

## **THE INQUISITIVE CHILD**

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This article originally appeared in the spiral-bound edition of *"The MidAtlantic Trailblazer - A GPS Trail Guide"* - my very first published book (now out of print - being revised). The article was inspired by my success using the techniques described with a child who had been on Ritalin since age 5. This article was also posted on my former Web site, and was the subject of heated controversy - complete with overwhelming complimentary e-mails and an occasional death threat. That is what happens when you speak the truth in the face of the *Hick-Farmer Sigmund Freud Wannabes* in this country.

Also see Dr. Jan Strydom's article: *"The ADD MYTH"* - from a Radio Liberty newsletter.

Also see my article: *"Endangering Children"*

By far, the most enjoyable time we adults can have is being in the company of an inquisitive and curious child. Second only to his instinctive need (and I stress the word "need") for love, affection and attention, a child needs to have, what may seem to be (to us adults, anyway) silly questions answered. Most adults don't understand that when a child asks a question on a subject he is not familiar with, he has no point of reference. If you were to walk into a nuclear physicists convention, could you carry on an intelligent discussion, or even ask a simple question that didn't tip them off immediately that you don't fit in with the crowd? Most people couldn't.

A typical 8 to 12 year old will go through several (for lack of a better term) phases in the course of a 24 hour period. During the day, when there is lots to do, he may get into mischief as he explores new things (like hunting for frogs), at times testing the patience of his elders. During the late afternoon, as the energy reserves dwindle, he may become cranky and cantankerous, getting bored, wanting to do something else, or wanting to stay up late, etc.

At bedtime is usually when the child's mind is still racing, going over the activities of the day and usually thinking about tomorrow's adventures (or planning the morning's mischief). This can be difficult for an adult who wants the child to sleep. Understanding what is going on, even though the child is incapable of communicating it to you, is the key to keeping your nerves from getting worn down to the synapses.

Over the years, I have developed an ability to relate to kids. After Scout mastering a troop of up to 70 boys for 5 years and being around children constantly, it has become almost instinctive or "second nature". Dispensing with the "fad" theories of the day, I can tell you what works for me.

Be a friend, not a "grown-up". Every human being has the instinctive need to "belong". The desire to be part of a group, and accepted by peers probably ranks right up there with the need for affection. If you want the child to respond to you, be his peer, not some overwhelming authority figure ready to respond with harsh sanctions at the slightest infraction. Any child will respond more positively, wanting to please and to share his delight with someone he looks up to and admires, rather than out of fear of being punished.

Never get angry at the child. This can be most difficult at times. Children respond to anger by withdrawing. Once you get angry, once you start intimidating or threatening, he will become defensive. If you do lose your cool, try to regain your composure quickly. Take the child aside for a few minutes. Talk quietly with him. Be rational. Let him know so that there can be no shadow of doubt, that you love him, but make sure he understands that his behavior is not acceptable. Ask questions that cause him to admit that what he did was wrong, then ASK him to promise to not do that again.

Be a "KID" yourself. Hey, you only live once! Lighten up! Have FUN. Don't be such an "old fogey". The most fun you'll ever have in your adult life is to see the world through a child's eyes. Keep your adult sensibility, but give in to the child's desire to do silly things. Climbing a tree, swimming across a river on a "Tyrolean Ferry", or exploring a cave may be mundane to you, but to a 10 year-old, it's the adventure of a lifetime.

Heighten the adventure. This is particularly easy to do with outdoor sports. Rappelling down a cliff face using a Petzl Stop is really not all that dangerous, if you take reasonable precautions. Make the trip or the task SOUND as dangerous, as adventurous, and as difficult as the child will accept. He will talk about it for months, and remember it forever.

Always keep your promises. don't break any promises you've made in the past, as punishment or in retaliation for a recent misdeed. Children aren't stupid. If you break your promise as a punishment for something, the child will resent it, figuring you're just using the punishment as an excuse for not keeping your word.

Almost never use physical force. I say almost never, because there will be some times where the need for a wee tap on the backside is absolutely warranted. You should never actually hurt the child, and if you do find yourself having to get his attention this way, always hug and cuddle him afterwards. Don't make a habit of doing this however, as the child will learn that your mood and demeanor are unpredictable from one moment to the next. He will respond either by becoming introverted in your presence or by emulating you, by developing equally unpredictable behavior.

Spanking is definitely verboten, is embarrassing and humiliating to the child, borders on child abuse, and is the typical knee-jerk response of a bona fide idiot. Spanking a child will instantly cause the child to lose any respect he may have had for you. He may actually hate you. For many children, the first time a parent spansks him is the first time the child experiences the feeling (however tempered by love), of genuine hatred. He may suppress it, he may not articulate it, but you will most definitely have opened a rift between you and that child that may never completely heal.

Have a genuine interest in what the child is doing. How big that tadpole is may not be interesting to you, but to him, it is absolutely fascinating.

Letting the child share his enthusiasm with you about such little things and being genuinely and equally enthusiastic rewards the inquisitive mind, and the learning experience becomes FUN. On the other hand, making snide remarks like "So what?", or brushing this spark of innocent enthusiasm aside, dismissing it out of hand as insignificant, absolutely kills the FUN the child is having being naturally curious and sharing his new-found knowledge. Something that's fun is twice the joy if it's shared. It is a hundred times as joyous if it's shared with someone who cares and takes an active part.

When you're wrong, admit it, then apologize to the child. Oh, this may scrape the nerves of some of you authoritarians out there who think you're above apologizing to a kid, but if you want to evoke good behavior from a child, try setting the example yourself.

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