

Creativity by Choice, Not by Chance: Unleashing Your Child's Creativity

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Creativity includes drawing and painting, but it is more than just art. Creativity includes having fun and playing, but it is more than just fun and games.

Creativity provides an exciting way for children to become intrinsically motivated, to find joy in the ordinary, and to discover their hidden talents. All children possess creativity.

"The creativity force is present naturally to some degree or another in all humans, in all cultures, and at every age," writes Minneapolis-based creativity educator Berenice Bleedorn in her recent book *The Creativity Force in Education, Business and Beyond*. "It is central to the human sense of personal identity and significance. It is a force that seeks and deserves expression."

Creativity – in children *and adults* – can be unleashed to regularly experience, discover and foster the power of one's imagination.

Children are masters of creativity. Although we begin our lives with active, vivid imaginations, most of us stop applying this creativity and subsequently fail to encourage it in children.

Fortunately, we have the capacity to tap that part of our brain which allows us to think divergently – suspending judgment, generating many novel possibilities and creating new and different worlds.

Although this article is geared at helping you unlock your child's creativity, it also can be applied in your own life, both personally and professionally.

Tapping your child's creative spirit requires deliberate attention. But like exercising our physical capacities, the more he or she begins to think creatively, the easier and more natural it becomes.

Three areas can be developed to encourage your child's creativity:

Applied Imagination

Creativity helps people think wider. It allows children to ask the big questions, to explore the unknown, and to perceive implications and consequences of choosing certain solutions.

Creativity allows the mind to diverge, following many possible alternatives and ideas before settling on a workable solution. This seems so easy, but we usually don't allow ourselves this exploration, instead

beginning our problem solving with limited expectations for the solution.

Judgment is ubiquitous in children's lives – children judging themselves, parents and teachers judging children, parents judging parents, kids judging each other.

Children quickly learn to stop exploring unusual ideas, being told things like "there is only one right answer," "things don't really work that way," or "zebras only have black and white stripes."

They learn that mistakes should be minimized and that risk taking comes at a high cost.

Pre-mature judgment kills creativity. It is the fundamental block that keeps our inherent creative ability from sparking unique ways of looking at problems and challenges. A key to thinking wider is learning to defer judgment and helping children learn to do the same.

Pay attention to when you are judging (when using phrases like "no, it isn't done that way" or "the sun isn't that color," etc.) and when children are stopping their creativity by judging themselves.

Encourage them to think of more unique ways of looking at something. Help them think of as many ideas as possible, as quantity of ideas leads to quality ideas. Build on earlier ideas so that possible solutions become more elegant and elaborate. Explore far-fetched and crazy ideas. Breakthroughs come from exploring the unlikely and then making that workable.

Becoming Aware

German artist Joseph Beuys said: "Everyone is an artist." He wasn't suggesting that we all become painters, writers and sculptors. Rather, he was challenging us to apply the life-giving creativity in each of us in a meaningful way.

Children and adults are moving faster than ever before. No one seems to have time to stop and think. But this is required if we are going to help kids find the artist in each one of them.

Creative thinking is a wonderful tool for teaching children to think imaginatively about the future. Paradoxically, they must become aware of what is happening in the present moment if they are to defer judgment and think wider.

Focusing on the following key areas brings children to better awareness of themselves and their world: sensory and emotional awareness, and meditation and relaxation.

Practice developing all five senses. Get an orange to eat with your child. Before you even begin to peel it, observe it with all senses. Take your time – even 10 minutes just looking at it. Discover from where the sound of an orange comes. When you finally begin to peel it, be very deliberate and pay attention to detail. Remove each section with full attention. Have your child describe this whole process out loud.

Kids traverse the full gamut of emotions. Emotional self-awareness can reduce stress and productively transform boredom. How often do we create the conditions for kids to explore how their feelings influence their thinking and behavior?

Creative thinking is excellent for resolving conflicts. If children can create alternative solutions when emotions flare, better outcomes can emerge. If they can recognize where they find the most joy, they can channel their creative endeavors in fulfilling ways.

Meditation can provide a welcome break to kids' busy lives. Although this practice has become very popular with adults, one seldom hears about children's meditation. Yet, meditation makes them more relaxed, increases concentration and provides a more-centered way of being – all of which facilitates the flow of creative juices.

There are many good meditation resources and variations. But you can start meditation now with your kids. It can be as simple as sitting with them and helping them focus on the in and out of their breathing for brief or extended periods of time.

Engage and Act

The faster-better-cheaper focus of many companies has even trickled down into kids' lives, which creates the threat of over-activity and merely spinning their wheels as fast as they can.

If kids learn to live with a creative worldview – where they suspend judgment, think divergently, seek many alternatives, become aware of this moment, and connect beyond themselves – they can radically transform the way they choose to engage in life and meaningfully create joy-filled vocations and careers.

This is no easy task. Creative risk-takers often feel like “a minority of one.” Yet they choose to follow this path, intrinsically motivated to discover their bliss.

Paul Torrance, a pioneer in the research of creativity in children, says: “The genius of the future will be the creative mind adapting itself to the shape of things to come. This will require “Satori,” bursts of new insights. The skills of creative thinking must be recognized as mankind's most important adaptability skills.”

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TRY IT WITH CHILDREN:

- **Regularly ask and have them ask: What if? What else? Why not?**
- **Read fairy tales. Ask questions about the tales and encourage them to think of imaginative answers. Have them write a fairy tale called, “The Flying Monkey”.**
- **Explore with them the connections between seemingly unrelated things. For example, how is leaf like resolving an argument with a friend?**
- **Ask them to look for examples of “making the familiar strange and the strange familiar.”**
- **Regularly use the language “How might we...?” to encourage multiple ways of looking at ideas and challenges.**
- **Don't forget to warm-up the brain before creative and academic endeavors. A great warm-up is the “Alternative Uses” exercise which seeks as many different uses as possible for common items, such as a stuffed animal or a comb.**