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Friendly Fire

My two sons and their friend showed up at my door yesterday, after an afternoon at the neighbor's house.

"Is it okay that we brought our weapons?" My older son is holding a paper mache tomahawk. My younger son, all of eight years old, is swinging a ball on a long chain, in imitation of some ugly brute from the Middle Ages. And their friend is carrying a large stick, strikingly similar to a policeman's nightstick.

I look sternly at my son. "What are the weapons for?" Oh, yeah. This was going to be good.

"For fighting invisible people." He could have fooled me.

My motherly instinct took over. "Are there any problems with friendly fire?"

"What's that?" Okay, so my kids don't remember the first Gulf War.

"Never mind. Just keep the weapons in the playroom, okay?"

"Okay, Mom."

How many of us create our own play weapons for fighting invisible people? And how often has it resulted in a friendly fire for those around us? Not that we mean to shoot down our own allies. It's just that we do. I know I do. My husband is my biggest ally, my most loyal supporter. And when it comes to whipping out that paper mache tomahawk, I can strike with the best of them when I'm having a bad day. His innocent question becomes the Intruder That Must Be Stopped. And later I realize, with the hurt look on his face, that the Intruder was only in my mind, an invisible person after all.

Sure, you can create all the play weapons you want. In the comfort of your own mind. But remember that friendly fire hurts real people, not just invisible ones. So keep the weapons in the playroom, okay?

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