

Our goal when approaching parents about our faith transition is to amass the wisdom to hold their fears and emotions while creating space for our own. If we have taken care of our own needs and we can reasonably prepare for most of their responses, we will be in a better place to prevent emotional fall-out in the relationships.

Your believing loved ones have no way of knowing what you are going through with your faith crisis, they have never been on *this* side of the fence. Expecting them to be sensitive to your emotional needs while telling them your vulnerable news is unreasonable. You will be better off using your new emotional genius to manage and tend to your emotional needs prior to the “big reveal.” Make a commitment not to expect your loved ones to be sensitive to what you are going through. Release them from needing to support you, agree with you, understand you, or be sensitive to your needs. If you are revealing this information to your parents you will find the parent/child roles reversed. As the differentiating child, you may feel you are being asked to be more sensitive and considerate of your parent’s emotional needs and dismiss your own during this interchange. Really, you are being asked to care for your own needs first and then tend for the needs of your parents, not to dismiss your needs. Your needs are priority. As you care for your needs you are more equipped to tend for the needs of others.

Remember, you are exposing information to your loved ones that may initiate a cycle of grieving. You are not responsible for the hurt you are about to cause, but you are the one initiating it. You are about to enter sacred ground with this person. How you walk the holy territory will impact their feelings about your disaffection from the tribe. Going in well informed and armed with your newfound inner wisdom will not guarantee a flawless outcome, but it will guarantee the best outcome possible, certainly better than if you went in unaware.

If you begin telling your loved ones about your disaffection by gently holding their fears at the forefront, you can prevent them from some of the emotional trauma and grief associated with the news. The following are some of the fears and beliefs that travel through a parent or loved one’s mind as they are being informed about your transition.

Places a parent’s mind may go to when hearing of their children leaving the church:

1. I’ve failed my duty to teach them the gospel (especially with moms) It’s all my fault, I should have been a better parent
2. They’re going to live an immoral, destructive, life without the guidance of the church
3. They will return if I’m faithful enough (triggers religiosity insanity)
4. They’ve been deceived, lazy, sinful, offended, rebellious, etc. (false reasons for your disaffection)
5. If I withdraw my love maybe they will see the error of their ways
6. They might try and corrupt my testimony with their spirit of deception
7. Their family will be destroyed without the influence of the gospel
8. Since I have the truth it is my responsibility to teach their children or bear testimony whenever I can, even if I must cross boundaries
9. If I give them the right article, experience, event, words, then the Spirit will help them remember the truth

Things to avoid telling yourself when revealing to your parents about leaving the church:

1. It's my fault for the hurt this will cause them (it's not, it is the doctrines fault)
2. I need them to understand me
3. I must defend my position
4. If I explain it logically, then they will understand (you cannot unravel a belief system made through emotions through logic)
5. I need to tell them the whole story (they will look for loopholes in your story, not seek to understand it)
6. If they read the CES letter or the Essays or _____ or _____ then they will understand
7. If I give them a window of hope that I may return, then they may not be so upset

Below are some sample scripts of how to dispel or manage some of the fears and emotions of parents and loved ones when they hear about your disaffection from the church. Take the liberty to cross out what does not apply to your situation or insert the wording that sounds more authentic to your relationships. The goal is to prevent emotional fall-out and to validate the concerns of the loved ones before they become an issue.

Warning: No matter how elegant, logical, wise, or precise you are about delivering this news, the impact and how the loved one takes the information will be determined by their unique enmeshment with the doctrines. The best we can do is remember not to allow our emotional fears of being rejected, abandoned, betrayed, shamed, etc. interfere with the emotions that are being triggered by their fear. Release your parents, family, and friends from needing to validate you in any way. Tune into your new, sustainable source of energy from within and make no attempt to manage their emotions or react and respond to them. Allow them to manage their own emotions as you manage yours. Acknowledge that they are emotional and that the news is impacting them because they love you and don't want to lose you, but DO NOT engage by being responsible for how they are feeling. You are only responsible for how you are feeling.

Sample Scripts:

You Were a Great Parent, this isn't about You

Mom, I want to thank you for all the effort you have put into raising me in the way you felt was right. You have always done what you have felt was right and I am so thankful for your example of valiant, moral parenting. Your dedication to making sure your family lived true to the gospel is so commendable and I want you to know I honor that quality about you. I also want you to know that I have taken this transition very seriously because I want to honor those efforts. Living a moral life is always going to be a priority for me, as well as being a contributive citizen and doing my best to use my gifts and my bounty to bless the lives of others. Thank you for your example.

I am Sorry about Your Grief

I am aware of the grieving that occurs when a parent feels they have lost their child because they are transitioning out of the safety of the church. I am sorry for any hurt my transition causes you, however, I will not be taking any responsibility for the hurt because it comes from the doctrine that cause us to believe that our God will separate us in the next life because we do not submit to the theories established through the Mormon religion. I believe God is much bigger than that separatist, exclusionary and divisionary theory that cannot be proven.

I Still Receive Direction

I have been conditioned to believe if I don't subscribe to Mormonism that I will lose my place in the kingdom, not have the Spirit to guide me in my choices, live an immoral life and lose the blessings of the temple. I have decided to research whether these things are true for myself. I have discovered that many of the doctrines of the church do not align with my understanding of the world or with healthy growth and development of the spirit, especially in deferring my inner authority over to the prophet or other authorities of the church who have proven, repeatedly, to be on the wrong side of civil and human rights. I believe it is more important to trust my conscience on these issues. I feel I have continued to be spiritually led and conduct a moral life even if I no longer believe in the truth claims of the church.

Creating Boundaries with Your Children and the Believing Grandparents

I/we honor and respect your faithfulness in the church. I/we respect those things you feel are sacred. I/we ask the same from you. What I/we feel is sacred is my/our right to raise my/our children the way that feels right for me/us, just as you were given that privilege. I/we will agree not attempt to persuade you to believe in the things I/we have researched, I/we ask that you honor me/us in not trying to persuade me/us or my/our family to think as you do. Please do not give my/our children LDS gifts to influence them. You are free to ask them what they are doing in their life and to be involved in their interests, but any effort to influence them into the church will only prove to create a distance between you. You are free to share your testimony and whatever you want with them, after they turn eighteen. The more interested you can be in them for who they are, rather than whether they agree with your religion, the stronger your relationship will be. If you make your relationship about the church, they will feel your disappointment and it will create a wedge and separation between you. I trust you will do the best thing. I/we will not intervene unless I/we see something too intrusive and then I/we will have to act, otherwise I/we will leave your relationship with my/our children between you and them, just know that they are very open and share their experiences with me/us.

Your Religiosity Won't Bring Me Back

There are some talks by general authorities that encourage people whose family members have left the church to continue fasting and praying and increasing their level of religiosity as a valid way to cause them to return to the fold. I can guarantee that any stories you hear about traying loved ones returning were not likely because of the same reasons I am experiencing. Those who leave because of a faith expansion never return. You are free to do as you will, however, no degree of faith, prayers, fasting, or religiosity has the power to put the many things I have learned back into the small paradigm of the church. I am happier with this expanded view of the world even though it does not offer the certainty Mormonism offered, I choose to deal with the existential dilemma of mortality the same way the rest of the world does, and I am happy to live within the mystery of it all.

The Real Reason I'm Leaving, Don't be Fooled

It is important to me that you realize I did not come to the realizations I have about the church because I wanted to relieve some guilt about a sinful way I wanted to live, or that I was being lazy in my testimony, or that I was offended, or because I failed to obey the promptings of the spirit. You may even feel I have been deceived, however, I believe my efforts at fair and balance research have brought me to the truth. I have done an extraordinary amount of research into the doctrines and theology of the

church, of church history, both church approved and not church approved. I have re-evaluated the truth claims of the church and its claim to authority and being the only true church being lead by Jesus Christ, and I have studied the origins of the religion, fundamental religions, ethical and unethical influence. I have listened to the church leaders, attended my meetings, and explored other spiritual practices and I have concluded that the church isn't true, that it no longer feeds my need for spiritual growth and that it is time for me to part ways.

I Lose a Lot by Leaving

I have come to these conclusions through so much study because I know what is at stake should I choose to not believe and risk being wrong. Please realize the reasons I no longer believe are far deeper than you may realize and my search for truth is what has lead me in the direction I am in right now, not my search to break away from the church. I stand to lose a lot by losing my testimony. The easier path would have been for me to stay and try and fit within the church's way of thinking, however, I am not looking for the simple path, I am looking for the truth.

Agree to Exchange Information

I will agree to exchange information and allow you to send me talks and articles, videos, etc. and I will promise to watch and read them under one condition, that you will agree to watch and read any talks, articles, and videos I might send you, otherwise we agree not to suggest information to one another.

Do you have any questions for me?

You might feel apprehensive about answering any questions family and friends may have about your disaffection with the church, however, when you invite them to ask, it makes them feel like you aren't afraid to talk about what you have learned, that you aren't ashamed of your transition and that they're welcome to inquire about your journey. The following are a few hints to avoid unfruitful and emotional arguments.

- Answer the questions directly with the least amount of commentary. The less you give them to dissect the better.
- Explain why some doctrines *do not align with your values*, not whether they are true, we could argue the source of truth all day.
- Avoid attacking their beliefs, we tend to defend what we hold sacred even when logic and reason unravel its validity. When you keep their beliefs sacred, they will honor yours, or at least you can ask them to.
- Avoid defending your position, this prevents circular reasoning, just say, "I don't believe that is true, or I believe this way now"
- Agree to disagree, surrender any need for them to understand or agree with you.

Below are some of the questions parents and loved ones may have for those leaving the church in case you would like to prepare. The more prepared you are to answer these questions, the less chance you have of responding emotionally.

- When did you begin having doubts?
- Why didn't you come to me?
- What will you do with the children?

- What will you do on Sunday?
- Why don't you believe in the Book of Mormon?
- Didn't you have a spiritual witness about the validity of the gospel before?
- What about your baptismal covenants?
- What about your temple covenants?
- What about a past miracle or spiritual experiences in your life, isn't that a testimony it is true?

What if they start bearing their testimony?

Many are trained in the mission field, that if they bear their testimony the Spirit will overpower the confusion in the conversation, a sign that the spirit will witness the truthfulness of the gospel. Your loved one's testimony is very sacred to them. They are probably mustering up as much of their faith to share this testimony as possible. The testimony they share at this time could possibly be as much about shaking off the confusing things that have stirred questions in them in the conversation as it is about hoping you will feel the spirit of their testimony. Allow them to share it. Thank them. How you manage yourself after this experience will greatly affect your relationship afterward so be sensitive, but there is no need to give them the impression the gesture was successful or effective if it wasn't.

In any of your exchanges with family and friends, it is important to remember that their own faith crisis may only be a year or two away. Have compassion on them. The conversation you are having with them may be the trigger point to ignite their own journey down the rabbit hole. Remember the regret about how you treated non-believers when you were a true believer? Be sensitive enough to help them lessen the blow when they reflect on their interchange with you. When they remember how patient and kind you were as bore their testimony to you and mowed you over with question after question, they will feel safe to come to you with their questions and doubts when they have their own disruption of faith.