

Should I force my child to go to church?

My son does not decide whether he will go to church or not. I know that as parents we have a responsibility to allow our children to grow and choose their direction in life, allowing them to succeed and fail by their own direction. We won't have a hand in many decisions he'll make in life – sexual orientation, career paths, higher education or who to marry. But when it comes to our kids' faiths should I force my child to go to church?

Hell, yes.

Many of us have bad memories of being forced to go to church because an adult made us. Of course we all need to learn to have a willing relationship with God, but no matter what your belief system is – and I'm going to put aside the ridiculous idea that atheism exists as a childhood discipline – I believe we are responsible as parents to force our children into what we think will be good for them. But here's the big caveat in this forced inculcation – I won't force him to "believe." That's something he'll have to decide for himself. Instead, what we are enforcing is the family practice of visiting our church on Sunday mornings and during other times of the week when our spiritual community demands. It is a well known [fact](#) that kids who are raised with the structure of going to church are more likely to stay in school. Regardless of denomination, kids are 40 percent more likely to graduate high school and 70 percent more likely to enroll in college than their peers who were not forced to go to church.

School is not much different. We force our kids to go to school in the morning, although we don't believe our kids are going to be forced into acknowledging that higher education is the path to happiness. Much of what they learn in school they'll come to question and disagree. Although many kids will ultimately decide church is not for them later in life, we can enforce the idea that by exploring and learning about our institutions that we believe are good, then they will learn to live with others in our society who believe the same thing.

I think it helps that the church where we go does not approach spirituality as a purely religious discipline. There is community, beneficence, altruism and values taught by the people who shake hands at the door, smile when they hand out candles and ask how things are going.

Although I do think I should force my child to go to church, I will not force my child to pray. We believe that churches should be open and welcoming to all, so choosing a church that supports our value system is at the heart of the decision whether I should force my child to go to church.

~~Bumpkin anti-helicopter parenting explore this philosophical quandary through his own journey. Nonetheless, we do study the bible together, we do study history together, we do practice spelling together, and we definitely study the sciences together. We talk about our faith and discuss the beliefs of different religions. He will know the truth about different religions and that they can be accepting and good for those successful citizens within them. Perhaps one day he will have a choice to follow one of those religions, just as one day he will have the choice to keep going to school or not. But while living under our roof, he'll go to church with us.~~

By enforcing responsibility instead of religious dogma, I am giving him the ability to discern the difference between spiritual choice and our responsibilities to family and community.

I want him to experience freedom that I never experienced before. I want to give him options. I want him to know that no religion can ever save us. It is our personal relationship with family AND God that matters.

Now, he goes to church with us every Sunday. It just feels wonderful that the whole family goes to church together. He even joins us every Saturday for the music ministry practice, playing the beat box during the Sunday service and participating actively in the children's special number that is a part of the service every other Sunday.

There are many things that can feel forced about childhood. Discipline is a matter of give and take between parents and kids. It feels so good that I can see him develop a deeper relationship with God on his own initiative by presenting him with the opportunity to do so. While I don't force God on him, I do force him to be with our family and friends. That's nonnegotiable.