



Headteacher Audrey Reeder of The Olive Tree School looks at the best ways to teach children how to create a dialogue and think creatively about a situation.

Creating a climate of questioning

As the headteacher of a child-centred school, I am often asked, "How can a parent create excitement about learning and school-work?"

A sea change comes about in a child/teen when adults create a climate of questioning.

So what is 'questioning', and how can I do do this at home?

Questioning is an invitation to a child/teen to engage with any given situation; a leaky bucket, a piece of algebra, a Shakespeare excerpt, or Lego bricks that will not come apart. Questioning is also extremely useful in negotiating disagreements between peers.

How does it work?

The child/teen and adult consider a situation/problem;

The adult poses 'blue sky' or 'open' questions;

This opens a creative dialogue of high order thinking.

Examples of open questioning:

Why do you think this has happened? (About a bedtime story, a news item, a home incident, a maths question.)

How else could you/they have done this? How would things have turned out differently?

What alternatives are there to this?

What ways could you improve on...?

What would happen if...?

In what ways can we move forward from this? (disagreements)

Extra hints:

Avoid yes/no questions (What is? / Where is? / Is it...?).

These imply that you, the adult, have the answer, indeed that there is one right answer. This inhibits the child's open thinking for fear the answer may be 'wrong' in the adult's eyes.

Listen actively to the child/teen (and perhaps respond with another considered question, to broaden and lift the dialogue further).

Create a joint excitement around the dialogue itself. Not praising the 'right' answer but 'great thinking'.

Encourage your child/teen to ask searching questions themselves.

In our classrooms, searching questions are written into every teacher's lesson plan for the hour. Every child is challenged to think creatively about any situation, including traditional right/wrong subjects such as mathematics.

A questioning culture is easily adopted at home with enormous rewards for a family. It creates a team approach and collective responsibility; it gives a voice to the youngest members of the house.

Questioning is based on the unshakeable belief that a young mind is precious and infinitely capable of great thinking.

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