



PARENT GUIDE



For Christian parents living in, pardon us, unprecedented times, it's hard to know what to focus on and prepare our kids for. **In a world powered by robots, where will Jesus fit in to it all?**



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2026: It's Gen Zalpha's World, We're Just Living In It

What to know

It's the dawn of a new year—but also, a new technological era. In 2025, AI crossed a critical threshold, moving beyond novelty and becoming nearly inescapable. This past year, adults began to see what many young people have understood their whole lives: these technologies will likely be the defining issue of our time.

The year 2025 shed light on how streaming, music, and social media trends will be shaped by generative AI. The influencer economy weakened. The cost of living went up, while it became harder to get an entry-level job. Sports betting skyrocketed. Mental health diagnoses rose. TikTok was banned—and then it wasn't. The Dodgers, powered by a player who can pitch as well as he hits, took a second World Series. Oh, and people still talked about Taylor Swift and Sydney Sweeney—a lot.

So what comes next? The future belongs to young people, which is not exactly a new phenomenon. But in 2026, that refers to a huge population subset with a wide spectrum of life experiences, from Zoomers who graduated from high school during the Covid years to middle schoolers tucked in for bedtime stories on YouTube every night.

The oldest members of Generation Z, the first generation ever to grow up as natives in the online world, are now 28 years old and establishing themselves in the workplace. But the youngest members of that cohort are quite young, indeed. They're kicking off high school and figuring out the basics of their identity.

The rising generation behind them, so far simply known as "Gen Alpha," is estimated to be the largest generation the world has ever seen, making up a quarter of the world's population (2 billion people). Most of them will grow up to work jobs that don't even exist yet.

In God's perfect wisdom, He gave us a story of redemption that extends to every generation, that applies to every soul around the globe, and that can't be made irrelevant by any technology. If we can engage our teens in regular discussions, we can understand what they're going through now and help them navigate what's ahead.

We put together this guide as a tool for discernment as you approach conversations with your teens this year. Learning about the culture your teens are living in is a way to show you care, as well as a quick way in to lasting, enriching conversations.





MUSIC

What to know

It will be a significant year for live music in every major genre. In K-pop supergroup news, **BTS** has reunited—for real this time—and **BLACKPINK's Jisoo** will debut a solo album. Veteran groups like **EXO** and **Big Bang** are returning, and young groups like **Dare2Dream**, **Next Hyphen**, and **NeXtrising** are beginning to expand into Western markets.

KATSEYE's story began on the Netflix series *Dream Academy*, a global talent search created through a partnership between labels HYBE and Geffen Records. Now, the band is poised for worldwide success. Blending the signature addictive hooks of K-pop with a unique storytelling sensibility, KATSEYE is proving that pop music's future doesn't belong to one country or one language. It's global, collaborative, and made for a generation that grew up online together.

Fans dubbed the reunion tour of rap artists **Dr. Dre**, **Snoop Dogg**, **Eminem**, and **50 Cent** as the “Last Supper,” a camera-free event highly anticipated by both old-time fans and a new generation of fans interested in the West Coast hip-hop legacy. New albums by chart-topping mainstays, including **Lana Del Rey**, **Olivia Rodrigo**, **Nicki Minaj**, **Louis Tomlinson**, and even **Madonna** are all in the works. Fans also predict **Billie Eilish** will have some new releases in 2026—the “Birds of a Feather” singer is already nominated for several Grammys in the new year.

Also look for a tidal wave revival of EDM, with artists like **2hollis**, **Nate Sib**, and **The Snow Strippers** achieving popular success. Stadium shows will include **Ed Sheeran**, **Lewis Capaldi**, **The Weeknd**, **Lady Gaga**, **Sabrina Carpenter**, and **Jelly Roll's** world tour.

Coachella 2026

Festival venues, including Coachella and Lollapalooza, are testing grounds where leading lights meet up-and-coming singers. Coachella, in particular, is always seen as music's biggest fashion show—and an influencer mecca.

This year's Coachella lineup—the festival's 26th year—will favor restrained singer-songwriters over loud rock; see the intimate, emotional indie-pop of **Sombr**, **Laufey**, **Bibi**, and **Dijon** for reference. Other confirmed performers include **PinkPantheress**, **FKA Twigs**, **Young Thug**, **Ethel Cain**, **Teddy Swims**, **Justin Bieber**, and **Karol G**.



FILMS & STREAMING

What to know

BookTok is making its way to the box office in 2026, with romance authors like Colleen Hoover, Suzanne Collins, and Emily Henry's novels being adapted for the big screen. Expect Hoover's *Reminders of Him* and *Verity* to be smut-heavy and messy, while Henry's *People We Meet on Vacation* offers a sweeter story with more hopeful tones.

The highly anticipated prequel *Hunger Games: Sunrise on the Reaping* tells the backstory of the beloved character Haymitch. Director Greta Gerwig (*Barbie*) has an adaptation of *The Chronicles of Narnia* that has sparked some casting controversy but is likely to draw both nostalgic fans of the franchise as well as a new generation.

Big screen and streaming releases to remember

YA Adaptations & Book-Based Movies

- *Reminders of Him*: February 13, 2026
- *Verity*: May 15, 2026
- *The Hunger Games: Sunrise on the Reaping*: November 20, 2026
- *The Chronicles of Narnia*: November 26, 2026 / December 25, 2026 (Netflix)
- *People We Meet on Vacation*: January 9, 2026

Superhero, Sci-fi, and Fantasy Movies

- *Supergirl: Woman of Tomorrow*: June 26, 2026
- *The Mandalorian and Grogu*: May 22, 2026
- *Project Hail Mary**: March 20, 2026
- *Spider-Man: Brand New Day*: July 31, 2026
- *The Legend of Aang: The Last Airbender**: October 9, 2026
- *Masters of the Universe*: June 5, 2026
- *Avengers: Doomsday*: December 18, 2026
- *The Odyssey*: July 17, 2026

Animation

- *Toy Story 5*: June 19, 2026
- *Mega Minions*: July 1, 2026
- *Moana (Live Action)*: July 10, 2026
- *Super Mario Galaxy*: April 3, 2026

Streaming series

- *Jujutsu Kaisen* (Crunchyroll/Hulu)
- *My Life with the Walter Boys* (Netflix)
- *Only Murders in the Building* (Hulu)
- *Euphoria* (HBO Max)
- *Emily in Paris* (Netflix)
- *Stranger Things* (Netflix)
- *Bridgerton* (Netflix)





GAMING

A quick recap

In 2025, we saw the meteoric rise of the “friendslop” genre with games like *Peak* and *RV There Yet?* – a trend that will probably continue into 2026. We also saw a rise in the popularity of “indie” games, including *Clair Obscur: Expedition 33* and *Silksong*. *Expedition 33*, in particular, came out of nowhere and took over the world for a month or so.

What’s you’ll see next: Delays and last-minute announcements are commonplace in the games, so it’s difficult to pin down exactly *what* will be released and *which games* are going to be huge. But let’s make some educated guesses. Fighting games are poised to take off in popularity. The release of *Marvel Tokon* (a Marvel-themed fighting game) in 2026, combined with the release of *Riot’s 2XKO* (which features popular *League of Legends* characters) in late 2025, makes it easy to make the case that this genre will be a very big deal for young gamers.

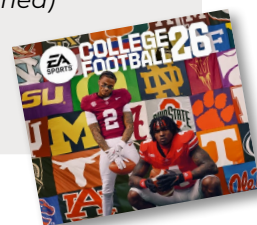
But most “big” game releases will probably pale in popularity for the 14-and-under set compared to *Minecraft*, *Fortnite*, and especially *Roblox*. Those games are the background hum of the industry right now. While bespoke, single-player experiences have their place, these continual, live-service games will be what young people continue to return to when there aren’t as many splashy new releases coming out.

Industry insiders think Nintendo has a *Super Mario* game in the pipeline, but Nintendo usually waits to announce games until three months before their release. It will probably drop around the release of the *Super Mario Galaxy* movie. Nintendo also appears to have been working on a **multiplayer game** that would emulate *Minecraft* in style and popularity. If this gets released this year, it could be absolutely massive. It’s just no one with permission to speak on the record is quite sure how far along it is.

If you take one thing away from this year, it’s that *Grand Theft Auto 6* WILL be the biggest game of the year, and maybe the biggest game of the next five years. When it is finally released, every other game on the planet will have to get out of the way or die on the vine.

2026 Big Game Releases to Remember

- *Grand Theft Auto 6*
- *Resident Evil Requiem*
- *The Duskbloods*
- *Fable*
- *Fire Emblem: Fortune’s Weave*
- *Lego Batman: Legacy of the Dark Knight*
- *Marvel Tokon: Fighting Souls*
- *Marvel 1943: Rise of Hydra*
- *Marvel’s Wolverine*
- *Slay the Spire 2*
- *Call of Duty (currently unnamed)*
- *EA FC*
- *NCAA Football*



STYLE

What to know:

In 2026, **style is everything**. And by that we mean... style can literally be everything.

Teenagers have fully embraced seeing themselves as an avatar of sorts, assembling a magpie personal aesthetic made up of borrowed bits and bobs from various decades and then committing to that bit. Flared jeans from the thrift store can co-exist with a \$70 White Fox hoodie. A silk blouse from Zara with a giant bow goes great with oversized barrel jeans. And chunky boots with a retro plaid miniskirt work just fine with a cropped tee shirt and hair thrown up in a big claw clip.

Our cool-girl-on-campus trend reporter told us to expect a pendulum swing from maximalist aesthetics like “mob wife” and **back to the simpler silhouettes** of the early 2000s, so have your high ponytails and tracksuits ready to go. (Let’s call it **modern minimalism**). Young women are open to playing with proportions, embracing barrel jeans and an off-the-shoulder crop top for a relaxed look, but opting for a corset top and fitted skirt for a night out.

One thing that Gen Z and Gen Alpha are not shy about is dressing up—they want **a look that appears intentional, well-groomed, and put together**. For girls’ hair and makeup, curtain bangs, glowy skin, classic red blush, and bold lip colors remain “in,” while layers of pink blush and visible contouring are becoming less of a thing. For boys, take a look at dominant athletes to know what’s trending—a well-styled mop-top, bleached or permed curls, or hair worn long-ish in a wolf cut are all on trend.

A unifying theme of fashion this year is **making your look personal—by bringing in your fandom**. We’re not talking about Yankee hats and band tees, *necessarily*. When you want everyone to know you’re a fan of *Wicked* but you can’t come to school dressed as Elphaba, there’s a cottage industry of cosplay lite—character references and symbols embedded in everyday looks. (Think of a hoodie with the *Minecraft* pattern, but no *Minecraft* reference to be found.) It’s IYKYK fashion, and it’s everywhere.

When you lose your place in a conversation about clothes with your teen, remember: “drip” is a great outfit, if it’s “buns,” it looks bad, and “tuff” is actually good, trust us.

Trend Cheat Sheet

GIRLS

- Miniskirts
- Chunky loafers
- Lace-up boots
- Corset-style tops
- Oversized crew necks and hoodies
- Mini backpacks
- Dainty dresses
- Choker necklaces
- Bows

GUYS

- Nike and Adidas sneakers
- Burnout-style graphic tees
- Elevated hoodies, sweatpants and joggers
- Preppy polos
- Classic trousers
- Utility brands (Ex. Carhartt)
- Light denim jeans





SOCIAL BEHAVIORS

What to know

Offline is the new online. Social media usage **peaked** in 2022 and has been in steady decline ever since, with young people first to abandon ship. In late 2025, Gen Z activists **hosted** a “Delete Day” in NYC’s Tompkins Square Park, where attendees chose an app to delete and then had a phone-free party. One of the organizers was Nick Plante, an “attention activist” who told *Business Insider*, “We’ve realized how weary we are, how screen-addled we are, and we’re taking stronger steps together to do something more lasting about it.”

What you’ll see: Teens will continue to see offline connection points as just as, if not more valuable than, digital communities. But that doesn’t mean they’re all preparing to throw their smartphones into the sea. Teens are online to an obscene degree— but so are the rest of us. Ian Bogost of *The Atlantic* even argues that the term “screentime” should be discarded since at this point, for most of us, it pretty much just means “being awake.”

According to the **Pew Research Center**, 15% of teens say they are on YouTube “almost constantly,” while 16% say the same about TikTok. (Interestingly enough, 2026 is **projected** to be the year that YouTube beats out cable to become the top-paid TV distributor in the US). According to Pew’s data, teens from families in higher income brackets were less likely to report high social media use, and teens in urban areas were more likely to spend more time on screens.

What to watch out for

In 2025, there was a **huge surge** in reports of cybercrimes against minors— including financial sextortion, online enticement, and child sex trafficking. Parents need to prepare teens to encounter bad actors online. As soon as teens have access to a device where anonymous adults can contact them, your family should have a plan that encourages honesty, transparency, and safety when it comes to using these devices.

Gen Z is notoriously risk-averse, with binge drinking cratering among younger people. But that doesn’t mean they aren’t experimenting with substance use. Emergency rooms are seeing more and more reports of Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome (CHS), a dangerous reaction to cannabis caused by chronic, long-term use.

Trust in traditional news outlets is at an all-time low, as reported by Gallup. Young people in particular don’t even seek out news from cable or print legacy outlets. Instead, they scroll until the news they are interested in finds them via their algorithm. This makes them less likely to see a distinction between vetted, fact-focused sources and opinion.



SLANG

Every year at Axis, we update our comprehensive list of over 100 slang terms. But there are always a few terms that stick out from the rest; a few new terms emerge that really strike us as notable, memorable, or important.

Here are a few of the slang terms that defined 2025 and are sure to keep floating around in 2026:

- **Ate:** Slang for executing a task absolutely perfectly, particularly in the phrase, “ate and left no crumbs.”
- **Bop:** An insult meant to describe a promiscuous girl (Ex: She’s a bop.)
- **Chat:** Refers to ChatGPT or any AI search engine
- **Get sandy:** Commit wholeheartedly to an activity
- **NPC:** Non-playable character; a derogatory term for someone who mindlessly follows the crowd
- **Temu:** The online retailer famed for cheap knockoffs is now used as an adjective to describe anything that looks better online than it is in real life
- **Zoo-wee-mama:** A term that escaped from the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series and is now used ironically, or sincerely, to describe a great outfit, an attractive person, or something else you’re excited about

What to remember

Meaningless memes and slang that pokes fun at the utter brainrot that the social media landscape has become will likely continue to migrate into the real-life lexicon (see how “6-7 became 2025’s [Dictionary.com](#) “Word of the Year”, and who can forget, “doi doi doi”). Usually, these terms have been harmless, but keep an eye on our Parent Guide to Teen Slang for red flags.

**ZOO-
WEE
MAMA!**



Outro

Thanks for reading through our preview of the year ahead. We hope you can **use this material to get quick wins throughout the year.**

Return to learn the names of buzzy bands, trending topics, and a few notable slang terms. Maybe use it as a gift guide or surprise them with concert tickets. Remember: if you want to talk to your teen about what matters to you, start with what matters to them.

If you only get have to have one conversation with your teen, make it one that will last a lifetime.

Conversation starters to kick off the year:

- What do you think the year 2025 will be remembered for?
- What's something you think people got wrong when they made predictions about culture last year?
- How do you think you might change this year?
- What should our family focus on together this year?

What's Axis up to in 2026? BIG things.

More Conversation Kits. More research on the topics shaping your teen's world. More Parent Guides. Weekly podcasts and YouTube episodes. And, of course, The Culture Translator.

Here's the thing: **Axis is 100% crowd-supported.**

That means resources like this guide exist because of generous people like you—those who believe in equipping parents, grandparents, mentors, coaches, and ministry leaders to build lasting faith in the rising generation.

Research shows parents are the greatest influence on a teen's faith, yet less than 2% of teen ministries focus on strengthening family connection. Axis bridges that gap with Christ-centered tools that spark meaningful conversations, build trust, and help families grow in faith; *together*.

If this mission resonates with you, consider giving to Axis. This is more than a gift. It's a lifeline—for a parent, for a teen, for a family

2026

