carried by tradition rather than pursued with passion. [Jesus' parable of the sower](#) comes to mind, especially the plants that grew quickly and plentifully in the shallow soil but withered when it got too hot.

Teenage believers are not growing up in a culturally Christian time. When they make a choice about what they believe, they have to do it firmly and consistently, and they have to be willing to face backlash everywhere. This can be hard for us as parents to watch—who among us *wants* our children's lives to be hard? But it is also a powerful testament to the next generation's passion, determination, and perseverance, and how amazing it is when the best of who they are is sanctified and set to action by God. This can give us hope when the world grows more painful and confusing and frightening; the darker things get, the more blindingly bright God's light shines in the lives of our children who have turned everything over to Him.

For more on this topic, check out our [One Conversation Podcast on How to Disciple Gen Z!](#)



One Conversation

They say the only constant is change, and when it comes to culture that's certainly true. The world we live in is so different than it was ten, five, one year ago—sometimes it feels like a totally different world every day. But the only thing we can actually count on is not change, it's an *unchangeable* God. Through the ups and downs of life, through the expected and the unexpected, when things feel like they're moving too fast or not moving at all, God remains the same. His sovereignty, power, and above all His love have not changed or weakened since the beginning of time, and they never will.

At Axis, our hope is that by creating some awareness about where we stand now, we can encourage you and your family to take joy in the good stuff and press into the hard stuff with faith that our changing world is no match for a changeless God. With that in mind, we leave you with the encouragement of the timeless hymn, [*Great is Thy Faithfulness*](#):

*Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father.
There is no shadow of turning with thee.
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not.
As thou hast been thou forever wilt be.*