



# Primary Project

## Winter 2009

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## From the Playroom

### Childhood Curiosity

Children and curiosity...the two go hand in hand. Curious children wonder, explore and ask questions...oh, so many questions! When we take time to truly watch young children, we witness their joyful discovery, their natural gift of curiosity.

In Primary Project playrooms, children are allowed to be curious. Through the process of unstructured and expressive play, children grow. By providing children a safe and secure play environment and then fully engaging with them, children's social and emotional competencies are developed. The less we try to control, the more children can explore.

This edition of *From the Playroom* is about curiosity.

- Enjoy reading how curiosity is fuel for children's healthy development and learning.
- Enjoy learning about new faces and new programs in New York State.
- Enjoy discovering that despite economic uncertainty, Primary Project continues to grow in several communities nationally and internationally. Read the comments submitted by staff members in the Dufferin Peel Catholic School Board District, a suburb outside of Toronto, where Dr. Debra Lean, Chief Psychologist, first read about Primary Project over three years ago. Dr. Lean is a true example of not only being curious, but also remaining patient and persistent in her efforts to bring Primary Project to her school district.

Above all, stay curious, and stay playful, for...

*"The truly great advances of this generation will be made by those who can make outrageous connections, and only a mind which knows how to play can do that."*

—NAGLE JACKSON

# Fuel for Healthy Learning

Curiosity is a wonderful childhood trait. Being in the presence of young children is a opportunity to observe a world of wonder. In an article that originally appeared in *Early Childhood Today* (March, 2001 edition), Dr. Bruce Perry feels that curiosity is really the fuel of development.

Dr. Perry, an internationally recognized authority on brain development and children in crisis, says curious children are engaged in a cycle of learning. When young children discover, they find pleasure. When they experience pleasure, they often repeat the exploration. Repetition then leads to mastery. Mastering a new skill or task, or mastering new knowledge leads to confidence. A confident child will actively increase his or her willingness to act on this curiosity and that results in increased self esteem. A child experiencing a healthy sense of self feels secure in the world, including the world of school. That security results in more exploration. More exploration fuels learning. This cycle of positive learning includes pleasure, repetition, discovery, mastery and confidence and a healthy sense of self.

**Curiosity → Pleasure → Repetition → Mastery → Confidence →  
Increased self esteem → Feeling secure → More exploration → Learning**

Another exciting element of childhood curiosity is the pleasure that comes from sharing discoveries. When an adult (a parent, teacher, child associate, counselor, principal, neighbor) shares a child's interests and gives encouragement, the child's confidence and curiosity continues to be fueled. This type of confidence builds even more confidence and can help sustain a child through new challenges and frustrations.

For some children, however, curiosity is dimmed. Dr. Perry states, "Curiosity dimmed is a future denied." He feels that children's emotional, social and cognitive potential is expressed through the quality and quantity of their experiences. The less curious child will make fewer social connections, read fewer books or take fewer nature hikes where discovery of the vastness of outdoors takes place. The less curious child is harder to teach because he or she is harder to inspire, enthuse and motivate.

Dr. Perry feels that common ways adults constrain or even crush enthusiastic exploration of curious children are a) fear, b) disapproval and c) absence.

- Common **fear** triggers are a chaotic world, natural disasters, family distress, violence and living in a war zone. When children are afraid, they seek the familiar, look for comfort zones and are not able to explore.
- **Disapproval**: A world that limits children with "don't" messages..."don't touch, don't get dirty, don't climb, don't yell, don't wiggle, don't, don't, don't." Children are extremely good at sensing disapproval, as well as our fears, attitudes and biases.
- **Absence**: In the presence of a caring, invested adult, the child feels safe and secure. Because they feel safe to explore and discover new things, children typically have a willingness to share whatever they discover. Therefore, they get pleasure and reinforcement from that discovery, and the cycle of learning continues.

Taking the wisdom of Dr. Perry and applying it to the Primary Project relationship, it is clear why Primary Project children grow in their social and emotional competence. Primary Project fosters exploration in the context of a safe, familiar and comfortable play-based relationship. In the presence of a caring, invested school-based adult, the child is allowed to lead the play and the child associate is trained to offer encouraging and esteem building reflections as part of the formula. A child associate responds empathically and non-judgmentally which fosters that cycle of learning. The child associate looks for what is unique and special in every child.

Child associates and others who support young children can offer opportunities for curious and imaginative exploration, which as Dr. Perry suggests, provides the fuel of healthy development.



# Curious Growth...

In New York, Primary Project programs continue to grow throughout the state. This year alone there have been six new schools that have implemented Primary Project this past fall, 2008. In addition, Rochester City School District was awarded a grant through Safe Schools and Healthy Students which has allowed them to expand Primary Project to nine new elementary buildings.

If you are "curious" about how new schools in New York State can implement Primary Project within your district or in neighboring districts, a Request for Proposals is available on our website at [www.childrensinstitute.net](http://www.childrensinstitute.net).

If you are outside of New York and interested in exploring the possibility of growing Primary Project in your state, please contact Mary Anne Peabody at [mpeabody@childrensinstitute.net](mailto:mpeabody@childrensinstitute.net).



"We keep moving forward,  
opening new doors,  
and doing new things,  
because we're curious and  
curiosity keeps leading us  
down new paths."

—Walt Disney



"I have no special  
talents. I am only  
passionately curious."

—Albert Einstein

## New Staff Member

Welcome to Shelley Sanyshyn who has joined Children's Institute as a Clinical Associate. We asked Shelley to introduce herself focusing on 3 areas: 1) her professional past 2) her present role and 3) the role of curiosity in her life as a young child and as an adult. Here are her responses:

*Tell us about your professional past:* I am returning to my New York State roots after residing in Baltimore, Maryland for the last 10 years. In my last professional role as a Licensed Professional Counselor, I provided therapy to inner-city children and families within the Baltimore City Public School System, while simultaneously maintaining a role in leading the University of Maryland's School Mental Health Program.

*Tell us about your present role:* I feel so fortunate to have landed at Children's Institute. I am thrilled to be part of the enthusiastic and motivated team here. In my new role as a Clinical Associate, I have been given the opportunity to take what I have learned over the years and share it with others, as well as be given the chance to learn new things. I am eager to provide support to schools and partner with all of the key players that are involved in strengthening the social and emotional health of children.

*Share with us about your childhood curiosity and how you view yourself and curiosity now:* When I think about my childhood, many memories come to mind. As a child I recall being curious about practically any and everything. I can distinctly recall hearing things like, "Why do you ask so many questions?" or "Stop asking so many questions." As an adult, not much has changed. People are still around making the same comments. I feel that I am lucky to have not lost this sense of curiosity over the years. For me, being curious about things keeps me going, makes me feel alive, interested in life and what it has in store for me.





# Bringing the Lessons Home


## **Promoting your child's curiosity**

Curiosity is your child's natural way to learn about the world. Allow yourself to be taken away by your child's curiosity from time to time. Below are a few ways to promote your child's curiosity.

1. Why? Why? Why? Children's questions can be both wonderful and tiresome. When a child asks a question, to promote creativity and curiosity, you can sometimes answer the question with a question. Ask your child to make a guess based on information they already have or based on prior experiences.
2. Ask your own genuine questions when your child is with you. For example, if you wonder why certain plants won't grow in your house, say so out loud near your child and go through the process of finding the answer, modeling the curious side of discovery for your child. Children imitate adult behavior, so give them a great example of what it means to be curious. Model and show them where you find answers to questions.
3. Play with your children and encourage imaginative play! Your involvement in your child's imaginative play will help enhance play scenarios and encourage thinking skills.
4. Read to your child. The world opens up with books. New ideas are presented as you read, opening your child up to new ways of thinking. This is also an opportunity to ask more questions. Encourage your child to ask questions while you read.
5. Let your child take the lead. Observe your child in a new situation. What does he or she find interesting? What is your child drawn to? Take some time to slow down and let interests and curiosity develop. Use your observations to plan future adventures incorporating your child's interests.

Curiosity is your child's natural way of learning about the world.

**Please feel free to copy this page and share it with Primary Project parents.**



# Trayendo las Lecciones al Hogar

## **Promoviendo la curiosidad de su niño/a**

La curiosidad es la manera natural que su niño/a tiene para aprender acerca del mundo. Déjese llevar por la curiosidad de su niño/a de tiempo en tiempo. Abajo encontrará varias maneras para promover la curiosidad de su niño/a.

1. ¿Por qué? ¿Por qué? ¿Por qué? Las preguntas de los niños pueden ser tanto maravillosas como cansadas. Cuando un niño hace una pregunta, para promover la creatividad y curiosidad, usted puede contestar la pregunta con otra pregunta algunas veces. Pídale a su niño/a que trate de adivinar basándose en la información que ya posee o en experiencias pasadas.
2. Haga sus propias preguntas genuinas cuando su niño/a está con usted. Por ejemplo, si usted se pregunta el porqué ciertas plantas no crecen en su casa, diga esto en voz alta cerca de su niño y pase por el proceso de encontrar la respuesta, modelando de este modo el lado curioso del descubrimiento para su niño/a. Los niños imitan la conducta de los adultos, así pues deles un gran ejemplo de lo que quiere decir ser curioso. Modele y demuéstreles dónde usted encuentra respuestas para sus preguntas.
3. ¡Juegue con su niño/a y motive el juego imaginativo! Su participación en el juego imaginativo de su niño/a ayudará a realzar los escenarios de juego y estimulará las destrezas para pensar.
4. Lea a su niño/a. El mundo se abre a través de los libros. Al usted leer se presentan nuevas ideas, lo cual ayuda a su niño/a a encontrar nuevas maneras de pensar. Esto también es una oportunidad para hacer más preguntas. Aliente a su niño/a para que haga preguntas mientras usted lee.
5. Deje que su niño/a tome el mando. Observe a su niño/a en una situación nueva. ¿Qué es lo que él/ella encuentra interesante? ¿Qué le atrae? Tome algún tiempo para ir más lento y dejar que los intereses y curiosidad se desarrollen. Use sus observaciones para planificar aventuras futuras incorporando los intereses de su niño/a.

La curiosidad es la manera natural que su niño/a tiene para aprender acerca del mundo.

**Siéntase en libertad de copiar esta página y compartirla con los padres del Primary Project.**

# The Cardinal Sings



—Deborah Johnson  
Primary Project, National Director

I'm curious. I wonder. I explore. What's out there? Is it safe? What will happen if...?

What do you get when you Google search, "curious?" I found three definitions: 1) eager to learn/ inquisitive; 2) prying/meddlesome; and 3) arousing/exciting speculation, interest or attention. Definition two surprised me. I have always thought that prying and being meddlesome were considered to be annoying.

I looked further on the Google search and came across a discussion about "Curious George" who is described as the inquisitive little fellow who always seems to get into one scrape after another. It is predictable that he is unpredictable and that George is going to get into trouble, and that eventually he will dig himself deeper. The author says that George can do all the naughty things that kids would like to do!

Ah, curious. I like the "Curious George" concept. But now that I am an adult, I think the first definition (eager to learn) fits best.

Perhaps you are curious about what I did on sabbatical. I played. I watched children play. I read about play. I took pictures of children playing. I loved watching children build dams, make forests out of twigs (one child even made a forest that had burned), make a tent using a bedspread and tree limbs only to take it down and make another the next day. They picked flowers and skipped, they dug holes in snow piles to find monsters and they dressed up as Vikings to welcome visitors.

There is so much that we can learn when we allow children to take the lead and we are their partner. Through children's curiosity they learn, grow, and yes, they can practice doing some of those naughty things just to see what we will do!

Happy playing in 2009.



Do you need a great resource for a parent night idea?  
Do you need to help explain the importance of play to adults?  
Do you need a great "new parent" gift?

Consider the latest DVD from Children's Institute...

## **Possibilities of Play—Building Connections through Play**

This 28-minute video looks at play through the eyes of parents, grandparents, play therapists, educators, pediatricians and other mental health providers. The DVD:

- Examines the crucial importance of play to the healthy development of children's emotional, social, physical and cognitive growth.
- Explores definitions of play, ages and stages of play, universal nature of play and the significant role of adults in providing enriching play opportunities for children.
- Highlights child-led play, where parents/caregivers use special playtime as a way to enhance and strengthen emotional relationships with children.

**This DVD is a great resource to help you spread the message about the importance of play.**

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274 N. Goodman Street, Suite D103  
Rochester, New York 14607  
(585) 295-1000 (phone)  
(585) 295-1090 (fax)  
(877) 888-7647 (toll free)

[www.childrensstitute.net](http://www.childrensstitute.net)

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Editor: Mary Anne Peabody  
Deputy Director of National Services  
[mpeabody@childrensstitute.net](mailto:mpeabody@childrensstitute.net)

Design: Mary Maiolo  
Senior Graphics Coordinator

To receive this newsletter, please send your current  
e-mail address to [cwalker@childrensstitute.net](mailto:cwalker@childrensstitute.net)