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The Science of Curiosity

Why We Keep Asking “Why”

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In: The Science of Curiosity, Why We Keep Asking "Why"

Personal Development / Curiosity

Take-Aways

- People’s curiosity decreases over time.
- Curiosity boosts physical health, mental prowess and relationships.
- You can cultivate your curiosity easily, for example, by asking more questions or delving into a new topic.
- Develop curiosity about people as well as things.

Recommendation

In standardized tests that measure people's curiosity, children consistently outperform adults. In fact, kids don't perform just a little better on these tests, they are significantly better than adults. Since curiosity boosts longevity and improves memory of new information, adults should be concerned. However, don't despair. You can relearn curiosity by incorporating some easy strategies into your daily life.

Summary

People's curiosity decreases over time.

Most children are highly curious. But people's inquisitiveness decreases over time due to various factors. Research by psychologist Susan Engel suggests that schools can be an impediment to children's natural curiosity. In her study, Engel found that the curiosity students exhibited through asking questions, manipulating objects and visual attention decreased from 2.36 "episodes" every two hours in kindergarten to only 0.48 episodes by fifth grade.

Author and general systems scientist George Land conducted a longitudinal study to measure how the creative potential of 1,600 children developed over the span of a decade. The kids had to take a divergent thinking test that assessed their ability to develop multiple creative solutions to a problem. At age five, 98% of the subjects attained the highest possible creativity score. Those scores dropped over time, however, to only 30% of the same kids reaching a high creativity score by age 10, and only 12% earning good marks by age 15.

"This dramatic decrease in curiosity could be caused by our increase in knowledge as we grow up."

When a separate sample of 280,000 adults took the test, a meager 2% fell into the creative category.

Curiosity boosts physical health, mental prowess and relationships.

Research on the effects of curiosity and advanced aging showed that study participants with higher levels of curiosity were more likely to be alive after five years. Additionally, being curious about new information boosts people's memory.

"The more curious you are about a topic, the more likely you are to remember it."

Research also shows that curiosity about others increases intimacy and makes for better relationships.

You can cultivate your curiosity easily, for example, by asking more questions or delving into a new topic.

Ask more questions in your daily life and take time to find the answers. Read about topics that you usually wouldn't just to gain exposure to something different. Or take a deeper dive into something you are already interested in by finding new resources. Expand what you know further by researching and writing about a

topic. Carry a notebook and when something sparks your interest, write it down as a reminder to explore it later.

Develop curiosity about people as well as things.

Ask lots of questions, talk less and listen more to people around you.

Self-reflect to generate curiosity about yourself. Feelings, goals, personal behaviors, your past and family history are all fair game for exploration to boost curiosity. Daydream and let your mind generate new things to explore.

“Playing and talking with a child is probably one of the best reminders of our potential for curiosity.”

Don't be afraid to turn to the experts, the children in your life, for guidance and inspiration on how to view the world through a curious lens.

About the Author

Anne-Laure Le Cunff is the founder of Ness Labs, a community of curious minds striving to maximize human potential while safeguarding mental health.



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