

# Young Adults Face Mental Health Issues in 'Emerging Adulthood'

A little condescending, yet precisely accurate.

That's how I feel about "[emerging adulthood](#)," a new term used by researchers and psychologists to describe a new stage in life between adolescence and adulthood.

People in "emerging adulthood" have left adolescence but haven't fully become adults. They are still exploring identity, self-focusing and living with deep instability.

In the past, people were considered adults at certain life milestones: marriage, degrees, children and so on.

But as these milestones get pushed deeper and later into life, the uncertainty in the lives of young adults makes it difficult to plunge fully into adulthood.

Hence the term "emerging."

This new stage both causes and is caused by emotional, financial and spiritual challenges.

Over the last 10 years, cases of psychological distress in young adults have increased by over [70%](#). Student debt has risen by [56%](#).

The emerging adult is dealing with family transitions, new relationships, establishing authority and capability and cementing an identity.

All of this is on top of mental health problems that generations before never faced, at least not at this rate and intensity.

Considering all I have experienced in my few years of adult life, I find it slightly condescending to be called an "emerging adult."

Since I turned 18, I earned two degrees, I got broken up with, I started paying all of my own bills, my parents separated, I got a full-time job, I fell in love, my mom died, I became an aunt and the world entered into a pandemic.

I'm not married, I don't have kids, and I don't feel 100% solidified in my identity and calling. But does that mean I am not a "full adult"?

The "emerging adult" statistics ring true for my life. I've dealt with anxiety and depression at a higher rate, and I'm experiencing adult milestones later than my parents did.

I've struggled with mental health, spiritual questions and existential crisis. But I also believe that the young adult generation's commitment to authenticity and depth has allowed me to truly deal with my complex emotions and hardships, allowing myself time to emotionally prepare for some of life's larger milestones.

Years ago, it may have been normal to base "adulthood" off life milestones. This just isn't true anymore.

And trying to force young adults into that mold simply increases anxiety and unhealthy comparison patterns on a generation that is already dealing with a lot.

Rather than people, parents and churches pushing us into old molds, young adults need mentors who allow them to embrace uncertainty.

We need mentors who encourage us to explore our options through contemplative action and spiritual discernment.

If we learn anything from this pandemic, it should be that we don't need to be rushed in a society that already moves too fast.

Up until about the fourth century, Christians were persecuted - often viciously and violently - in their communities.

However, under the rule of Emperor Constantine, Christianity received governmental support, leading to many converts and widespread corruption.

As Christianity grew, early Christians disliked the worldly, oppressive and accessible nature the religion was taking.

Some people who wanted something deeper and purer were drawn to monasticism as anchoritic or cenobitic monks.

Anchoritic monks lived a hermit lifestyle, a result of fleeing from the corruption of society. They lived in solitude so they could focus on and develop their inward life.

Others became cenobitic monks, or communal monks, and started small societies that focused on internal disciplines. The communal monks would work to hold each other accountable and spend time in fellowship and communion together.

In “Seek First the Kingdom: Orthodox Monasticism and Its Service to the World,” Bishop Kallistos Ware says, “Monastics are not so much an exception or an aberration but rather an example to the whole church.”

The practice of monasticism is long-lived for a reason, and it can speak to our lives now as we navigate quarantine, mental health and faith questions as young adults.

Monasticism offers a unique way to go about life, with a deep focus on the internal life, the will of God and spiritual practice.

It looked different from what others were doing, but that does not mean it was less valuable. It offered depth over accessibility and normalcy.

As young adults, we face challenges unique to our generation, alongside the normal struggles of adulthood.

Our mental health issues and spiritual questions are real and important; we should take the time to face them, to get to know ourselves and to learn to love God.

By seeking emotional authenticity and spiritual depth over what is expected of us, we free ourselves up to be the people God created us to be, not the people society expects us to be.

*Editor’s note: This article is part of a series this week for Mental Health Awareness Month. The previous articles in the series are:*

[\*How Coronavirus Affects Your Mental Health and What You Can Do\*](#) | Cate Schilling

[\*Despite ACA, Not All Insurance Provides Mental Health Care\*](#) | Monty Self

[\*7 Issues Your Family Must Navigate During COVID-19 Crisis\*](#) | Kristyn Arnold

[\*Maintaining Clergy Mental Health Proves to be Complex Puzzle\*](#) | Elizabeth Denham Thompson