

Religion

At one time, religious education was placed at the heart of every educational programme. Church and State worked hand in hand to ensure that children were brought up as confirmed members of a particular faith.

As the influence of religion has declined in society as a whole, the prominence that it is given in the school curriculum has been gradually eroded. This has left a situation in which no one is really sure how religion should be taught to young children.

Consequently, religious education that does still happen in schools varies in quality from place to place and from teacher to teacher. Many children receive next to no religious education at all and grow up without having even heard the stories from the Bible or any other scripture.

This means that religious education is another area in which parents have to consider what contribution they are able to make themselves.

It should not equate with an attempt to indoctrinate a child into accepting a certain set of religious principles. Such an attempt would probably fail in our multi-faith/no-faith society, even if it were desirable: children are able to see how other people live, and become uncomfortable when they feel that their parents are restricting them to a set of beliefs that are only held by a minority of the population and which are at divergence with the mainstream of popular thought. This is something that has frequently led young people to reject their parents' religious beliefs, thereby causing serious family rifts.

A more enlightened approach is to view the world's scriptures as the greatest cultural heritage that we possess. As a parent you have the opportunity to introduce them to your child by reading aloud and by telling stories from them. You will find that you do not need to place interpretations upon what you read—it speaks for itself. Children appreciate the opportunity to reflect upon stories that contain genuine wisdom and welcome the chance to draw their own conclusions.

The ability that children have to understand these stories shows us that we have at least as much to learn from them as they have from us.

