

Think about it this way: would you present both sides of an issue and let your child make a decision when the topic was something obviously harmful like smoking? Probably not. What about dental care, or hitting people, or lying? Do you take a stance on those subjects? If so, then by not taking a stance on religion you are telling your child that religion isn't as important as health or morality or ethics.

And who thinks religion is less important than any of these things? Atheists, that's who. By treating religion as an open choice, you're not teaching religion generously, you're teaching atheism ambiguously — and giving your child a false impression of how important religion is in some peoples' lives.

Bringing up your child as an atheist doesn't imply being dogmatic about it. Tell your child what you believe about religion, just as you would about any other topic. If you emphasize skepticism and thirst for knowledge, your child will have plenty of opportunity to make informed decisions as the years go by.

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# SHOULD I CALL MY CHILD AN ATHEIST?

A Question of Moral Atheism

*from blog.iamanatheist.com*



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If you do this, are you treating religious beliefs differently than you treat other kinds of beliefs? If you say, "Some people believe God made the world," do you also say, "Some people believe a witch can bring death with a curse" or "Some people believe cats can suck the breath out of you when you sleep"? When your child needs to go to a doctor to get an uncomfortable shot, do you point out that some religions think the procedure is unnecessary? Do you treat all religious beliefs equally, or do you give preference to those that are prominent in your culture?

Some parents try to expose their children to a variety of religious beliefs so that the child can decide whether to be religious or not.

## LET THEM DECIDE

Atheism belongs in this last category. Does your child believe in deities? No? Then your child's an atheist. If you're worried about stereotypes that go along with the word, then avoid using it, but it seems intellectually dishonest to call yourself an atheist but not call your child an atheist when neither of you are religious.

I read a blog by a parent who said, "We're atheists but our children aren't. We don't label our children." It's true that labels — popular, ugly, poor — can be harmful, particularly when they are subjective or loaded with stereotypes. It's also true that some labels can't meaningfully be applied to people too young to make informed decisions — pro-choice, chaste, Democrat. But there are labels that are unambiguous statements of fact, like female, diabetic, or American.

## NO LABELS

SOME ATHEISTS, PARTICULARLY those who were raised in a religious family or community, are concerned about imposing philosophical beliefs on children. They worry when they see how some religious people bring up children, not allowing them to hear other viewpoints or interact with "nonbelievers" so that they will grow up with strong, unquestioned faith. Atheist parents may try to avoid what they see as damaging dogmatism by not raising their child as an atheist. But does that make sense from a moral, developmental, and educational standpoint?

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# QUESTIONS OF MORAL ATHEISM: INSTRUCTIONS

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1. Print pages one and two of this document, one on each side of the same piece of paper (if you don't have access to a duplex printer, print page one, put the page back in the paper tray upside down, and print page two — depending on the type of printer, you may have to experiment a bit).
2. Cut the printout in two, using the thin rules across the middle of the page as a guide.
3. Fold the two pieces of paper in half, making a pair of small pamphlets.
4. Keep one of the pamphlets to read, and give the other away to an interested friend or stranger.

That's it! If you have any questions, suggestions, or comments, we invite you to share them by leaving a comment on [blog.iamanatheist.org](http://blog.iamanatheist.org). Thanks!

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