

Ministering With Gen Z

Thinking Generationally

Why Generations?

Whether you're a Boomer, Gen Xer, Millennial, or Gen Z, your generational identity influences the way you see the world. Instead of letting these differences be a source of tension, we want to learn how to cross generational cultures to build deeper connections with each other. By doing so, we can effectively minister together with our current and future campus demographic—Gen Z.

Three Distinctives of Gen Z

Gen Z (sometimes referred to as "iGen" because of their heavy usage of devices like the smartphone) are distinct from previous generations for these three reasons:

Individualism	Safety	Mental Health
Gen Z tends to be less communal than previous generations. They are creative and embrace difference through slang, fashion, social media usage, and artistic expression. However, this does not necessarily make them a more independent generation. Like Millennials, they'll enter adulthood later than their Gen X or Boomer counterparts.	Gen Z cares a lot about making sure others feel safe. Part of this is due to having grown up in an increasingly diverse society as well as seeing violence and terrorism unfold live online and even in their schools. Underneath the value of safety is a desire to see everyone valued and included. When correctly exercised, this can be a gift in ministry.	Mental health issues such as depression and anxiety seem to be higher among Gen Z. The rise of social media and prevalence of smart phones may be powerful contributing factors. Yet, Gen Z is also more self-aware and likely to name and address mental health issues than previous generations.

Putting Generational Theory in Practice

Reaching Out to Gen Z

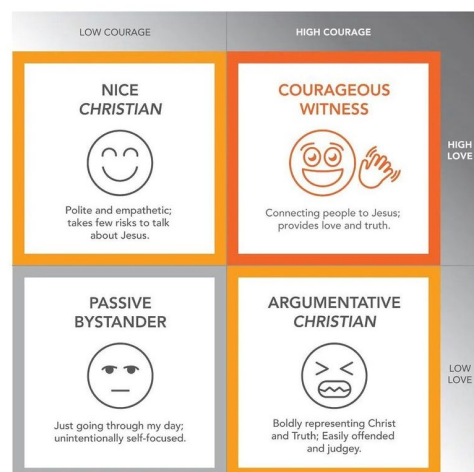
Because we want to reach Gen Z students and faculty with the Gospel, it's important to adapt our methods of outreach, discipleship, and leadership. What worked for a previous generation, may not work for this one. How does this look practically?

- **Kill the Bait-and-Switch** – Trust is important to Gen Z. Don't lure them to your ministry with free food without being upfront about who you are. Honesty will go a long way.
- **Ask Safe and Brave Questions** – Gen Z appears to be a more sensitive generation. Still, you shouldn't be afraid to challenge them. They are less religious than any previous generation, but they long for meaningful connection. Create safe spaces without compromising the power and beauty of the Gospel.
- **Prioritize Self-Care** – Be open and encourage openness with your Gen Z students and faculty. Ask them to share their struggles and check in to see how they're doing physically, emotionally, and spiritually.
- **Be Directive** – While Gen Z is very individualistic, they are not as independent as other generations. When leading them, make sure to set clear and specific expectations. Even though they may need more guidance in the beginning, your extra support will eventually help them thrive.

Evangelism with Gen Z

Witnessing without love devolves into argument. Recent research from Barna and Focus on the Family show that rising polarization in Gen Z has led to an increase in people who radically and combatively hold their faith. On the other extreme, we can slip to a shallow niceness that preserves a tolerant space at the expense of authenticity. The mirage of safe space starves students and faculty of real human connection for which they long.

Dr. Twenge found that the radical individualism of Gen Z creates a dynamic where their first move in the religious space is to give you room to believe whatever you want. **The default entry attitude of Gen Z is acceptance, not aggression.**



Trends in the University World

In the last few decades, universities have bulked up their services dedicated to mental health, and the terms "safe space" and "trigger warning" are a part of everyday language. These are real indicators that this generation has very different needs from the ones before it. Having said that, our ministry has a great opportunity to meet those needs.

Reach out to a campus administrator and let them know that you're supporting and mentoring students and faculty. Ask how you can help the university care for students and faculty. Offer to buy them lunch or to pray for them.



Coaching Gen Z

Affirm Before Challenging Gen Z

But don't be afraid to do both.

- **Affirm Gen Z in their strengths** – Too often in the media or in popular literature, Gen Z is caricatured with negativity and criticism. We don't think these depictions are true nor are they helpful in coaching Gen Z. Affirming and honoring their strengths is a great place to start.
- After you affirm them, **don't be afraid to also challenge** them also to release hyper-individualism in favor of healthy community and to step into difficult conversations, even when it feels uncomfortable.

Questions You Should Start Asking Gen Z Today

Who is missing?

This question will utilize their strength of inclusivity to welcome more people to community.

How are you doing, really?

This question will honor their value for self-care and mental health.

Ask other generations to think deeply about what they can learn from Gen Z, as well as what they can teach Gen Z. This will help to foster intergenerational curiosity and appreciation.

Related Resources

- [Con Confianza](#)
- [iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy--and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood--and What That Means for the Rest of Us](#) by Jean M. Twenge PhD
- [Love and Courage IV](#)
- [Real Life: A Christianity Worth Living Out](#) by James Choung
- ["Understanding & Honoring Gen Z"](#) by Mikee Golingo
- ["What I Learned From Gen Z's Faithfulness During the Pandemic"](#) by Tom Lin

Recommended Courses

- [Dealing with Anxiety](#)
- [Ministering Across Cultures](#)
- [Reaching Out to New Students](#)
- [Sharing the Gospel](#)
- [Understanding Human Sexuality and God's Big Story](#)

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