

Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting

Stop Telling and Start Asking ~ How to Use Curiosity Questions



BY KIM DeMARCHI

Helping children explore the consequences of their choices is much different from imposing consequences on them. Exploring invites the

participation of children to think for themselves and figure things out for themselves. Exploring invites children to decide what is important to them, and to decide what they want. The end result is focusing on solutions to the problem, instead of focusing on consequences.

Imposing consequences, however, often invites rebellion and defensive thinking instead of explorative thinking. The key to helping children explore is to stop telling and to start asking curiosity questions.

Too often adults tell children what happened, what caused it to happen, how the child should feel about it, what the child should learn from it, and what the child should do about it. It is much more respectful and encouraging when we ask the child what happened, what the child thinks caused it, how the child feels about it, what the child has learned, what ideas the child has to solve the problem, or how the child can use what she has learned in the future. This is the true meaning of education, which comes from the Latin word *educare*, which means to draw forth. Too often adults try to stuff in instead of draw forth, and then wonder why children don't learn.

Curiosity Questions:

- What were you trying to accomplish?
- Is there anything you wished you had done differently?

- How do you feel about what happened?
- What did you learn from this?
- How can you use what you learned in the future?
- What ideas do you have for solutions now?
- What's your picture of what is going on?
- *My favorite: What's your plan for ____? (getting homework done, finishing your chores, etc...)

I call these typical curiosity questions because it is important not to have a script. The point is to get into the child's world. You'll notice that "Why?" isn't one of the suggested questions. The reason is that "Why?" usually sounds accusatory and invites defensiveness. This isn't always the case. All of the questions can be asked in an accusatory tone of voice. "Why?" works when children feel that you are truly interested in their point of view.

Guidelines when using curiosity questions:

Don't have an agenda. You aren't getting into the child's world if you have an agenda about how the child should answer these questions. That is why they are called curiosity questions.

Don't ask questions if either of you are upset. Wait until you are both feeling calm.

Ask curiosity questions from your heart. Use your wisdom to show you how to get into the child's world and show empathy and acceptance.

Encourage child driven solutions. When the solutions come from the children, or are brainstormed together and the child chooses what will be most helpful, they learn that they can make a valuable contribution when using respectful decision-making skills. Children learn that mistakes aren't horrible if you don't beat yourself up about them and if you look at mistakes as opportunities to learn.

Examples of Telling Statements vs. Asking Questions:

Telling:

- Go brush your teeth.
- Don't forget your coat.
- Go to bed.
- Do your homework?
- Stop fighting with your brother.
- Hurry up and get dressed or you'll miss the bus.
- Stop whining.
- Pick up your toys.

Asking:

- What do you need to do so your teeth will be squeaky clean?



- What do you need to do so you'll be warm outside?
- What do you need to do to get ready for bed?
- What is your plan for getting your homework finished?
- What can you and your brother do to solve this problem?
- What do you need to do to catch the bus on time?
- What words can you use so I can hear you?
- What do you need to do with your toys when you are finished playing with them?

Try to get into your child's world by learning to really listen and "draw forth" instead of "stuff in". It's difficult to just listen without trying to fix it or change a thing. It's also challenging to just listen without wanting your child to give you the answer you hope they will give you. Practice asking instead of telling and practice simple curiosity questions to help your children explore the consequences of their choices. Getting children to start thinking for themselves is getting them one step closer to being more self-reliant.

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