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You Better Not Lie, I'm Telling You Why...

By Dawn Fry

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by: **Dawn Fry**

Santa Claus Is Coming

Holiday season brings the perennial return of Santa Claus. According to traditional lore, St. Nick flies around the world on his reindeer-powered sleigh. He lavishes gifts upon the good children of the world, and as for the naughty youngsters...well, they can expect lumps of fossil fuel in their stockings. This jovial, rotund old fellow provides a magical experience that enriches the lives of children. Right?

Well, not necessarily.

Parents often recount their childhood stories as cherished memories and want to recreate the same experiences for their children. Unfortunately, parents' good intentions may actually lead to mixed messages that may be harmful to children—and there is no magic in that. After taking a closer look at how the Santa "fantasy" really affects children, you'll realize that it's time to give the traditional Santa fantasy a modern makeover.

You Better Not Pout....

"He knows when you've been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake." The song "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town" provides an example of the mixed messages associated with the traditional Santa Claus myth. In this song, the take-home message for many children is: "Santa is watching you, so you better be good. If you are not good Santa won't bring you toys."

Adults, in some cases, take advantage of this message to control children's behavior. A department store employee once boasted that she had the perfect way to keep customers' children under control. Whenever children became unruly, she would warn them that Santa had cameras all over the store, and he could see them being bad. If they didn't stop misbehaving, the clerk warned, they wouldn't receive any toys on Christmas. She took great pride in the fact that this trick worked every time.

You Better Not Lie, I'm Telling You Why...

What a creepy idea: Santa watches and judges you, and worse, he may even punish you. Youngsters believe that if they don't perform in acceptable ways, Santa won't bring them toys. This reward/punishment scenario encourages children to be good for the sake of a reward, and even worse, it instills a sort of "Big Brother is watching" feeling. So be good to get toys, and be good because someone's watching you. What happened to be good for goodness sake?

He's Gonna Find Out Who's Naughty or Nice....

Another harmful message implicit in the Santa myth is that material objects reflect quality of character. In this faulty logic, if being good leads to toys, then receiving toys signify good behavior. Take, for instance, the following example—a true story.

After the holidays, several children discussed the exciting gifts Santa had brought them. One child

claimed that she had been so good that Santa brought her the bike she had really wanted. Another little girl, who had suffered parental abuse and neglect, listened to the first girl's story. Later, in a very meek voice, she asked her caretaker a heartbreaking question: Since she had been good, when was Santa going to bring her bike?

In this case, and unfortunately in others, the Santa myth sets children up for disappointment and self-doubt.

I'm Telling You Why....

At about age five children begin to question the Santa myth by asking such questions as: Is Santa Claus real? How can he make it to all the houses in one night? How can he fit down the chimney? We don't have a chimney, so how can Santa come to my house? How can this be Santa when we just saw him at another store? Do reindeer really fly?

For each of these questions, parents must extend the fantasy (i.e. generate more lies) to keep the myth alive just a little longer. While these adults think it's okay to deceive children when it is for their own good, it may actually harm them.

Whether they finally figure it out for themselves or their parents confess the truth about Santa, children experience sadness, regrets and often, a sense of betrayal. Their parents—the adults whom they had trusted the most—lied to them. What good is a short-term fantasy if it damages a child's core sense of trust?

Santa Claus is Coming to Town

Parents need not do away with the Santa experience all together. A fun and emotionally safe alternative to the traditional myth is the Santa Claus Game. In the Santa game everyone pretends that Santa is real. This enables everyone to enjoy all the activities that others enjoy. The main difference is that your children understand that Santa is just pretend.

You Better Not Lie, I'm Telling You Why...

You can introduce the game during the pre-school years. Of course, at this age children are too young to truly understand the difference between pretend and real. But you can take them to visit Santa and do all the Santa related activities children like to do. From time to time you can say things like, "This Santa game is fun!" You can even put out milk and cookies for "Santa," again explaining that it's just pretend.

As the children get older and want to know more, explain that in this pretend game Santa has magic and can do all the amazing things that people talk about. Talk about Santa in a fairytale, magical kind of fashion. The fact that it is a game will not detract any pleasure from the child's fun.

By the time children are five and six, you can stop the emphasis on the pretend factor. At that age they will still be excited to visit Santa and sit on his lap, even though they know it is all pretend. When the children are ten and eleven years old, they can still get presents from Santa and many will still want to put out milk and cookies. The difference now is that they will have that "special twinkle" in their eyes when they ask, "What kind of cookies would Santa like this year?"

Eventually you won't have to talk about it being a game anymore; you'll simply have fun. And isn't that what the holiday spirit is all about?

Children are excellent at pretend games and enjoy them immensely. Even though the Santa game is make-believe, it differs from the traditional myth in a crucial way: All the players know it is a game. Adults may then tell children that not all families play the game and that some children don't know it is a game. This information explains why Santa doesn't come to all families, and why some children think Santa is real. It also clears up why some children don't get what they want from Santa, even when they have been "good."

Children who learn the Santa game equally enjoy the magic and excitement that others receive from the traditional Santa experience. Most important, though, they don't suffer the disillusionment and sense of betrayal of discovering that Santa isn't real. So keep in mind that when you sing, "You better not lie, I am telling you why"—a child's trust and happiness is at stake.

Dawn Fry is the founder and CEO of Helping Our Children Productions, a publishing company that provides educational CD's giving practical help to families and childcare professionals. Ms. Fry has more than 60,000 hours of professional experience working with children. For more information, visit

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When I Lie Safe In Your Arms

By Emmanuel Emesakoru

When I Lie Safe In Your Arms by Emmanuel Emesakoru

When I lie here safe in your warm arms
Defenseless at the mercy of your charms
A weakling I turn staring into your eyes
I lose my strength in this new paradise

This paradise of encircling warmth I love
For it's cool as the rainfall from above
That falls upon my skin and makes it shine
Knowing that you're always mine and fine

When I lie here safe in your strong arm
Though I'm weak but I'm safe from harm
I feel my bones turn into water and flow
My dead feelings gently kindle and glow

This glowing feeling compares to the galaxy
For it always brings me closer to sweet ecstasy
When I lie here safe in your soothing arms
Boneless, defenseless at your irresistible charms

There's really nothing about me. I am Emmanuel Emesakoru, a budding poet who desires to live someday by the poetic works of my hands someday in the United states and make a fine name, just writing poetry.

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