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Survival Lessons

Young children today live an interesting life created for their benefit, and indoctrination, by their elders. It is a world full of strange things and oddities that must, at times, make little sense to the children. Christmas, and Santa Clause in particular, have a profound effect on their developing psyche. Much as lion cubs learn how to stalk and kill by watching the prominent leaders in their society, human children learn how to lie and rationalize from the earliest age by watching those they trust the most practice to deceive.

Volunteering at the Scholastic Book Faire at Valley Oak Children's Services, I got to dress up as Clifford the Big Red Dog. I was told not to talk. The reason for this, I presume, is to not give the game away. The same person can't always be in the Clifford suit, and if Clifford sounded different every twenty minutes (the longest time one can remain in the suit and not asphyxiate) then that may arouse the suspicions of the children, and adults will single mindedly defy any attempt of a child to break out of their fantasy and into the truth.

In spite of taking care not to talk, as one little girl was leaving she asked me what my name was. Thinking quickly, I pointed at the sign that said "Clifford". Several adults laughed at the question and thought it was rather cute, and every one of them developed a case of selective hearing when the child made it apparent she was not going to accept my answer. The girl, looking a little frustrated, pointed at me and said, "What's *your* name?" I got the distinct impression she wanted to know the name of the person in the suit. But now the adults just ignored her and hustled her out of the room, her repeated questions falling on deaf ears.

The people children look up to as examples of how to interact with the world go to great lengths to lie on grand scales. Even if the young person begins to catch onto the lie, the adults simply ignore it, as shown above. Children are forced to deal with these lies whether they want to or not. Countless numbers are annually hauled to the mall to sit on the lap of Santa, a magical person they have been assured exists in reality. Tooth fairies and Easter bunnies, leprechauns and flying reindeer, all these things and more are honestly believed in by the youngest amongst us.

Such grand deceptions, as well as more commonplace ones such as where babies come from, or frivolous answer to the myriad of questions that children ask, work because young children do not perceive the world in quite the same way adults do. They have not learned to make the kind of intuitive distinctions adults have learned to make. For example, if, in front of a child, you take a squat container full of 10 ounces of liquid and pour it into a tall thin container that also holds 10 ounces of liquid, a child will believe the tall container actually has more liquid inside of it, in spite of the fact that they just saw the same amount of liquid poured into it. Children are gullible, unsuspecting, and quite naïve. This makes them very easy to trick and deceive.

The massive amount of routine deception that goes on between a child and that child's guardians is like an immersion therapy course to prepare the child for the real world, where honesty is a rarity, and lying for personal gain is the name of the game. That is especially true in today's world of mass-market media. Commercials and advertisements daily bombard individuals by the thousands. Almost all are cleverly constructed lies, and every last one exists solely to change the viewer's way of thinking. By teaching our children that the most trustworthy person they know, their parents, can, will, and have lied to them with no compunctions, our children are learning to mistrust everything. Always question what you are told, take all advice with a grain of salt, never stop searching for the truth, and perhaps most important, do not be afraid to lie if you need to. These vital survival skills are necessary to survive in the illusory world filled with the phantasmagoria of advertising that we have created.