

# Youth define spirituality in terms of positive behaviors, connections

June 21 2010

---



A University of Missouri researcher is examining how youth define and practice spirituality separate from religion. Defining spirituality can help reveal its impact on adolescent development. Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Few studies have examined the differences between spirituality and religion in adolescents. Now, a University of Missouri researcher is exploring these differences by determining how youth define and practice spirituality separate from religion. Defining spirituality can help reveal its impact on adolescent development. Initial findings reveal that youth define spirituality in terms of positive behaviors, feelings and relationships.

"Ultimately, we want to determine the impact of spirituality on positive youth development, including self-esteem and pro-social behavior, and if

it buffers against negative or risky behavior," said Anthony James, a graduate student in the MU Department of Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS). "To begin that research, we first need to identify how youth define and practice spirituality."

James examined adolescents' responses to the question, "What does it mean to be a spiritual young person?" The responses reveal that youth describe their spiritual behavior in terms of seven categories related to personal and social development, including:

- To have purpose
- To have the bond of connections, including those to a higher power (typically God), people and nature.
- To have a foundation of well-being, including joy and fulfillment, energy and peace
- To have conviction
- To have self-confidence
- To have an impetus for virtue; for example, having motivation to do the right thing and tell the truth

In addition, James created an "unable to define" category. The category includes responses, "Not sure," or "I don't know," from youths who self-reported being "spiritual." This reveals that there may be a disconnect between classifying oneself as spiritual and defining what that entails, James said.

"Although the assumption is that many people are 'spiritual,' spirituality

is not something that is easy to articulate and define," James said. "People have a hard time separating spirituality from religion, but the differences are important to understanding behavior and development."

The study, "Preliminary findings on qualitative exploration of children and youth's conceptualizations of spirituality," was presented at the 2010 Northwestern Black Graduate Student Association Conference. Data consisted of Missouri youth's responses from wave 6 of the national 4-H Study on Positive Youth Development, headed by Richard Lerner of Tufts University. James will use the present findings to further evaluate how [spirituality](#) is related to positive and negative behaviors in youth. James works with the MU Extension 4-H Center for Youth Development and is advised by Mark Fine, HDFS professor in the College of Human Environmental Sciences.

**More information:** The study, "Preliminary findings on qualitative exploration of children and youth's conceptualizations of spirituality," was presented at the 2010 Northwestern Black Graduate Student Association Conference.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

Citation: Youth define spirituality in terms of positive behaviors, connections (2010, June 21) retrieved 25 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-06-youth-spirituality-terms-positive-behaviors.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--