

Promoting Creativity

*If I were to ask one thing above all others . . .
it would be imagination . . .*

—Kenneth Eble, *The Perfect Education*



here are glorious moments when a new twist in our thinking suddenly lets us see things in a fresh and unique way.

Do you consider yourself a creator or inventor? Creativity is not limited to artists.

Everyone has the potential for creativity. For creativity is the ability to:

- Think in imaginative and unique ways
- Look beyond ready-made solutions
- Experiment and gain insight
- Express ideas in new and unusual ways

Whether we work with words, wood, hair, movement, steel, or concrete, we all can be creative. We were born that way.

The creative urge

The child's world is fresh and new. Faces, hands, and bottles miraculously appear above the baby's crib, then go away. While being carried around the house, the infant discovers chairs, pictures, and window panes. What are these things? Their names and purposes are a mystery.

It's easy to understand why children itch to touch every object they see.

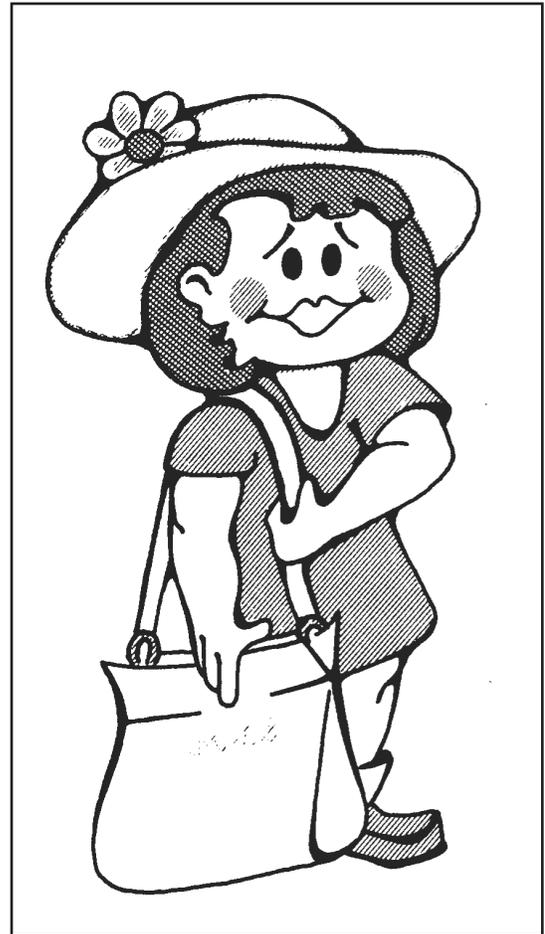
Children become increasingly creative in the ways they explore the world around them. From the start, they stare, taste, and listen with all their might, but they can't get the things they see and hear. Gradually, they become more coordinated. They squeeze, shake, and bang things. They try to make things happen. As they experiment, they try out every action they have learned on a new object.

Young children find problems to solve. We forget that simple things such as getting a rattle that is out of reach are tough problems for babies. Preschoolers tackle harder tasks, such as how to fit clothes on a doll, paint stripes, or make a road.

Often children solve problems in unusual ways, for they have few preconceived ideas about how things are supposed to be done. They will try anything. A 3-year-old may shake, bang, and turn a jar upside down rather than use a spoon to get some cocoa.

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Gradually, children learn to pause and plan ahead before plunging into action. They start to consider alternatives. They choose between tape and glue rather than trying the first thing they see.

Around their third birthday, children develop a bursting desire to recreate everything they have learned. They make replicas of things they are familiar with and pretend to be people they know. They will use any means—words, paint, blocks, or clay—to express things that are important to them.

In the process of recreating their experiences and ideas, children can create something new, unique, and special.

Keeping the spirit

At some point, most children lose faith in their unique view of the world. They stop exploring and experimenting. They tear up their pictures. They don't dare paint trees purple or sing their own songs. Somehow, they learn that there is only one "right" answer, one way to do things.

Sometimes parents and teachers are responsible for this. They stifle their children's creativity, often unintentionally. You can, however, help your children keep their creative spirit alive.

H E L P I N G • C H I L D R E N • G R O W

- Help children to be observant and curious.
- Encourage children to explore and experiment.
- Give children opportunities to solve problems and plan ahead.
- Encourage children to recreate their experiences and ideas.

Who knows? Helping your children think in imaginative and unique ways may awaken you to your own creativity.

The creative climate



You can help your children be creative by encouraging them to be curious, to experiment, to solve problems and recreate what they know about the world. Some more specific things you can do with your children at different ages are listed below.

Babies

Some things you can do with babies include:

- Carry them around the house and outdoors so they can look at and touch different things.
- Give them a few safe objects to look at, touch, taste, listen to, and smell. They like to look at faces.
- Put a favorite toy slightly out of reach so older babies can figure out how to get it.
- When older babies are not looking, hide a toy under a see-through scarf or mesh berry container.

Provide them with the following objects:

- Brightly colored balls and pictures on the wall
- Noisemaking toys—rattles or measuring spoons tied together
- Things that move—people, mobiles, or balls
- Squeeze and cuddly toys made of different textures and fabrics

Toddlers

Some things you can do to encourage creativity in toddlers include:

- Encourage toddlers to safely explore objects in different ways by shaking, banging, hitting, or squeezing.
- Encourage them to solve simple problems such as how to fit things inside of other things.
- Play hide and seek games with their toys.
- Help them begin to recreate things by imitating simple sounds, words, and actions.
- Introduce them to materials such as paint, which they can use to be creative and make things.

Provide them with the following objects:

- Containers of different sizes, such as margarine tubs, egg cartons, shampoo bottles and tops, old pocket books, and cardboard boxes, and small objects to put in them. (Be careful about very small objects which a child might choke on or swallow.)
- A variety of expressive materials: paint, play dough, sand and water, blocks, and simple dress-up clothes like hats and purses.

Preschoolers

Things to do with preschoolers include:

- Join preschoolers in pretending to be other people and things, such as helicopters, animals, and trees.
- Encourage them to use the same toy or material in several different ways.
- Encourage them to recreate their experiences: make up a song about making cookies or draw a picture of a trip to the ice cream parlor.
- Give them opportunities to plan activities: what they will do after supper or before going to bed; how to make a building out of blocks.
- Read them stories and poems that use words in creative ways.

Provide them old materials to explore in new ways.

- Blocks of different kinds to be used together
- Paint on paper, cardboard, burlap, or wood
- Water on sand or rocks; mud or water on concrete
- Water mixed with soap bubbles or food coloring
- Paper to fold, roll up, tear, or cut in different ways

Give them materials for problem solving:

- Water, funnels, sections of old hose or tubes
- Jars and tops of various sizes
- Hole-punched paper and yarn or shoelaces for weaving
- Pipe cleaners

Provide a variety of expressive materials:

- Wood, bottle caps, fabric scraps, string, elastic bands, nails, and a lightweight hammer
- Dress-up clothes: shirts, dresses, cut-off pants, neckties, hats, shoes, and wallets
- Homemade instruments: drums made from pots, pans, or cardboard containers; shakers made from plastic bottles and dried peas or beans; pop bottles with water; sturdy elastic tied taut between two nails on a board
- Paper and magic markers for drawing and storytelling

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