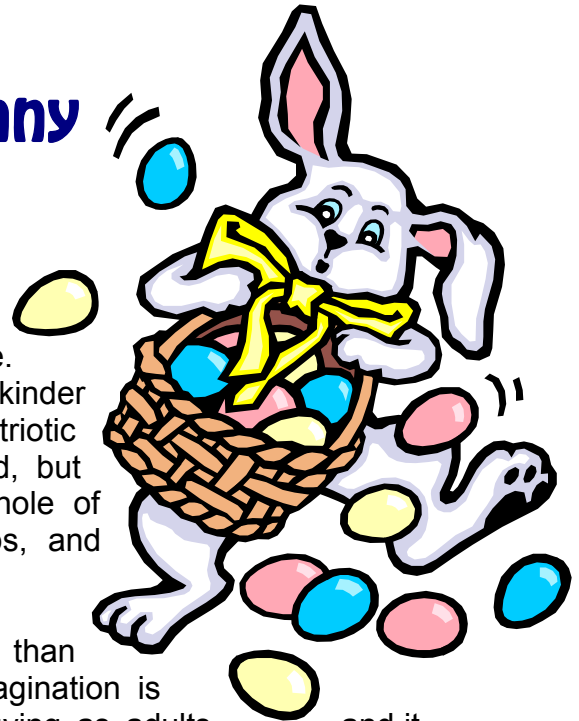


# In defence of the humble bunny

By author and educator Maggie Dent

Kids need to think these mystical creatures are real, to allow their delicate minds to wait eagerly for those days of the year when these larger-than-life characters arrive. As Easter comes speeding towards us, I invite you to be kinder to the humble Easter Bunny (or Bilby if you are a patriotic Australian.) Yes it's a creation of the commercial world, but heck, childhood is fast disappearing down the rabbit hole of DVDs, customised Bob the Builder and Barbie laptops, and electronic gadgetry.



Our children's imaginations are being starved faster than Victoria Beckham on her daily lettuce leaf. Healthy imagination is essential for flexible thinking, creativity and great gift-buying as adults, and it all starts with babies and toddlers.

When adults buy bright plastic toys to stimulate their wee one's brain, they are starving the imagination that grows from playing in Mum's tupperware cupboard. This is the same imagination that over joys in tipping out a peg basket while Mum or Dad hangs out washing and playing with discarded wrapping paper.

Traditional fairy stories are being given the flick by many modern parents because mean things happen. Take Hansel and Gretel, for example. It is pretty scary stuff with Hansel being stuck in a cage to be fattened up the wicked witch so she can eat him.

However, even her house made of gingerbread and lollies does not stop these two creative children from working out how to overcome her evil antics. Yes it is awful when they bundle her into the oven and presumably kill her. The deeper message of the story is classic - good can conquer evil and overcome adversity by planning and perseverance. Would today's imagination-starved children be able to overcome the wicked witch, metaphorically?

So Santa and the humble Easter Bunny are excellent ways to allow children to live in a child's world protected and insulated from adult stuff. It is inappropriate that children know about mortgage stress, their parents' lousy sex lives or frigid relationships between emotionally challenged family members - there's plenty of time for all that.

Kids need to think these mystical creatures are real, to allow their delicate minds to wait eagerly for those days of the year when these larger-than-life characters arrive with stuff kids love to have and especially eat.

The Easter egg hunt is still very popular in our family even though my four sons initially look at me as though I have lost the plot. As these six-foot spunks start searching the yard, the four-year-old inner child comes out and before long the race is on with rugby tackles and cries of "it's not fair." My sons remember the many times they have enjoyed the egg hunt - and the eager waiting for weeks before.

Waiting is a key ingredient of the magic of having these important imaginary characters in our children's lives.

Children need to know about anticipation and the use of gratification as a behaviour modification tool because one day they will use it themselves, when they become parents.

They also need to know about excess - that awful pain in the belly when one has eaten all those eggs. All these experiences teach us about life.

Without imaginary legends and characters, we starve vital parts of the brain and create boring thinking patterns based solely on logic and rational thought.

Healthy imaginations build protective factors that build resilience later in life.

The "seeking mechanism" in the brain is developed early in life in close partnership with the imagination. Later in life, this mechanism allows us to change soul-destroying jobs, leave toxic relationships and strive to overcome serious illness or disability. They have the capacity to dream of something better and that possibility acts as an impulse for positive change.

So this year as you wander the aisles in your supermarket don't curse the commercialism of Easter. Know that it's not about the size or number of eggs; what's important to kids is the imaginary character who brings them.

Let our kids be kids. Sure, one day they will be bitterly disappointed when they learn things aren't always as they seem. But that bitter pill also prepares them to manage those other things that will appear in their lives - mortgage stress, lousy sex lives and family dramas.

*Maggie Dent ([www.maggiedent.com](http://www.maggiedent.com)) is an author and educator, specialising in parenting and resilience. Her latest book, *Real Kids in an Unreal World: how to build resilience and self esteem in today's children*.*