

When children ask about God, some parents at loss for words

Dear Abby: I would like to respond to "Agnostic Dad in South Carolina," who wondered about how to answer the inevitable "Is there a God?" question his children will ask. My parents had strong but differing Christian faiths. They compromised when bringing us up, and we went to the church nearest our home (another denomination). Further, when we were teens, they allowed us to "sample" other religious traditions to determine what would suit us best.

I became agnostic, and like "Dad in S.C.," was unsure what to tell my son. My husband and I do not belong to any organized religion and didn't take him to church as a youngster. Instead, we introduced stories from the Bible at bedtime, and allowed him to attend his friends' churches when he asked to. More important, we showed him that all people are to be valued and that differences are to be respected.

Our son is now in his late 20s. He's a gentle, caring person with an interest in people from other cultures, religions and circumstances. Whether he is agnostic, religious or an atheist is a personal matter to him. He's comfortable with his beliefs and



Jeanne Phillips
Syndicated advice columnist

Dear Abby

doesn't impose them on anyone else. As a parent, I couldn't ask for more. — Free-thinking Mom in Washington

Dear Mom: Thank you for writing. Many readers were eager to offer guidance on this subject to a fellow parent. Read on:

Dear Abby: Despite eight years of Catholic education, I'm an atheist. My wife is a Lutheran. We've never argued about it because we feel everyone has a right to religious freedom. We have three sons, whom she took to church and Sunday school regularly with my complete support. We discussed in advance what our answer should be when the God question came up. Our response was: "Some people believe there is a God and others do not. You will get a sound religious education, and when the time comes, you will decide for yourself."

Our sons are now adults with families. Two are religious; one is not. At family meals we join

hands and say grace. Some recite it — some just listen — and everybody's happy. — Harmonious in Illinois

Dear Abby: There is no problem for "Agnostic" and his wife to "handle." If his children ask if there's a God, he should model honesty for them and say what he thinks. So should his wife. If the kids get two different answers, they will learn that not everyone shares the same opinion. Suggesting that "Dad" not express his view plainly, without input from his wife, amounts to recommending that they collude in providing a dishonest answer. — Emeritus Professor of Philosophy in Iowa

Dear Abby: My husband and I are agnostic parents of two adult children, both of whom are tolerant, open-minded and decent people. My advice to "Dad" is to read some of the excellent books that are available about discussing God and religion with children. He should also look into the Unitarian Universalist church, which does not push any one creed but encourages people to find their own beliefs in a supportive environment. — Nancy H. in Texas

— Write to Dear Abby, P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069, or www.DearAbby.com.

Dr. Peter Gott's medical advice column appears Tuesdays in the Health & Fitness pages of Life and all other days on the Advice page.

School locker is not teen's castle

Dr. Wallace: I am shocked that our high school administrators conducted a "surprise" locker search. They opened every student locker without student permission. The word around school is that the administrators were looking for drugs. We are not sure what was found, but several students were suspended.

Don't students have the right to privacy as provided by our Constitution? Did our administrators break the law? A lot of us think that they did. We attend a private school. Does this make a difference? — Nameless, Chicago.

Nameless: Though teens have constitutional rights, the fact remains that young people cannot do everything that adults are able to do. According to a 1985 decision by the Supreme Court, if school officials have a reasonable suspicion of illegal behavior that might cause harm to any student, lockers can be searched without student permission. It makes no difference if the school is private or public. At the public high school where I was an administrator, we never conducted an all-school locker search, but on several occasions, individual student lockers were searched with the



Robert Wallace
Syndicated advice columnist

Between 12 & 20

student present, with or without, his or her permission. The safety of the student body is paramount, and if searching a locker without a student's permission can ensure their safety, it must be done!

Dr. Wallace: Will you please tell me when a person is considered to be an alcoholic or chemically dependent? My boyfriend's brother has a real problem with alcohol and drugs, but my boyfriend says his brother is not addicted. I sort of think he is addicted. — Nameless, Lake Charles, La.

Nameless: "Alcoholism: A Treatable Disease," a brochure published by the Johnson Institute, puts it succinctly: "If the use of alcohol or other chemicals (drugs) is causing any continuing disruption in an individual's personal, social, spiritual or economic life and the individual cannot or does not terminate the use of the chemical, this constitutes

harmful chemical dependence. Alcoholics are also chemically dependent."

Dr. Wallace: Our father played basketball in high school, and from what I've heard, he was pretty good. I'm 14 and have a brother who is 10. Our dad is forcing him to play for a team in a league for 10- and 11-year-olds. My brother is overweight, uncoordinated and a very poor player. He also hates sports.

Our dad won't let him quit because he doesn't like "quitters." My mom and I think that my father is doing my brother an injustice. Do you agree? — Nameless, Seymour, Ind.

Nameless: Sports are a wonderful way to get exercise, learn teamwork and enjoy the thrill of competition. But the main reason to participate is to have fun. Your father is taking the wrong approach. Forcing someone to play is unwise and will most likely make your brother hate the game even more than he already does. Dad needs to figure out how to encourage his son to participate in activities that your brother might enjoy and be successful in.

— Write to Robert Wallace at rwallace@galesburg.net.

College student attends Catholic retreat Posted by Marie Schoettle

The Inter-Collegiate Retreat for the Catholic Diocese of Savannah was recently attended by Paula Collado, a student at the College of Coastal Georgia, Brunswick. Her participation was sponsored by C3M, the outreach of local Catholic parishes to college students and by St. Ann's Yard Sale Store, Darien. Pictured are **Margaret Vasquez**, C3M volunteer, **Paula Collado**, **Helen Almeter**, diocesan director



of campus ministry, and **Mark Joseph**, a missionary with the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS).

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STAR Foundation holds graduation Posted by Peter Boyton



Graduation ceremonies were recently held for the STAR Foundation. Seventeen students completed the eight-week program learning about computers and becoming proficient with Microsoft Word and Excel. Job readiness and soft skills are studied, as are financial management and goal setting. Seven of the students attended every day of class and attained certificates of perfect attendance. Registration is required to enroll. For additional information about the program, stop by the training facility at 1907 Gloucester St., Brunswick, call

554-0540 or go to the website at www.starfoundation.org. Pictured are, **Tiffany Whitt**, from left, in front, **Monica Holland**, **Natashia Ellis**, **Curtissa Frazier**, **Rolana Davis**, **Annie Cooper**, **Cashonna Johnson** and **Katie Orrell**, instructor; and **Shenequa Wallace**, from left, second row, **Jasmine Dallas**, **Wendy DeLoach**, **Ellen Murphy**, director, **Juanita Johnson**, **Terri Chambliss**, **Cathy Berrian**, **Regina Williams**, **Arschell Lane**, **Gary Frierson Jr.** and **Necheshia Carter**.

School choirs get recognitions Posted by Jim Weidhaas

The Glynn Academy Concert Choir and the Glynn Middle School Chorus performed for a panel of judges at the Georgia Music Educators Association Large Group Performance Evaluation recently at Ware County

High School, in Waycross. Each group received straight superior ratings from the panel, including a superior rating in sight-reading. Glynn Academy and Glynn Middle School were the only two of 14 choirs at the

competition to earn straight superior ratings. The Glynn Academy Concert Choir is directed by Nathaniel Roper; the Glynn Middle School Chorus is directed by Leslie Jackson.

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