

How can educators and families nurture creativity in young children?

The most important thing families and educators can do in nurturing children's creativity is provide **time and space**. Learning happens in all kinds of ways. However, research suggests that children learn best with unstructured play.

Give children time to explore and investigate, at their own pace without interruption or intervention (unless they ask for it of course!). Leave their creations, or have some space where they can leave them and return. They may go away and come back after having reflected, considered a new idea or approach, solved a problem, eaten, or investigated something else. This allows them to

build on ideas and concepts, develop deeper or higher order thinking skills, master a skill or test multiple theories. It also provides them with an opportunity to seek input from others, encouraging teamwork and collaboration.

This can get messy and chaotic, so if you can, set aside a space where children don't have to pack up at the end of an activity or at the end of the day. It is even better if you can do this both inside and outside. When they are happy with their work and satisfied that they are finished, then encourage them to pack it up.

In your busy schedule, allow time for **unstructured, child-directed play**. This is when the magic happens! When children are left to their own devices, without adult direction, they will learn, create, explore, imagine, experiment, collaborate and solve their own problems. They might fail, but they will try again or come up with a new idea. It will also help them to build resilience and independence. Encourage children to **try new things**. New ways of thinking, a different perspective (observing the world through all their senses), a different medium (clay, mud, paint, fabric, charcoal, pastels, wax, blocks, gears, tools, role play, music, etc.) or a new activity can stretch their imagination. This provides an element of challenge which encourages them to build on previous knowledge and experience. Every experience a child has, impacts their understanding of their world and how things are connected.

Encourage children to use play and creative processes to **express their ideas, thoughts, emotions and feelings**. There is no right or wrong in creative and imaginative play and children can process their ideas, thoughts and emotions without judgement.



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Loose parts in your environment empower creativity. Research has shown the provision of loose parts, or items that can be played with, transposed, combined, adapted, manipulated, constructed, deconstructed, used alone or in combination; may be natural, man-made or recycled; and used for many different purposes; are perfect for encouraging creativity. They provide endless possibilities for creative and imaginative play.

These may be things like:

- Balls
- Stones or pebbles
- Cardboard tubes
- Ribbons or string
- Fabric
- Twigs or sticks
- Pallets
- Wheels
- Buckets
- Crates
- Flowers
- Seedpods
- Logs
- Sand
- Blocks
- Straw bales
- Cushions
- Nuts and bolts
- Cardboard boxes



These resources should be available for children to access continuously so that they can choose the material that best suits their purpose.