



# INSPIRE the creative instincts in your child AVOID the CREATIVITY KILLERS

by Lyssa Harvey, EdS

**C**reativity is a characteristic that parents hope to nourish in their children. We are all born innately curious and creative, and natural creativity helps us develop our intelligence, enhance the ability to problem solve, spark new and innovative ideas and bring fulfillment and joy into our lives. Humans are also competitive, and this trait has been blamed for extinguishing that creative spark in children.

Teresa Annabile, PhD, a professor at Brandeis University, cites in her book *The Creative Instinct*, four ways parents' efforts at enhancing creativity may backfire, which she labels "Creativity Killers."

## CREATIVITY KILLER #1 evaluation

Simply expecting evaluation can deter creativity, even if the outcome is positive. Children should focus on the process, not on how their work is going to be judged. Evaluation is necessary in most areas of our lives, but if presented continually to young children, it can restrict creativity.

## CREATIVITY KILLER #2 reward

Most believe that rewarding a behavior will improve that behavior, but this is not always the case in the creative process. For tasks that are straight forward, reward does help children perform faster and better. However, for problem solving and creative insight, offering rewards can stifle the imagination. It has been shown that a lack of stimulation and praise can inhibit creativity, but excessive stimulation and praise can desensitize intrinsic motivation and deaden creativity.

## CREATIVITY KILLER #3 competition

Competition encompasses both reward and evaluation. Unbridled competition is often uncalled for in creative activities. Remember, it is the process, not the product that rewards children.

## CREATIVITY KILLER #4 restriction of choice

Most artists and scientists agree that to truly learn and be creative one cannot be restricted or forced. This does not mean that parents should not set boundaries with children's behaviors and choices. A framework for choice and behaviors is always the best way to instill positive creative exploration.

So, what can parents do to avoid creativity killers? We need to teach children stability and predictability, as well as the ability to fail without discouragement. Often parents push children into areas where they have little interest.

The key is to find out where interest and skills overlap. Not all children's gifts and interests are apparent. Parents who encourage children to experiment with different skill sets are correct. Children are wired to be parent pleasers, and often stick with an area of interest to please parents rather than what they really want to do. It can be fun, but hard work for some parents to find out that special area of interest their child desires. Here are some ways parents can encourage creativity:

- Encourage independence.
- Do not micromanage play.
- Encourage children to discover solutions on their own.
- Allow your child to fail.
- Avoid enrolling preschoolers in competitive activities.
- Keep the learning environment fun.
- Engage children to use all of their five senses in learning.
- Be a role model, and engage in stimulating experiences.
- Teach children to respect differences in people.
- Respect your child as a unique individual.

As parents learn to appreciate the differences in each of their children, they will become more aware of what is special about each child. To foster a child's creativity, you must first understand his or her uniqueness and allow him or her to learn the possibilities of how he or she relates to the world. Encouraging your child to take creative risks, explore interests, and engage in the joy of learning will ignite the internal spark called creativity.



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