



FOCUS on Early Childhood Mental Health Nurturing the Natural Curiosity of Children

In the introduction to a collection of *Curious George* books, the editor quotes one person's response about why he liked the books: "George did all the things we didn't dare to do, so we could do them in our imagination and not be scared." Curiosity, especially when mixed with courage and imagination, helps us understand our world and is something to encourage in our children right from the start.

Why curiosity is important:

Helps children develop their whole selves, including their minds

Provides answers to many of the mysteries of daily life: What happens when I do that?

Increases children's potential to learn new things and builds confidence in the ability to learn and grow

Enhances children's ability to be open-minded and tolerant of different ways of handling challenges

Contributes to their enjoyment and awareness of the world

How curiosity fades

Fear—when a child is afraid, she won't explore and will stick with the familiar

Disapproval—when a child hears "Don't" all the time, his desire to experiment will decrease

Absence—when a child doesn't have a caring adult to share his new experiences or offer safety when trying new things, he may stop trying

How to encourage the natural curiosity of children

Show your own interest in what's happening in your world

Encourage children to pursue their own interests (music, play, books)

Answer questions simply, clearly, factually, and in keeping with the child's developmental stage

Ask open-ended questions (How do you feel about ____? Why is green your favorite color?)

Redirect a child's interest but don't discourage it (e.g., if he likes to pour his cup of water on the floor, provide opportunities to experiment with water in the bathtub or backyard)

Provide toys that encourage a child's imagination and aren't limited in their use

Praise a child's discoveries of new things and efforts to master new skills

Encourage children to explore their natural surroundings and look for answers to their own questions



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Resources

"Tips on Nurturing Your Child's Curiosity," Zero to Three; <http://tinyurl.com/3fgyuzk>

"Emotional Development: Curiosity—The Fuel of Development," by Bruce Perry, M.D.; <http://tinyurl.com/nss2gu>

"Five Ways to Develop Your Child's Curiosity," ETL Learning; <http://tinyurl.com/3wvnmz6>

Factsheet #30, September 2011

Pennsylvania Key

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Finding Low-Cost Materials and Toys for Home Learning

Our classroom offers children a wide variety of items to use in different ways. We like to keep things fresh to respond to children's growing skills and changing interests—and stay within budget. Often we find ideal learning materials at thrift shops, garage sales, flea markets, and other places that sell gently used play materials. Using this approach, you too can find inexpensive, engaging toys that encourage creativity, promote learning, and introduce new interests. Here are some items to look for:

Books. Look for books in good condition, with no missing or torn pages. You might find a small bookshelf for storing the books, which helps your child be organized. Remember, it isn't possible to have too many books.

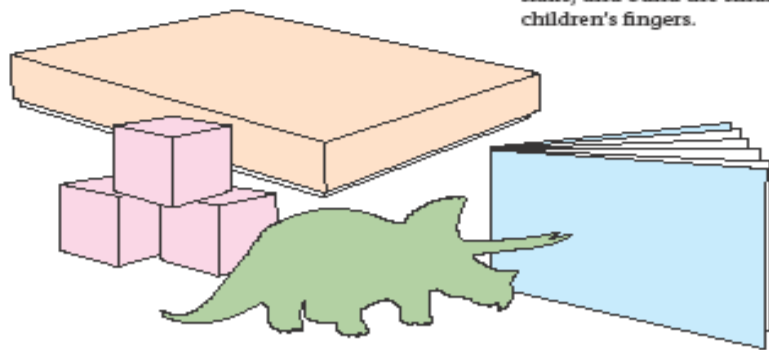
Art materials. Create a family creativity center stocked with crayons, markers, chalk, chalkboards, paint, paper, yarn, glue, and scissors. Look for playdough and props such as cookie cutters, spoons, and rolling pins (your child can help like he or she does in the classroom).

Puzzles. Bring home sturdy wooden or foam ABC and number puzzles along with puzzles with just enough pieces to provide a challenge. Always count the pieces before purchasing puzzles and try them out if possible.

Manipulatives. Keep an eye out for loose Legos, wooden blocks, Lincoln logs, pattern blocks, and other building toys; small plastic or rubber animals of all kinds; bags of shells or large buttons; muffin tins and other containers for sorting; and other small items that encourage creativity, introduce math skills, and build the small muscles in children's fingers.

Pretend play. Support your child's creativity with items such as

- wooden vehicles—cars, trucks, planes, and so on
- dolls, toy people, or action figures NOT associated with TV or movies
- dress-up clothes, shoes, and accessories (check for cleanliness and safety)
- pieces of fabric or tablecloths (cover a table to make a play space, make a shawl or cape, or spread on the floor for an indoor picnic)
- stuffed animals associated with favorite books such as *Corduroy*, *Curious George*, and *Goodnight Gorilla*



A message from your child's teacher _____