

The Importance of Questioning



While answers are appropriate for many situations, questions can be a useful tool to encourage curiosity and help children develop skills to discover answers independently. This is a skill that requires practice, especially when we know the answers to children's questions! But when we learn the importance of questioning, we can help foster a sense of natural mystery and wonder in children.

Here are some useful questioning techniques to enrich walks or household discoveries with children:

- Use who, what, where, when, why and how when a child starts to ask questions about something they've discovered.
- Try to reset your brain to "beginner's mind" (perhaps where your knowledge was when you were that child's age) and start asking questions from that reference point.
- If you know the answer, and the child is struggling, ask questions that might help inspire the child to ask more questions or think more deeply. For example, if a child is struggling to guess who lives in a nest, ask them to brainstorm what could fit inside something of that size.
- Keep in mind: depending on what we ask, we can prolong or end inquiry. If our questions are several steps ahead of the children's, they might immediately arrive at an answer, which can end child-led problem solving.

If you don't know the answer, no problem! Model your own sense of curiosity to ask questions (I wonder... can be a useful phrase here). Not knowing answers is also an opportunity to solve mysteries together, researching answers using field guides or online tools.

Here are some useful tips for exploring answers:

- **Process over product.** The process of asking questions is often more effective at creating lasting nature connections than quick facts or answers.
- **Journeying together.** Looking for answers can be a great opportunity to cooperate with the kids in our care. We highly recommend looking up answers in guidebooks together or bringing questions to friends, family and colleagues.
- **Making language accessible.** Photosynthesis, Pollination, Latin names – there's a lot about nature that can feel complex! How can we simplify these concepts and see them through the eyes of a child? Perhaps photosynthesis could be framed as trees eating sun through their leaves!

EXAMPLE

Bird Watching with Children

Imagine a situation where you and the children in your class or in your care are watching birds in a nearby park. Here are some of the questions you could ask to prompt their problem solving:

- What do you think the birds are saying?
- Why was the bird in the tree? On the wire? On the shore? On the ground?
- Why did that bird just fly away from us?
- Why did that bird move away from the dog?
- Why is that bird brightly coloured? Why is that bird camouflaged?
- Which one of those birds is the papa? Which one is the mama?



You all hear a chickadee saying “chickadee-dee-dee”! But what does this really mean? A great way to tune in to what birds are saying is to see if you can distinguish between alarms and songs.



Alarms are given by birds when they feel there is some sort of threat, be it a possible predator or even you getting too close to their nest! Alarms are often shrill, short and sound angry. A famous alarm call is when you hear a chickadee say “chickadee-dee-dee”!

Songs are usually performed by male birds and are used to communicate territory or to attract mates. It’s literally males saying “this is mine, it’s all mine” or “I’m super handsome”! In contrast to alarms, songs are often longer, more melodic and prettier. The chickadees song sounds like they’re saying “hey sweetie”!