

The science of saying goodbye to Santa

December 18 2018, by Jim Davies



Research suggests not many children over the age of seven and a half believe in Santa. Credit: Michael Nunes/Unsplash, CC BY

Dear Parent,

Santa here. I know this season has been hard. Your eight-year-old looked at you baldfaced and said I wasn't real. How can this be? Is the

innocence and magic already gone? It seems like just yesterday they were so easily convinced that crumbs on the plate were irrefutable [evidence](#) that I'd been there. And they have no respect for how hard I work to make my handwriting look just like yours!

No matter that you never got a chance to tell them I don't exist. [Most children come to that conclusion themselves.](#)

But don't worry about your kids too much. Coming to disbelieve in Santa is not particularly distressing for them. You, like many parents, are actually [sadder than your kids are about it.](#) And they probably won't blame you for having told them I exist, either. Kids who no longer believe in me [think that other kids should be encouraged to.](#)

And a little happiness can't hurt, particularly in light of evidence that [people are less happy around Christmastime.](#) (with the exception of devout Christians).

Parenting is tough these days. I don't get a lot of news up here in the North Pole, though we've gotten a lot more since Mrs. Claus talked the elves into using pixie-dust to make a rocking horse that functions as an Amazon Echo. But from the little news we get, we can tell that people are [super-judgmental about every decision you make,](#) including your decision to (or not to) tell your kids to believe in Santa Claus.

Some Christians think Santa strengthens [consumption as religion.](#) Indeed, like the gods of religions, I do have ["strategic knowledge"](#) about what your kids do that is good and bad, paying more attention to moral issues than anything else (I don't pay any attention to *you*, parents, so don't worry about clearing your browser history, ho ho ho!). But the similarity of believing in me to believing in the gods of religions is [tenuous,](#) because [I have failed to attract a substantial community of true believers.](#)

Your skeptical kids are not alone. [Not many people over the age of seven-and-a-half believe in Santa Claus.](#)

Some think that telling kids about me is lying, and destroys trust, but there's no evidence that that happens. In fact, there isn't any [scientific evidence](#) that believing in me is harmful in any way.

But belief might have some benefits: kids are more generous after talking about me (versus when they talk about pets or the Easter Bunny). But [it's unclear whether bringing up Santa promotes good behaviour.](#)

So if your kids stopped believing, or if they never did, it probably doesn't matter much either way. But don't be too sad. Just because a sleigh ride ends doesn't mean it wasn't fun, does it?

Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night,

Santa Claus

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