



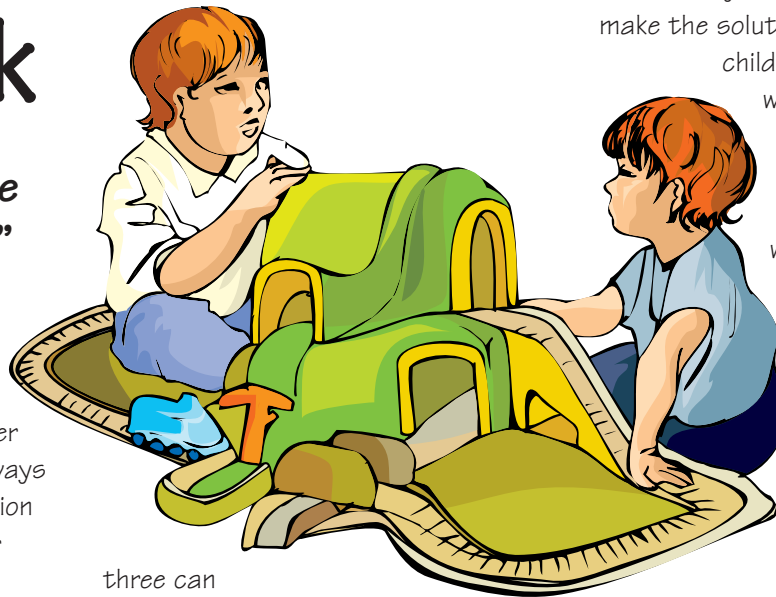
Teaching Kids to Think

Does your child drive you crazy with “why” questions?

You don't want to discourage her curiosity, but you can come to really dread hearing “Why?” over and over again. One of the best ways to handle the dreaded why question is to ask a question back to your child. “What do you think?” Your child's ideas may surprise you, and will often help you understand what your child really knows. Then you can use what he says as a way to start talking about the topic. Often you discover that what the child wants to talk about is not what he has asked about, so take your time to listen before you answer a question – it may not be the real question at all.

Do your kids squabble?

All kids do from time to time. Instead of struggling to play judge and jury, try something new. Make your children responsible for finding a way to work it out. You will have to supervise to make sure that older children don't take advantage of younger children, but even children as young as



three can learn how to solve problems with a brother or sister.

If they are arguing over a toy, put the toy out of sight and say, “You can have the toy when you have figured out a plan to play with it that you both agree to.” Most often both of the children want the toy enough that they are willing to work together to get it back. Even young children will work out plans: “She'll play with it for five minutes and then I'll play with it for five minutes.” As long as they both agree to the plan, you can give the toy back.

Sometimes one child doesn't want it enough to work out a plan and walks away or refuses to talk. If this happens, give the toy to the child who was willing to try to work it out. Say, “Since she doesn't want it enough to talk about it you can use it now.”

For reluctant problem solvers you can set a timer. “If you won't work out the problem in five minutes then I'll decide for you.” It is always best to make the solution in favor of the

child who was willing to work out the problem and less favorable for the child who did not put in real effort to work out the problem.

This is a great consequence for not problem solving – kids learn that it is better to work with others than to refuse to try to work things out.

Ten ways to encourage your child's thinking

- **Restrict viewing of TV or videos and time spent at a computer or playing video games.** Children learn best by doing. The American Academy of Pediatrics is recommending no television for children under two years and restricted viewing of only one to two hours a day of quality programming for children three and above.
- **Have a family dinner time regularly.** Talk with your children at the table. Mealtimes help children learn words and can be the most important way to prepare your children for school.

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- **Give your children time for play.**

With our busy schedules it can be hard to find time to just relax at home, but make sure your child has time regularly for satisfying play time.

- **Tell your children stories about your own childhood.** Children learn a great deal about the world from the stories you share with them. It doesn't even need to be a full story or funny or fancy in any way. Just simple everyday activities make great stories.

- **Read, read, and read some more to your child.** The wonderful world of books will open up to your child if you read to her daily. Pick stories about things that are interesting to your child.

- **Help your child explore his interests.** If you have a child who is interested in trucks, visit a construction site, read books about trucks, talk and wonder about trucks together, and play trucks with him. All of this will help your child learn many things about the world through his special interests. This will help your children develop their unique talents and abilities.

- **Ask your child questions such as "What do you think?" or say "Tell me about it," and really listen to his answers.** These kinds of open-ended questions have no right or wrong answer and build great conversation. The answers will also help you understand what your child does and doesn't know.

- **Help your child learn to work on projects of her own choosing.**

Encourage her to stick with the project when she becomes frustrated. If it isn't working, help her find another way by asking, "How else could you make it?" Learning how to take children's ideas and turn them into something real teaches children the broad skills they will need to succeed in the future.

- **Let your child make (safe) mistakes and experience some failure.**

Let him make something that won't work and allow him to discover for himself why it doesn't work. Nothing beats the school of real life.

- **Treat problems as opportunities.**

You lost some pieces of a game? Make up a new game. You don't have tape—what else could you use? This makes your children resourceful and good at coming up with fresh ideas.

Let Them Fail

Sometimes we protect our children from failure because we don't want them to be hurt or disappointed, but failure is a wonderful teacher for those brave enough to take the lesson. If your child wants to try out an idea that is doomed to failure, don't stop him—let him try it. Let him create the raft that will sink, or the plane that won't fly. The surprise of discovering that it doesn't work is worth far more than a lecture —

it's a lasting life lesson. As long as the mistake puts no one in harm's way, let your child learn some lessons from the best teacher, the school of real life.

Family Fun

Challenge your child to make a boat that floats. Let her use things from your recycling bin and let her creativity go to work. Let her test boats out in the sink to see if they really float. Remember, failure can be part of learning. Help your child "go back to the drawing board" and make another design until she is successful. Then celebrate by taking the boat out to a nearby creek on a nice warm day and set her creation afloat.

