

Help your child learn to ask and answer questions



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As mentioned in your Practica Parents' Guide, one of the most valuable things that you can do from day one to encourage your child's development is to involve him in as many everyday experiences as possible whilst giving a running commentary.

Yet, as your child learns to speak, your conversations with him will naturally become less one-sided.

Why is it important that your child learns to ask and answer questions?

- 1) His self-confidence will get a boost.
- 2) He will benefit more from learning opportunities as he will be able to actively gather information and get feedback on his own ideas and thoughts.
- 3) He will be more socially skilled since children who find it difficult to ask and answer questions struggle to continue conversations.

Learning to Ask:

What to expect:

Developing the ability to ask questions is an ongoing process, which is not completed until adolescence, but you can start to encourage your child to practice this skill from about 21 months of age.

As children learn to talk they typically acquire questioning skills in the following order:

Typical age:	Type of Question:	Example:
2 yrs	Yes/No	May I go?
2 yrs	What	What is this?
2½ yrs	Where	Where is my shoe?
2½ - 3 yrs	Who	Who is that?
4-5 yrs	Why	Why is he crying?
4-5 yrs	How	How did you make that?
5-6 yrs	When	When is she coming?

norms from an article by M. Ann Marquis

"What" and "where" questions develop early because young children are typically interested in the names of various things in their environment, as well as the locations of people and things.

"Why" and "how" questions usually develop from age 4 onwards since children typically start to experiment with abstract thoughts from there-on.

"When" questions develop even later since children obviously need to have developed a sense of time before they can formulate these questions.

Why do some children have difficulty asking questions?

To be able to ask questions, your child needs to (1) know how to put words together to form questions, (2) have the thinking skills to think of something to ask and (3) trust that the other person is going to react positively.

So, if your child struggles in this area, try to establish which of these 3 components need attention and start helping him from there.

General tips to encourage your child to ask questions:

- You can show your child how people think and how to ask questions by asking yourself questions while you are doing everyday things with your child and then answering your own questions. "What is this? A feather!" or "What will we do next? Close the door!"
- Give your full attention when your child is trying to ask you a question. Get down to his eye level and allow enough time for the question to be asked. Be patient.
- Answer your child's questions. When you give information in response to a question, your child has been successful and his self-confidence gets a boost.
- If you didn't understand the question, ask him to repeat it or show you. If you do understand, let your child know by repeating the question in a simple, correct way. Then answer it. (Try your very best to enjoy yourself as you do it.)

Learning to Answer:

In order to reduce frustration it will be wise for you to start with questions that your child can answer and progress from there. His ability to answer questions develops in approximately the same order as his ability to ask them. So, if he can ask 'why-questions' you can expect of him to answer the same type of question, and so on.

The ideal time to ask questions is while the two of you are engrossed in an activity together. Wait and watch your child to see what he is focusing on and then ask a question about that.

Make sure that you have his full attention before asking the question and allow a few seconds for him to think before answering. Create a calm and accepting atmosphere.

Parents usually don't need a lot of encouragement to ask questions, but it's best not to ask too many questions as it's all too easy to dominate a conversation with a series of questions. Try to use questions to find out more about what he is thinking and what he knows so that you know how to relate to him, rather than turning the conversation into a 'test' or a 'lesson'.

Also keep in mind that questions like, "You know what?" are a child's way of getting your attention so that he can share information with you. So respond by being interested. HAVE FUN!