

Atheists Flock to Secular Sunday School

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Christian kids are typically sent to Sunday school for lessons on the Bible and morals. For nonbelievers, there's atheist Sunday school.

With an estimated 14 percent of Americans professing to have no religion, according to the Institute for Humanist Studies, some are choosing to send their children to classes that teach ethics without religious belief.

Bri Kneisley sent her 10-year-old son, Damian, to Camp Quest Ohio this past summer after a neighbor had shown him the Bible.

"Damian was quite certain this guy was right and was telling him this amazing truth that I had never shared," said Kneisley, who realized her son needed to learn about secularism, according to Time magazine.

Camp Quest, also dubbed "The Secular Summer Camp," is offered for children of atheists, freethinkers, humanists and other nonbelievers who hold to a "naturalistic, not supernatural world view," the camp website states.

The summer camp, offered across North America and supported by the Institute for Humanist Studies, is designed to teach rational inquiry, critical thinking, scientific method, ethics, free speech, and the separation of religion and government.

Kneisley welcomes the sense of community the camp offers her son.

"He's a child of atheist parents, and he's not the only one in the world," she said, according to Time.

Atheist and humanist programs are expected to pop up in such cities as Phoenix, Albuquerque, N.M., and Portland, Ore., and adult nonbelievers are leaning on such secular Sunday schools to help teach their kids values and how to respond to the Christian majority in the United States.

Outspoken atheist Richard Dawkins argues that teaching faith to children can be dangerous, noting the possibility of extremism.

"The point about teaching children that faith is a virtue is that you're teaching them that you don't have to justify what you do, you can simply shelter behind the statement 'that's my faith and you're not to question that,'" he argued in a debate with Christian apologist John Lennox last month.

A recent study by Ellison Research, however, found that most Americans who attended church as a child say their past worship attendance has had a positive impact on them. The majority, including those who no longer currently attend religious services, said their attendance at church as a child gave them a good moral foundation and that they are glad they attended.

Yet today, nonbelievers want their children to participate in Sunday school the secular way.

"I'm a person that doesn't believe in myths," says Hana, 11, who attends the Humanist Community Center in Palo Alto, Calif., according to Time. "I'd rather stick to the evidence."