



Process Versus Product: Becoming a Creative Problem Solver

When most people hear the word “creativity,” they often think about art and artists. But creativity is really about finding solutions to problems.

Along the way to solving a problem – during the **process** – your child constructs knowledge, builds confidence and learns skills that she will use in every aspect of her learning.

Process focuses on your child’s actions, her thinking and the way she expresses herself. This happens whether or not her solution is successful. How the final result looks is less important than what your child learned along the way.

You may notice that your child is often not interested what she made. She might paint over it, tear it up or throw it away. This can be a sign that she values the process more than the end result.

Instead of being upset that you don’t have a picture to hang on the fridge, ask her what she learned from making it. Follow your child’s lead about what creations she wants to keep.

Supporting the process

Give your child a chance to do her own thing. Look for projects that challenge your child to think. Let her choose what materials to use, decide how to use them and stop when she is satisfied with the project.

- > Craft projects tend to be adult-led, have predetermined steps, use only certain materials and focus on the end result. These are OK once in a while, but they can limit your child’s thinking. They don’t leave room for her to come up with her own solutions. If she insists on copying a model, broaden her thinking by showing alternate examples.

Let her take initiative. Design the environment to support your child’s creative choices.

- > If your child has easy access to materials, she will be more likely to act on a creative impulse than if supplies are out of sight or out of reach.

Question her. Almost all experiences begin with a question: “I wonder what would happen ...?” Look for ways to prompt this in your child. “I wonder ... where the green mark came from? You only used blue and yellow paint.” “I wonder why the magnet won’t stick to the plate? It sticks to the cookie sheet.”

- > Your child is more interested in finding answers to her own questions than the ones you and other adults ask. Encourage this by showing her how to find answers to her own questions. She might try an experiment, a book or an online resource.

Share her perspectives. Your child’s creations can tell you how she feels, what she fears and what she treasures. Likewise, giving her your feedback lets her know that her creations convey meaning.

- > Be mindful to make comments that focus on the process. For example, saying, “I saw that you kept working until you were happy with it,” lets her know that you value her creative process.



Let her take risks. Creativity is about doing things in new ways. Trying to represent an idea that exists only in your child's brain can lead to failure, questions or criticism. This is risky business! Let your child's know that you place value on taking risks, experimenting and being original.

- > Rewarding appropriate risk-taking helps you build trust and respect with your child. She may not always make the right decision. Her experiments may not always have the outcomes she wants. Her mistakes may worry you, but keep in mind that they help her learn.

Follow her lead. Help your child work through the ideas she generates. This sends the message that her ideas have value. Her interests are worth focusing on.

- > She may draw you into areas that you know nothing about. These are exciting opportunities to learn something new together!

Give her chances to construct physical knowledge. Working with a variety of materials helps your child learn about the world around her. Paint dries. Water beads up or runs down. Glue drips and smears.

- > Active learning gives her a base for abstract knowledge later on. This helps her learn about things she can't see: that water evaporates, for example, or that gravity affects everything on earth.