

Nurturing the Natural Curiosity of our Kids

Research shows that the natural curiosity of childhood helps to develop the “seeking mechanism” of the brain. Too much TV, screens, structured play options like toys with batteries or gadgets can shut down this vital brain development. This can slow the imaginative problem solving and creative thinking that young children are normally very good at doing! We must never forget that babies, toddlers and young children are biologically wired to learn from the world and they can find a dry leaf fascinating!!! It's important to honour this child-like appreciation of the world and avoid double guessing what “stuff” we may need to buy to help our children grow smart. Not only are our wee ones learning ALL THE TIME they each have unique ways of learning. I call it the unfolding of their own unique blue print – one that we can't see! It would be so much easier if all our children had the same blueprint and I am sure our education system would like that too. However, every child is unique and different and being able to respect that they will explore and discover the world quite differently, at their own pace is a key understanding of healthy child growth and development.

To help the “seeking mechanism” to develop strong ensure that young children (I would also argue older children and even adolescents) have lots of opportunity to be able to move things around and adapt the way they play according to their amazing imaginations. That is why cardboard boxes, sheets, plastic containers, blocks of wood and of course dolls, teddy bears, toy characters, trains, diggers, cars and even sometimes pets make for some very interesting play opportunities for children. Things that numb the brain include the virtual world, toys that only work one way, gadgets that require constant finger control and also too much visual entertainment. The vital interaction between child and the natural world develops sensori-development and a primary connection between child and nature. Children are meant to absorb themselves with as many sensory explorations as possible even though we would prefer they skip the poo painting! This is not only vital for them to understand the differences of textures, sensations of temperature – a research I read just lately suggests a strong link between sensori-motor development and thinking. This means there are links between the motor cortex and the reasoning parts of the frontal lobes - movement stimulates creativity. So being couch potatoes as young children may mean that a child will not necessarily reach their full potential as a thinking adult. Sand pits are still great for kids!

Mother Nature knew what she was doing when she designed children! Being healthy means that at times children will need to get dirty, they will post things into your DVD player being Postman Pat, they will be fascinated pouring water, juice or milk from a great height, they will pull up your plants to see check out the roots and they will paint their teddy – all of this is fascinating vital and essential learning that keeps their seeking mechanism alive and strong. Not only will this help them learn more, a healthy seeking mechanism as an adult will help you avoid getting into “ruts” that can become graves. By this I mean that an under developed seeking mechanism in adulthood can mean you are more susceptible to depression, low motivation and the possibility of staying in a lousy job or loveless relationship. So this child like curiosity when nurtured as a child, will build physical, psychological, emotional and social competences that will then build resilience and self esteem.

Remember, real kids need dirt, trees, water, real people, pets and real life experiences to grow healthy, happy and strong! Little things like getting dirty, wet, and making a mess in the play room are exactly what they need to do to learn the intricate patterns and nuances of life. Being able to help clean up the messes they make is also a helpful life skill too – so avoid martyrdom, get your kids to help clean up!

