

Individual Matters

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Newsletter — April 2024 Issue

How Do I Help My Child Self-Advocate and Ask Good Questions?

Young children ask hundreds of questions every day.

But research suggests that by adolescence, the number of questions per day drops to only 3!

Why does this decline occur? There are lots of theories that include both reasons of nature (i.e., natural development) and nurture (learned behavior and life experiences). Nonetheless, it happens... Kids stop asking questions as they grow older.

How can we as parents encourage kids to ask questions and self-advocate? Here are six ideas:

1. Create a safe space for more questions.

Try not to answer your child with a quick “No!” or with dismissive statements such as, “Why weren’t you paying attention?” or “Look it up” or “Go figure it out.”

Instead, respond with reinforcing statements such as: “Great question!” or “Tell me more about what you are thinking” or “That’s interesting, what made you think of that?” or “You ask great questions.”

If the child answers and then asks if they are correct, avoid replying with a simple “yes” or “no.” Instead, consider saying, “Let’s take a look...show me your thought process” or “That is

not quite right, let's look again" or "I love that you are checking in" or "that is not quite right...let me help...what questions do you have? Let's see if we can figure out where you got off track."

Kids think and ask questions when they feel safe.

2. Help your child see themselves as being good at asking questions.

Positive and prescriptive statements such as, "You are such a thinker" or "I love how your mind works" or "You are so curious and ask such great questions!" are highly reinforcing and will increase the likelihood that your child will ask more questions. You may already know that our words inform our children's beliefs about themselves.

Tell your child they are good at asking questions, and they will see themselves as having good questions to ask.

3. Avoid answering questions for your child.

Instead, respond with statements or questions that facilitate thinking, problem-solving, and further contemplation. Imagine that you and your child are playing volleyball with a giant beach ball. When the child asks a question, gently volley the "ball" back into their court.

Be sure your volley is supportive and not dismissive. If you know the answer, consider responding to part of the question, and then research the topic further with your child. For example, if the child asks why flamingo feathers are pink, you might reply, "Great question! I feel like it is either because of the bacteria in the water or because of what they eat...I can't remember. Let's find out." Or "What got you thinking about pink feathers?"

Answering with a question keeps your child thinking.

4. Give your undivided attention.

Avoid multi-tasking or half-heartedly mumbling a response when a child asks a question. Your non-verbals are a strong reinforcer. Let the child know that their questions really matter by using your eye contact, smile, gestures, and body posture.

If you cannot stop what you are doing at the moment, be sure to circle around later when you can give your undivided attention.

*It is never too late to let your child know
how glad you are they asked.*

5. Play games that get your child asking questions to think.

My favorite is The Answer Game. You think of a question (“What was my first childhood pet?”) and then give the answer, such as “a cat.” The child must figure out the question. You can play this game verbally or on paper. Encourage your child to ask as many types of questions until they figure out the question. You can add clues or respond with “hot/cold” responses to keep them going. Then reverse roles and have them give an answer and you model asking good questions. Another favorite is the 20 Questions Game.

Children of ALL ages learn best through play.

6. Model curiosity and vulnerability.

Ask your child questions about their areas of interest and expertise. Model being vulnerable and asking all kinds of questions—even if they might be considered “stupid questions.” If your child is into LOL dolls, get curious about LOL dolls. If they are into football, get curious about football.

If they are into poetry, get curious about poetry. If they like a certain show, get curious about that show.

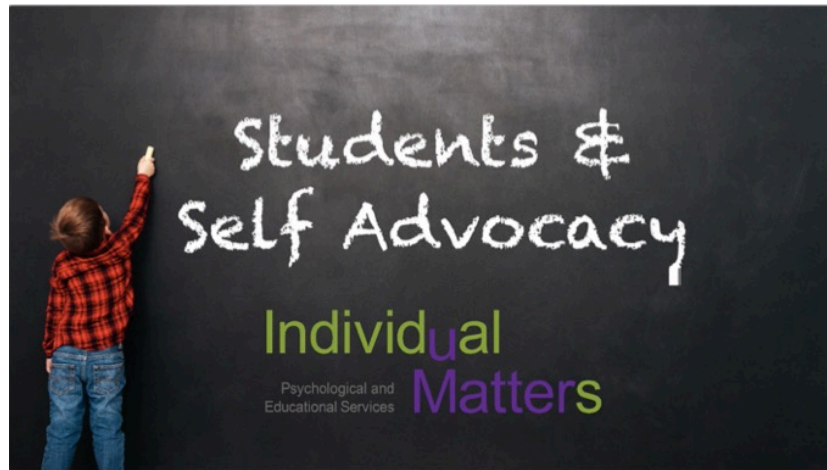
Model asking different kinds of questions to them (and in front of them). Early on, children learn that when an adult asks them a question, there is an expected response or a “right answer.” When we ask lots of questions, we are showing them that no one knows the answer to everything. We are modeling that it is okay not to know, and most importantly, it is okay to ask “stupid questions.” Essentially, we are teaching them that asking questions does not make you stupid.

Rather...

*Asking questions shows that you are curious
and makes you wise about many things.*

Based on an article originally published [here](#).

Check out [this podcast](#) with Dr. Katen to learn more about promoting student advocacy.



New Resource for Parents! **K-12 Scholarships for Mesa County**

Eric Gil of Strong Branch Learning recently joined [The Individual Matters Podcast](#) to share a valuable resource available to Colorado K-12 students: **Parents Challenge**.

Parents Challenge is a nonprofit organization that disrupts the legacy of educational failure by empowering parents of K-12 students with scholarships, information, training, mentoring, tools, and other resources so they can choose the education they think is best for their children.

Listen to our conversation with Eric [here](#).

Eric Gil
Founder, Nerd, CEO
Strong Branch Learning

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**#26 – Parents Challenge:
K-12 Scholarships for
Mesa County**

Spring is here! Hoping you can get outside, enjoy the sunshine and nature, and take new steps towards a happier and healthier you!



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