



Ways to Spark a Child's Creativity

by April Thompson

Whether it's playing dress-up, making forts from sofa cushions or drawing pictures, creative moments can define and distinguish a happy childhood. Yet it's not all just fun and games, according to experts. Childhood creativity, nurtured both in the classroom and at home, is crucial for developing qualities such as sound decision-making, flexible thinking and mental resiliency.

Analyzing more than 150 studies

across the fields of psychology, neuroscience, education and business management, the Center for Childhood Creativity, in Sausalito, California, found many important life skills are affiliated with a creative upbringing. The resulting white paper, *Inspiring a Generation to Create*, underscores that rather than simply being an innate trait, creativity can be taught.

"Creativity should be an integral part of every child's education. The research shows that we can avoid the

drop in original thinking that happens as students move into early adolescence," reports Daniel Pink, author of *A Whole New Mind*.

Creativity isn't only child's play; parents also could do well to infuse their own lives with its discoveries and delights. "Through creativity, parents can reawaken a sense of wonder and joy, and nurture characteristics like patience," says Julia Cameron, author of *The Artist's Way for Parents: Raising Creative Children*.

Engaging Parents

Cameron wrote the book in part to guide her own daughter, actress and film director Domenica Cameron-Scorsese, in her creative journey through motherhood. While many such works focus on art projects for kids, Cameron's book emphasizes activities that put creative fuel in the parental tank. For example, she recommends parents take up the ritual of "morning pages"; writing three pages of stream-of-consciousness thoughts the first thing each morning.

Jean Van't Hul, author of *The Artful Parent*, started a daily sketchbook practice for herself and to set an example for her kids. "I like that the kids see me creating regularly and they've joined in a couple times. I also want to get over my self-limited belief that I'm not a good artist," remarks Van't Hul, who blogs at ArtfulParent.com.

Engaging Kids

A family ritual, like a bedtime story or relationship with a pet, can be reimagined to inspire household members to co-create together. "Instead of always reading to my kids, we take turns making



up stories by ‘giving’ each other three things, like an airplane, a shovel and a pair of pants, which we have to use in a story,” says Nicole Corey Rada, a working mother of two in Richmond, Virginia. “Sometimes, we pretend our pets are having conversations, and use different voices and accents to express what they might be saying, given their circumstance at the time. This is a family favorite; we laugh constantly.”

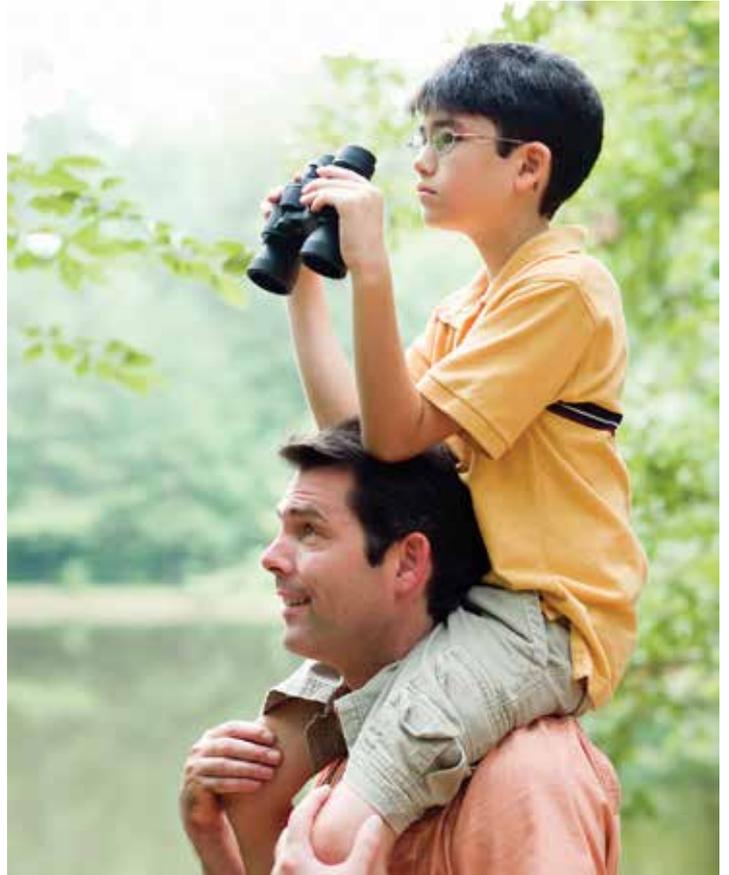
Mark Runco, Ph.D., a University of Georgia professor of gifted and creative education, founder of the *Creativity Research Journal* and advisor to the Center for Childhood Creativity, notes the importance of balancing unstructured and structured activities, creating space for both individual expression and creative collaboration.

To foster the former, Van’t Hul encourages “strewing”, which she refers to as “the art of casually yet strategically leaving invitations for learning and creativity out for kids to discover on their own.” Invitations to play could be a basket of non-toxic blocks, a recycled-paper sketchpad opened to a blank page or some nature finds from a walk in the woods.

As an example of the latter, Cameron suggests that parents lead kids on a weekly creative expedition, allowing the kids to choose a new place to aimlessly explore such as a park, bookstore, pet shop or museum. According to the author, that sense of shared adventure, fostered in a safe space, naturally nurtures the creative process, both for now and the future.

“If you make art the center, insisting that kids be creative, they may feel a sense of pressure,” advises Cameron. “If you make inspiration the center, it spills over into art.”

Connect with freelance writer April Thompson, of Washington, D.C., at AprilWrites.com.



When we are willing to explore our creative gifts, we allow ourselves and our children to connect with something greater and to each other.

– Julia Cameron