



IS YOUR CHILD 'FUTURE-SMART'?



Great examination results are wonderful - but they only tell part of the story. Is your child learning the hidden 'secrets of success' required for a shining future? This simple set of 8 questions, devised by leading child education expert C. J. Simister, will give you a few initial clues.

Curiosity

1. How many questions can you ask about this...?

Activity

Choose an interesting object from around the house and tell your child you've just come across it and haven't thought about it for ages. You'd like their help to carry out an investigation. How many questions can they think of that could be asked about that object?

Start yourself with one example, eg 'I wonder how old is this...?' Then see what your child comes up with. Prompt if necessary part way through, by saying, 'Let's see if we can come up with some more unusual questions now.'

What to look for...

Listen closely to your child's suggestions. Are they mostly lower-order questions that focus on its physical characteristics (colour, shape, size etc) or do some demonstrate a deeper curiosity (eg *I wonder who invented this? What else could it be used for?* etc)

Sadly, children's natural curiosity is often dampened as they grow up, so activities like this can help to keep a questioning spirit alive.

Ability to sort sense from nonsense

2. What did you think of that advert?

Activity

Next time you're watching TV with your child and the adverts come on, wait until the end of one of them, then ask your child what they thought of it.

If they offer only a very short answer, you could prompt with questions like: *What did it make you think about the toy/chocolate bar/drink etc? What do you think the person who made the advert wanted viewers to believe?*

What to look for...

Children are bombarded with messages – from advertisers, chat rooms, tv programmes, internet search engines... all over the place. They need to learn how to sift through the mass and work out for themselves what to believe.

How critical is your child? Listen to their thoughts about the advert they've just watched. Do you feel reassured that they're growing up to be media-savvy or might a few games and activities to sharpen their judgement be useful?

Flexibility of mind

3. How many explanations can you come up with for...?

Activity

Play a game with your child where you offer a surprising situation (eg *'Oh no! The shops have all run out of chocolate bars'* or *'A hole has appeared in the middle of the garden'*) and they come up with as many explanations for this as they can. Set a time limit if you wish.

What to look for...

Very often children will settle for one of the first possible explanations that come along. This activity teaches them to take the time to explore a much wider range of options - from the sensible to the really silly! Afterwards you can ask them, on balance, which one they thought was the most plausible idea.

Listen carefully to the explanations your child generates. Does he or she struggle to find more than a few or does the range of ideas surprise you?

This is a good strategy to use when your child has a problem, say with a friend or other situation at school. It helps them to think more flexibly and to learn not to jump to conclusions.

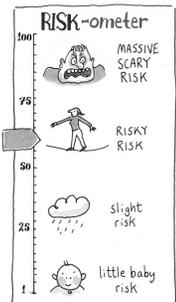
Risk-taking

4. How many risks have you taken in the past few days?

Activity

Chat with your child about risks and what they mean. For example, you might say that a risk is something we're scared of doing but have a go at anyway, because we've decided the possible positive outcomes are worth the gamble.

Ask your child how many risks they have taken in the past few days. You could jot them down on self-adhesive notes and get your child to put them in order on a riskometer!



What to look for...

This can be quite a revealing question. The message that children receive too often these days is that avoiding all risk is the sensible option.

It's not. The result is children who are either too afraid ever to 'go for it' (so stay well within the boundaries of their potential) or who are drawn indiscriminately to risk later.

Creativity

5. How many uses can you find for a...?

Activity

Show your child a simple object like a waste paper bin or a cheese grater. In one minute, how many different uses can they think of for it?

What to look for...

A great test of divergent thinking, this activity helps to reveal your child's ability to think creatively and look at things a different way. Having a fertile mind - demonstrating the imagination and lateral thinking to see beyond the normal solution - can be a far better predictor of future achievement than standard IQ tests.



Count how many ideas your child comes up with in one minute!

Inventiveness

6. How could you improve this...?

Activity

Take another everyday object – something like a coat hanger or even a simple elastic band. Remark to your child how dull the design is! Surely it could be improved? If they were a designer, how many ways could they think of to improve that object?

What to look for...

Most inventions are simply upgrades of things that have gone before – ideas rarely come out of the blue. Teaching your child to question the status quo gives them a sense that they too can play an active part in improving the world around them.

Children often find this hard at first unless there are a few players. How many answers did your child think of?

Attentiveness

7. How many things can you spot about...?

Activity

When you're next outside, point out a particular tree or car, for instance, and challenge your child to be as observant as they can and see if they are able to spot anything about it that you wouldn't have noticed yourself.

What to look for...

Without practice, children will often only identify quite basic attributes. Count how many things your child notices. Did they surprise you with any more unusual or perceptive observations?

As you can imagine, if you play this game regularly, you'll see a real difference in the number and quality of your child's observations. And it's hugely useful, as being attentive and observant is one of those essential cornerstones of success.

Reasoning

8. Can you persuade me that...?

Activity

Invite your child to defy logic and argue in favour of something that sounds completely ridiculous! For instance, tell your child you bet they can't persuade you that by law everyone should wear orange... or... that all houses should be built underground.

What to look for...

How many reasons can your child come up with? Are any of them particularly ingenious?! You might set a 1 minute time limit to make it more challenging.

The ability to reason - to generate and articulate clear, logical arguments (and not just those learnt from a book or the teacher) is extremely important. This activity also helps your child learn how to think on the spot!

This is just a tiny sample of the activities described in 'The Bright Stuff: Playful ways to nurture your child's extraordinary mind', by C. J. Simister (Pearson: 2009).

"If my parents had had this goldmine of a book, I'd be a brighter and happier person. Buy it, read it and sprinkle your child's life with its wisdom." **Professor Guy Claxton, author and Co-Director of the Centre of Real-World Learning, University of Winchester**

"This is a practical handbook for parents about encouraging their children to be original and daring - when it makes sense. Many of those I most admire have few formal qualifications, but do exhibit all the qualities that are the focus of C. J. Simister's book. As a parent and a risk-taker, I applaud her work." **Luke Johnson, entrepreneur and Financial Times columnist, Chairman of Channel 4 and the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce**

"A really excellent resource for parents looking for imaginative ways to illuminate young minds... I will be using it with my own children." **Dr Stephen Law, author and Editor of THINK, the journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy**

