

# Most US Teens See Examples of Religious Faith in Public Schools

Seeing expressions of religious faith in public schools is common for U.S. teens, according to a report published by Pew Research Center on Oct. 3.

Respondents ages 13-17 were presented a list of five faith expressions:

- Wearing religious clothing or jewelry
- Praying before a sporting event
- Inviting someone to religious youth groups or services
- Praying before eating lunch
- Reading religious Scripture during the school day (not as part of a class)

A majority (67%) said they see at least one of these “often or sometimes,” with 26% seeing one expression often or sometimes, 33% (two or three expressions) and 8% (four or five expressions).

The most common religious expression observed by U.S. teens is “wearing clothing or jewelry with religious symbols,” with 53% saying they see this in their public schools often or sometimes.

Prayer before a sporting event was the second most visible expression, with 39% of respondents observing this often or sometimes.

The other three expressions were less common: inviting someone to a religious gathering (26% often or sometimes), praying before lunch (16%) and reading Scripture (8%).

Evangelical Protestant teenagers were most likely to wear religious clothing (38% did so often or sometimes), pray before lunch (39%) and invite friends to religious services (43%).

They tied with Roman Catholic teenagers for leaving school to attend religious activities (10%).

Teacher-led or school-sponsored prayer was declared unconstitutional in the 1962 Supreme Court ruling on [Engel v. Vitale](#).

Despite this decades-long precedent, 8% of all teen respondents said they have had a teacher lead a prayer in class.

Respondents in the South were most likely to say this had taken place (12%), followed by those in the Midwest (7%), West (6%) and Northeast (2%).

Pew asked respondents to share their perspective on whether teacher-led prayer is constitutional and whether it is appropriate.

Responses varied by tradition, with evangelicals being most likely to say it was appropriate (68%), compared to 41% of all U.S. teens.

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Evangelical teens were slightly less likely (79%) than the national average (82%) to affirm that teacher-led prayer in public school was unconstitutional, though this is within the 6.6% plus or minus error margin for the sampling group.

“Roughly half of teens who attend public school (53%) know that teacher-led prayer is prohibited and also find the practice inappropriate,” the report noted. “At the same time, roughly three in 10 (29%) know that it is unconstitutional but say that it is appropriate for a public schoolteacher to lead a class in prayer. Smaller shares think that teacher-led prayer is both legally permitted and appropriate (11%) or that it is permitted but inappropriate (4%).”

The full report is available [here](#). Topline results are available [here](#).