

Tips for Parents by Susie Kohl

Scary Images Leave Lasting Impressions

A SHORT TIME AFTER HALLOWEEN some years ago, a mom told me that her young daughter was having an unusual reaction. She didn't want her mother to leave the room and suddenly cried fearfully when they had to be separated. Thinking back, this parent realized that her daughter had viewed a surprisingly scary scene on Halloween that neither of them was prepared for, and the fear made the little girl regress. This wise mother concentrated on calming and reassuring her and the girl's anxiety slowly ebbed away.

Children's reactions to frightening things can confuse us because they often enthusiastically seek them out what terrifies them. "I want to hear that scary story" or "see that scary movie." The fun and exhilaration of being scared can be enlivening. Sometimes it is fun for an older child or adults. Yet if we measured what was happening to young children's bodies during sudden fear-inducing experiences, we would see, as modern scientists have, from galvanic skin responses or respiration indicators, that their bodies can be excited, though not in positive ways.



Recently teachers asked me about a child in preschool who continually repeats the scary images she has seen in movies with her older brothers. Perhaps at the time the films are shown, she eagerly watches, and yet in her daily life, at her age, it's very difficult for her to process them.

In this season, when more movies for children will be coming out, it is helpful for parents to evaluate the content of what their children will be seeing and to make their own determinations about the images they want to fill their children's minds.

At school we are dedicated to leaving out the popular stories and characters from movies and uninspiring traditional books and turning instead to tales that fill children with positivity and the imagining of new possibilities.

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