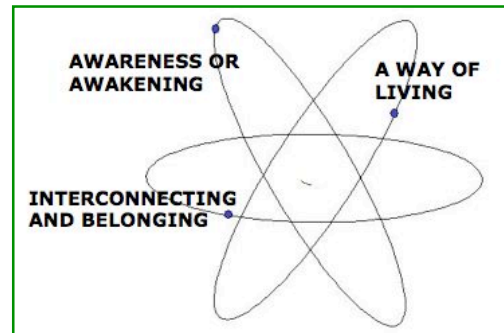


## What Is Spiritual Development?

*At Search Institute's Center for Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence, we have been working to create a framework for understanding spiritual development that can be widely affirmed across cultures, traditions, disciplines, and worldviews. To do this, we have reviewed research, conducted focus groups on several continents, and engaged in a consensus-building process with 118 international advisors. Our research to test the framework is just beginning, but we offer the following "beta version" of a framework to advance mutual understanding.*

Spiritual development is, in part, a constant, ongoing, dynamic, and sometimes difficult interplay between three core developmental processes (which are emphasized differently in different cultures and traditions):

- **Awareness or awakening**—Being or becoming aware of or awakening to one's self, others, and the universe (which may be understood as including the sacred or divine) in ways that cultivate identity, meaning, and purpose.
- **Interconnecting and belonging**—Seeking, accepting, or experiencing significance in relationships to and interdependence with others, the world, or one's sense of the transcendent (often including an understanding of God or a higher power); and linking to narratives, beliefs, and traditions that give meaning to human experience across time.
- **A way of living**—Authentically expressing one's identity, passions, values, and creativity through relationships, activities, and/or practices that shape bonds with oneself, family, community, humanity, the world, and/or that which one believes to be transcendent or sacred.



These dimensions are embedded in and interact with other aspects of development; personal, family, and community beliefs, values, and practices; culture and sociopolitical realities; traditions, myths, and interpretive frameworks; and significant life events, experiences, and changes.

This framework suggests that spiritual development is a core developmental process that occurs for all persons, regardless of their religious or philosophical beliefs or worldview. Young people engage in these processes in many different ways with different emphases and levels of intensity (from highly engaged to passive). And many young people tap their own culture or religious tradition's belief systems, narratives, and community to give form to this process.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Roehlkepartain, E. C. (2008, March). Seeking common ground in understanding spiritual development: A preliminary theoretical framework. Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute. Available at: [www.spiritualdevelopmentcenter.org/DefinitionUpdate](http://www.spiritualdevelopmentcenter.org/DefinitionUpdate).

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