

Parenting Tools:

- Do You Believe In...? -



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Parenting Tools: Do You Believe In...?

From “New Parent Power!” by John Rosemond

Let’s approach this topic in a question and answer format.

Q: I have a five-year-old daughter with whom I feel I have an open and trusting relationship. The problem, that I am at a loss to deal with, involves my religious views. Through family members, kindergarten, and friends my daughter is exposed to a belief system that I do not share. I am not necessarily opposed to this, but I feel reluctant to share my religious views with her for fear that, if she repeats my thoughts and ideas, she will be ostracized at a time in her life when she is not able to deal with it. And yet she is beginning to ask me questions. In the past I have responded to questions with, “Yes, lots of people believe that.” Now, she asks, “Do you believe it?” How do I maintain the openness we have without endangering the relationships she has with others?

A: More important than the need to protect your daughter from having differences of opinion with other children is her need to know exactly where you stand on these issues. At this time in her life, her need to identify with you takes precedence over peer affiliations and peer approval. You are her primary role model, and she is consciously striving to pattern herself after you – your behavior, your interests, your ideas. She looks to you to set the standards and wants only to follow your example. And, yes, she will identify with your beliefs and claim them as her own.

You are also her primary source of security and will continue to be for the next seven years or thereabouts, as she goes about finding a comfortable place for herself within her own generation. Before she ventures into new social territory, however, she must have a

blueprint for behavior, and the directions must be clear. She depends on you to show her the way, but in this instance, it sounds as though she's having some difficulty reading you.

If you make it difficult for her to pin you down (remember, she doesn't know that you are trying to protect her), she will become hung up on the question, "What does Mommy believe?" The evasive quality of your answers will frustrate her and stimulate feelings of insecurity. In an effort to reduce her anxiety, she will fixate on the religious issue until you clarify matters for her.

Furthermore, she may interpret your discomfort as a sign that you are ill at ease with your own beliefs – that perhaps you feel something is wrong with them.

Answer her questions. I would suggest, however, that instead of telling her what you don't believe, you answer her primarily in terms of what you do believe. Keep in mind that five-year-old children cannot understand philosophical abstractions. Explain your beliefs clearly, concisely, concretely and for the sake of trust.

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