

**Parenting Discussion Group Article & Questions  
For Parents of Children 6yrs and under**

**Topic:** Children and who they should look up to

**Article:** The fantasy years, Perspective Magazine, Adapted from Hacer Familia

Please read the following article and then answer the questions at the end of this document.

The Parenting Discussion group should not run for longer than an hour. If you have any feedback about this topic or the questions used please forward your comments to [elisabeth@familyeducation.org.au](mailto:elisabeth@familyeducation.org.au)

**How to Manage the Small Group**

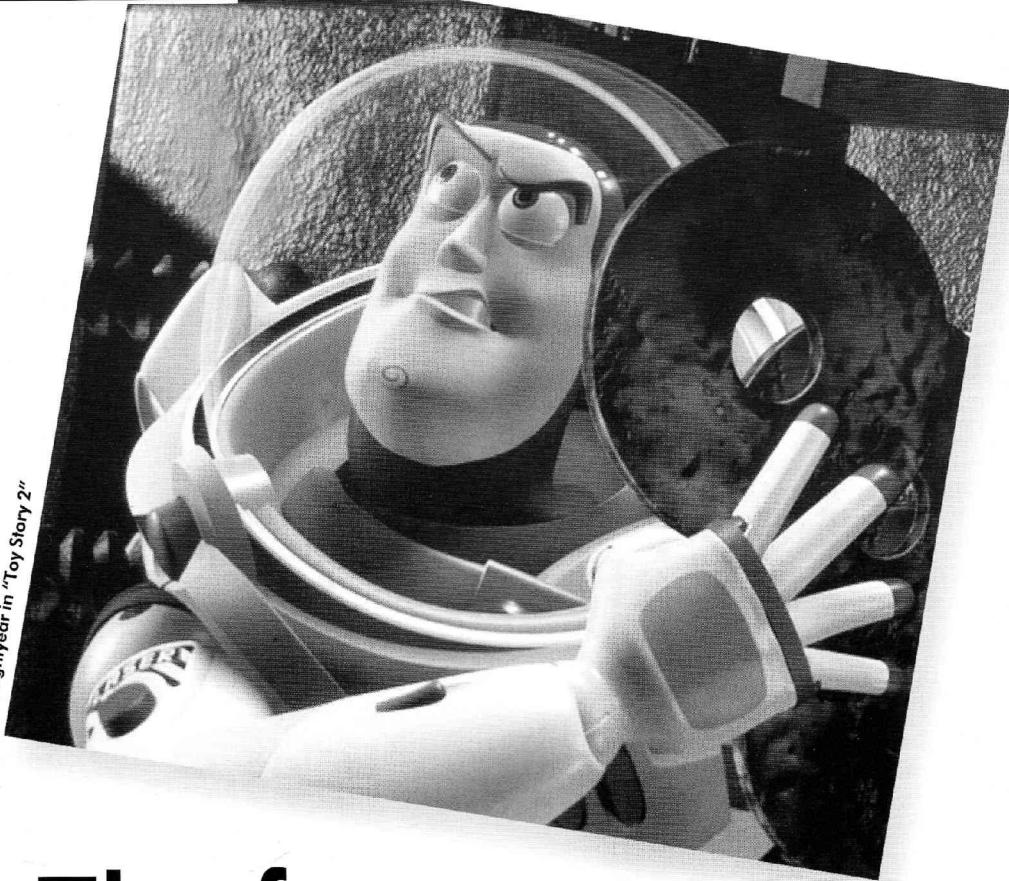
- select a small group leader for the session
- know the time limit and organise time accordingly. Leave time for summing up at the end.
- try to include everyone without letting someone dominate
- don't let people talk too much about their own children.
- avoid unnecessary digressions. This can be done by refocusing the group's attention back on the question and using questions like:
  - "What does everyone else think?"
  - "Does everyone agree?"
  - "What about.....?" or
  - "Do you think....?"

# YOUR kids



3 to 6

Buzz Lightyear in "Toy Story 2"



## The fantasy years

It is very natural for youngsters between 3 and 6 to identify themselves with fictional heroes, especially those with strange powers. For them, it's not just make-believe when they hold tea parties for dolls or explode passing cars with X-ray beams. It is a way of exploring the world around them in a much more imaginative fashion. They live through a rich variety of experiences – acting out roles as a mum, a superhero, or their favourite TV character.

This is the age of fantasy in which everything has a different logic. A toddler's world is different from an adult's because they have a much more active and volatile imagination. A doll *can* fly and they *can* turn themselves into pirates. Fantasy is a way of learning. With their imagination they can create situations in which they are the invincible stars – which they are patently not in reality.

Why do they like superheroes? Their favourite dolls

can break rules (at this age, rules begin to become a burden), go flying wherever they want on a magic carpet, or kill the baddies with beams of X-ray vision... Make-believe allows them to live in a world tailored to their likes and dislikes.

Nowadays, powerful forces of marketing provide children with weird Pokemon or Teletubby heroes. But their first and primary heroes live at home: Dad, Mum, their older brother, the stuffed

panda and so on. In the beginning, children adopt many of the features of their personality from the people who surround them. But as they grow, they discover other models such as their teachers, TV characters, characters in fairy tales and their collection of heroes keeps growing.

So don't forget that you have pride of place in their pantheon. Even if Mum and Dad lack the superpowers of Batman or Buzz Lightyear, you are still top of the charts. From time to time during these fantasy years your special powers might be ignored or overlooked because of the attraction of a miserable doll from a movie like *Toy Story*... but sooner or later you will be a star again.

It is important not to stifle the creativity of children. It is good for them to play a lot, to invent things, to paint fantastic situations, to carry on dialogues with imaginary friends, and so on. But it's also a good idea to step in from time to time to separate their rational thinking from their imagination and to learn how to distinguish what is real from what is unreal. The ability to differentiate reality from what only exists in their head is a fundamental quality of maturity.

However, you don't need to be hasty about curtailing their imagination. The important thing is for them to have the ability to snap out it. Let them live in a world of their own – so long as they are only visitors and not permanent residents.

Wet blankets who are impatient with children's fantasies are familiar characters in children's novels and films – and with good reason. There are very few children who ever are truly sucked into a fantasy world, a la *Jumanji*, but there are many parents who

are too matter-of-fact and pragmatic and somehow regard fantasy as a personal affront to their sense of logic.

A better policy is to enter into their fantasy world and play the game with them. You might feel a bit stiff and unnatural, but go with the flow. Allow yourself to be "taught" by your children how to have a bit more imagination. Take part – don't just observe. Come down to their level. Get down on the floor and play horsies; have an imaginary tea party; die in

agony when you are shot with an X-ray cannon.

In fact, playing with children should be an important part of your timetable, a time when you are completely at their service to play a role in their games without rushing things.

*Adapted from "Hacer Familia" by Margaret-Maria Dudley. Her email address is MM\_Dudley@yahoo.com*

### Points to ponder



Small Soldiers

✓ Apart from being a natural stage in children's development, make-believe helps to develop permanent qualities, such as creativity, imagination and sensitivity.

✓ Make-believe also helps children to entertain themselves and not get bored. They quickly learn a thousand ways of entertaining themselves without resorting to television and video games.

✓ Fashionable superheroes are often created by clever marketing techniques. It is important to try to control the effects of advertising.

✓ Try to direct their attention towards virtuous heroes – although it's no disaster if they like playing Star Wars every once in a while.

✓ In this fantasy phase, try to show your children that they can become superheroes by learning how to tie their shoelaces or write their name, too.

✓ Try to balance fantasy with action. Teach youngsters skills which have a definite outcome – cooking scones, painting, gardening, etc.

✓ Having friends is a good way of keeping your feet on the ground. Children have to learn how to get on with other people from a young age. A fantasy world could be dangerous if it fosters a feeling of isolation.

✓ There is very little danger that children will not learn the dividing line between reality and fantasy. When they get older, they will learn that it was all a game. It's not a good idea to burst the bubble of their imagination.

**Questions:**

Q1) Are you reluctant to allow your kids to be creative because of the mess and hassle involved? If so, discuss what activities you avoid and try to work out how you can get around the issues.

Q2) What do you do at home to encourage your child's imagination and creativity?

Q3) Rather than buying toys and super hero dolls list some materials you can provide for you children to use when they play in their “make believe” world. e.g Toilet rolls, old shoe boxes, crepe paper etc