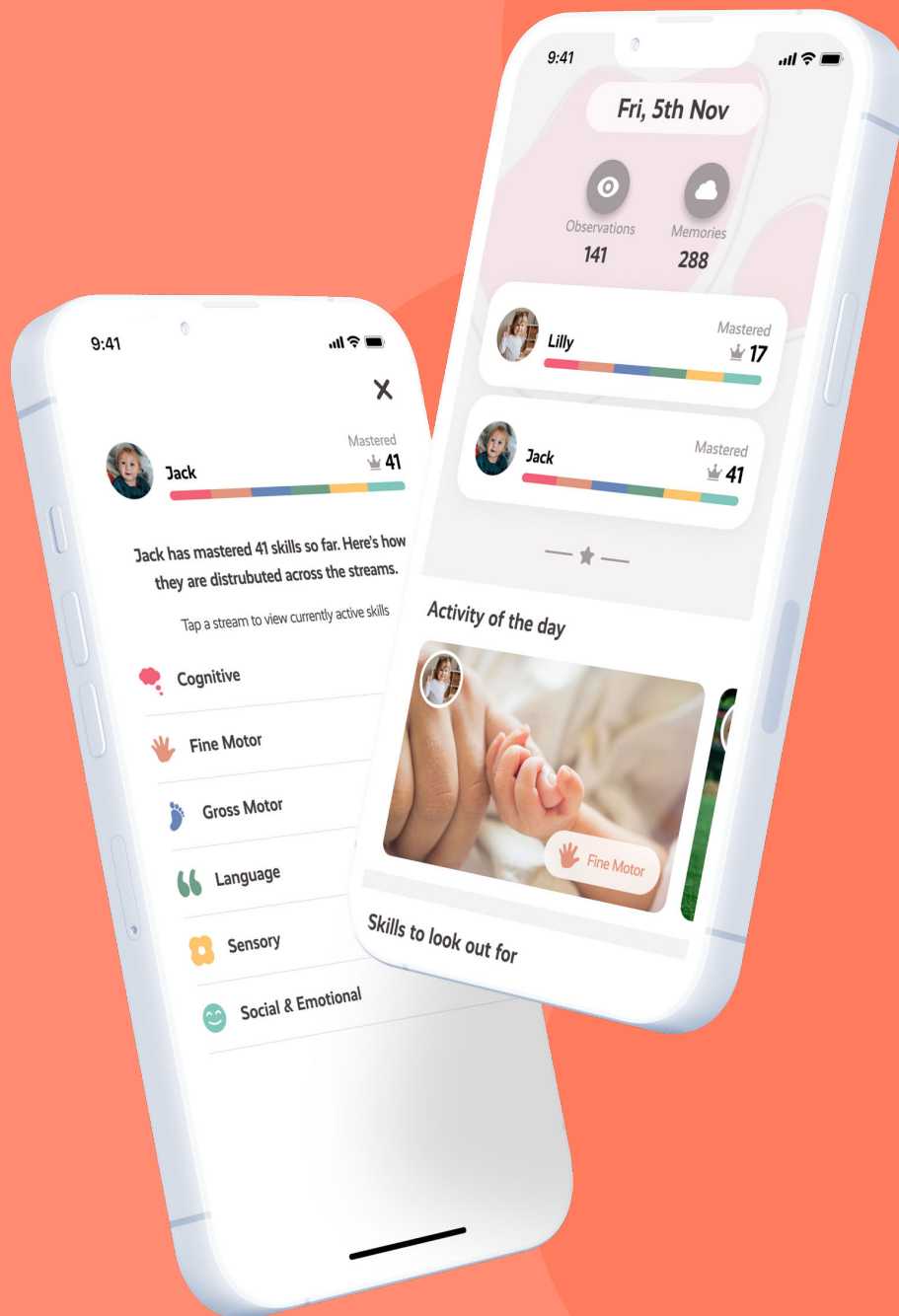


Becoming *creative*

by Anne Statham



My First
Five Years®



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becoming creative,
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introduction

For babies and young children, the world is brand new and absolutely everything is waiting to be discovered. Young children are natural explorers who take their first steps in creative exploration from birth, as they begin to make connections and sense of their world.

Childhood curiosity is the basis for creativity. As adults, however, we can sometimes find it frustrating when young children feel the need to explore and test out, using all their senses and everything they can get their hands on! As they grow, children's curiosity may transform further as they use their developing language skills to delve deeper into investigations. Your child may constantly ask you "Why?", "How?", "Where?", "What if..." and "When?" Tricky though this may feel to navigate, your child is demonstrating their thirst for knowledge and their drive to discover and test out new things, all of which forms the basis of creativity.

Our children often show us the courage to open themselves up to the unknown without inhibition, the power to take failed attempts on the chin and try things again and again in different ways. We are sure you will agree that even the youngest children show us daily their capacity for imagination and innovation, and a willingness to come up with and test their ideas without fear of mistakes. These are the qualities we want to help them retain and foster. Rather than supporting our children to become creative, we could consider our role to involve supporting them to stay creative as they grow, and to give them the self-confidence to continue these fearless investigations along with the self-belief that their ideas are worth pursuing and will be favourably received by others.

Children also benefit from being around creative adults who are prepared to question the things they are familiar with and open themselves up to unfamiliar experiences alongside them. Being creative as an adult means being open to trying things in a new or different way to how you would normally approach them. Your child may often show you how to do it!



There is another misconception that considers creativity as being focused on the arts. While it is true that, dance, sculpture, music, painting, and drawing, for example, can all involve creativity, it is also possible to be creative in other ways. Creativity is a way of thinking which applies across all experiences and all areas of learning. Creative explorations can involve problem-solving, testing ideas, investigating possibilities, discovering and inventing. Creativity is possible in all areas of life, in science, the arts, mathematics, technology, cooking, teaching, politics, business, and more. And like many human capacities, our creative powers can be cultivated and refined.

creative potential

There are a few misconceptions around what creativity is and what being creative means. Traditionally, creativity has often been considered as a trait limited to a special set of 'creative' people, however, at My First Five Years it is clear that creativity weaves through the six streams of development in our app. **To learn more about your child's personal learning journey, and find more information and advice, download our My First Five Years app from the App Store.**



Creativity is an approach that we all have capacity for; it can be thought of as the ability to think flexibly, to see things from different points of view and to recognise multiple possibilities, and to come up with original ideas. It includes finding new ways to think about and do everyday things. Developing these capacities in our children involves a balance between teaching skills and understanding, and promoting the freedom to innovate and take risks.

everyone has huge
creative capacities.
The *challenge* is to
develop them.

– Ken Robinson [1]

our children in the world of tomorrow

Creativity is often discussed as a key skill for the future; it's interesting to think that children who start school in 2022 may not retire from work until at least 2082! We don't know what the world will look like when our children are grown up, however, we are hoping to prepare them for this world. One thing we do know is that the world is rapidly changing and the skills to be able to adapt and innovate are increasingly important. So, we need to think about how we support our children to develop the dispositions and attitudes to learning to help them navigate a future we can't grasp, imagine or predict.

components of creativity

Knowledge and cognition

During our first five years, our brains are busy building lots of incredible connections that allow us to develop new skills. Recent scientific discoveries and research have expanded our understanding of the importance of experience or stimulation in early brain development. The more of life we experience, the more we have to think about and the stronger neural connections we will forge.

One of the six streams of development in our My First Five Years app is cognitive development. This is all about thinking, as it's about how we process information, remember, understand and use what we learn from the world around us.[2]



Play supports the development of cognition and creativity in multiple ways. Predominantly, play allows young children the freedom to be able to explore their thoughts and feelings, and come up with new ideas through developing imagination and innovation. Imagination is the root of creativity, as it is the ability to visualise in the mind things that do not exist yet. Creativity is also sometimes referred to as 'possibility thinking'. Possibility thinking is the way questions are posed and explored. One way to think about this is the way children are often considering the question "What if?"[3]

Psychologist Lev Vygotsky believed that creativity is present when any discovery is made, whether that is artistic, scientific, mathematical, or technical. Vygotsky also believed that creativity was linked to previous experiences.

"The more a child sees, hears and experiences, the more they know and assimilate, the more elements of reality they have in their experience, and the more productive the operation of their imagination will be."[4]

This highlights how creativity and cognitive skills interlink though early childhood, and how creativity supports cognition and vice versa.

Personal dispositions and attitudes

Supporting your child's creative learning dispositions gives them a strong foundation of self-confidence and self-belief. This happens each time you respond and engage with your child as they wonder about and question objects, events and phenomena. As you acknowledge and extend their thinking, you are showing that you take their questions, ideas and lines of enquiry seriously.

Creative learning dispositions include:

- curiosity
- confidence
- resilience
- risk-taking
- self-regulation and executive function
- focus and motivation
- collaboration

Creative thinking

Creative thinking involves putting knowledge, experience, memories, language and skills to work. Creative thinking is divergent thinking, thinking which is flexible, 'outside the box' and which moves away from the norm, to allow the imagination to lead. Imagination is sometimes called the ultimate power of creation. Children are great at this, as they are not yet constrained by conventional ways of doing things, and they are enthusiastic at coming up with new ideas and new or innovative ways of doing things. Often, they generate multiple new ideas which they can then test and evaluate.

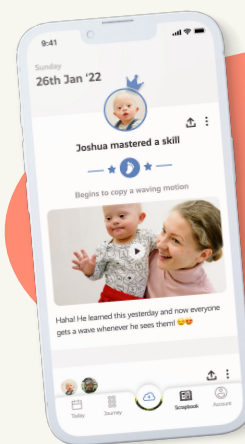
Innovation is putting these new ideas into practice. Anything that we create starts with an idea or a representation in our mind.

We then use our other skills to bring it into reality. The more of the world children are able to experience, the broader they can stretch their creativity. They can make unique connections that no one else would have imagined.

Critical thinking

Creativity also involves making critical judgments about whether what you're working on is any good, be it a theory, a design, or a poem. Often different ideas need to be considered, tested and analysed. Reflection and evaluation often involve adaptation or rejection. Sometimes, what you end up with is not what you had in mind when you started. It's a dynamic process.

So, we can see that creativity is not simply a matter of letting go and is not the opposite of discipline and control. On the contrary, serious creative achievement relies on knowledge, control of materials and command of ideas. You can discover more about this in [our blog](#).



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Gender and creativity

We want to ensure our children are encouraged to act and behave outside of traditional gender roles and to view these roles more flexibly than in the past, and this links to creative behaviours. By offering young children different perspectives, including those that counter society's usual constructs, we allow the youngest of children to access a range of roles, expressions and identities, and we don't limit their view of the extent of their potential.

Nurturing creativity in your child

When we think about encouraging creativity in young children, we are really talking about cultivating the different components, outlined above, that lead them in the direction of creativity.

The journey starts with growing and cultivating our children's 'funds of knowledge'. Young children's interests develop in the context of their relationships with the people, places and experiences they encounter in their daily lives. Through these relationships, children build funds of knowledge [5] that enable them to play an active role in the lives of their families and communities.

Through their day-to-day experiences, your child's knowledge will grow, and they will begin to develop their own interests and passions, which can be the springboard for further exploration and playful inquiry.

It's helpful to recognise and tune into the different modes your child uses to communicate and make meaning of their knowledge, previous experiences and interests. This can take many forms, such as language, model-making, role-play, drawing, writing, dance, music and mathematical mark-making – in fact there are hundreds of different ways!

Children's books with positive messages about girls creating, making and inventing, especially using tools, are great, as book characters can be powerful role models. Of course, these are for boys too, as they need to appreciate what girls can do, as well as what they can do themselves. Some favourites are:

- **Ada Twist Scientist** by Andrea Beaty
- **Rosie Revere Engineer** by Andrea Beaty
- **My Mummy is a... plumber, soldier, scientist, engineer, et cetera series** by Kerrine Bryan
- **Be a Maker** by Katey Howes

How can I nurture my *baby's* creativity?

Let them have a go

Give your baby a chance to solve simple problems themselves, such as manoeuvring themselves to reach a toy, or guiding a spoon into their mouth. We know it's difficult to resist the urge to help your child when they're struggling, but by intervening too quickly, you may stop a potentially valuable learning experience. Try to wait just a little longer and offer encouragement. If they succeed, your child will begin to experience and enjoy the feeling of mastery, however, if they're getting too frustrated, you can step in to help make it a little easier for them.

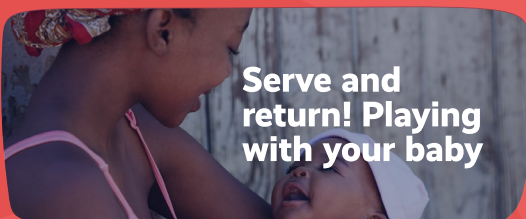
Talk a lot!

Just because your baby can't talk yet does not mean they're not learning. Babies learn all the time through watching and listening. By describing what you are doing, or thinking aloud as you carry out day-to-day activities, your baby will begin to tune into the sounds of your language and your emotions. You can also comment on your baby's play, for example, "Oh, you have dropped your teddy, let me help to pick him up."

Explore household objects

Offer your baby safe, everyday objects, along with toys, to touch, grasp and explore. Items such as metal spoons or whisks, small tins, pebbles, fabrics, silk scarves and brushes all stimulate the senses and curiosity. As your baby experiences different shapes, materials, weights, and textures, this will lay the foundations for comparing, sorting and classifying.

Read more about serve and return interactions in our blog!



How can I nurture my toddler's creativity?

Loose parts – searching and collecting

Loose parts are simply collections of objects that can be moved and combined in a temporary way. There is no pre-determined way of playing with them, instead the possibilities of how they are used are open-ended and determined by your child. Accompany your child on journeys to search and collect, choosing things that appeal and creating your own collections. For example, pebbles, sticks, buttons, blocks of wood, fabrics, lids, containers et cetera, all make great loose parts. These can then be explored and combined in loads of creative ways.

Shake up the environment!

Shaking up and changing your usual home or garden environment is a great way to spark curiosity. Perhaps you could move some furniture from its usual position to create a tunnel behind an armchair or sofa, or build a den with a clothes airer. It's great for your child to explore the possibility of using something in a novel, unusual or different way. Similarly, perhaps hang some sheets in the garden and watch how they move in the wind or explore some shadows.

Imaginative play

Imaginative and pretend play engages your child creatively. Let this be self-driven and self-directed, following your child's interests and experiences. It's great fun to support the play by taking a role and adding props. For example, if your child shows an interest in animals, you could suggest collecting toy animals and playing vets together. However, it's important to allow your child to guide the play and decide the direction that it will follow, tempting though it may be to take over!

How can I nurture my *child's* creativity?

Loose parts – searching and collecting

More open-ended play and creative thinking can be sparked by providing a range of small or large recycled items to allow your child to design and create their own 3D models. This could be anything from old cardboard packaging boxes, tubes, lids, ribbons, buttons, and pieces of fabric. Offer these with a range of potential ways to fix and join (tape, string, glue, paper clips, staplers et cetera). Encourage your child to think aloud about their plans, or perhaps draw a design on paper first. Support them to evaluate and select materials to fit their idea and to fix and join their model. This allows your child to test out different ways to achieve their goal. Praise the process of their thinking, rather than the product.

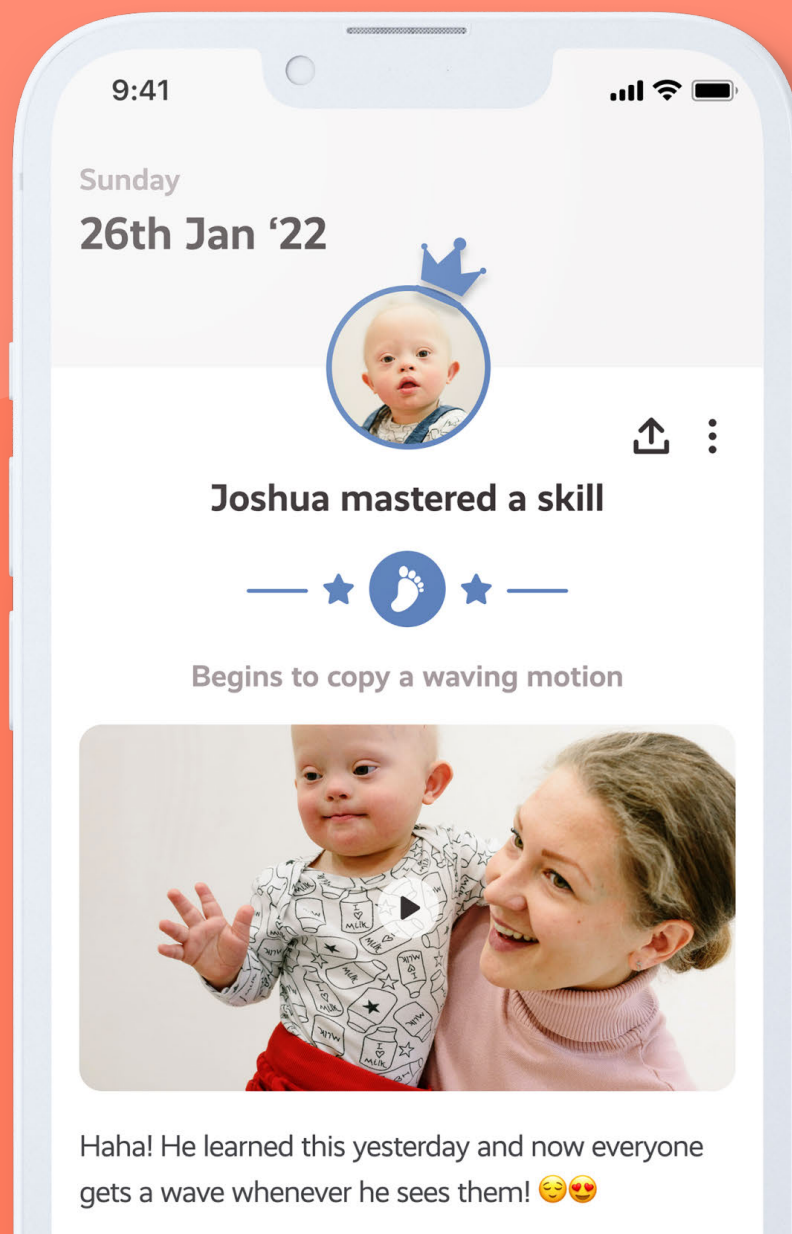
Shake up the environment!

Malleable materials offer an alternative way to imagine and create in 3D form. They are simply materials that your child can shape themselves, perhaps by pulling, stretching, pushing, rolling, squeezing, poking or pinching et cetera. Playdough or clay is great for this. You could make your own playdough and combine this with twigs, straws, stones, lids or feathers. Simple tools from around the house can be introduced alongside the malleable materials, extending the possibilities for creativity.

Local organisations

Check out your local museums, theatres, art galleries and orchestras, as they often run sessions for young children. Looking at the work of other artists and craftspeople, actors and musicians offers lots of scope for the imagination.

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