

It's never too early to foster kids' faith

My 3-year-old is getting smarter, which means it's time for religion lessons.

He still hasn't made the connection between a wonderful device called the potty and the uncomfortable mess in his pants, but he has managed to figure out how to operate the remote control so that Winnie the Pooh magically speaks Spanish.

Bedtime now has become Religion 101, which is much more difficult for this theology graduate to teach than I thought.

I'm afraid he might be terribly confused by now, attending both a Jewish and Unitarian preschool. Our house resembles a children's multifaith museum, with colorful Sukkot baskets and Stars of David made from construction paper decorating his room.

"David," I say in my semiserious don't-get-down-from-the-table-yet tone of voice, "do you know who God is?"

He gives me a blank stare. This speech-delayed toddler uses his words very sparingly, so I'm not expecting a lengthy discourse on salvation history. I just would be pleased if he recognized the name



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Our Turn

of God outside the context of rushed words before pizza and chicken tenders, at bedtime after a few rounds of "The Hungry Caterpillar" and in the hard pews at church on Sunday.

"Think basic, very basic," I tell myself, looking around his bedroom. My eyes fall on his humongous stuffed Nemo, the fish from the blockbuster movie "Finding Nemo."

"Do you see your big Nemo?" I ask David. "God made him."

Now, even in my sleep-deprived state, I realize that Nemo was probably manufactured by a few underpaid workers in China and that in a few months or years David will ask about the "Made in China" tag. But

in an effort to get down to his level, I go with it because, in my mind, everything comes from God, whether manufactured in China or the United States.

He looks at me, confused.

"Actually, Nemo came from Toys-R-Us," the smart man of house injects.

I'm not amused. This could get complicated.

"Nemo just lived at Toys-R-Us for awhile before Daddy brought him home," I explain.

Enough with the fish.

"David, who gave you your heart?" I ask. We've recently been making the connection between a person's heart and love.

"Warren," my little guy responds. My husband and I look at each other and smile. Warren is our 60-year-old neighbor who watches him an hour or two a week and spoils him with new matchbox cars and T-shirts and shorts. Every time David has something new, he assumes it comes from Warren.

"No, David. God gave you your heart."

I try once more before adjourning the first session of this class.

"David, who gave you your baby

sister?"

"Dr. Brown," he says, so matter-of-factly that I can't help but laugh.

In my attempt at an innocent Reader's Digest version of the birds and bees, I had spoken to David about the role of my obstetrician, Dr. Brown, in Katherine's delivery six months ago.

"Yes, David," I explain, "Dr. Brown pulled out Katherine. But God made Katherine. And you. And me. And Dad."

"Oh," he says.

I may be getting somewhere. But he's pulled that fake "Oh" before, like when I told him that socks don't need to be microwaved and his blankie doesn't need to be refrigerated.

According to recent studies, children have a clear concept of God by the time they go to school. By the ages of 2 to 4 their sense of morality already is formed.

This means Religion 101 needs to meet every night until God is the answer to at least three out of every four questions, and his name becomes as familiar as Nemo.

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