“What should we do at home?” is a question I am often asked by the parents of children in our gifted program. I used to send these parents home with loads of literature chock-full with activities and ideas for working with gifted children.

However, after becoming a parent myself and realizing the time, budget, and energy constraints imposed by parenthood, I have changed my philosophy. In this day and age, when most gifted children are involved in numerous activities anyway, I have come to the conclusion that it is not so much what parents do but how they do it that is important.

Fostering critical and creative thinking and applying these skills in solving problems are among the goals of most gifted programs. Parental support and opportunities to practice such skills at home are also necessary. In fact, most activity suggestions for parents of gifted children are selected on the basis of these criteria.

Skillful questioning is one method of fostering critical and creative thinking, and it is cheap, readily available, and easy to do. Once a few basic questions have been learned, one can elaborate on them to produce a variety of questions appropriate for almost any situation.

Costa and Presseisen (1985) give a definition of “question” that is helpful in guiding questioning strategies. To them, one questions “to formulate relevant inquiries so as to evaluate a situation, guide hypotheses, verify information, seek logical evidence, clarify, and so on” (p. 312). In other words, questions are designed to aid one’s thinking in problem-solving situations. This definition may be used in designing appropriate questions for the gifted.

Listed below are samples of questions that correspond to the definition and that will foster critical and creative thinking and aid problem-solving ability in gifted children:

**Evaluate a Situation**

1. What are the advantages or disadvantages of ________?
2. Which is the best? Which is the worst? What is best or worst about ________?
3. What could you say or do to alleviate ________ (problem)?
4. What are alternatives to ________? What could you do instead? What could you substitute for ________?
5. When is the best time to ________?
   Who would be the best person to ________?
6. What must you do first? Second?
Guide Hypotheses

1. What will happen if you ________?
2. What effect did ________ have?
3. Why did ________ occur?
4. ________ is true if and only if what occurs?
5. Why did you ________?
6. What are the consequences of ________? What will happen if you ________?
7. Will ________ work? Why or why not?

Verify Information and Seek Logical Evidence

1. How could you test ________?
2. What could you do to see if ________ will work?
3. What could you do to find out if ________ is true?
4. Where could you locate ________ information?
5. What makes you think ________?
6. Is ________ true in every situation?

Clarify

1. What do you mean by ________?
2. Give some examples of ________?
3. What do you mean when you say ________?
4. Why do you say ________?
5. Will you explain more about ________?
6. How is your idea similar to or different from ________?
7. What could you say to ________ to convince him or her of ________?

Questions such as these may be used in a variety of situations, from the classic “I’m bored!” to completing a science fair project. Asking good questions not only fosters the skill development we desire in gifted children, but it also places on children the responsibility for solving their own problems.

As parents, we have the responsibility to guide our children in becoming mature and responsible contributing members of society. Skillful questioning is an essential parenting technique for meeting this responsibility.

Reference