

Harnessing the Pediatric Superpower of Curiosity

Susan Kressly, MD, FAAP
AAP President -Elect



American Academy of Pediatrics
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Learning Objectives

- Explore the definition of curiosity
- Reflect on what we love about childhood curiosity
- Imagine what we might accomplish if we tap into our collective curiosity

Merriam-Webster Definition

curiosity **noun**

cu·ri·os·i·ty (ˌkyūr-ē-'ä-s(ə)-tē) ,kyər-

plural curiosities

[Synonyms of curiosity >](#)

1 : desire to know:

a : inquisitive interest in others' concerns : **NOSINESS**

The construction inside their house aroused the *curiosity* of their neighbors.

b : interest leading to inquiry

intellectual *curiosity*

Her natural *curiosity* led her to ask more questions.

Synonyms:

- Concern
- Interest
- Wonderment
- Questioning
- Inquisitiveness
- Inquiry
- Curiousness
- Attentiveness

What Does the Science Say...

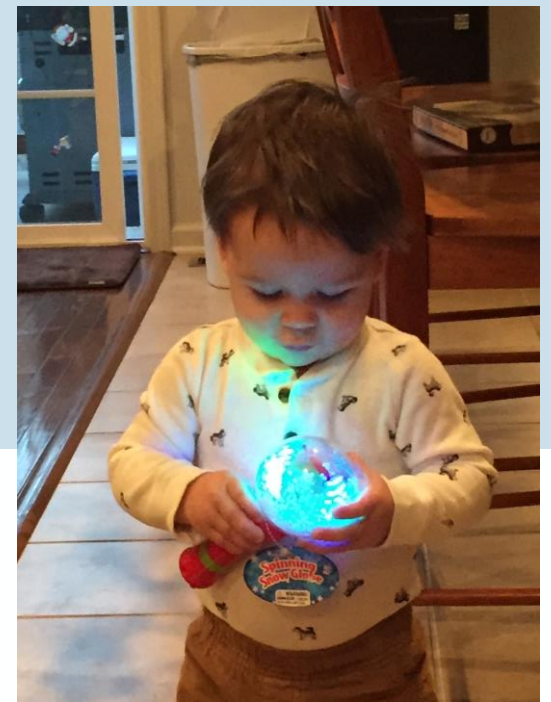
According to cognitive scientist and researcher [Elizabeth Bonawitz](#), curiosity is innate in all humans — **a sensation much like hunger or thirst.**

“Curiosity acts as a kind of filter you put over the world to help the mind decide what information to attend to,” she says. “It’s a physiological response that helps drive action and decision-making to ***support learning.***”



Early Innate Curiosity

- Every baby is born with a huge, powerful urge to find things out
- Look at everything that comes into their vision
- They grab everything, feel it and put it in their mouth, they shake it, they try to do different things with it
- Will do anything to try and figure out how the world works...nothing gets in their way...
- Toddler's are one man wrecking crews, take things apart Learn through actions
- Development of language...they get the knew tool through Wh words (most children ask between 25-50 questions per hour..goes down to 2 when go to school)



Why do we LOVE Pediatrics?

- There is so much unrealized potential!
- There is so much hope!
- Silly is celebrated!
- Early on there is no hidden agenda, no judgement, just curiosity, honesty and joy!



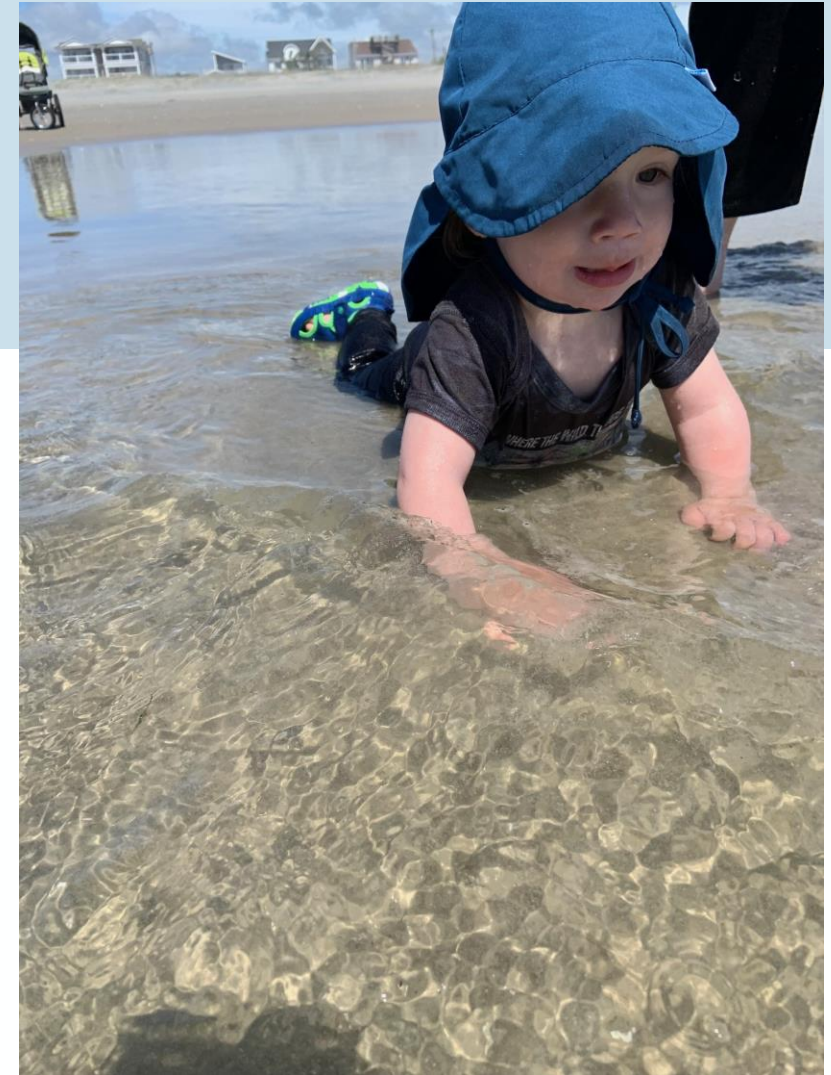
Curiosity is Not Static

- You can't force it. Curiosity – learning new things – is fundamentally enjoyable, as long as they are things that you want to learn.
- My curiosity doesn't have to look like yours.
- Curiosity leads to a rich and enjoyable life as long as you follow it down the paths that interest you.



Curiosity is Not Static

- We were all born curious. **How do we get it back?**
- We get too busy for exploration.
- We don't want to appear silly when asking questions.
- We live and work in organizations that stifle curiosity.





Curiosity Shut Downs

1. **We think we know everything already**
2. **We have an unchecked ego**



The Expert Shutdown

- Curiosity is shut down when we think we know all the answers and need to be the expert.
- Instead of fostering a culture of curiosity, we foster competition to be experts.
- When we **know**, the learning is done.

Are You Shutting Down Curiosity in Yourself and Others Around You?

Ask Yourself the Following Questions.....

- Would I rather mentor/teach or be the student?
- Do I fight to interrupt? Feel the need to correct information? Or simply wait to interject my knowledge into a conversation?
- Do I need to be right and struggle when made to feel wrong?
- Do I feel like I must be competent and know how to add value or be a useful contributor?
- Do I struggle when I do not know something (i.e., feel stupid, incompetent, etc.)?
- Do I focus more on what is going on for me than being curious about what others are thinking or experiencing?
- Do I have a genuine desire to learn from others and understand their perspective and worldview?
- Do I silently judge those who “don’t know”?



Ego

- The ego wants to know, be competent and safe.
- We find safety when we know and have a level of power from knowing.
- Not knowing can make us feel vulnerable or small. This is what makes curiosity hard. Our ego is not curious.

To become more curious, we must become aware of our ego and how it shuts down curiosity.

A Few Ways to Overcome Ego



- **See others as a mirror** who have a new or different perspective to learn from.
- **Be open to what you do not know.** Enjoy asking questions to understand how others see the world.
- **Create a safe space to be curious** and ask any question. In this space, there are no bad questions and no need to be perfect.
- **Be humble and acknowledge the brilliance of others.** Seek to learn from them.

What Would Happen If We Reclaimed Curiosity?



Our Patients and Families Would Feel Seen, Heard and Valued

- Curiosity about the individual patients before you is essential to your ability to understand their cultural background, their personal and health priorities, and their deepest values.
- Curiosity is key to **building respectful relationships** with patients.

FORBES > INNOVATION > HEALTHCARE

11 Seconds: How Long Your Doctor Listens Before Interrupting You

Bruce Y. Lee Senior Contributor @

I am a writer, journalist, professor, systems modeler, computational and digital health expert, avocado-...

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<https://www.forbes.com/sites/brucelee/2018/07/22/how-long-you-can-talk-before-your-doctor-interrupts-you/?sh=59a91aed1443>

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We Would Deliver Better Care

- **Sound Clinical Reasoning:** being curious and asking questions avoids the rush to premature decisions based on incomplete understanding
- We would **understand more about the families** we treat and their priorities
- **Decreases inherent assumptions/biases and judgement** by our practice teams:
 - “this mom is always late because she doesn’t respect our schedule”
 - “this family always no-shows because they don’t value our care”



We Could Innovate Our Practice Workflows

- Frame our design from the patient/family viewpoint
- We would free ourselves from doing things the same way “because we always have”
- We could redefine our practice teams and roles
- I wonder what would happen if.....

We Could Empower Our Practice Teams

What if we trained people not just how we want them to do something, but why we do it that way and give them the opportunity to be curious and ask questions?

What if we created a culture of curiosity where members were encouraged to ask the “W” questions like young children?

- Of each other
- Of the patients/families
- Of leadership



We Could Create a Positive Working Environment

What if we as leaders asked questions...

- Of ourselves
- Of our team members
- Of our partners
- Of outside leaders



The First Step to Innovation is Understanding

“When you figure out how something works...you can make it do new things/you unlock it’s potential! “
Steve Mould

We make all kinds of assumptions of why things are the way they are in pediatric healthcare delivery and payment

Are they all valid assumptions?

Is there more to understanding **how** things work today?
Why they were built that way? **Which** ideas work best in which regions?





We Could Change the Way Pediatrics is Valued

- What if we were curious with our **elected officials** and ask them how they are thinking about creating a healthier future for their constituents?
- What if we used our curiosity to **ask how payers** view pediatrics?
- What if we used our curiosity to ask how **organized medicine** views pediatrics?



Benefits of Curiosity

An environment where curiosity is encouraged and allowed is a ***playground for creating new things***, discovering new solutions and uncovering different and possibly better ways to do things.

It gives people ***permission to fail*** and to learn when things don't work out.



Benefits of Curiosity

Places where people feel unleashed to try things and be themselves are highly attractive.

People feel happier and freer knowing they are not going to get in trouble for taking a risk.

A space of freedom, joy, laughter and excitement attracts others who are also creative to the playground.



Benefits of Curiosity

When the brain can be curious and explore different ideas and avenues, it begins to **make new connections**.

We see things that we did not see before. It has a snowball effect on brainstorming and expands our ideas



Curiosity is the engine that fuels lifelong learning

- Knowledge is cheap, and getting cheaper. The value of memorization is diminished daily by the ubiquitous availability of facts. Medical school has traditionally been about memorizing vast quantities of esoteric information, but those facts are now freely available online. **Will the job of the physician will change drastically in the coming decades?**
- The internet can only answer questions that have already been asked. **Curiosity**, as a source of novelty and previously unasked questions, **will likely become more valuable** as the retention of facts becomes less.

The world of medicine is vast, complex and dynamic.

It is a world that needs physicians with inquiring minds, physicians who can think nimbly and who are fearless and adept at asking questions, seeking answers, and then asking new questions.

What does the world of medicine need from us?



WTF? (What's Their Frame?)

Jenny Rudolph: Excellence in Healthcare Communication

- Love's cerebral cousin is “curiosity”
- When we are curious we can attend to the signs and symptoms of others and see what is going on with them
- It's exploring the motive behind actions
- By being curious as to what someone else was thinking we can be more collaborative in our teams, reduce harm and drive better outcomes.

How do we cultivate more curiosity in ourselves and others?

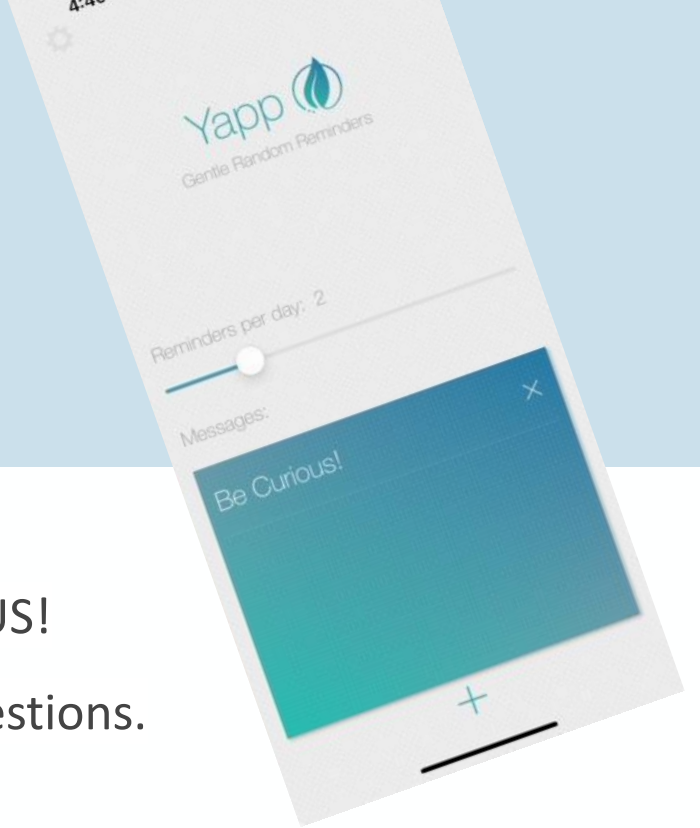


- **Observe:** watch an animal explore their surroundings
- **Ask questions:** challenge yourself to ask 2 or 3 questions before sharing your thoughts
- **Expand your sources:** make a habit of listening to others with differing beliefs and perspectives
- **Try something new:** take a different route to work or ask someone who reports to you how they would solve a problem before offering a solution

Practicing Curiosity

There's an app for that!

- Install a reminder app (I used Yapp Reminders)
- Twice a day at completely random times I get a message: BE CURIOUS!
- I stop. Observe the world around me and spend 1 minute asking questions.
- No limits on questions.
- Sometimes it's a question about me. Sometimes it's about someone I'm in a meeting with. Sometimes it's about nature. Sometimes it's about my phone.
- Most of the questions aren't important.
- Often I don't have time to search for answers.
- Helped me to develop a habit of curiosity. I still often fail (especially when I'm tired), but I find myself asking more questions and being more curious.



“ *When you are curious, you find lots of interesting things to do.*”

-Walt Disney



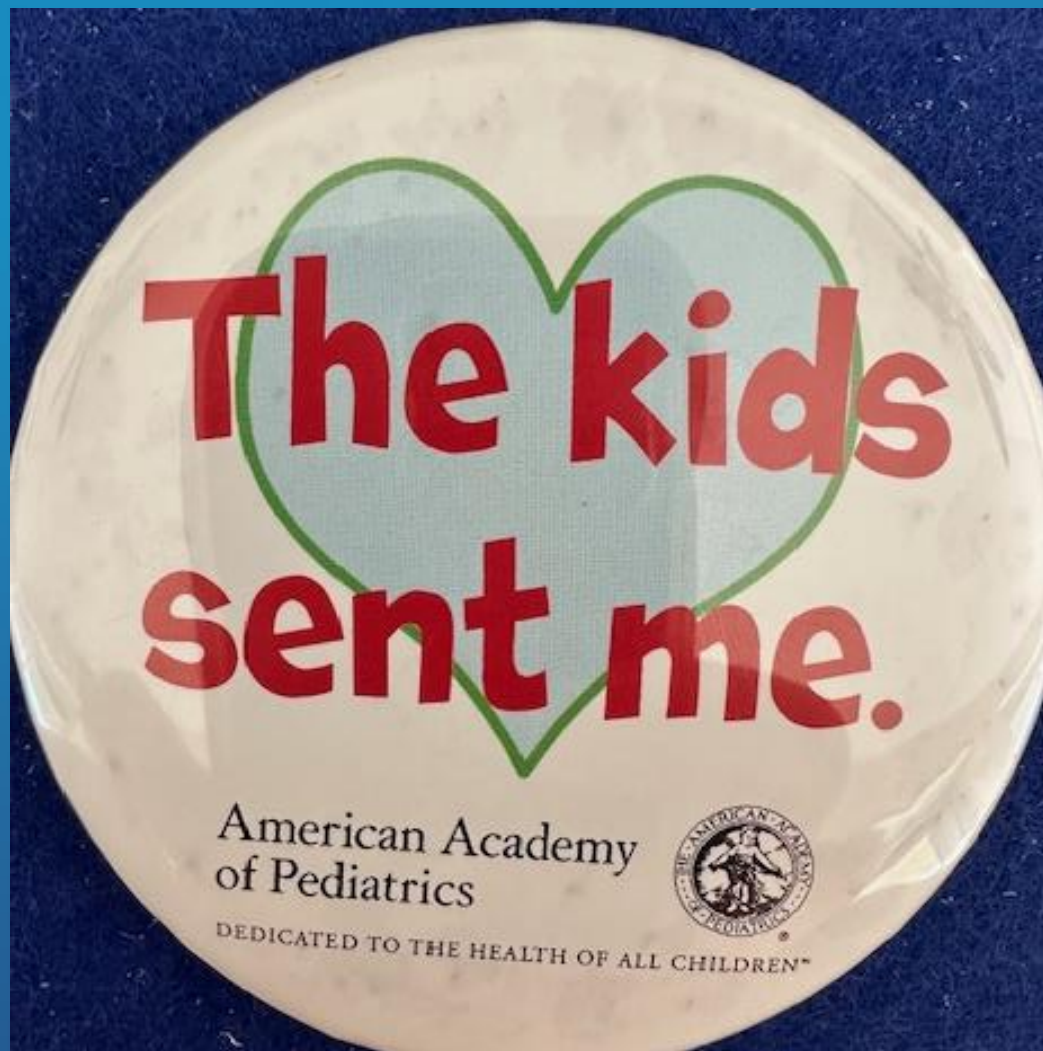
Resources

To learn more...

- [A Curious Mind](#), Emily Boudreau, November 24, 2020, Harvard Graduate School of Education
- [Dean's Corner: Exercise Your Curiosity](#), Harvard Medical School, May 2015
- [Thinking in Medicine: The Darkside of Checklists](#), Genevieve Fairbrother MD MPH MHCM, November 26, 2019, LinkedIn
- [Addressing the Curiosity Decline in Medicine](#), Amitha Kalaichandran, October 1, 2019, Stanford Medicine
- [5 Ways to Benefit from Curiosity in Medicine](#), Heidi Moawad, MD, February 7, 2020, Walters Kluwer

More Resources

- [Curiosity: Why it Matters, Why We Lose it and How to Get it Back](#), Christy Geiger, Forbes Coaches Council
- Curiosity, Justin Morgenstern, April 15, 2019 First19EM, <https://first10em.com/curiosity-some-musings/>
- The Importance of Being Curious, Adashi, et al, The American Journal of Medicine, [https://www.amjmed.com/article/S0002-9343\(18\)31174-4/fulltext](https://www.amjmed.com/article/S0002-9343(18)31174-4/fulltext)
- [Excellence in Healthcare YouTube Video](#), Jenny Rudolph



Thank You!

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