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Coming clean about Santa

When should you tell your child 'the truth'?

by [Sylvia Anderson](#)
Sunday, December 21, 2008

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When Corrine Gregory's daughter turned 12, her husband felt it was time to tell her the truth about Santa. As far as they knew, she still believed in the jolly old elf with a beard as white as snow who knew if she had been good or not. Mrs. Gregory is the founder of the SocialSmarts program that teaches kids and parents about social skills and character education. Although she had worked with children on a variety of tricky subjects, she struggled over whether she should "come clean" about Santa.

Usually children start asking questions around second, third or fourth grade, says Debbie Kunz, coordinator of the St. Joseph Parents as Teacher program. But how and when you handle it depends on a number of factors.

"For some families, it's so much fun to play Santa, sprinkle out the reindeer food and put out the cookies," she says. "So why should you crush that whole moment

by being too realistic?"

And a child believing in Santa doesn't have to conflict with Christian beliefs, says Erin Boyd-Soisson, professor in the department of Human Development and Family Science at Messiah College in Grantham, Pa.

"If you look at Santa from a family traditions perspective, Santa is a tradition that most Christian families have and something that connects these families across time," she said. "Santa is also supposed to be a symbol of the love, caring and giving that represents the birth of Jesus and the anticipation and hope of Jesus. In that way, it could help Christian children relate to the true meaning of Christmas."

So should you come clean when your child asks for the truth about Santa?

"If the child is probing you, I think the best answer is honesty," Mrs. Kunz says. "Reflect it back to them. Find out where they are and what kind of answer they want and only answer their question. Let them continue to ask questions and answer what they ask."

That way, if the child has heard children at school talking about Santa but still wants to believe, you haven't crushed his spirit, she says.

When Mrs. Gregory finally talked to her 12-year-old about Santa, her daughter was shocked a bit. But Mrs. Gregory turned it around so she was now part of the "secret" and could help with the fun with her younger siblings. Mrs. Gregory says having the talk about Santa also is an opportunity to impart some great life lessons, not just kill off a dream.

"Santa is the symbol of that selflessness, of that graciousness and that giving of one's self," she says. "This is really what the holidays are supposed to be about. And if we are smart, we won't leave it just for the holidays and use that joy and love as a seed all year round."

Lifestyles reporter Sylvia Anderson may be reached at sylviaanderson@npgco.com





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Posted by MichaelH on December 21, 2008 at 8:19 a.m. (Suggest removal)

I have a hard time believing any 12 year old believes in the Fat Guy.

I guess it's possible, I just didn't think it was possible to shelter an individual to such an extent in the information-age.

Tell 'em when they start asking.

Posted by azmaggie on December 21, 2008 at 8:37 a.m. (Suggest removal)

I had a cousin that claimed to believe until she was 13 because she would get better presents! Her mother was the only one that she scamed.

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