

IDD-HUMANISTS NEWSLETTER

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The Newsletter of the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disorders' (AAIDD) Humanist Action Group – March 2008, v.2 issue 1

This newsletter expresses the opinion of members of this subgroup and not necessarily of AAIDD

All data presented are opinions and alternative opinions may be printed in later issues. Send feedback and submissions to jrmullin@verizon.net

Notes from the editor

You may have noticed that this newsletter is dated a few months late. This is consistent with my goal of publishing a quarterly newsletter. So this one is merely a few months late. Lol.

In this issue I want to close up my discussion on *How do you talk to a person with IDD about Humanism in light of their friends' beliefs*. Perhaps one of you might want to comment on this issue and what I've said about it. Also feel free to suggest the next topic of discussion. As always, email me at jrmullin@verizon.net.

I had actually made great efforts to attend the AAIDD annual meeting this year but couldn't clear up my calendar. Hopefully next year we can have a Humanist Action Group meeting. A short follow up on the man undergoing a phenobarbital taper that I mentioned in the last issue: He's doing great. He's even moving better than he was before. Nothing but good has happened because of that taper. I would still be open to printing any discussion on other medication side effect issues particularly with people with IDD.

How do you talk to a person with IDD about Humanism in light of their friends' beliefs.(Part III)

In the first part of this discussion we reviewed the nature of attempts at conversion. In the second part we discussed the emotional aspects of friends trying to influence another in religious areas. In this third part I want to discuss how to make someone ready for a friend's well-intentioned attempt at conversion.

My basic suggestion is that the vulnerable person should already be familiar with the religion and even already attended a service. In spite of my personal feelings about religion, many of the people I know have strong pro-religious beliefs and it is at least a courtesy to know about their beliefs and how to act at their services. For example, at a catholic service, it is useful to know that the service tries to recreate the high-points of a pivotal several day period two thousand years ago. It is useful to know that one stands, sits, or kneels when everyone else does and that one doesn't go up to get communion when everyone else does. Except for the spoken parts of the service, everyone is quiet during the service. The priest is referred to as "Father" and any nuns, a "Sister" even though they aren't your family. Catholics make more mention of Christ's mother than they do of any of Christ's assistants (except perhaps Paul of Tarsus who ironically never even met Christ) even though she plays a minor role in the story after giving birth to Christ and that most other religions don't give her this important role. There are other things that might come up after going to a service. I am most familiar with Catholicism and that is why I used them as an example. Most every church has their ceremonies and priorities and they are good places to start.

After visiting a particular religion, it is useful to review what you saw and what you think about it with your valued friend with IDD. If you are judgmental in doing this, it is important to explain your opinion clearly. For example, you can't say that the Mormon's additions to the new testament are just silly. You can go over their history like how the additions were based on a translation of gold tablets from the bottom of a hat and that no one except one person ever "saw" them and the tablets probably never really existed. You might discuss how there were a number of fledgling religions forming about that time in our country and discuss some of them. I wouldn't get into the magic underwear thing unless it came up because it is above what would have been discussed at the service.

If your friend is asked to go to a service they can truthfully say, "I've already been, thank you". Hopefully this will end at least half of the conversations on this matter. Some people will be persistent in their request for attendance and your friend will eventually give in and agree to go to a service. It is important that you or another family member go too. Then afterward you can discuss the experience.

What is a little more difficult is addressing requests to attend a church-sponsored activity. Often these are fun and say they are non-religious. Often they *are* non-religious but other times they aren't. I had a personal experience with my daughter and a Baptist vacation camp one summer. My sister-in-law insisted that my daughter go and that it would be fun and a secular experience. My daughter said she enjoyed herself but later she received a letter from one of the counselors telling her how happy they were that she had accepted Jesus into her life in some ceremony they held. My wife and I were aghast. My recommendation is to totally forbid attendance at overnight or long term activities and to allow field trips and the like under the condition that you can attend to monitor them. Tell your loved one that they should always run these things past you first. These aren't perfect answers, I doubt that there are any. As we discussed earlier, the person asking your loved one to come with them thinks they are being friendly and helpful. They may be a great friend other than their attempt at conversion. Your loved one may have to break up the friendship if the friend is too persistent, but you want to avoid that because friends are valuable. These are my feelings on this issue, what are your's ???

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