

Inviting Santa (and the Tooth Fairy) Into Your Home

You must admit, there is a certain amount of hypocrisy for parents to teach their children to be good and honest in order to receive gifts from Santa Claus and yet, at the same time, they must lie to their children in order to foster that belief.



Dr. Jenn Berman

Rituals create meaning and mark the passage of time. Children are naturally drawn to them. The rituals that have evolved surrounding the Tooth Fairy, Santa and the Easter Bunny, to name a few, put the central focus on the children and provide them with a modicum of control. In order to get Santa to visit, little Jimmy had to have been good all year, he probably made a request list, and he most likely left Santa a snack. The tooth fairy does-

n't come unless Madison has lost a tooth and has left it for the Fairy to collect. Every family has their own variation on these rituals, and often they reflect and help maintain the family values.

Santa Claus is a symbol of children's innocence, of their ability to suspend disbelief and to allow for magic and fantasy. When children stop believing in Santa, it saddens parents because they associate that rite of passage with growing up. The age at which children stop believing in this type of cultural mythology varies. Often questions begin to arise around the age of 5 or 6, when cognitive skills are developing and children become increasingly social, exposing them to other children who may start questioning these beliefs. Most parents expect their children to find out the truth about Christmas from a friend.

Santa is a highly symbolic character. He signifies abundance, generosity, and even moral development. "He knows if you've been bad or good," therefore, his lessons have the ability to help children contemplate ethical behavior and to strive to be kind to others. He has the capacity to open up discussions between parents and their children about what it means to be a decent human being. Even when children lose their belief in Santa, they can still maintain their belief in his symbolic meaning.

While most children know the difference between playing pretend and lying, some parents believe the difference is not that substantial. According to one cyber-mom, "I've never understood the notion of deliberately feeding a child a falsehood, knowing very well that one day that parent is going to be exposed as a liar. My credibility as a parent is a lot more valuable than that."

This also raises religious questions. Often the religious meaning behind Christmas is lost among gift lists, Christmas ornaments and holiday parties. One religious dad was horrified when his son found out the truth about Santa and confronted him, saying, "You said there was a Santa Claus and now I find out that's not true. You say there's a God. How do I know that is not another story you're making up?"

Some parents refer to Santa as the "God of Materialism." Much concern has been raised about the gifting focus of the holiday and the messages that sends kids. Even the idea that children get material rewards for having "been good" is a dangerous message. How do you explain to your child why little Taylor down the street got 10 times more toys than she did? Does that mean that she was a better child?

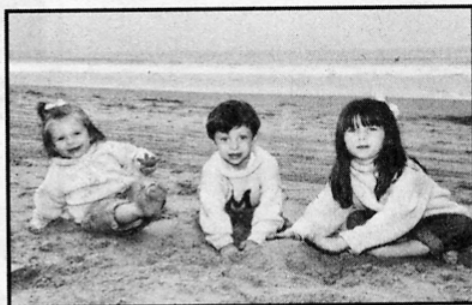
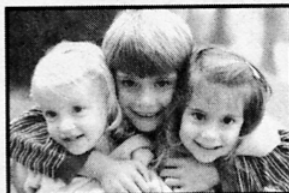
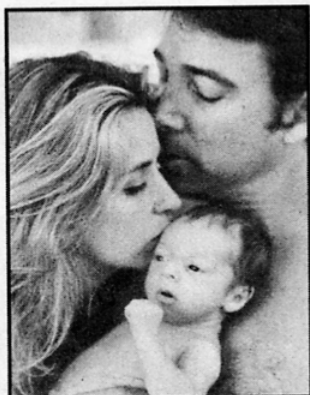
The Tooth Fairy

Perhaps more often than with the myth of Santa, parents are eventually faced with the decision of whether or not to perpetuate the myth of the Tooth Fairy. It is easy to forget how scary the loss of a first tooth might be without the aid of the Fairy. Many children worry that they may never grow a new one in its place. The Tooth Fairy not only distracts from those initial fears; she also creates new positive associations with tooth loss.

Because the tooth fairy offers psychological aide to distressed, gap-toothed children, I feel I can wholeheartedly endorse her actions and deeds. Santa, on the other hand, is a bit more complicated. I encourage families, who are committed to leaving the chimney flu open, to use Christmas as an opportunity to touch on more significant issues with their kids. Use Christmas stories and television shows to explore related issues with your children. With this in mind, Christmas can be about more than just gifts and parties.

Dr. Jenn Berman is a psychotherapist and sports psychology consultant. She can be reached through her website at www.DoctorJenn.com.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS ! Sharon Holly Photography



gift certificates available!

(310) 720-2611

www.sharonholly.com