

Where The Wild Things Are...

Interview with Merianne Grigoriuc, human development and family studies expert, psychologist and early childhood education professional, wife, mother, & stepmother...

What were your thoughts about the film "Where The Wild Things Are?"

I generally have so many other things to do than read someone else's opinion about something, but I just had to get this out. I read an article yesterday with reviews of the movie "Where the Wild Things Are." The review was mixed but the complaints from many parents were that the movie was too sad and boring for their young children.

One woman even said her 20 month old was bored early in the movie...what in the world is a 20 month old doing at a movie anyway? Their attention spans are only about 15 minutes and it is not appropriate for 20 month old children to go to movies.

I will agree that the movie was more appropriate for 6 years and up. It is definitely not a movie that mirrors the beloved preschool book.

How does the screenplay apply to parenting today?

The movie was poignantly sad because it touched on what so many children face everyday. They are faced with life, which is messy. And, the emotions of life are even messier. All parents should see this film.

What is the most important parenting lesson someone can learn from this film?

Children are not supposed to know how to handle their emotions all the time. Helping our children handle emotions is our job as parents and adults...to teach them how to navigate the muddy waters of emotional expression.

Unfortunately as adults, most of us are not graced with, nor do we aspire toward high "emotional intelligence." Even those who work toward emotional maturity still have their "days" when emotions get the best of them.

Who hasn't felt angry, isolated, envious, inadequate, unsupported, silly, playful, carefree, and dare I say it...out of control at times? Our kids feel these same emotions everyday.

What can we do to help our children negotiate these emotional landmines?

They have bad days just like us and for no apparent reason feel emotions that they cannot understand. On other days they are completely justified to feel the emotions they feel. I have seen this with my stepdaughter who struggles at times with living in a blended family. Yet, I see it with my son whose parents are in a committed loving marriage.

Yet, as parents we think our children should be like little adults. We think they should not feel these emotions or express them – and worse – that they should be able to handle or manage their feelings.

So what psycho-emotional and social issues make this movie controversial?

Dare say they make a movie about a boy who feels all these things because he cannot control the events of his life. This movie emulates real life, to a certain extent, for kids and adults.

But life for children can be harder because they are still learning about their emotions. They are learning how to understand their emotions and how to handle them in an "acceptable" manner. They are struggling psycho-emotionally while the world around them is controlled by stronger forces (parents, stepparents, school officials, coaches, etc.).

“Where the Wild Things Are” is not a carefree movie about a boy's imagination. Instead, it was a movie about real feelings.

I took my 4 year old and some of the film was hard for him to understand. However, I was able to use the movie to talk with him about emotions and how to handle them. Another important point was to let him know it is OK to have these emotions and to sometimes, feels out of control because of them.

My job as his mother, and for all of us as mothers, is to help guide our little ones through messy emotions and the messy things in life.

What is the one nugget of truth you would like to share with all mothers?

Let your kids be kids. The next time they are a little "wild", remember that sometimes you would like to be a little "wild" too (but) you have learned to navigate those emotions (hopefully).

In other words, extend your children a little slack (or grace). Give them a big hug and let them know that though you may not like the way they expressed themselves - you understand. And most importantly, you love them no matter what.

About Merianne

Merianne Grigoricic, MS

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Merianne has worked in research at teaching universities, has extended experience as an early childhood educator, and is an experienced researcher for statewide research in the child care workforce and currently a vocational evaluator. Her previous work focused on program management for a statewide Professional Development Scholarship program for early childhood workers. Her greatest life's work and experience is as a stepmother, mother and wife.