

# Cambridge Elements

Elements in Child Development

edited by

Marc H. Bornstein

*National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Bethesda*

*Institute for Fiscal Studies, London*

*UNICEF, New York City*

## THE SCIENCE OF CHILDREN'S RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

Annette Mahoney

*Bowling Green State University*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-81277-1 — The Science of Children's Religious and Spiritual Development  
Annette Mahoney  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
New Delhi – 110025, India  
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108812771](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108812771)  
DOI: 10.1017/9781108874342

© Annette Mahoney 2021

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2021

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

ISBN 978-1-108-81277-1 Paperback  
ISSN 2632-9948 (online)  
ISSN 2632-993X (print)

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

# The Science of Children's Religious and Spiritual Development

Elements in Child Development

DOI: 10.1017/9781108874342  
First published online: July 2021

Annette Mahoney  
*Bowling Green State University*

**Author for correspondence:** Annette Mahoney, amahone@bgsu.edu

**Abstract:** This Element provides a comprehensive yet concise account of scientific research on children's religious and spiritual (RS) development up to age 12. After providing a historical sketch of definitional issues in the science of RS, the first section reviews basic descriptive information on children's RS development as well as wholistic theoretical models and measures of children's RS development. The second section covers evidence about links of child and parental RS to children's psychosocial adjustment and highlights the need for more research that discriminates specific positive and negative manifestations of RS for children's development. The third section summarizes evidence about the robust influence of parents on their children's RS development and parents' perceptions of their role in this process. The fourth section focuses on cognitive-developmental research on children's cognitions about God/deities and prayer. The Element concludes with a synopsis of key themes and challenges that researchers face to advance the science of children's RS development.

**Keywords:** religion, spirituality, children, faith development, parenting

© Annette Mahoney 2021

ISBNs: 9781108812771 (PB), 9781108874342 (OC)  
ISSNs: 2632-9948 (online), 2632-993X (print)

## Contents

Introduction	1
Historical Sketch of Science on Children's Religious and Spiritual (RS) Development	4
Children's Wholistic RS Development: Conceptual Models and Measures	8
Children's RS Development: Ties to Psychosocial Adjustment, for Better and Worse	26
Intergenerational Transmission of RS to Children	41
Social and Cognitive-Developmental Research on Children's RS Development	49
Conclusions: Challenges to Advancing Science on Children's RS	61
References	69