



Erasmus + VET Strategic Partnership

**IENE 8 - Empowering migrant and refugee families with parenting skills**

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## Bitesized Learning Tool no. 4.3

### CURIOUS MINDS (6-12 YEARS)

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## CURIOUS MINDS

This bite-sized learning unit concentrates on the importance of supporting curiosity among pre-adolescents. Tips will be given on how to ignite and maintain a curious, healthy mind, both for parents and their children in accordance with their own cultural beliefs and practices.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To discuss the nature of a curious mind.
2. To give examples of how to support in a culturally sensitive way the development of curiosity in pre-adolescence

## CURIOSITY IN PRE-ADOLESCENCE

Before they are able to speak, children are asking questions with their fingers. Children are born eager to learn. Between 6 and 12 years of age – when their speech and language, the awareness of their senses and their body (proprioception), and their motor skills are all developed – an investigative attitude and an explorative behaviour can fully flourish. In addition to asking questions, creativity, problem solving, risk taking, investigating and exploring are all expressions of a curious mind. Wonder entails a healthy development among children, while also being a sign of mental wellbeing among adults.

Refugee families often live for years in limbo-like situations characterised by uncertainty in time and space. As a consequence, refugee families in transit can suffer monotony and meaninglessness, which can be even harder for children not attending school regularly or not having available resources for playing. Maintaining a curious and engaged approach to life, people and the world around them is therefore exceptionally important for the cognitive and emotional development of children and their carers in refugeeedom.



## KEY POINTS

### Curiosity and learning

- *Talking and free play.* When children explore their curiosity, they expand their vocabulary as they use language to describe what they are thinking, seeing, hearing or experiencing. Talking, asking and answering questions, to your child helps their growth and support their curiosity. Unstructured play is an excellent way to encourage and nurture your child's sense of discovery. It is however important for them to know that there are some rules and boundaries. You may want to refer to bite-sized learning unit 1.2 on Boundaries.
- *The small world.* You can nurture your child's curiosity by providing them with opportunities to explore. Children love to learn about plants and animals, and you can begin to encourage your child's curiosity by finding ways to help them to connect with nature, food, and animals, or whatever you think is relevant following your cultural. Invite them to talk about what they see or hear, like a thunderstorm, the stars at night, the clouds in the sky during the day, a newborn baby moving, eating or making noises, and - if available - how vegetables grow. If there is a particular plant or animal they are drawn to, you can further their learning by seeking access to the internet to do more research together.
- *The big world.* As they grow, children start developing a more 'abstract' curiosity about the reasons behind things which are farther in time and space. They may want to know about the universe,



about religion, about civilizations or animals that no longer exist, about 'scientific' topics, and about their own culture and traditions. Children approaching adolescence are also likely to develop a passion for a sport or a hobby, and if possible encourage them. It is important to support their child in their desire to know and explore. It is also an occasion for the parents to learn new things, rediscover the world with a child's eyes, and increase their own cultural awareness.

### Curiosity and wellbeing

Curiosity is very much linked to life as a whole. If children's brains are designed to learn via an innate curiosity, curiosity is also connected to meaningfulness and satisfaction. Therefore, by encouraging your

child curiosity, you also promote their mental health. Staying hopeful and confident in a better future is crucial for the recovery process of refugee families who have gone through incredible atrocities. You may want to refer to bite-sized learning unit 2.5 on Motivation and Coping.

To maintain an engaging and fun environment within the family you could, for example:

- share open-ended stories (i.e. leave the ending of the bedtime story to their imagination). This can also lead to co-creating new stories altogether.
- visit new places, if it is possible. Take your child around the camp or the town you are temporarily based at.
- leave little surprises, such as a little note, or drawing, or a special dish you cooked unexpectedly, or have one of their friends for dinner. Positive surprises contribute to boost your child's mood and drive their curiosity.
- avoid the word 'boring'. When a routine activity gets to a point of being monotonous, encourage your child to look at it from a different light and find new ways to make it interesting. Boredom is something children do not know, they learn it as they grow. Nothing is boring with the right attitude, and also 'doing nothing' can be turned into a fun and challenging exercise. You may want to refer to bite-sized learning unit 4.5 on Mindfulness and Stress reduction.



## Practical Wisdom

As adults we usually know what is good for us and what is the moral thing to do when dealing with others. In our experience, children learn at a very young age what is good or bad based on what their parents and teachers instil in them. However, even though young children know that they should be nice to their siblings, they often do not have the skills to be nice; for example, if their brother or sister wants to play with their favourite toy, they may push, hit or kick the sibling away to prevent them from taking the toy. Practical wisdom is about wanting to make and also making good choices. Practical wisdom is rooted in people's culture and is very important for everyone, but it can be a lifesaving skill for refugee children.

As parents, we should educate our children from an early age regarding some transcultural values, such as love, kindness, friendship, fairness, respect, telling the truth and so on. But we must help to learn how to choose these values when it is sometimes easier or more appealing to do the opposite in order to benefit themselves at the expense of others. One way of teaching them practical wisdom is by example. If they can see us showing kindness (despite the harshness of a refugee life) they will most probably follow our example. If we praise them for being kind they will choose kindness again and again. If we discover that they lied, the best response will be to sit down and have a conversation about why they lied and the possible consequences of their lying.

## ACTIVITY



Invite refugee parents and carers to sit together to share their worries around their children inquisitiveness, such as feeling of ignorance, inadequacy, and embarrassment. Help them to find the answers and the best ways to formulate them according to their own cultural identity and background. Describe the scenario you envision.

## REFLECTION ON ONE ISSUE FROM THIS BITESIZED TOOL

## SELF ASSESSMENT

1. How is curiosity linked to learning and wellbeing?
2. List three ways whereby you could turn a routine activity into an engaging activity.

## REFERENCES

<https://www.parenttoolkit.com/social-and-emotional-development/advice/social-awareness/encouraging-curiosity-in-early-childhood>

<http://www.easternflorida.edu/community-resources/child-development-centers/parent-resource-library/documents/curiosity-and-wonder.pdf>

<http://www.mindchamps.ae/8-ways-encourage-curiosity-children/>

## PHOTOS' CREDITS

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