

How and when is the right time to expose your kids to the truth behind Santa and the Tooth Fairy? Before I was a parent, I wondered that and I have ever since. I remember thinking, “Should I even lie about Santa and the Tooth Fairy?” and “How will my kids know the difference between our religious beliefs and make-believe like Santa?” Of course, like many parents, I gave in to the societal standard of Santa ‘bringing presents’ and the Tooth Fairy ‘giving money for teeth.’

For years now, we’ve snuck out on Christmas Eve and planted Santa gifts under the tree. We’ve quietly tip-toed into bedrooms at night for a little tooth. However, with our oldest past the middle of third grade, we knew it wouldn’t be long before the idyllic dream we had presented to our kids vanished.

At nine years old, our oldest child lacks the cynicism (and older siblings) I had as a kid and has, therefore, defended others about Santa. She would tell us how kids in her class would say Santa wasn’t real, but that she didn’t believe them. Whether this was simply a ploy to keep getting Santa gifts, I guess we’ll never truly know; however, she did have a very firm belief that he was real. The only problem now: she still does. It is now almost March, she will be ten years old before next Christmas and we’ve decided the charade must end. We don’t know exactly when we’ll tell her, but it will be before Christmas this year. With a little brother, however, we still will have ‘Santa gifts’ at Christmas, but once she knows, we will be counting on her to keep the secret for her sibling.

We thought that perhaps a lead-in by telling her about the Tooth Fairy would help. Or, at least, that’s what we had hoped. Recently, my stepdaughter was told about the Tooth Fairy by her mother (without myself or her father present or having warning). When we found out, we were flabbergasted. We had expected a mutual front in parenting; that both parents would handle the situation together. We didn’t know she would be finding out in that way and this incident has led to some issues for us, as shown by the following example.

My husband and I were aware that our eldest had recently been told about the Tooth Fairy while spending time with her mother and fairly soon after my stepdaughter came back to our house, she lost a tooth. She put in it her little ‘Tooth Fairy Bear’ and went to bed, just like before. We thought the behavior a little strange, but weren’t sure what to do about it and thought the next morning would resolve the issue once and for all. We were right; the next morning, she was somewhat confused and said she still had the tooth and no money. We asked her, “Who is the Tooth Fairy?” She replied, “You and Daddy.” We looked at her; she looked at us. She thought that even though she knew the truth about the Tooth Fairy, we would still give her money! She simply didn’t make the connection.

This could be because her parents were not on the same page (and were not both with her) when she was told about the Tooth Fairy. We know how important it is when a child realizes the truth about a long-standing children’s tradition that we have reinforced and going forward, we want to

make sure that when she finds out about Santa, it will be a different experience (and that she won't believe that Santa will still deliver presents at Mommy's house, just not at Daddy's house). Having a united front and co-parenting for the best interest of the child both help to ease the transition from innocent idealist into more knowledgeable pre-teen. And it just might save Mom, Dad, various stepparents and grandparents some gray hairs too.