

# Creating a Creative Child

by Ann Gadd

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## Boredom and creativity

"I'm bored Mum," my five year old would say after the first ten minutes of being home from Play-School. I soon learnt that "go and play" did not work to alleviate the problem. Nor did the suggestion "why don't you play with your new so and so." Instead she would roll around on the floor at my feet, doing everything possible to focus my attention away from what I was writing and onto herself. With painting, another way I work, it was even harder, as paints and large areas of white canvas, mixed with bored and frustrated five year olds are a recipe for disaster – you have no idea how much a 5l can of paint contains, until you have to mop it up off the floor.

## How we respond

The common reaction is either to sigh resentfully, get up from what you are doing and head off to play cops and robbers, or to give in to letting him/her watch TV, play the latest Playstation game, which results in carrying a huge amount of guilt, or resort to some form of bribery, which seldom lasts longer than it takes to eat the bribe.

When we make boredom a symptom that we, as parents have to relieve, we inhibit much of the child's potential for creative exploration.

Our children have so much more in terms of entertainment today than most previous generations had. They watch TV, have Playstations, Lego, that goes way beyond the straightforward blocks, dolls that don't just wew they actually speak and space rockets that do amazing stuff our parents could only dream of. Yet boredom still prevails.

When I was young, we would hide in our 7m hedge and shoot water-pistols at unsuspecting passers-by. We dug hideouts in the sand, built treehouses and made edible concoctions with fresh picked mulberries and oats.

Forced to explore our world, with few toys, we created dolls and dragons from old boxes, string and leaves. The youngest by six years, I often found myself forced to play alone. In time, I began to love the solitude, because it allowed me time to create. I built instant juice feeders so I could drink while reading a book in bed, a cable car to my friend's house, so even when we were confined to our bedrooms we could communicate, a boat that ran on a cotton reel motor as well as regularly interior decorating my treehouse.

### **Why we need solitude to create**

People seldom invent great things in meetings. Nor do they get inspired while watching TV. It is time alone that creates space for a fertile imagination to grow.

I discovered that if the boundary between "Mummy is working now" and "I'll play with you at three o'clock," were firmly in place, eventually my daughter would find otherways to amuse herself. She may have started making birthday cards from tissue paper and cardboard, invented a game with buttons or started to build elaborate castles in the sandpit. To do so though, she had to go through the initial process of being bored. Now at thirteen, the benefit of that time alone, has manifested into a teenager with a rich imagination, an ability to see things differently, a love of creating and someone who enjoys her own company.

## **Why creativity is important**

Creativity is far broader than the ability to paint a pleasing picture or colour in between the lines. To live a creative life is to live with infinite possibility. To see creative solutions where others see only problems. To create what we want in our lives, instead of feeling that we have to accept the mundane. Creativity allows us to overcome fear and move into a world of vibrancy and potential.

Kids are naturally inquisitive. They want to know why things are as they are. Yet so much of this questioning gets dampened by parents who don't have the knowledge or time to give answers. The trick is to assist the child to discover the answer for themselves. This way they learn to look for their own solutions and, as they get older, they learn to rely on their own resources more and more.

Through creativity much of what is emotionally suppressed is able to be expressed, thus making a happier, balanced child who is in touch with their emotions and themselves.

## **Busy little bodies**

A colleague of mine had a six year old niece in America who did no less than eight extra mural activities a week. The child was shipped from ballet, to tennis, to karate, to modern dancing amongst others, arriving home exhausted just before supper every day. There was no time to unwind. To just lie on her bed and ponder. Life was all go, go, go. While her parents believed they gave her everything, in many ways, they deprived her of a vital part of becoming an integrated person – time alone.

Now visualize this child as an adult. Life would be about being driven, often unsure as to the real goal. Self-worth would relate to the superficialities of what you did, not who you are. And success would be about what you achieved and not how content you were..

## **Creativity and self-esteem**

Each time we create we add to our self-esteem. Children feel good about what they create and a certain amount of praise, gives encouragement and confidence to create something new. By doing everything for them, as in when we actually colour in the picture or built the lego model for them, we are subtly giving the message "you aren't capable of this."

I have worked hard at being fulfilled. I want my children to have a good example to follow. To do this I require time alone – it is essential to my work and wellbeing. I want them to feel fulfilled, which they can only be if they are in touch with their emotions, enjoy their own company, have a healthy self-esteem and relish their ability to be creative, whatever form they choose their creativity to manifest in.

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