

## RELIGION EXPERTS COLUMN

*Below is my response to the question provided for the Ask The Religion Experts feature in this Sunday's Ottawa Citizen. We hope this will generate thoughtful discussion of real-life applications of Buddhadharma and deeper understanding for us all.*

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Sunday, April 1, 2012

**Q** : Some people say children should be left to make up their own minds about religion. Do you agree?

**A** : Kids will pretty much make up their own minds no matter what. As parents or community leaders, the challenge for us is to help them do so wisely. As in most aspects of working with kids, we need to strike a balance between hands off and hands on, that is between encouragement and guidance, on the one hand, and pushing and over-structuring, on the other. It hardly needs saying as well that we need to set a good example through our own faith lives.

We need to provide several things. They should receive information and resources appropriate to their learning and age. Whatever literature, cultural elements and social practices need to be available, open to question as well as honestly celebrated. We need to provide the critical skills to support them in evaluating such resources for their lives. Its never enough to tell kids (or anyone) that such and such is the right and only way to see things. We must not threaten, guilt or shame them into acceptance and compliance.

As any parent or teacher knows, children's needs change and evolve with their age, and as leaders, we have to respect that and try to meet them where they are, inviting them into the faith space that is appropriate to them.

I always recall the experience of Eleanor, one of the children of some members of one of our congregations. As a toddler, she was invited to

join in and find her own space, as her parents participated. No one excluded or made her feel out-of-place. Once she arrived at adolescence, she decided to stay away from services, although her parents continued. When she reached her late teens, she re-discovered what the community, the teachings and practices meant, on her own terms. She returned as a fully participating young adult and pursued it for her own needs. She was never bullied, criticized or disrespected, rather helped to discover her own meaning. This seems to represent a good model to pursue.(insert)

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:: om namu amida butsu::*

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<http://www.ottawacitizen.com/life/ask-the-religion-experts/index.html#>  
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