

Creating More Realistic Gift Expectations For Your Child

from the American Counseling Association

The holiday season is a time of giant expectations for young children. Kids face enormous marketing efforts from every front about the toys they “must have” this year.

Even adults get affected by all the advertising. We may find ourselves fantasizing about football games on that giant screen TV, or looking great in that new sports car.

Of course, as adults, we usually can put such fantasies aside as we remind ourselves that our lives have limits. But for a young child, it’s much harder to accept parents’ practical decisions and budget limitations. That fantasy about how much better that “hot” new toy will make his or her life is very real.

This happens because young children have the ability to move from reality to fantasies and dreams much more easily than adults. Our life experience has taught us that allowing dreams to run wild for too long increases our chances for disappointment when we face the reality of our everyday lives.

But kids are programmed to spend a lot more time in their fantasy worlds and to see all their dreams as realities that are possible. It’s all part of normal human development. This ability to play and imagine is the root of creativity.

Belief that a particular toy will help them live out their fantasy is very strong for young children. Your adult reasons why their request can’t be met will have little meaning or impact. Saying, “That toy is too expensive” may just make the child cling harder to the fantasy of how wonderful it would be to have it.

Rather than fighting the request, try allowing your child to enjoy the fantasy by showing you understand. Saying, “That really does look like a great toy,” or asking “What do you like about that toy?” or “What would you do if you had it?” allows the child to keep the dream alive without your giving in to the demand or just saying no.

By not resisting the fantasy you allow your child to return to reality at his or her own pace, and you avoid feeling guilty or being responsible for a broken dream. Then, when the passion for the toy is not as high, try having a calm discussion about why getting that particular toy is not a good decision. Your goal is to bring your child back to realistic expectations slowly but surely.

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