

THE CURIOUS CHILD

"Where did the Sears Tower come from?"

"Why do we have to wear seat belts?"

Do you know a child who is full of questions? Young children are naturally curious. They believe parents, caregivers, and teachers know a lot about the world. Asking questions and listening to answers are vital to their learning. The way you respond can affect what and how a child learns.

DO YOU...

...reject questions? "Stop asking. Be quiet. Don't bother me." Responses like these may tell a child that curiosity is unimportant or annoying. If you are too busy, or uncomfortable about a question, you might say, "Let's talk about it later. Right now my mind is on something else."

...deflect questions? Answers like "Because I said so" give the child no information. It may be true that he must sometimes do something "because Daddy said." But too many responses like this can squelch his curiosity and creativity.

...give answers? A short explanation accepts her question and acknowledges your ability to answer. "We wear seat belts because it's safer and the law says to." It's also all right to tell her, "I don't know!"

...invite the child to find answers? Your response can encourage higher-order thinking. Depending on the question and the child's age, you might:

Suggest ways to look for answers (reference books, the Internet, an expert, an experiment). "I wonder about the Sears Tower, too. Let's look it up in ____."

Invite her to brainstorm with you. "I don't know the answer. Let's write down some possibilities." When you brainstorm, don't throw away any ideas. (That's the next step.)

Ask her to evaluate the ideas you brainstormed together. "Now we've got some ideas. Which ones do you think are good possibilities, and why?" When you have decided together which ideas to investigate, ask, "What can we do to find out?"

Investigate with her. Create a simple plan together, and decide what each of you will do to find the answers. You might look in an encyclopedia together or ask an expert. The two of you could set up an experiment, make a model, or take a survey. You can help provide what she needs. Set a time to share what you learned.

It's important to let children do most of the thinking, even if they pursue "wrong" answers. You can guide them to helpful resources, and they can eventually find out what they want to know. Meanwhile, they are learning important research skills.

To learn more about helping curious kids learn, see these Web sites:

Handling Children's Questions:

www.learner.org/channel/workshops/lala2/support/harlen2.pdf

Helping Children to Ask Interesting and Researchable Questions:

www.project-approach.com/foundation/questions.htm

Children's Questions: Tips for Parents:

www.thefamilyworks.org