



## 5 SIMPLE THINGS EVERY PARENT & TEACHER CAN DO TO NURTURE A CHILD'S CURIOSITY!!

*By Anubha Bhatla*

Yes! **C**urious might seem like the most obvious choice of word for baby or a toddler.

And yet “**B**ored” seems to be the most commonly used refrain from children as they get older. Babies are naturally curious about the world around them and curiosity is known by researchers, educators and parents to be one of “the most important” engines of learning and innovation. Research and even the most casual observations of children, however reveals that curiosity wanes in children as they get older. No wonder that surveys like Gallup find that only about 30% of U.S workforce is engaged and the worldwide numbers are a dismal 13%. Younger workers are the least engaged aka they are effectively bored.

Can we “as parents” and “as teachers” hack the system & thwart this pattern? Turns out it is simply a matter of “letting the child’s curiosity be” and if possible consistently “fuel it”. Parents often ask us “What can I do as a parent to nurture curiosity in my child”? Here are my 5 cents:

1. **NURTURE YOUR OWN CURIOSITY:** Children are sponges and absorb everything from their environment. When parents, teachers and caregivers ask questions, children get the message that “It is okay to ask questions”. As you take a walk in the park, go to the grocery store cook in the kitchen – “Ask questions and wonder”. I wonder how the trees know when to bloom in spring? I wonder what causes thunder? I wonder where all the birds went in winter? I always think if the earth goes around in 24 hours, why don’t we get dizzy? Let us find out together. Teachers can budget time for what I call a “**Today’s Curiosity Lab**” during the day when each child in the class asks a question & then the class picks one or two to explore together. Open ended and fun! If there is a question waiting to be answered, curiosity is alive and all is well. And like laughter, curiosity is infectious too!
2. **BE MINDFUL NOT TO EXTINGUISH THE FLAME:** Be aware that as children get older & especially if they go to school –have to constantly follow protocol. Spreadsheets

and tasks have to be finished in stipulated amounts of time. Then comes homework & endless other activities. When a child asks a question, a subtle “let’s talk about it later” or “I don’t have time for all this” consistently is enough to discourage most except the most persistent to “learn that adults probably do not like questions.” I suggest that even if you are busy, stop & take 20 seconds to acknowledge the question, add your 2 cents to it and suggest how the child or both of you can find out more about the issue before moving on. Teachers may find this more challenging, but a solution can be to do the above said & then depending on the question, it can be written on a piece of paper & put in a “Q Box” to be talked at “Today’s Curiosity Lab”.

3. **BUILD SOMETHING TOGETHER:** Building things is by its nature an extremely unpredictable yet fun process. It also is great at building self-esteem as you accomplish something, often forces you to think out of the box, improvise and not create fear of the unexpected.  
Set aside some time to build together periodically. Teachers could do this once a month. If planning a building session seems like a chore to some parents, start with predictable activities like a building workshop and move on to more innovative approaches. How about building something to fill a need in the house or classroom instead of buying something?
4. **SPEND TIME IN NATURE:** Children are wired to seek nature and it provides a fantastic opportunity to nurture curiosity. Research done by University of Utah showed that after spending four days in nature disconnected from electronic devices, backpackers scored 50 percent better on a creativity test. Several other studies have shown reduced moodiness, brooding, ADD and depression symptoms. If unplanned nature walks are not your thing, plan something every week into your calendar & let nature be your teacher. The possibilities are endless.
5. **UN-WIRE YOUR KIDS:** Studies from American Academy of Pediatrics, Harvard School of public Health and UCLA have shown the tremendous disadvantages of allowing children excessive screen time. Yet, it is a fact that some children on an average spend 6-7 hours daily in front of a screen! The use of electronic devices in schools exacerbates the problem. As a parent, limiting family screen time should be a priority as it is the biggest killer of creativity and innovation. Start young when habits are forming & stay consistent. Realizing the long term damage this causes children, can help you stay firm when tantrums happen. Always seek alternatives to the television with hands-on activities that are innovative and fun.