

Encourage your child's curiosity at every age level

To be curious is to have the desire to figure out or to understand, to be eager to learn or to know. All children are born with this quality. Indeed, curiosity is necessary to survival. Babies are constantly exploring. Children often ask endless questions. They learn because they are curious. A curious, learning child often evolves into a self-educating adult. It is a quality and a value that can add enormously to a fulfilling life.

Harriet Heath, Ph.D., developmental psychologist and author of "Using Your Values to Raise Your Child to Be an Adult You Admire," says parents can deliberately nurture or discourage curiosity in their children. The basis for curiosity is basically "an awareness of the details in one's environment

and an understanding of how they relate to each other," says Heath. She points out that parents can use a child's curiosity to help her learn countless things she needs for a successful life.

On the other hand, parents can



also destroy curiosity by not allowing their child to explore, by overstimulating her with too much to explore, by not allowing her to explore at her own pace, and even by not reinforcing that she has learned something from her exploration.



Parenting Tip

understanding that a round peg will fit into a round hole) and let her experiment with how things work. Use discipline techniques that help her understand cause and effect.

- **Preschooler:** Continue as for the toddler. Take note of his interests and build on that with field trips, books, and the Internet. Change your focus as you see his interests change.
- **School-age:** Continue exploring with your child and show her how to find answers to her questions. Discuss what she learns with her. Be aware of what is happening in her school and how she responds to it. Many schools are excellent sources of encouragement and assistance, but some can stifle curiosity with dull lessons and rigid curricula. Be your child's advocate for appropriate learning situations. Provide and support outside interests for her.
- **Teenager:** He should be able to ask questions and develop a strategy for finding answers about issues that are straightforward. He may be asking questions for which there are no answers yet and may begin to think about getting the specialized skills needed for finding those answers (i.e., college or other training).

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Dr. Heath offers ideas and tips for teaching and preserving curiosity in children at different ages and stages.

- **Baby:** Infants satisfy their curiosity through their senses. Give baby things to look at, reach out for and manipulate. Let him touch your face, hair, and body. Give a crawling baby safe space to explore, inside and outside. Since babies immediately begin learning language at birth, talk to him all the time about what he is experiencing.
- **Toddler:** Allow your toddler to continue to explore and offer her even more and new opportunities. Let her struggle to figure out how to do something (for example, toddlers benefit just as much by figuring out that a square peg won't fit into a round hole as they do from



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