

**Tips for Parents** by Susie Kohl

## *Mean World, Kind World*

**A**DRENALINE RACES THROUGH MY BODY sending a chemical warning: “The world is a dangerous place.” My brain doesn’t seem to register that I’m not being pursued through the jungle by an ominous looking tiger called Shere Khan. I’m just watching the movie *Jungle Book*. The girl sitting next to me in the theater, disturbed by the violence, makes the wise decision to leave before the movie ends. Though I wait for the conclusion, I don’t feel happy or uplifted by the image of Mowgli hanging out peacefully with his friends. My body still feels edgy and ready to jump from two hours of intermittent attacks.

The aftereffects watching frightening images has on our minds has been dubbed “mean world syndrome.” When we watch violent images on TV or in movies, a subtle residue tends to color our thinking, causing us to see the world in more pessimistic way. Much has been written about the negative effects of allowing children to become fans of aggression in the media, whether it’s TV, movies, or video games, and this is a helpful way of categorizing that imagery.

Now researchers are turning their attention to positive films and programming, noting that there are lingering effects from watching a heartwarming or inspirational film. They call that phenomenon “kind world syndrome.” A recent article in the *Greater Good* newsletter highlighted the movie *Zootopia*, with its wonderful messages of fostering inclusion and appreciation for diversity, as a movie that could transform people’s attitudes about the world in positive ways.

The terms “mean world” and “kind world” offer us a handy way to judge whether something we or children are watching will have positive or negative effects. We all want to promote kindness in the world, and simply watching positive entertainment can aid us in achieving that goal.

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