

Choosing Godparents



Start with the “job description.” A godparent (also called baptismal sponsor) is to develop a special, lifelong relationship with the godchild, communicating faith and values to her or him in word, deed, and play, reminding him of his baptism, rooting for her as she grows and questions and struggles.

What qualities suit a person for this role? Someone who:

- Will take a child seriously and invest time in developing a friendship with him or her.
- Listens well, is caring and trustworthy.
- Is a baptized Christian who could share her or his faith with a child (and later an adult) in conversation or action.

You don’t need to have a “matched set” of one man and one woman. You can name just one godparent, or two godmothers or godfathers. It doesn’t matter if they are parents. If they are, you can tell how they are with children. But a person without children may value being a godparent all the more because of that.



Relatives or Friends?



The advantage of choosing relatives is that they are more certain to remain connected with your child throughout their lives. It can sometimes be a challenge for an uncle or aunt if they’re worried about “playing favorites”—being a godparent means they should pay special attention to one niece or nephew, doing more with and for the godchild than for the others. This need not be a problem if they don’t get lavish gifts for the godchild and if your other children have godparents who spend special time with them.

The advantage of choosing a nonrelative is that you get an extra person involved deeply in your child’s welfare, someone who wouldn’t otherwise be a consistent part of his or her life. You can, in effect, draft that person into your child’s “chosen” family.

You want the person to commit to keeping in contact with your child even if distance separates them—even if you and the godparent don't remain as closely connected as you are now.

Sometimes parents feel they have to name certain people as godparents because it's expected—much the same way people may feel obligated to include someone in their wedding party. The important thing is to put your child's interests first. Who would be most likely to be a great godparent? You can always choose more than two godparents—some Lutherans traditionally have had three. Make sure at least one is “godparent material.”

What about Godparents Who Aren't Christian?



What if the most spiritual and child-friendly person you know isn't Christian? As far back as we know, godparenthood has been about two things: mentorship in Christian faith and creating close family-like bonds. The difference between medieval times and today is that many of us have loved ones who aren't Christian.

If you want a non-Christian friend or relative to develop a special tie with your child, there's nothing to prevent you from calling that person a godparent within the family. Since she or he can't share and explore the Christian faith with your child, you'll want at least one godparent who is Christian. Some congregations will provide a Christian sponsor.

At the baptism, the Christian godparent would answer the questions that imply Christian belief. If the pastor says the non-Christian godparent may stand with you at the baptism, you might want to write another question that he or she could answer honestly about supporting the family and being a spiritual friend and mentor to the child.

Some people believe godparents are expected to raise the child if the parents die. That's been true at some times and places, but in the United States today, godparenthood has no legal status with regard to issues of guardianship. If you want to designate someone to take care of your children in the event of your death, you need to name that person as the legal guardian in your will.



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