

Tips for Parents by Susie Kohl and Ellen Evans

Superheroes: Preschool to the Rescue

LAST WEEK WE SENT a short *eNote* asking White Pony parents to please support us in our effort to reduce and neutralize aggressive play by not sending their children to preschool in shirts and costumes displaying superhero images. (Lunchboxes, shoes, socks, and underwear are just fine).

The day after this note went out, teachers in one of the classrooms noticed a dramatic reduction in aggressive play on the yard because parents were kind enough to comply with the request. The teachers couldn't express enough gratitude.

We want children to understand what true heroes do. We are very aware that three- and four-year-olds need to express strength, power, and mastery in their play. We try to develop that expression and channel that energy through games and dramatic play about real rescue workers, brave men and women, fire and police personnel, and others in helping roles. We also divert children from playing shooting games at school.

These are controversial topics, and we don't want to suggest that if your child likes superheroes, or loves to turn a sandwich into a gun, that it will have an effect on his or her development. We simply ask that our preschool remain free from those images and activities.

It may be that your child can wear superhero outfits and never act aggressively. The challenge at school and in groups is that other children seeing Spider-Man or Batman on a shirt may feel afraid or may want to act out.

We are saying this based on real incidents, not on conjecture.

The teachers who were so relieved had been experiencing a proliferation of these outfits, and a wave of superhero play, and while they had been working hard to divert this play into more positive activities, it became impossible because of how the children were thinking of them-selves and each other. Some children were nervous about coming to school because of the absorption in superhero activity.

We want to emphasize that this request was sent to parents of preschoolers, not elementary-age children. Older children can handle wearing superhero logos without acting out. They are in a different cognitive stage and have more self-control than preschoolers. The preschool mind is characterized by the phrase "What I see is what I believe." If they connect Batman with hitting, that's what happens in their play. Our teachers have observed, some of them for decades, how hard it is to transform this repetitive, aggressive play into something more positive and imaginative.

The *eNote* revitalized a long-time principle in our preschool: *No scary or negative images on shirts.* We don't ask children to wear uniforms or refrain from any logos on their shirts as other schools commonly do. We are simply asking for your help in keeping preschool play positive and fun and free from the kind of play that is encouraged by these images.

Thank you for your cooperation and help.

Please e-mail Ellen Evans at ellen@meherschools.org or Susie Kohl at susie@springtide.org with questions.

February 5, 2014