

Religious tolerance in my house means my rules

My family does not eat red meat during Lent. Most Christians believe we have to make some sort of sacrifice just like what Jesus Christ did on the cross. Some even fast to atone for their sins. Where I'm from in the Philippines there are even some people who participate in the reenactment of Christ's sufferings. They feel the whips on their backs, on their feet, and even on their hands as they are crucified. There are countless processions with otherwise normal businessmen, teachers and policemen who have taken it upon themselves to walk for miles to grottos and other religious places to visit the seven stations of the cross. There's even a practice where people don't shower on Good Friday after 3:00 pm until Easter Sunday.

I grew up catholic and followed a lot of traditions and practices during the weeks leading up to Easter. Lent was not an option for most of us raised in the catholic religion – we did it because we were told to do it. But where we were a generation that accepted our fate, kids are now empowered by the Internet and their friends to say no to principles that go against what they feel to be correct.

But what I do in my house my kids must also do. We ask for forgiveness for our sins every day. We also stay away from red meat for health purposes. We shower every day for hygienic purposes. I explain to my children why we do these things, whether religious in nature or not. An open dialogue is the best way to keep your kids in line and participating. Cutting off questions by saying, "Because I said so" or "God says so" does not work. A better answer would be "Because we believe these rules in our life, both spiritual and practical, make for a happier life in the long term."

But "NO" does have a place in my house. There are laws and then there are options. As long as they're living under my roof there will be no debates on what I consider laws. What they do outside with their friends I can't always control, but when participating in my life there are requirements my kids must follow, similar to the rules they must follow at school and the rules I must follow at my work. The trash gets taken out. We bake bread for the soup kitchen every week. We say our prayers before bed.

Nonetheless, it is important to be open to the questions kids have about religion. Today's kids are not as timid as we were about asking lots of questions. But respectful discussion about religion is not always easy, so it's that much more important to teach our kids how to have good natured conversation when discussing religion with friends or strangers. Here's a few basic rules:

- No hurting yourself or others
- No changing people's minds
- No criticizing other values
- No bias against other religions or lifestyles
- No intolerance of difference
- No mixing religion and politics
- No assumptions

For me, the path to living an adult Christian life necessitates good spirited debate about the morals and practices of our churches and other Christians. To understand the flawed nature of humanity is to understand the challenges we all face in our churches, synagogues and mosques. But this understanding starts at home. By practicing basic rules of etiquette outside our house I hope my children will continue their spiritual journeys to help them lead an inclusive and productive life. We have a responsibility, at least, in preparing our children to do so.