



Greater Good in Education
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

TAKE-HOME SKILL: NURTURING CHILDREN'S WONDER AND CURIOSITY

"Always be on the lookout for the presence of wonder."

—E. B. White

OVERVIEW

A list of strategies for parents and caregivers that encourage their children to explore the world around them

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- When you and your child plan an outing in nature
- When your child says they are bored
- When working on an everyday task with your child

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 15 minutes

LEVEL

- PreK/Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary

MATERIALS

- None

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Expand their curiosity and capacity for wonder

- Deepen their understanding of cause and effect
- Develop creative ways to use and play with a variety of materials
- Investigate topics of interest

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Wonder
- Awe
- Curiosity

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Social Awareness

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Focused attention
- Open Awareness
- Non-judgment

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Take a moment to think of a recent time when your curiosity or sense of wonder was sparked.
 - Did something happen that made you ask, "I wonder why....?"
 - Did you take a walk in nature and observe something that filled you with awe and amazement?
 - Did you experiment with a new way of doing something and learn something new?
 - Did you visit a library or bookstore and found a book on a topic that is totally new to you and that you're excited about?
- How did it feel to explore something new? Did it motivate you to want to learn more? Did you notice a shift in your emotional state?

INSTRUCTIONS

A child's constant stream of Why?, Can I?, and What if? questions can sometimes test our patience. But our children are wired to explore, label, and make sense of the world. And that's a good thing because it helps them to learn!

Here are five ways to nurture your child's wonder and curiosity:

1. **Enjoy nature together.** Spending time in nature is one of the best ways to elicit wonder in children. Go for a walk, letting children set the pace as they stop to dig in the dirt, jump in leaves, or search for treasures. 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.** *What will happen if...?* is a great scientific question that helps children 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. 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 add a paperclip to the nose of the paper airplane?
3. **Let them figure it out.** Giving children explicit instructions for how to play can limit their creativity and discoveries. 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 *wonder-ful* 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. 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 tools they can use to find answers, and encourage them to keep questioning and wondering as they learn and grow.
 5. **Model wonder.** Children take their cues from us. When we get excited about learning something new, we remind them that wonder is a lifelong pursuit. Take children to the library and pick out books about diverse topics that spark your interest and theirs. You can also inspire children's curiosity by wondering out loud yourself: The clouds are getting darker! I wonder if rain is coming? I wonder what bird is making that noise? I wonder why the moon looks so big tonight?

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

Does your child express more curiosity and wonder at the world around them? Are they less likely to say they're bored and more likely to independently occupy themselves? Are they more motivated to learn in school?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

In a [study](#) of a diverse group of 6,200 Kindergartners, researchers found that curiosity is significantly linked to higher scores in both reading and mathematics, particularly for children with lower socioeconomic status.

Another [study](#) with teens in Hong Kong found that when school is more challenging, curious students perform better than their less curious peers on academic achievement tests.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

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](#).

Parents and caregivers have multiple opportunities throughout the day to encourage curiosity and wonder in their children. As Dacher Keltner, founding faculty member of the Greater Good Science Center and leading researcher on awe, said, "When I think back on my own parenting experiences, some of the best moments are moments of awe. How do you find awe? You plan unstructured time. You wander. You take a walk with no aim. You slow things down. How do you find awe? You allow for mystery and open questions."

SOURCE

Adapted from [You Wonder All the Time](#) by Deborah Farmer Kris, copyright 2022, with permission from Free Spirit Publishing.