



Fact Sheet

HYG-5177-97

Family Life Month Packet 1997
Family & Consumer Sciences
Campbell Hall
1787 Neil Avenue
Columbus, Ohio 43210

Families: the strongest link

Encouraging Creativity in Children

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Creativity is the ability to see things in a new way, to see problems that no one else may even realize exist, and then come up with new, unique, and effective solutions to these problems. Standard intelligence tests measure convergent thinking—the ability to come up with a single correct answer. But creativity involves divergent thinking—the ability to come up with new and unusual answers (Papalia and Olds, 1993).

How Can Parents Encourage Creativity?

Research describes ways that parents can encourage their children to be more creative (Amabile, 1983; B. Miller and Gerard, 1979):

- Provide a stimulating environment that appeals to the child's developmental age level abilities and skills. By providing a variety of materials and books and games, opportunities to experiment with these materials, and reinforcement of the child's process and development of the product, parents can encourage the child to try new methods through exploration.
- Encourage the child to experiment with the novel and unusual. Listen to the child's questions and comments about his or her observations. Clarify what the child has observed by repeating what you have heard and ask further questions about the experience. New questions and observations may emerge from this process of exploration together.
- Relax and enjoy the creative process with your child. Children who are constantly directed to conform to expected outcomes lose the confidence and spontaneity essential for the development of creative thinking.

- Respect the child's efforts and let them know that you have confidence in their ability to do well. Let the child have both freedom and responsibility to deal with the consequences of their thinking.
- Expose your child to a diversity of cultures, experiences, people, and ways of thinking. Let them see that there are different ways to think about a problem. Encourage children to try new experiences within their age level abilities and expectations.
- Set an example of the enjoyment of life experiences and the willingness to appreciate novel thinking processes. Share your own artistic, scientific, creative, occupation or hobby with your child. Your enthusiasm can be contagious and the child will appreciate the excitement and involvement that you have in an effort that you feel passionate about.
- Model perseverance. Encourage the child to complete a project by encouraging each step of the process and helping the child to understand his or her own strengths and weaknesses.

Activities to Promote Creativity

- Use creative questioning. One way to help children to think more creatively is to ask them how they would change things to make them better. (What would taste better if it were sweeter? What would be more fun if it were faster or slower? What would be happier if it were smaller or bigger? What would be more interesting if it went backwards?) (Sprenger, 1992).
- Ask "what would happen if?" (What would happen if all the cars were gone? What would happen if every-

one wore the same clothes? What would happen if no one cleaned the house?)

- Ask “in-how-many-different-ways” questions? (How many different ways can a button be used? How many different ways can a string be used?)
- Use creative play. Activities such as “follow the leader” encourage a child to think of creative movement and experience the reward of others following their example. Use simple materials (blocks, mud, sand, clay, water) that the child can build and design using their own skills.
- Use a continuing story concept. Someone starts the story and then each person adds a part. Read a story and act it out. Use puppets to act out a plot.
- Use props to create new ideas. (Animal cracker game—child chooses one cracker; looks at it; then eats it. Then the child becomes that animal for 1–2 minutes. Use creative movement to act out how the animal acts and moves.)
- Use role playing (family happenings, simulation games, school situations) to help children see the viewpoints

of others and to explore their feelings. Have children describe the people that they see in pictures as to how they might feel or think. (Sprenger, 1992).

Parents who encourage their child’s creativity have an opportunity to learn about their child’s thinking processes. By experiencing new ways of perceiving the world together, parents foster children’s abilities to prepare for a future of dealing with change in a resilient manner. They are training their child to make a unique contribution in the future.

References

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