



A cutoff point for playing with stuffed animals?

My 7-year-old boy asked for stuffed animals for the holidays. Is that worrisome? Up until what age is it normal for a boy to play with a teddy bear, for instance?



PARENTAL GUIDANCE

Beth Whitehouse

beth.whitehouse@newsday.com

"While the request for a stuffed animal might not be the most popular of requests for 7-year-old boys, there's certainly nothing abnormal about it," says Sherry Henig, a psychologist in private practice in Plainview. Lots of boys like to sleep with a stuffed animal, although it's often one the child has had from early childhood that, as such, is imbued with meaning, Henig says.

Boys also may incorporate stuffed animals in their fantasy play. The child may use stuffed animals, action figures, maybe even dolls, to act out imaginary scenes, she says. Stuffed animals such as Webkinz and Pillow Pets are the kind of items boys this age may enjoy, she says. Webkinz,

for instance, allow the owner to engage in computer play associated with the toy.

"I'm sure plenty of successful, well-adjusted men enjoyed stuffed animals at age 7," Henig says.

Renee Clauselle, a child psychologist in private practice in Franklin Square, echoed Henig. Even teenagers still treasure stuffed animals and may sleep with them or bring them on sleepovers, she says.

The only issue she sees is if playing with stuffed animals causes your son pain socially. "Problems would occur if they were getting teased for playing with it," Clauselle says. "But if that's their special little toy to play with, I wouldn't be concerned about it."