

Reindeer Ruminations

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By Alfie Kohn

When my daughter was about three, she had a mad crush on Clifford the Big Red Dog. You can imagine her delight when she spotted a six-foot Clifford greeting children at a fair one afternoon. She dashed over and wrapped her arms around his fur, excitedly informing him that she had seen him on television. After a few minutes, she trotted over to me and said in a confidential whisper, "Daddy, you know that isn't really Clifford. It's just someone dressed up like him" – at which point she scooted back over and resumed her hugging.

The fact that my daughter understood it was all pretend didn't dilute her joy one bit. The same is true of the endless imaginative games that all kids play: It's enormous fun even though they know it's make-believe. Why, then, do so many adults assume children can't enjoy the Santa myth unless it's presented as literal truth? Given that it's possible for kids to have fun without our having to deceive them, why not have the best of both worlds: gaiety and honesty?

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