

Encouraging Your Child's Interests

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From a very young age, children demonstrate different interests. As parents and grandparents we can encourage their interests in several ways. We can follow our children's lead choosing our time and the activities we do together. We can set up an environment that encourages free play and exploration. We can introduce our children to a wide array of resources such as libraries, museums, parks or books, the internet or field trips.



Spontaneity

Early in my teaching career, I collaborated with other special education teachers and a very wise school psychologist, named Jacqueline. At the time, which predated computers, we often lamented the increasing numbers of children who were unable to play by themselves and who needed the immediate gratification of entertainment education. Grandparents can promote independent learning by encouraging spontaneity and child initiated learning.

Ask your children whether this is an indoor or outdoor activity.

Ask them to explain the rules or guidelines.



Be a ready and equal participant rather than a judge.

Share the key to future play.

For an additional perspective on encouraging autistic children's interests please check out the following link: <http://to encourage their interests>

Free Play

Hand in hand with spontaneity is the need for free play. This requires enabling children to pursue their unique interests. This might involve imaginary play. This may show up in the many hours spent outside shooting (basketball) hoops. This could involve a dress up box with homemade or Goodwill original costumes. It may require art supplies. There should be opportunities for free play throughout the week with no endgame.

Additional Resources

Most communities have additional resources for enriching children's interests. In my own community there are wonderful recreation programs at the local library and children's bookstore. In neighboring cities there are museums of natural history, art and science to name a few. As parents and grandparents we can access these resources with our children through field trips, online videos and of course literature.

Personal Examples

Grandchildren:

A few weeks ago, two of my grandchildren were down

visiting. My 4 year old granddaughter wanted to use colored chalk and draw the world on our driveway. Our world was a very simplified version but the North Pole was essential. Santa needed to have his workshop there so he could continue to build all the toys he needed to deliver during the upcoming year.

On the other hand, my two year old grandson found a lone sprinkler attachment and screwed it onto the spicket of my rain barrel. Outside as he observed the tiny bugs traversing the garden, he looked to me to see what reaction he should have. Intrigued he watched as spider crossed the brick pathway. He remarked that he liked the spider as long as it stayed outside.

Special Education Students

One of my special education students is about to enter her senior year at USF. As so often happens, chance had a role in developing an interest that has become her principal college interest. In her sophomore year of high school, JT ended up taking a video production class because she needed to add a class to her schedule. The video production teacher was willing to take her into his class very late in the semester. JT continued to take classes from him during her junior and senior years. This has led to her major in film production and a job on campus in which she produces videos for the college news station.

We can never see into the future for our children. Yet we can nurture and encourage their interests in the present.

Karen Salzer

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