Imaginary Playmate Encyclopedia Article

Imaginary Playmate

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Imaginary Playmate

Companion created by imagination or daydreaming.

An imaginary playmate is a friend or companion created by the child in his imagination or daydreams. Imaginary playmates are common during the preschool years: experts estimate that about half of all children create such a playmate. By the early elementary school years at around age six, most imaginary playmates disappear from the child's imagination.

The type of interaction the child engages in with his or her imaginary playmate varies. The playmate generally has a name and a clear identity. Parents and teachers do not need to discourage children from playing with imaginary friends, if they have them. The imaginary playmate relationship nurtures the child's imagination and can provide practice of social skills.

John Caldeira and his colleagues conducted a study to examine the relationships between children's play with imaginary playmates, children's general **creativity** and positive social interaction, and television viewing patterns at home. The activities of 141 three- and four-year-olds were observed and rated eight times over one year by trained observers. According to parents' reports, 55% of the children in the study had imaginary playmates at home. The researchers found that the children with imaginary playmates at home were more likely to engage in imaginative play in school. They were also more likely to demonstrate positive affect, social interaction, cooperativeness, and greater use of verbal skills. Boys who did not have imaginary playmates at home were more likely to demonstrate aggressive behavior. The parents who reported that their children did not have an imaginary playmate also reported that their child watched television more frequently.

For Further Study

Periodicals

Caldeira, John, et al. "Imaginary Playmates: Some Relationships to Pre-Schoolers' Spontaneous Play, Language, and Television-Viewing." ERIC document ED 174303.

Cassidy, Anne. "The Power of Pretend Friends." *Working Mother* 18, October 1995, pp. 92+.

Epstein, Robert. "The Creative Spark." *Working Mother* 17, February 1994, pp. 58+.

Levine, Karen. "Telling Tales: What Your Child's Never-Ending Stories Say About His Inner Life." *Parents Magazine* 71, October 1996, p. 139.