

Time to Tango with the Tooth Fairy?

BY CHRISTA MELNYK HINES

It seems like just days ago when I waited patiently for my son's first little biters to erupt in his infant mouth. Those days somehow melted magically into years and before I knew it, I could hear the Tooth Fairy fluttering about. So I wondered: what is developmentally normal when it comes to baby tooth loss, how does the tooth-obsessed fairy collect her pearly prizes, and what is the paying pixie's going rate for a baby tooth these days?

Losing Baby Teeth

As with other stages of development, pediatric dentist Dr. Jill Jenkins of Jenkins & LeBlanc Children's Dentistry in Kansas City, KS, says it varies when a child begins to lose baby teeth. Generally, children lose their first tooth between the ages of four and seven with teeth falling out in the order in which they first came in.

Should you yank a loose tooth? "Usually, the best policy is to let it come out on its own," Jenkins says. "If the other tooth is coming in, parents can have their child suck on a popsicle to numb the gums and eat pizza crust, carrots or apples. If a tooth is wiggly and we're not seeing the new tooth, letting your child work through it on his own is usually the easiest way and the least stressful way to go about it."

Be sure to consult your child's dentist if you have any concerns.

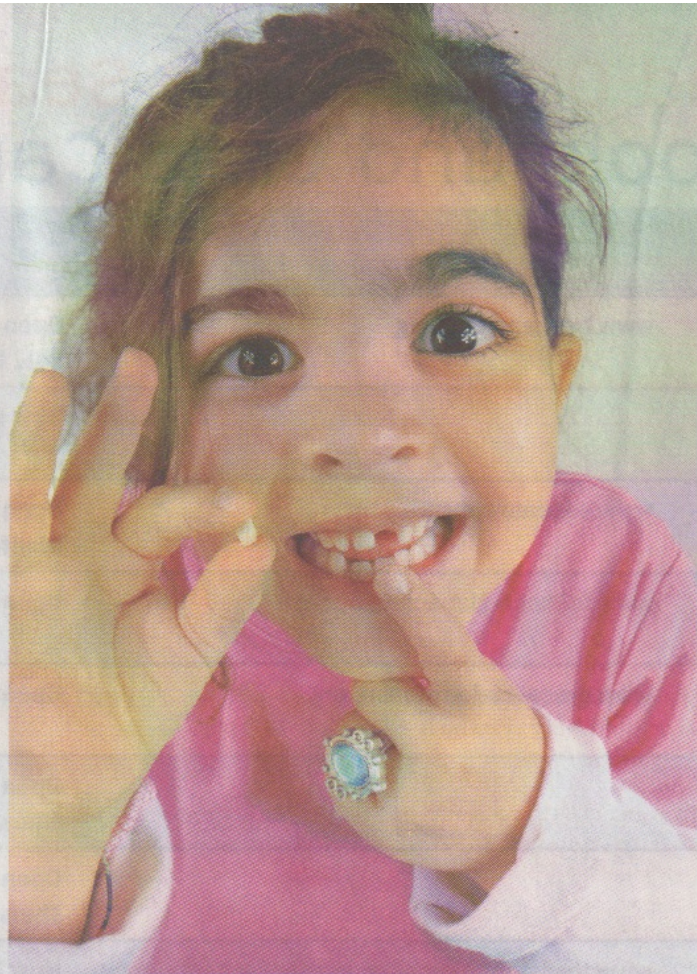


Enter the Tooth Fairy

That first loose tooth can cause anxiety for some children. Often, anxiety turns to excitement as children listen to tooth-loss stories exchanged among classmates and anticipate the reward the Tooth Fairy leaves behind.

While the exact origin of the enigmatic Tooth Fairy is steeped in mystery, historically the loss of baby teeth is an important rite of passage.

The earliest known written records regarding baby teeth date from northern Europe and describe a tann-fe, or tooth fee, in which money was paid for a baby tooth. In the Middle Ages, Europeans, fearing witches could curse their children if they acquired their baby teeth, buried the teeth in the ground. The Vikings wore baby teeth as jewelry considering them good luck



talismans in battle. Other cultures fed the teeth to animals believing the adult tooth would resemble the animal's powerful, strong teeth.

Today, countries all over the world continue to mark the loss of baby teeth with various customs. In Spain, France, Italy and Mexico, for example, the Tooth Fairy appears as a small white mouse or rat, symbolic because rodents have strong teeth that never stop growing. In Sweden, the baby tooth is placed in a glass of water where it is mysteriously replaced overnight with coins. And, it is customary in much of the Middle East for baby teeth to be thrown towards the sun and in Asia, onto the roof.

The Tooth Fairy as many of us know her, appeared in the United States in the early 1900s.

Cups, Pillows, Pockets and Doors

The Tooth Fairy isn't picky about how she collects baby teeth. Lori Poland grew up placing her baby teeth in a clear glass of water on her nightstand. She says she loved fishing a wet \$2 bill out of the cup the next morning, setting it out to dry and storing it in her memory box.

Although a tooth placed in a plastic ziplock bag or envelope tucked under the pillow should do the trick, many parents opt for a Tooth Fairy pillow or pouch for their youngster. Retailers offer an assortment of pillows, or try making your own.

Scrapbook extraordinaire Monica Bradford designed a Tooth Fairy pocket for her 6-year-old son when he lost his first tooth.

The Boy with No Brain

How our children live what they believe

Perception always trumps reality. What our kids believe becomes real enough to direct their lives and their behavior. The problem is that, as parents, we often don't know what's going on inside a son's or daughter's head; so it's sometimes difficult clear up a case of toxic confusion. Perhaps this true story (only the boy's name has been changed) will help reinforce the notion that young people don't always tell us when and where it hurts. That's when we need to listen to the behaviors and not be afraid to play a hunch, especially when that's all we seem to have.

Puzzled. Duane, a fifth grader, had a brain tumor. Fortunately, it was benign. The tumor was removed and the boy healed quickly and completely ... physically.

Academically, however, it was a different story. Duane had been a solid and capable student before the brain surgery. After the surgery, however, he began to fail everything.

Everyone was puzzled; there was no obvious reason why he should be having difficulty. Doctors assured the school and Duane's folks that the boy should be able to do *everything* he could do before the surgery, only better. I was a school psychologist assigned to work with Duane and come up a solution to the problem.

Could It Be? This boy was your proverbial "Good Kid." Duane was a polite and respectful young man, the sort you wouldn't mind taking home with you. The testing I administered and my interview with Duane didn't point to any issues that would account for his present difficulty.

In short, I was stumped, also. Then it hit me like a brick!

Could it be? Could it *really* be?

A Puzzle Solved. I could hardly wait to get back to the school the next day and visit again with Duane.

"Duane, when you had that surgery ..."

"Yes sir?"

"Did you think they *removed* your brain?"

"Yes sir," he replied.

"Your **WHOLE** brain, Duane?"

"Yes, sir. Didn't they?"

"No Duane; they didn't. They just took out the tumor, the part that was making you sick. Your brain is **STILL** there, better than before."

"Really?" His eyes filled with tears as a smile filled his face.

"Absolutely! You shouldn't have **ANY** more trouble with it."

And he didn't. Duane was instantly happier, and his grades shot up in a matter of hours.

Take Care. We **MUST** be careful how we explain things to our children, and we must keep the channels of conversation clear. If in doubt, ASK.

Also, hunches can pay off. Don't be afraid to use them.

About Dr. James Sutton: Although a nationally recognized child and adolescent psychologist, author and speaker, Dr. James Sutton deeply values his first calling as a public school teacher. Today he is in demand for his expertise on emotionally and behaviorally troubled youngsters, and his skill for sharing it. Dr. Sutton is the founder and host of The Changing Behavior Network, a popular internet radio program supporting young people and their families, and every month he publishes The Changing Behavior Digest, offering tips on managing difficult children and teens. Both resources (and others) are available at no cost through his website, www.DocSpeak.com.

Time to Tango with the Tooth Fairy?

continued from page 16

"He placed his tooth in the pocket, hung it on his bedpost and woke up to find \$2 for his first tooth," she says. For instructions on making your own Tooth Fairy Pocket, visit Bradford's blog at <http://scrapinspired.com/2011/10/tooth-fairy-pocket/>.



Cathy Green, mom of three, says the Tooth Fairy enters their home through a small ceramic door that Green's step-mother designed. The door is outside the kids' bedrooms. After collecting the tooth from a small box under the child's pillow, the Tooth Fairy replaces the tooth with her reward and leaves the box next to the tiny door.

The Going Rate

Evidently, the economy impacts the Tooth Fairy's pocket-book, too. In a 2011 survey conducted by VISA, the Tooth Fairy paid an average of \$2.60 per tooth, down 40 cents from 2010.

Nicole Wohlgemuth says that the Tooth Fairy left her daughter a toy for her first tooth and a dollar for each additional tooth. "I think the dollar would have been more exciting," Wohlgemuth says. "I don't think she even knows where that toy is anymore."

Beth Foster also reported that the Tooth Fairy typically pays \$1 per tooth although her lucky daughter Logan, 6, discovered a \$5 payout under her pillow for her fifth tooth. "This is a Foster tradition and I've been assured the good old fairy does not leave \$10 for the tenth," Foster says.

What does the Tooth Fairy do with those teeth?

Legend says that the Tooth Fairy tosses the teeth up to the sky and they become stars. Naturally, many theories exist. Foster's daughter Logan says: "The fairy uses her wand to shrink the teeth to a very small size so she can carry them in a bag with her from house to house. She then takes the teeth to Santa so he can use them to make toys."

Whatever she does with them, with each tooth lost, adulthood gains another foothold on our kids. No wonder, through the ages, we've found ways to mark this stage in our kids' lives, which seems as fleeting as the Tooth Fairy herself.

Somewhat saddened by the loss of her son's first tooth, writer Christa Melnyk Hines, cheered upon seeing the gold coin that glittered with fairy dust placed neatly under her son's pillow.