

Who Am I – Teen Identity

Interviews with teenagers

Emma: How do we work out who we are? Where do we get our identity?

Teen A: *Right now, no, I don't think I know who I am.*

Teen C: *I thought I did. But then a couple of things happened, and then all of that kind of just went out the window. And I'm still trying to, I guess, find my way back to figuring out who I am,*

Emma: When I was a teenager, I struggled to feel like I belonged anywhere. I felt like no one really knew the real me. Least of all myself. And I was super anxious and shy because I was worried if I did show everyone who I really was, no one would like me. They'd think I was weird, or annoying, or not funny, or smart enough. And the worst thing was, I thought I was alone in this feeling. I thought most other people my age had worked it all out, or else didn't even think about these things at all. But then I discovered that wasn't true. In fact, almost everyone I know was still working it all out.

Now that I'm in my mid-twenties, I look back at my teenage years and think about the great opportunities I had to explore who I was, who I wanted to be, and what I valued.

So, I decided to have a chat to some teenagers about their own experiences of working out where they fit in in the world and what has shaped them so far, and where they see faith and belief in something bigger fitting into their lives.

So, my first question is, how would you describe yourself?

Teen A: I would say that I'm kind, but then I also think that I can be a bit crazy. Like, I've got a hidden personality.

Teen B: Funny, weird, little bit mature, quite laid back. Always try to bring a bit of humour into my life. I always love making the people around me smile, as much as possible.

Teen E: I would say I'm creative. I can be a little bit crazy and upbeat, and I can also be very mothering.

Emma: How would you define identity?

Teen B: What you are, like your values. The way you look, the way you act. Maybe what religion, what food you like.

Teen E: Identity is the person that you are inside.

Teen A: It is a hard question because everyone has different things that they would react to that because we're all different. So, I'm going to say your identity is your personality and who you feel that you are.

Emma: Being a teenager can be a confusing and difficult time for many reasons, especially because there can feel like there's so much pressure to work out who you are and where you fit in in the world. I'm talking to some teenagers today about where they find their identity and asking them to be honest and a little vulnerable about what kinds of things they're passionate about.

Teen C: I just always have felt that I always love making people smile.

Teen E: I love cooking and I love the environment. And also teaching people and educating people on things that I love.

Teen D: Definitely protecting my friends. Like, my friends are my family, they're my number ones. My education is a big one; that's my passion.

Teen A: I find it's very important to have a belief in your life. Coming from a public school, I've realised that it's something that's not talked about enough, and when it is, then people, I guess, are a bit scared to talk more about it. So, they either mock it, or they just don't want to hear anything else about it. But, if I didn't have it, then I don't know, you know, how I would get through lots of things.

Emma: And what would you say are some of your values?

Teen D: Being respected. I like to be treated the way that I treat other people. Being inclusive is a big one too. Like, I try to include everyone around me, even if I don't like them.

Teen A: Being kind as much as I can. Treat everyone how I would want to be treated. Respecting everyone. No matter where they come from and who they are.

Teen C: Manners is a really big one - always just try to be as polite as possible. Respecting elders, and loving everyone as much as we can,

Emma: Okay, so, you've answered a lot of questions about yourself and your passions and values, but do you feel like you know who you are?

Teen B: Eight out of ten. Most of the time.

Teen E: I think that I know some of it, but I also know that I'm going to discover more of myself as time goes on. And I'm excited to discover who I am. But also to like, look back on my past and realise how much I've grown in myself, and my beliefs, and my relationship with God.

Teen D: I would say I've changed a lot over the past two years. If you met me two years ago, it's like, that's not the same person.

Emma: And do you feel like you know who you are now?

Teen D: Yeah, definitely.

Teen C: I thought I did. But then a couple of things happened, and then all of that kind of just went out the window. And I'm still trying to, I guess, find my way back to figuring out who I am, what I want to do, what my place is in this world, and what place I have in God's kingdom and what plans he has for me.

Teen A: maybe like two or three years ago, I would have been like, "yeah, I know who I am." But then I guess school and friends and just teenage years, you know, things come into your life. People go in, people come out, and they kind of mess around with who you think you are. So right now, no, I don't think I know who I am.

Emma: Do you feel like your friends and family really know you?

Teen B: Yeah, they probably know me better than I do myself. Especially my grandma and grandpa, they're wise.

Teen E: My parents do. And My close friends, yes.

Teen A: No, I don't think so.

Teen A: I would have said about three years ago, yes. But, if I don't know who I am, then I don't think they'll be able to know who I am either. They might see me as the outgoing, crazy person at youth group, or they might see me as the closed up quiet person in class. Well, my parents probably see every single other aspect of my life.

Emma: And can you tell me, do you have any places where you feel accepted as you are? Where, you know, you don't have to try and be someone else?

Teen C: Yeah, so big ones are church and youth. Youth especially, there's a really lovely community of people there that are always so welcoming and supportive. They've really been helping me, which is great. There's a couple of families that are really, really close where I found that I can just crash at their place just and completely be myself. I could have done something horrible, but they'll always just be there to support and love me. And same with my family. I love my family. Again, I feel I can just be myself around them.

Teen A: I just feel very accepted at youth, no matter what I'm going through. And if I feel like my life is falling apart, then I'm still going to go to youth group because I feel like I'm still gonna smile.

Emma: For me, when I was a teenager, my Christian community and a personal relationship with God played a big role in shaping me, giving me confidence and showing me that there's people who do love me for who I am, and a God who created me this way and he loves me too.

But I wanted to hear from some current teenagers about whether having a faith has helped *them* in learning about who they are and finding belonging.

So how has faith shaped you?

Teen C: A big thing for me is the faith that even if I do stuff up, even if I do lose myself, I know that I've always got God to rely on. He's a firm rock. He's always going to be there. He's always there when we need him. He's always listening. And yeah, that faith is just kind of get, kept me going. Cause it's like, well, if I do stuff up, I know that he still loves me and I know all is going to be right in the end.

Teen A: For me, it helps me get through my life. And if I didn't have it, then I don't know how I would get through lots. I mean, sure, I have times where I go through rocky patches in my faith. I would say I'm going through one now. And that kind of messes up with my feeling of identity, I guess. But I think that just tells me that I do find identity in my faith. And if I'm having a rocky patch in my faith, then I'm going to struggle with pretty much every aspect of my life.

Teen E: I wasn't very faithful my younger years. I did get baptised because my mum's side of the family and dad's were very religious, but they never really carried it on. And then I went to a Lutheran school for the first time and really learned what it was to have faith and who God was. And then they kept giving me opportunities to learn more about God and discover what a modern church is, not just the church that I had in my head.

Teen D: I was one of those kids that, as soon as I started school, I got into the wrong group of friends. And being in that wrong group of friends, you get in the wrong kind of things. I was such in a dark place, like I was really clouded, I reckon, and going through all these traumatic events, you know, is kind of like, there ain't gonna be no God. Like, why would God put someone in this place? He knows the stuff I'm gonna go through. Why would he allow it?

So, I turned away from God for a very long time. My mom didn't believe in it, nor my sister, my dad doesn't believe in it. And I looked in the mirror one day in my room after going through a massive argument with my dad and I looked at myself and what I really was. And I didn't want to be that person.

And I was on the edge of ending my life when my teacher - she's one of the leaders at Lutheran Church - sat down with me and she was like, "you're a champion. God's got a special plan for you. You've gone through all this pain, all this suffering. He's gonna help you. He's going to be there for you. He can't just let someone suffer like that for so long."

And I was like, yeah, right, whatever. Everyone says that. Everyone says God's got a plan for me. But I still go through stuff every single day.

But I said to Nan one day, "let's go to church." I remember sitting down and listening to music, like, doing worship and just seeing everyone so happy and so calm when they're dealing with their own problems was really satisfying to me.

When you really believe in it and you really are in a dark place and you go to church for that first time, time stops. It stops completely.

You listen to the music, you listen to what they're saying, and they're reading stuff from the Bible. And to have something, like, speak to you directly every single page you turn. It's like, this is a purpose, it's almost like a reminder: God will be with you. And that's powerful.

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