

what do you believe? parent's guide

HOW TO USE THE FILM AND THE GUIDE

If you haven't figured out a good way to talk with your teenager about spirituality, watching the *What Do You Believe?* documentary together and using our questions as a conversation guide might be a unique solution. It's opened the door for many parents and their teenagers already and we hope that it will do the same for you.

The best way to talk to your teenager about spirituality is by having an open, non-judgmental conversation. If you really want them to open up and have a chance to share their questions, doubts, fears, and beliefs then you need to be truly ready to hear them. Please note that if you believe that your child should strictly follow the teachings of your faith, parts of this guide might not be right for you and your family. *What Do You Believe?* asks lots of the important questions but leaves the answers up to you. We hope this approach will make it comfortable for you and your teen to share your beliefs with each other.

Tips for a Successful Conversation

- ◆ Listen without commenting or contradicting, just listen
- ◆ Be open to your child's ideas and feelings
- ◆ Be aware that their beliefs are in flux and that this is a time of soul-searching
- ◆ See this as a way to learn from them
- ◆ Tell them it's O.K. if they don't think or believe exactly what you think or believe
- ◆ Talk about how you felt as a teen and how you feel now about spirituality
- ◆ Share doubts, questions, and beliefs you have
- ◆ *Remember that you don't have to have all the answers*

The Time and Place

We recommend that you set aside about 1 1/2 to 2 hours to watch the documentary and talk. It's helpful to have a private place to talk or to do something like go out for a walk to talk after watching the film.

CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

The questions are organized into three categories: *TALKING PERSONALLY*, *TALKING ABOUT THE FILM* and *THE BIG PICTURE*.

It may be easier to talk about the film first and then get personal, or you may find that you will skip around. Sometimes first talking about whether your teen believes there should be prayer in school can help you talk about whether they pray and what they pray about. If you haven't ever talked about prayer before it might be easier to lead into discussion about personal things this way. Look over the questions and use them as a guide. They can help you talk about the big picture and the role of religion in America, and they can help you talk very personally about things like life, death, prayer, the divine, suffering, and the purpose of life.

1) TALKING PERSONALLY

Here are some questions that may open up discussion. Pick a few to start with. You might want to answer them yourself.

- ◆ Do any of the young people in the film remind you of you?
- ◆ Do you agree or disagree with some of the things that they said?
- ◆ Did the film seem real to you and were any of the teens like teens that you know?
- ◆ What do you believe?
- ◆ Why do you believe what you believe?
- ◆ Do you believe something different from your parents?
- ◆ If you don't believe in any religion, why don't you?
- ◆ Do you think there is a difference between religion and spirituality?
- ◆ Where do you get your beliefs from?
- ◆ Was there something that happened in your life that really affected the beliefs that you have?
- ◆ Have you ever doubted your beliefs, or questioned them?
- ◆ Have you ever changed your beliefs?

- ◆ Do you pray?
- ◆ If you pray what do you pray for?
- ◆ Do you believe in a god, gods/goddesses, or some kind of greater power? Why or why not?
- ◆ How do you know there is a god or something greater than us?
- ◆ How did we get here, how did we come to be?
- ◆ Why do you think you are on this earth and what are you supposed to do while you are here?
- ◆ Is there a purpose to your life?
- ◆ Why do bad things happen?
- ◆ Why is there suffering?
- ◆ What do you believe happens to you when you die?
- ◆ Do you feel any connection to people in your life that have died?
- ◆ Do you believe in karma or that there are any consequences to your actions?
- ◆ Do you agree with all of the rules from your religion or spiritual practice, why or why not?
- ◆ Do you feel comfortable and accepted at school for your beliefs, why or why not?
- ◆ Does it matter to you what religion your friends are?
- ◆ Have you ever dated someone from a different religious background?
- ◆ What do you think religion is for?
- ◆ Do you want to be more or less religious or spiritual?

2) TALKING ABOUT THE FILM

You may want to start with these questions.

- ◆ What struck you about this film?
- ◆ How does this film make you feel?
- ◆ What reminded you of yourself? Of others you know?
- ◆ What did you agree/ disagree with?
- ◆ Do you face similar issues? Have you had any similar thoughts or challenges?
- ◆ What stereotypes does this film challenge, create or reinforce, if any?

Thinking about Anthony

- ◆ What role does the Catholic Church play in Anthony's life?
- ◆ What are the reasons that he disagrees with his religion?

- ◆ Anthony says that most teenagers aren't really thinking about God. Do you agree?
- ◆ How strong is Anthony's faith?
- ◆ Anthony says he disagrees with the church about abortion, what do you think about this?
- ◆ Is Anthony comfortable being a Catholic in America?
- ◆ Does Anthony remind you of you in any ways?

Thinking about Mazouza

- ◆ Why did Mazouza decide to wear the veil?
- ◆ Do you think it's O.K. for a girl to wear the veil?
- ◆ Do you think she should be able to wear it at school?
- ◆ What is the Koran, and why is it important?
- ◆ How does Mazouza feel about dating and premarital sex?
- ◆ How does she feel about being Muslim in America?
- ◆ How do you think she might feel after 9/11?
- ◆ Do you think she represents all Muslims?
- ◆ Why is Mazouza such a strong believer in her religion?
- ◆ Do you feel the same certainty as Mazouza about your religious beliefs?

Thinking about Morgan

- ◆ How did Morgan become a Pagan?
- ◆ Do you know any Pagans?
- ◆ In Paganism is sex considered a sin?
- ◆ Do you think it's a sin?
- ◆ Why does Morgan feel that there isn't freedom of religion in the United States?
- ◆ Do you feel accepted for your beliefs at school?
- ◆ Why does she like being a Pagan?
- ◆ Does Morgan remind you of you in any way?

Thinking about David

- ◆ In the film David says that he is not a typical Jew, what does he mean by that?
- ◆ What are some of the beliefs that Jews have that David describes?
- ◆ Why is Judaism so important to David?

- ◆ Do you know other teens who come from an interfaith family and what do you think it is like for them?
- ◆ Why did David stop believing in God?
- ◆ Do you think David will believe in God someday?
- ◆ Do you think there can be a God even though there is so much suffering and injustice on earth?

Thinking about Carina

- ◆ Why did Carina's family come to the United States?
- ◆ What is Buddhism and who is the Buddha according to Carina?
- ◆ In what ways is it difficult for her to practice Buddhism in the United States?
- ◆ What does Carina mean when she talks about mindfulness?
- ◆ Why do Buddhists practice non-violence?
- ◆ Do you think you have any Buddhist beliefs?
- ◆ What does Buddhism have in common with Christianity?

Thinking about Julius

- ◆ What are some of the main values of the Lakota religion?
- ◆ What is Julius's view of Mother Earth?
- ◆ Do you feel that the environment and earth are important?
- ◆ What does Julius say about God?
- ◆ How does he feel about drugs and alcohol?
- ◆ What happened to Julius's ancestors and why did it happen?
- ◆ What is his purpose in life?
- ◆ Do you feel like you have a purpose in life as well?

3) THE BIG PICTURE

- ◆ Do these teens have anything in common even though they are very different from each other?
- ◆ Do you know anyone from their religious background?
- ◆ Do you feel that these teenagers represent everyone from their religion?
- ◆ Are your beliefs the same as your friends? Does it matter to you if they are different??
- ◆ Is your school or community accepting of people from different backgrounds?
- ◆ Are you accepting of different religions and beliefs?

- ◆ Do you think there is freedom of religion in the United States? Why or why not?
- ◆ Do you think there should be freedom of religion?
- ◆ Do you think there should be prayer in schools or at sports games, why or why not?
- ◆ Should religion be a part of politics?
- ◆ Do you think America has more religious freedom than other countries?
- ◆ Why are there so many different religions?

FINAL THOUGHTS

Where will you go from here? This depends on you and your teenager and the outcome of your conversation. You might decide that the conversation was enough, or you might want to do some more exploration together. You might go visit a place of worship you have never been to and or meet some people who are from a different religious background. You might decide to incorporate more religious and spiritual practices into your daily life. You might try meditating or praying together, and see how that goes.

If your teenager does not believe in any religious or spiritual practice or believes in something that you don't, understand that it may be hard to convince them otherwise. However, making the time to have this conversation will certainly improve your relationship and communication in the future. This is an opportunity for you to learn to accept them as they are, as they are figuring out what they believe. If you do it with an open-mind and heart, you will make it possible for them to feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings with you as they go on this journey.