

HOW TO BECOME A trusted adult

BY ELLEN B. KONECK

27% of young people have
**one or fewer adults in their life
that they can turn to if they
need to talk.**



31% 18-to-25-year-olds



19% 13-to-17-year-olds



As we approach the end of the school year and faith formation programs (and a remarkable year at that!), it is helpful to pause and reflect on the importance of your role and presence in the lives of children. It has no doubt been a difficult year in many ways, and one that might leave you feeling like you didn't do enough, didn't teach enough, didn't connect with families enough, didn't celebrate enough. But this year, perhaps more than any other, the most important marker of success



in your ministry and work isn't programs attended or communications sent. The most important aspect of your work is becoming a trusted adult in the lives of children. Young people today are experiencing epidemic levels of loneliness—many report a sense of isolation, the feeling that no one really knows them, or the experience of always waiting for someone to call, text, or reach out.

These reports of loneliness were happening *before* COVID-19, which brought with it the requirement to social distance, shelter in place, or move to online work and learning, no doubt exacerbating an already difficult time for many young people.

Springtide™ Research Institute, a sociological research institute dedicated to listening to the inner and outer lives of young people, conducted research around this sense of loneliness. Our data is unique because it extends down to 13-year-olds; we are interested in finding out how they navigate questions of meaning, identity, and community as they move from adolescence into adulthood.

19% of 13-to-17-year-olds report they have one or fewer adults in their lives they can turn to if they need to talk.

In our landmark study of over 10,000 young people, *The State of Religion & Young People 2020: Relational Authority*, we identified alarming trends.

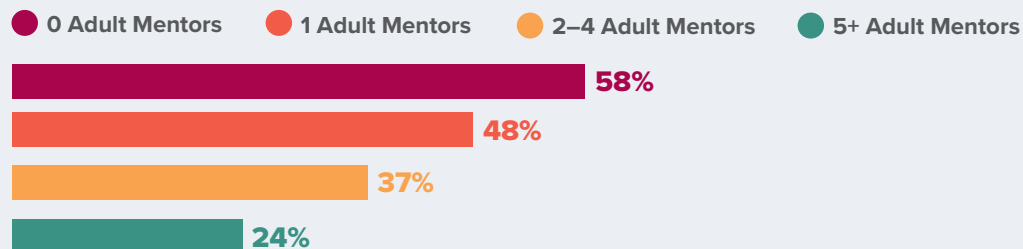
This is staggering. As a teacher or catechist of younger children, this statistic may register as important but irrelevant to your ministry. And yet **it underscores the importance of your role in the lives of the children entrusted to your care.** Relationships are not only important—they are essential. While children need to learn appropriate information and progress in their education, what they need most from you is a recognition that you care. The most important aspect of your ministry is to build relationships so that you become a trusted adult in the lives of children. In becoming a trusted adult, you are then able to be a model of faith and the voice of Jesus for young children.

How can you make sure young people know they can turn to you? How do you make yourself a trusted adult in their lives today?

We know that relationships make all the difference when it comes to combating loneliness and adding a sense of meaning and purpose to a young person's life.

Having adult mentors reduces loneliness

Percentages of young people who responded "sometimes" and "always" that feel they have no one to talk to




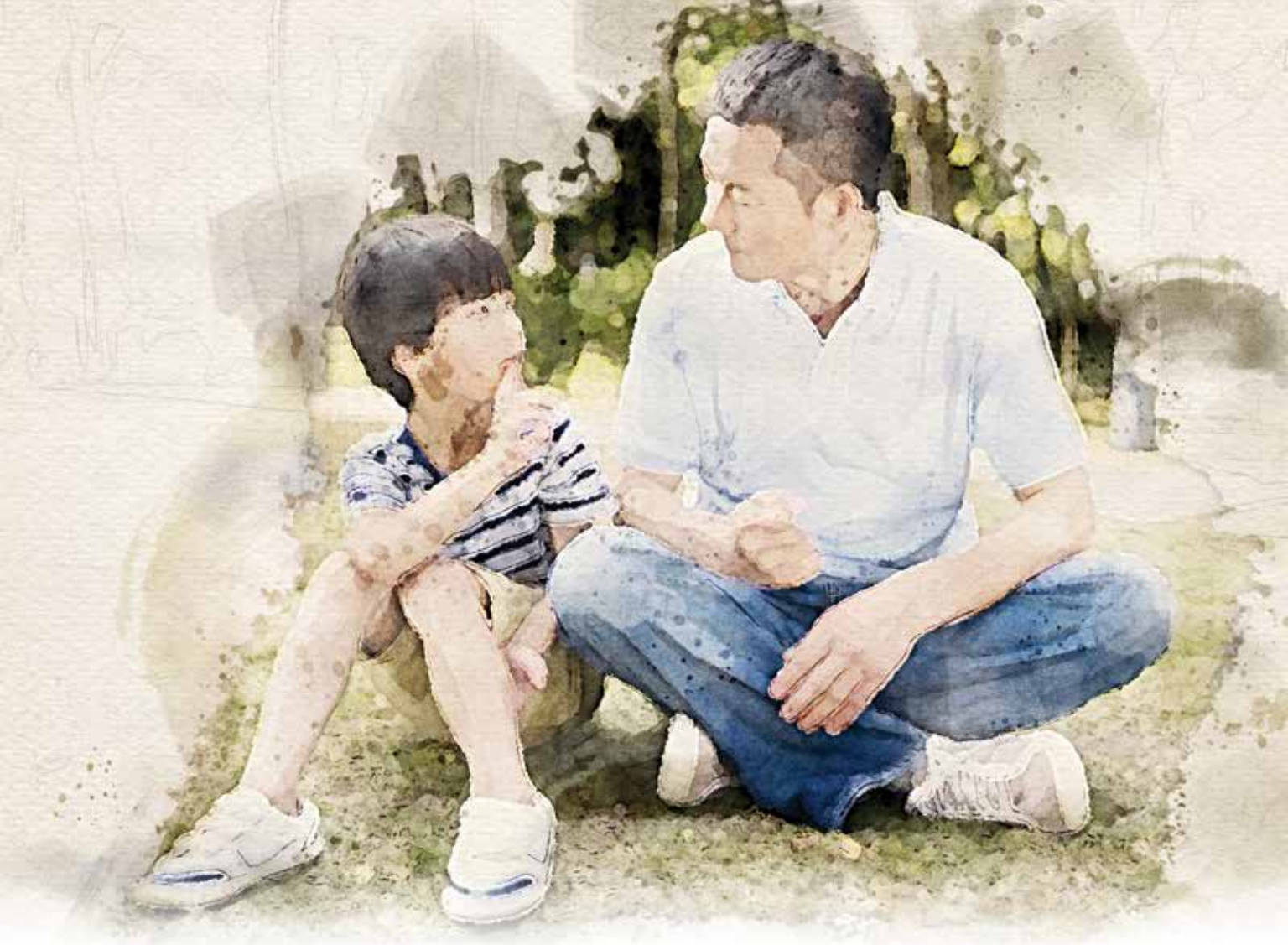
Simple practices can help build trusting relationships. These practices are rooted in data: they are the things we've learned young people respond to and respect when it comes to forging new relationships. One important practice of relationship building is simply listening.

84% of young people ages 13–15 say they will **trust someone who remembers what they shared.**

82% say they will **trust someone who takes the time to hear what they have to say.**

Here's an easy Springtide *Tide-Turning Tip* to show you're listening and to remember what they've shared:

 **Tide-Turning Tip:** Follow up by asking questions to clarify or repeating what you heard as ways to help your recollection. If your conversation is about actions, jot down notes as a way of showing your intention to follow through.



As a catechist or teacher of young children, the relationships you establish now are foundational for the development and support of the religious lives and human needs of the children in your care. In these days of COVID-19, take a moment to step back and assess your year in light of relationships and the ways you have become a trusted adult in the lives of children. While knowledge of the faith is important, know that it is also the relationships you have built that will have a long-term positive effect.



Get your free copy of *The State of Religion & Young People 2020: Relational Authority* at springtideresearch.org. You may also like *The State of Religion & Young People 2020—Catholic Edition*. Ellen Koneck is the head writer and editor at Springtide Research Institute.



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