Take It or Leave It

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Most Metropolitan State University students are mature enough to understand what it means to be responsible; but for those of you who think you’re ready to become parents, you might want to think again. Some folks out there might have told you that you need to map out your entire life plan, comb through it to remove any potential kinks, and *then* figure out the best time to raise a family. That works, but honest parents will tell you that there’s never a perfect time to have children. And they’re right. You could plan for years by saving every penny, reading all the highest-rated parenting books on the market, and even finding the perfect name for your firstborn; but reality will prove that you can never be prepared enough for the responsibility—the *commitment*—it takes to safely and adequately care for a child.

Parenting also comes with innumerable teachable moments that you can’t just brush aside. You probably already know that it would be your responsibility to guide your youngsters throughout life, holding your arms out just far enough to keep them safe, while also making sure that you help shape them into the adults they will become. Notice the word “help” in there. You’re not shaping them with your own hands and beliefs; you’re helping them shape themselves. After all, it’s not *your* life, is it? So anything beyond “helping” your child would be considered controlling—and that’s just not cool. Some of you might think that controlling your children isn’t such a bad thing. But it is. Take religion, for example.

Just last night, my six-year-old son, a kindergartener, told me that his classmate told him that god made the sky. “God who?” I asked, disdainfully. “You know, the one who made the earth and everybody in it,” he claimed. “There is no evidence of a god, so zip it,” I told him, before immediately realizing that I had just found myself almost guilty of the very thing I despised about the situation: indoctrination. As someone who doesn’t believe that we have a creator, based on years of my own research (call me atheist if you wish, but I don’t really care for labels), I was angry that someone—although indirectly, no doubt, since it was *probably* just another kindergartener—had tried to indoctrinate my child. Sadly, I would no longer be able to protect my son from the burden of the myth of eternal damnation.

No big deal, you say? My Christian family thought it was appropriate to take me to church every Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night, from birth until my early teen years, because they thought they were doing the right thing. They wanted me to be branded with their religion so that they could reunite with me in their golden afterlife. Pretty sweet, right? Absolutely not. I love my parents but those actions were selfish. Their controlling behavior created another follower of Christianity by ingraining their biblical principles into my youthful mind without even bothering to ask me if that was something I wanted. Of course they weren’t going to ask me. I was just a child. Most of you might say that children don’t know what they want. Well, that’s right because they’re too young to make important decisions. So how could they possibly be old enough to understand what religion might bring about in their lives? This is why it’s absolutely outrageous to assume that it’s acceptable to scoop them up and deliver them to your church without allowing them to decide for themselves whether attending services—or even believing in a higher power, for that matter—is something they want to take part in. What if they want to study Buddhism and just try to live a peaceful life without joining some sort of congregation, or what if they want to read about the lack of evidence for the existence of a higher power and simply live a happy life without following the rules of some book sent down from an alleged creator? Would you really want to deprive them of these options? Simply put: the choice is *theirs*, not yours.

The fact is children are easily influenced, so to cause them to be victims of religious indoctrination could be quite harmful in the long run. As humans, shouldn’t they be allowed to come to their own conclusions objectively? And don’t they have the right to decide whether they even want to be religious? Before carting them off to church this weekend, I challenge you to ask yourself if it’s really ethical to force your children to be religious before they’re old enough to do their own laundry. Kids, just like adults, are entitled to their own opinions. Fortunately, my son has two parents who will allow him to make these choices himself.

Last night, after forcing away my desire to chew out the monster that planted such a harmful seed in my son’s innocent and carefree brain, I cloaked my anger with a neutral attitude and turned the conversation into yet another fine learning opportunity. “Look,” I said, “maybe there is a god, and maybe there isn’t. What’s important is that you don’t go around saying things just because you hear them from someone else.” I then explained to him that, when it comes to theology, it would be wise to educate himself about the many different religions of the world before deciding which, if any, he might want to explore further. I told him that I would be willing to take him to the library, where he would have access to any religious reading material he might want to research and process. “That’s okay,” he told me. “We can do that when I’m a teenager. I’m gonna go trade some Pokemon cards now.”

So, my fellow Metro students, if you’re going to have children, ***please*** consider allowing them to think for themselves before hauling them to your place of worship and indoctrinating them before they have an opportunity to truly understand what’s going on. You don’t want to strip them of their rights to use their own brains to make such life-altering decisions. They just might thank you some day.