

Who, what, when, where, why, and how?

Can I please? Why not?

You ask amazing questions and
you ask them quite a lot.



You wonder all the time.

“Why does the moon grow big and round, then shrink to just a sliver?”



“When I get out of the steamy tub, why does my body shiver?”



You wonder all the time.

➔ A Letter to Caregivers ➔

One day, when my daughter was four, I wrote down all the *Why?* questions she asked in a single afternoon. They included:

- Why can't I drink water and breathe at the same time?
- Why do slugs make slime?
- Why are they called hot dogs if they aren't made from dogs?
- Why don't dandelions roar?
- Why does the sun go to bed later in the spring?

Children's constant stream of *Why?*, *Can I?*, and *What if?* questions can sometimes test the patience of parents and caregivers. But our kids are wired to explore, label, and make sense of their world. And that's a good thing!

Wondering is a form of curiosity. When we ask questions, we are using our observation and reasoning skills. When children are curious, they are not only motivated to learn, but they also learn more effectively. As psychologist Craig Anderson told me, the more wonder and awe children feel, the "more curiosity they express and the better they perform in school."

Here are five ways you can nurture children's wonder and curiosity.

1. Enjoy Nature Together

Spending time in nature is one of the best ways to elicit wonder in children. But you don't need to

head to the Grand Canyon or see the Northern Lights to experience the magic of the natural world. Go for a walk, letting children set the pace as they stop to dig in the dirt, jump in leaves, or search for treasures. Explore a local farm, park, or Audubon center. Go to an open field to observe the night sky. Turn over stones to see what creatures live beneath. Identify the birds, plants, and insects that live in your neighborhood. Being in nature not only stimulates children's brains, it supports their emotional well-being too.



2. Explore Cause and Effect

One of my favorite questions children ask is often an unspoken one: *What will happen if . . . ?* This is a great scientific question that helps kids learn about cause and effect.

Of course, this question can also be the cause of mess and stress as children wonder, *What will happen if I drop this egg on the floor?* or, *What will happen if I*

flush my toothbrush down the toilet? When necessary, try redirecting their experiments without squelching their curiosity. If they want to know what happens when they turn the juice carton upside down, let them play outside with cups and a jug of water. If they want to know what it's like to draw on walls, mix up some bathtub paint (you can find a recipe online) and set them loose in the tub. In other words, try saying, "You can't do that, but you can do this!"

You can also ask *What if?* to set up simple, cause-and-effect science experiments such as these:

- What will happen if we drop food coloring in the pancake mix?
- What will happen if we sprinkle salt on this ice cube?
- What will happen if we build the sandcastle closer to the waves?
- What will happen if we drop the acorn and the leaf at the same time, and from the same height?
- What will happen if we add a paperclip to the nose of the paper airplane?
- What will happen if we plant one seed in the sun and the other in the shade?

3. Let Them Figure It Out

Giving children explicit instructions for how to play can limit their creativity and their discoveries. For example, when you show children how to use a toy, they are more likely to play with it in only one way: the way they were

taught. However, when you let them figure it out on their own—particularly with open-ended toys such as blocks—they get curious and are more likely to find new and creative ways to play. Some of the most wonderful toys come from the recycle bin: think paper towel tubes and cardboard boxes.



4. Listen and Find Answers Together

One way to support children's wonder is to simply listen to their questions. It feels good when people pay attention. And when we honor children's questions, we validate their curiosity and invite them to keep exploring.

When children pose a question we can't answer, here's a powerful response: "That's a great question! Let's find out." Experiment together. Look up the answer in a book or online. Call a friend or family member who is an expert. All these responses show children that their questions are valued, demonstrate