

Explanations for why people believe or do not believe in God

- Below are some explanations people offer for their beliefs. Separate them into explanations for belief in God and for belief in no God.
- What kind of explanations are being offered? Put them into categories: psychological, theological, historical, philosophical, sociological, experiential, emotional etc. Some may fit into more than one category.
- Suggest at least two influences that may have led a person to give each of these explanations. For example, family and faith community are very likely to be influences on the first explanation.
- Could every statement be turned around to offer an opposite view? For example, 'I was brought up without belief in God.' Are these equally compelling reasons for belief in God's (non-)existence?
- These explanations work for those who offer them. Are there any that would be compelling in persuading someone else to believe (or not)? Who might find these explanations compelling? Which ones are most/least compelling to you? Reflect on why you respond this way: what has influenced your thinking?
- Reflect on what you know about dharmic traditions such as Hinduism and Sikhism. How many of the explanations below would apply outside Western monotheistic traditions?

I was brought up to believe in God. It is part of my life.	I have looked at the arguments for and against God. I have concluded that God does not exist. There is no evidence.	The Bible/the Qur'an teaches that God is real.
A friend was very ill. I tried praying for healing, but she still died. I cannot believe in a God now.	The life, teachings and example of Moses/Jesus/Prophet Muhammad draw me to worshipping God.	It seems clear to me that God and religion are human constructs – products of human minds and societies.
Believing that I am known and loved by God brings me wholeness and peace.	I find that God is the most satisfying explanation for human existence and human nature.	Belief in God prevents people from making society better. Ancient beliefs are not suited to the modern world.
Humans desire a supernatural parental figure, someone to keep them safe and to make things right. They create the idea of God as a comfort against the harsh realities of life.	The way the brain works makes humans look for explanations in terms of <i>purpose</i> in the world around them. 'God' offers an ultimate explanation.	I have often had a sense of the presence of God in my life.