

FIVE WAYS TO ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD'S SPIRITUALITY

by EDWARD HOFFMAN

Every child is born with an innate spiritual essence that parents and relatives, educators and clergy – indeed, anyone involved with youngsters – can do much to enhance. Because we live in a society whose mass media and public institutions generally denigrate our higher qualities, it is crucial that we become active in this domain. Here are five general principles – by no means all inclusive – for nurturing your child's spirituality in everyday life.

1. **Actively expose your child to nature.** As visionary poets like Blake and Wordsworth were aware, closeness to nature during our early years can have a profound effect on our spiritual development. If you live in a city, take your child on frequent trips into the countryside throughout the seasons to better experience the subtle rhythms of life. Strengthen your child's daily bond with nature by encouraging care for pets or plants. Become involved in helping raise a garden or even a windowsill flowerbox.
2. **Affirm your child's imagination and sense of wonder.** Mystical teachers have always insisted that imagination is a vital tool for inner development, yet nowadays most schools and other institutions dampen this natural, vibrant quality in children. Recognize that by praising your child's fantasy and imaginative play, you are doing something quite important. Reading bedtime stories – or creating your own together with your child – is an excellent way to foster imagination.
3. **Whether you embrace a formal religion affiliated with a church or synagogue or a completely personal creed, maintain regular rituals in you home.** These rituals can be as simple as lighting candles or blessing the food at your dinner table. The crucial thing is that they be meaningful expressions of your own spirituality and give you a heightened awareness of the transcendent that surrounds all things.
4. **Encourage your child to share his or her dreams with you.** If you show a genuine interest in your child's dreams, he or she will learn to value them and heed their messages for direction throughout life. In this regard, your day-to-day encouragement is more important than specific guidance in interpretation. Allow adequate time each morning for your child's recollection and subsequent discussion.
5. **Always listen to your child as fully as possible.** Certainly, in our fast-paced and technological world, it is not always easy to find quiet moments. We all get tired or irritable with loved ones from time to time. But safeguarding your child's natural spirituality requires putting aside time each day to hear about his or her joys, triumphs, and frustrations. Avoid artificial "let's sit and talk now" situations. Instead, call it "art time," and let each of you draw pictures or engage in crafts while sitting at the same table. Or simply go for a long walk together, away from intrusive distractions. Such moments honor the special relationship you have with your child and, ultimately, honor the divine spark

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