September 26, 2001 — *The Onion* Issue 37.34

The events of Sept. 11 are extremely difficult for a child to understand. What should you tell your child when he or she asks why this happened? Obviously, there's no easy answer, but the following is a start:

**Talking to Your Child About the WTC Attack**

Sit your child down, and gently explain to him or her that the destruction of the Twin Towers was part of a Holy War, or *jihad*, against the U.S. perpetrated by a small faction of Islamic fundamentalists bent on the annihilation of Western society.

As your child may or may not know, much of modern Islamic fundamentalism has its roots in the writings of Sayyid Qutb, whose two-year sojourn to the U.S. in the late 1940s convinced him that Western society and non-Islamic ideologies were flawed and corrupt. Over the course of the next several decades, his writings became increasingly popular throughout the Arab world, including Afghanistan.

Patiently explain to your child that in 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, outraging the U.S. Determined to stem the tide of communism, the U.S. provided Afghanistan with military support in the form of weapons and training. Among the beneficiaries of this support were many of Qutb's radical-fundamentalist adherents. These fundamentalists eventually took over Afghanistan in the form of a group called the Taliban. Militarized and radicalized by years of war, Taliban leaders turned against the U.S., which long supported them in their fight against the occupying Soviets but eventually came to be seen as the embodiment of Western immorality.

You should also let your child know that among those supported by the Taliban is Osama bin Laden, a Saudi multi-millionaire and terrorist who for years has taken refuge in encampments in the rugged hills of Afghanistan. Like his Taliban brethren, bin Laden believes that the U.S. is guilty of apostasy and should be punished accordingly.

Your child will likely ask why bin Laden is so angry at the U.S. Explain to him or her that much of his anger is rooted in the fact that, during the Gulf War, the U.S. stationed troops in Saudi Arabia, the nation that is home to the Islamic holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Bin Laden was further angered by America's post-Gulf War efforts to oust Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein by imposing an embargo against his nation.

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No doubt, your child will have more questions. He or she will likely want to know what role other terrorist groups played in the attack, as well as what destabilizing effects a U.S. invasion of Afghanistan could have on the increasingly volatile political climate in Pakistan. Hopefully, though, the above will serve as a start, helping your child better understand why the bad men did this terrible thing.
"More U.S. Children Being Diagnosed with Youthful Tendency Disorder"

September 27, 2000—The Onion Issue 36.34

REDLANDS, CA—Nicholas and Beverly Serna’s daughter Caitlin was only four years old, but they already knew there was a problem.

Day after day, upon arriving home from preschool, Caitlin would retreat into a bizarre fantasy world. Sometimes, she would pretend to be people and things she was not. Other times, without warning, she would burst into nonsensical song. Some days she would run directionless through the backyard of the Sernas’ comfortable Redlands home, laughing and shrieking as she chased imaginary objects.

When months of sessions with a local psychologist failed to yield an answer, Nicholas and Beverly took Caitlin to a prominent Los Angeles pediatric neurologist for more exhaustive testing. Finally, on Sept. 11, the Sernas received the heartbreaking news: Caitlin was among a growing legion of U.S. children suffering from Youthful Tendency Disorder.

“As horrible as the diagnosis was, it was a relief to finally know,” said Beverly. “At least we knew we weren’t bad parents. We simply had a child who was born with a medical disorder.”

Onion Med Watch

Youthful Tendency Disorder (YTD), a poorly understood neurological condition that afflicts an estimated 20 million U.S. children, is characterized by a variety of senseless, unproductive physical and mental exercises, often lasting hours at a time. In the thrall of YTD, sufferers run, jump, climb, twirl, shout, dance, do cartwheels, and enter unreal, unexplainable states of “make-believe.”

“The Youthful child has a kind of love/hate relationship with reality,” said Johns Hopkins University YTD expert Dr. Avi Gwertzman. “Unfit to join the adult world, they struggle to learn its mores and rules in a process that can take the entirety of their childhood. In the meantime, their emotional and perceptive problems cause them to act out in unpredictable and extremely juvenile ways. It’s as though they can only take so much reality; they have to ‘check out,’ go Youthful for a while.”

On a beautiful autumn day in Asheville, NC, six-year-old Cameron Boudreaux is swinging on a park swingset—a monotonous, back-and-

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forth action that apparently gives him solace. Spotting his mother on a nearby bench, Cameron rushes eagerly to her and asks, “Guess what?” His mother responds with a friendly, “What?” With unbridled glee, Cameron shouts, “Chicken butt!”—cryptic words understood only by him—before laughing and dashing off again, leaving his mother distraught over yet another baffling non-conversation.

“I must admit, it’s been a struggle,” Mary Boudreaux said. “What can I say to him when he says something like that, something that makes no sense? Or when he runs through the house yelling while I’m trying to balance the checkbook? You can’t just say, ‘Please, Cameron, don’t have a disorder for just a few minutes so I can concentrate.’ ”

Cameron’s psychological problems run even deeper. He can name every one of his beloved, imaginary Pokemon characters, but the plain realities of the actual world he inhabits are an enigma: Ask Cameron the name of the real-life city councilman sponsoring the referendum to renovate the park just across the street from his house—a park he plays in daily—and he draws a blank.

According to Dr. Dinesh Agarwal, director of child psychiatry at NYU Medical Center, such disconnectedness from reality is a coping mechanism for YTD sufferers. “The Youthful child is born into a world he or she does not fully understand,” Agarwal said. “Their brain pathways are still forming, and they need to repetitively relearn how to assimilate into society. These disassociative play-fantasies apparently help them accomplish that.”

**Common YTD Warning Signs**

- Near-constant running, jumping, skipping
- Sudden episodes of shouting and singing
- Preferring playtime and flights of fancy to schoolwork
- Confusing self with animals and objects, including tigers, dinosaurs, and airplanes
- Conversations with “imaginary friends”
- Poor impulse-control with regard to sugared snacks