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ENCOURAGING CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Do you have a child who responds in unusual ways to questions or shows a keen sense of humor? Does this child appear nonconforming or unpredictable? All these characteristics show signs that a child is thinking creatively.

Adults may become irritated by the behavior of creative children because they often go against the rules set at home and at school. Rather than getting upset, recognize and nurture this creative energy. When these creative children become adults, generally they are the ones who make a difference in our world with their innovative problem-solving skills.

How can creative thinking be encouraged? Help children learn to think and solve problems themselves allowing them the freedom to make mistakes. Give them choices rather than making decisions for them. Respect their ideas. Show them a variety of perspectives and work with them to discover several solutions. Teach children how to examine their surroundings for “clues” that will help them in generating solutions. Provide a stimulating environment and encourage play and fantasy.

Creative thinking can easily be stifled. Often adults, as well as children are not able to perform creatively because of outside influences that cause them to feel pressured and insecure.

When examining people’s behavior, it was found that people were more creative when they did not expect a reward. Many artists are not as creative when they are commissioned to create for money. Without the expectation of a reward people become more involved in the process and enjoy it more.

Knowing beforehand that a project will be evaluated or graded can also suppress creativity. Even being observed while engaged in a creative process shows a decrease in creativity. The results are similar when people feel peer pressure or the need to conform.

Art is only one way to express creativity, yet it is one of the first noticeable ways to observe the creative process with young children. Consider these tips to develop creative thinking through art:

- Avoid projects that can be completed in only one way, such as paint-by-number and kits that are assembled. Although these don’t generate creativity, they can be used as an exercise in following directions.
- Make a wide variety of materials available.
- Provide options so children can make choices.
- Ask children about their art while they are creating it, not just at the end. Have them tell you about it, rather than guessing. It’s too easy to guess wrong.
- Praise the effort, use of color, and the uniqueness rather than the final project.
- Display art at a child’s eye level.

