

Xtreme Roles – Xtreme Decisions

Checklist of things for a parent to consider

At some point in a child actors career, most parents will be faced with an acting role for their child that has an extreme element to it. It might be foul language, sexual situations, horror, nudity, pedophilia or child abuse storylines, religious issues, physical danger, or just scenes that are more mature than their actor child. Parents agonize over these decisions: Do you turn down the audition? Refuse the role? There is no one right answer to these questions. We have however, provided this checklist to help you make the right decision for your family. These are "talking points" and things to consider.

Three tips

1. Set your family's boundaries in advance. Have the dialogue as a family. Do NOT try to make these decisions under pressure. There is no doubt that it will be easier to do the right thing for your child if you have had a chance to mull it over without the pressure. Make your line in the sand.
2. Know that you CAN say no. Many, if not most working kids have turned down auditions. Learn to say NO when any audition goes past the family boundaries, whatever they might be.
3. Communicate with your child and with your representatives. Let them know what your boundaries are and why you think the way you do. Do not trust agents to make these decisions for your child, that is not their job. Their job is to make money and your job is to be a parent. Be respectful of film makers and Casting Directors. Don't go to auditions if you have no intention of taking the job.

The Checklist

Gathering Information

1. Ask your agent (or casting) for the whole script, not just the sides.
2. Read the real breakdown. Ask your agent or manager for it. It usually has lots of clues and often even warnings about the subject matter
3. Are there wardrobe considerations or adjustments available? Ask the questions. Many times production is unaware of the dangers (pedophilia related issues for example) and they are willing to make adjustments if asked.
4. Find out what, if anything, is negotiable. Most things are.
5. Be aware that unscrupulous people try to fly under the radar when filming questionable things. They may use alternative casting sites, or will hire newbies who aren't likely to be as savvy. Another red flag is filming in states with less child labor restrictions. Consider the context in which you got this audition.
6. Google all the people involved in the project you are considering. These are people you are allowing to influence your child. The quality of the projects they have been involved in prior to this will give you a good indication of the quality of the current project. Always allow yourself to follow your instincts and set your professional standards high. Yes, everyone starts somewhere but no careers require someone to be involved in a non-professional setting.

Considerations

1. Can you trust the film makers? What other things have they done? A boy doing a shirtless scene for Steven Spielberg is a lot more likely to be professional than if the film maker is

doing his first indie film. The professional quality of the people your child is working with will definitely affect the quality of the project and the respect your child will receive for their work.

2. Are there factors that make a risky situation more palatable to you? For example, humorous or spoof movies sometimes contain language or situations that you might deem OK, when you wouldn't normally condone that. Similarly, do you feel the questionable situations are important to the character development in the story, or simply gratuitous? Do you feel the story needs to be told for some reason (ex. a child abuse PSA, when you wouldn't normally let your child do a scene depicting violence).
3. Would this be good for your kids' career? Is it good money, a better credit than they have received in the past (not just ANY credit)? Would they be working with a good director? Is it a different type of character than they have portrayed before? Is there anything about this role that would cause the child to experience a negative association with the character (ie. sexual orientation themes, racial stereotyping, bully roles, etc) which might cause them career harm in the future? Does your child have a body of work that makes taking a risky role less risky? In other words, star names can take questionable roles because they already have a resume full of all kinds of roles. One mis-step isn't likely to kill their career. For a newbie, doing the same film could be a huge mistake.
4. Would this be good for your child as a person? Is the set likely to be safe? Are there reasonable working conditions, work hours and education provided? Will this have any negative effect on their regular education? Will they learn new things? Would it expose them to subject matter they aren't really ready for yet? Could they handle LIVING that role for lengthy periods of time? How long is the shoot time (a 3 month film shoot will carry a bigger emotional toll than a one day role)? Is your child mature enough to make the decision about whether to take this role? Even if they are "mature enough" to handle this role, should they? Be careful not to "over glamorize" a role. This is easy to do, especially when first starting out. You can think an appearance on a network show viewed by millions of people will have an overnight career changing effect for your child – when, in fact, it likely won't. As you fantasize about how great of an opportunity an "extreme role" will be, be very realistic. Realize that your child is taking a risk for possibly very little or no positive benefit to their career. It is easy to fall into the trap of "over glamorizing" a project as a way of justifying the risks.
5. Does my child really want to do this role? Honestly, without your influence, do they really want THIS job? Ask them!
6. Think of the future: what will you say in 10 years when your child asks you WHY you allowed them to do the role? Will this project be something your child will want their children and grandchildren to see and remember them by? Will you be able to face family and friends when the film is released? Trailers and film clips will last on the internet forever. Will the marketing and subject matter cause the child to be actively pursued by stalkers, and/or those opposed to the film? Will it be a negative thing when they apply for jobs and college a few years from now? Will your child be happy they did this job and say, "Thanks mom" in 10 years?

These decisions are very, very personal. As a parent, only you can do what is right for your child. You will need to balance the risks and the benefits and make a knowledgeable decision. Our children are working in a multi-billion dollar industry and the pressure from others can be great.

We know that all parents only want the very best emotional situations for their children, but also that this is not always as simple as it seems. This checklist will help you consider some of the choices you might have to make so that you will be able to stand behind your decisions without regret.