

Through a Baby's Eyes

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Why is it important to encourage a child's curiosity?

"Because nothing is more fundamental to solid educational development than pure, uncontaminated curiosity. Bear in mind that a very strong exploratory drive is of central importance to humans." - Dr. Burton White

And the deal is curiosity mixed together with quickly developing motor skills, makes for an eight-month-old, a fifteen-month-old, who is as ready for exploration as any scientist on their way to Antarctica! The lives of a crawling baby or a toddler "features active exploration of simple cause-and-effect mechanisms, of the movement patterns of objects, and of the textures, shapes and forms. This is an incredibly rich time during which the child is acquiring the foundations of higher mental abilities. Surely as far as education is concerned, few things are more central than the sensorimotor exploration upon which higher levels of intelligence are built. It is perhaps worth pointing out that the bulk of these acquisition that underlie later thinking ability come about through thousands of simple explorations of small objects and without the benefit of any special input by other people." (White)

How do you encourage it in infants, toddlers and twos?

- First, you have to realize the importance of curiosity. Recognize it as a vital piece of his education. Curiosity is an internal motivator. The thirst for knowledge comes from inside the child and you are simply providing opportunities for it to expand.
- Make certain that the child has maximum access to as much of your space as possible and to make that space as interesting as you can. You want really good toys and things to play with. Remember simple things like boxes and a plethora of balls!
- Give the children in your class time and opportunity to explore things. If a child is intent in her play, respect her play and try not to interrupt it unless it is absolutely necessary.
- Get the child outdoors as much as you can. Babies out under quilts. Stroller rides where babies see flowers and touch leaves and feel the wind. Time for watching clouds and stomping in puddles for older children.
- Help parents see their child's curiosity as an intrinsic motivation to learn rather than just a reason to make a mess of everything. Use cute sticky notes and a spiral notebook and note the curiosity you see. Use this to tell the parents about the importance of curiosity.
- Don't insist that a child must attend to something-- like flash cards. Try instead to build upon her natural enthusiasm for learning by responding as warmly and as supportively as you can when she gets excited about something. Sometimes it's as simple as making a positive comment. It is not terribly important that you come up with a brilliant observation: the major requirement is that you support and broaden her curiosity. Extend the interests with books and stories.
Implicitly, such behavior on your part makes it clear to the child that to be curious, to be learning, to be exploring, is something that you strongly approve of. What you approve of means a great deal to your child, especially at this particular phase of her life.

What inhibits curiosity?

1. Too many "no's." Too many things in the environment that they cannot touch, mouth, throw...
2. Too much caution.
3. The wrong clothes!

Living in the Land of the Giants

Proportionally, if you were a toddler. . .

. . . most grown-ups would be 10 to 12 feet tall.

. . . it would be like our walking into a room with ceilings 16 feet high. We might see a dining room table that would be 5 feet tall. And then we'd have to try to get on the seat of a chair that is 3 feet high. Think of trying to get up stairs this high (15") when you can't even reach the handrail because it is 5 ½ feet tall.

From a great book, The World of the Child, by Aline D. Wolf. It's about a daddy who mysteriously enters the world of a child. *"I stared at everything around me, hardly believing what I was seeing. The walls were four times as high as I was. The windows were so far above my head that I could only see the sky. Across the room where the giant lady was sitting, there was an unusual collection of legs. The table had six legs that were taller than I was. Each of the four chairs had four legs. The giant lady's legs were angled among the four legs of her chair - and her enormous knees were staring right at me. I couldn't see what was on the table, on what was under the table."*

. . . bathrooms would be a challenge. If we could get into the bathroom (door knobs are almost 6 feet high), and if we could somehow get the lights turned on (light switches are like 9 feet tall), -- and we'd find it really hard to get up on the pot at 30 inches high. The sink would be absolutely unusable at 5 ½ feet tall.

"Come into the bathroom with me," the giant lady ordered as she took my wet hand and dragged me down the hall. I did my best to keep up with her but my legs were much too short. "Now, lets wash your hands," she commanded as we reached the sink. At least I think it was a sink. It was so high that I couldn't peek over the edge of it. She pulled my hands forward as far as they would reach and let some water run over them. She handed me a bar of soap as big as a loaf of bread. My fingers weren't long enough to hold it firmly and it slithered to the floor. "Look at that," she said crossly. "That's the umpteenth mess you've made today. I'll have to go get the mop." All of a sudden I realized you this giant lady was. She was the custodian here. Her job was to keep everything clean and neat."

. . . and then there are the stairs. Try stepping up stairs with risers 15 inches tall - and trying to hold on to a handrail that is positioned 5 ½ feet above the steps.

So how can we help those little ones living in the land of the giants?

- Allow them to use the coffee table for their books and toys - it's the only low table in the house and the perfect height for their use.
- Let them play in a cabinet - that door is just their size!
- Make sure their silverware, their plates and bowls, their gardening tools, their shovels and buckets are the right size for their little hands.
- Slow down when you walk with a toddler - your stride is more than twice theirs.