

## Developing Children's Creativity

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### Introduction

The difference between people who are motivated to finish what they start even though it may take them hundreds of effortful actions and people who see only one solution to a problem or way to do something or who give up when their first attempt fails is the difference between creative and noncreative people. We all know these people who are creative and who live among us and we turn to them for solutions when we have a problem.

Scholars of creativity view it as a multifaceted, multidimensional phenomenon that leads to the creation of ideas, concepts, or objects that do not previously exist. Creativity is important in a variety of disciplines such as education, psychology, science, art, and literature and it manifests itself in a variety of forms. Given that creativity is a positive force that can result in the advancement of civilization, how do we foster creativity in the growth and development of children? Most children show elements of creativity in their early play, their language, and their interactions with other people. In some home and some school environments these creative impulses are encouraged and in others they are discouraged. If we want to have creative adults however, it is very important to provide children with environments that nurture their creative impulses.

Creativity begins in the crib. Infants discover their world by playing with the world that surrounds them. They try on different roles, they test their parents, and they discover what works. It is through testing that the infant discovers what works in their world. When the child's exploration is limited, creativity is limited.

When an infant discovers a new way to kick a toy, the baby is showing a creative response. The toddler who finds a new way to throw food on the floor is creative though the parent may not agree that this is positive.

Encouraging creativity in young children involves messiness, risk taking, and requires that adults trust children to discover the world for themselves. This is how creativity develops at different ages as the child grows and develops.

Another example of early creativity development is that when a young child is given a box containing a toy, the child may remove the toy and use the box in a new way. Though parents often are appalled when this occurs, this behavior leads to creative thinking. The child who uses the toy box for a car or other purpose is practicing creative actions. This also develops tenacity and the ability to find multiple solutions and options.

Creative children may look at the world through a different lens, and these children grow up to be adults who solve world problems. Because they look at the world through an upside-down lens, they see things that others may not see and these are the individuals who change the world. While it is true that creativity seems to be more prominent in some individuals than in others, most children show elements of creativity in their early play, their language, and their interactions with other people. In some home and some school environments these creative impulses are encouraged and in others they are discouraged. If we want to have creative adults however, it is very important to provide children with environments that nurture their creative impulses.

### ***Here are some suggestions for fostering creativity development in young children: Infants/toddlers:***

Encouraging creativity may not be at the top of the list for parents of a new-born, but creativity ensures survival of the species. Adults who provide a routine of loving, dependable care are establishing the foundation for creativity. The six-month-old infant explores the world by kicking and grabbing any object

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in their sight such as a mobile that is thoughtfully placed. As they develop, they will venture into different spaces as they crawl or climb but return to a safe, secure base. Toddlers seeking to expand their exploration of their world will discover items such as pots and pans. They create their own orchestra with the changing volume of each blow. Boxes are also a favorite at this age. Large boxes can serve as a car or rocket. Smaller boxes can be used to build replicas of a building or a unique creation that only the child recognizes. When children combine boxes, cushions, and blankets, they can create anything that they can imagine and this is the essence of creativity. Parents who allow children the freedom to explore, pretend, and get messy are setting the stage for creativity.

### **Older toddlers and preschoolers**

These children need materials that stimulate messy play such as shaving cream, bubbles, water, sand, and play dough. Give a child a pile of dirt, bucket, and spoon, and they will be occupied for an hour or more or give a five-year-old a hat and they will be equally occupied.

Props such as hats and costumes for dressing up and pretending are also great creativity enhancers.

### **Kindergartners**

Kindergarten children develop their ability to engage in abstract thought which enhances creativity. Children of this age need time to create play themes that involve multiple partners and extend over a period of days. Some children at this age may have a pretend friend with whom they develop a play theme. Language play also begins as children tell jokes that only they understand as funny. Parents stimulate creativity when they limit commercial toys, video games, or media and allow time for children to “think for themselves.”

### **Elementary age children**

Elementary age children are often at the height of their creative thinking, but it is often not observed by adults who usually require adherence to rules and conventional thinking at that age. If one observes outdoor play (or unsupervised indoor play) of this age child, however, they often get a glimpse of their extensive and long-lasting creative activities. For example, they create “clubs” with various purposes, perform “plays,” and engage in many pretend and artistic activities out of the range of observing adults. The best way to encourage creative action at this age is by giving children some time that is free of lessons, sports, and other adult directed activities so that their creative spirits can flourish.

### **High School adolescents**

While adults rarely will be able to observe the creative thinking of young people of this age, in the privacy of their rooms, in conversations with friends, and in actions in the community, they will extend their range of creative thought and action if given the opportunity to do so. Much of it will be nonobservable to adults but many young people live complicated “pretend” lives at this age and these creative impulses are extremely important in directing their future identity and life achievements. Adults can encourage creative thinking by listening to and appreciating their “wonderful ideas” even if some of them seem extreme or unachievable.

While creative children are sometimes harder for adults to appreciate, especially when their creative ideas differ from those of the adult, the future needs of society always depend on the vision and ideas of creative individuals. If the many environmental and societal problems are ever to be solved, we will need to encourage creative development in as many children as possible.

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