

# Saved by imagination

Take me to your happy place



**Erin Harrel**  
of Cape Coral is  
the mother of  
three children.

October springs children's imaginations into a world of wonder, full of ghosts, goblins, fairies and other playful characters. It provides that one day where children can act out their dreams and put on fairy-tale costumes and collect candy.

This year, I was forced to stimulate my youngest's imagination much earlier. When I accepted a full-time position at work, my husband, Greg, and I decided Maggie could handle a full day of preschool.

Maggie had never been in day care or any school setting. Over the past few years, my sister and friends had graciously watched Maggie as we coddled our youngest child and spent countless hours playing with her.

Truly, we thought we were doing what was right — staying home with her and protecting her from all of those day-care germs. We quickly found our decision had created a “clinger.”

On the first day of preschool, Maggie clung to my neck so tightly I could barely breathe. Not that I wanted to. I would have just as soon died than left her there in such a state of hysterics. Knowing that I had to do what the rest of the moms were so calmly doing, I tried to settle her and gently leave her.

It was useless. For the next week, she would throw herself into a tantrum so horrific other children



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were scared to pass by her. I knew she had to stay, and although it broke my heart each day, I was able to escape her clenches with only minor injuries.

However, her ultimate plea each

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day when she got into the car was to “pleeeeeaaasssse” pick her up before naptime the next day. Hence, I devised a plan to meet Maggie each day at naptime at her “Barbie castle.”

The power of a child's imagination is a wonderful thing. Each night, I would tell Maggie stories about a magical place she could go whenever she missed Mommy. When she closed her eyes and went to this magical place (she chose a Barbie castle), I would meet her there. It took some coaxing, and of course, I too had to

truly believe she could get herself to that happy place.

It took a few days — OK, a full week — before she could relax herself enough to enjoy the castle experience, a.k.a. naptime at school. However, two weeks after the start of school she no longer cried in the morning. And now each afternoon, I get to hear about all the wonderful things we did at the castle that day. It usually involves painting our nails and eating lots of cotton candy while riding pink horses.

Her teachers tell us she is adjusting wonderfully, despite the beginning-of-the-school-year drama.

In my young parenting years, I have come to realize that sometimes the decisions we make are not always the easiest ones, but once they're done, we need to figure out ways to cope with them in order to raise healthy, happy children. May your imagination help you to create a safe and magical Halloween. 