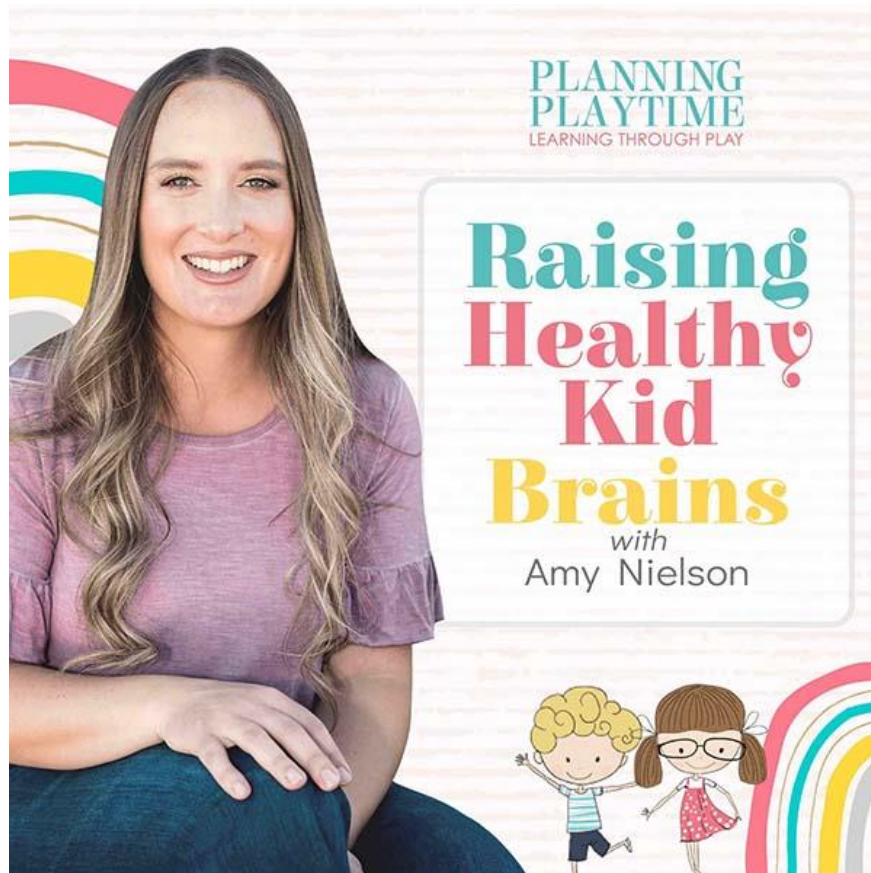


Ep #1: How Questions Build Healthy Kid Brains



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Amy Nielson

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What is the number one indicator of success in children six and younger? And how do the questions you answer and ask them each day make all the difference? Find out today in this episode of Raising Healthy Kid Brains.

Welcome to the Raising Healthy Kid Brains podcast where moms and teachers come to learn all about kids' brains, how they work, how they learn, how they grow and simple tips and tricks for raising the most resilient, kind, smart, compassionate kids we can. All while having lots of grace and compassion for ourselves because you know what? We all really need and deserve that too. I am your host, Amy Nielson. Let's get ready to start the show.

Well, hello there, I want you to take just a second and picture something with me. So you're sitting with your child in the kitchen, or maybe you're driving in the car, or maybe you're reading a book together. And you make some kind of statement to your child, something like, "Dinosaurs aren't alive anymore." And your child looks at you and asks, "Why?" So you think about it, you give a perfectly reasonable answer and they look at you and they respond, "Yeah, but why?" and this chain starts.

So this is a story that most of us have experienced or at least heard of, and maybe even with a little bit of exasperation because it becomes this cycle of why. And then you answer, "Yes, but why?" And then we answer, "But why?" They're so curious about it. Now, I have some good news for you, this is actually the sign of a healthy child's brain. So this is good. We want children to ask questions, asking questions is very healthy. Now, here's something else that's really, really fascinating. Question asking is contagious.

So there's been a lot of research done over the last century that shows that when children are asked more questions they actually ask more questions. And when children ask more questions, they learn more things and they get better at asking the right questions. So we're going to keep talking about why question asking is so important and what kinds of questions you should be asking your children every day.

But before we get to that, I just wanted to take a second and introduce myself. Hi, I'm Amy, I am a mom of my own five amazing kiddoes. And I get to spend all

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day helping moms and teachers of preschoolers and young children make learning ridiculously fun. That is my job. I get to play in Play-Doh and just have a blast. And I get to make learning amazing for children.

I have kind of a unique story of getting into education. I only completed one grade of public school, it was kindergarten by the way. And now I'm the founder and CEO of an international education company with over 100 million video views and millions of children around the world impacted by my early education products and programs. I have created amazing play based reading programs and preschool programs. But what I really wanted to do here in this podcast is go deeper.

I wanted to help moms and teachers understand their children's brains better. What is happening inside of there? We need the manual that we wanted that didn't come with our kids when they were born. We want that here. So what is going on in there? How do kids' brains develop? How do they learn? How do they grow? And that's what we'll be talking about here on this podcast.

In some of our upcoming episodes we'll be talking with a brain therapist who's going to talk to us about how the connections are made in the brain and how children actually learn and their brains develop. And we will be talking to neuroscientist about creativity and how to encourage creativity in our children. There's going to be so many great things for you to learn here.

For right now, let's get back to this conversation around questions. So why does question asking matter so much? In a study that was funded by the US Department of Education, they found that the most important contributor to future success for children ages six and younger is not their intelligence. It's not their IQ. And what surprised me a little bit was it was not their emotional intelligence either, their EQ. So what is it?

What was the most important contributor to future success for children ages six and younger? It was their general knowledge, the knowledge that was already in their brain at aged six years old. So that is the biggest contributing factor. And how do you think children get general knowledge in their brain? What is one of the best ways for children to acquire general knowledge? It's through asking and

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answering questions. So when your children ask you questions we want to answer. And we want to ask our children lot of questions because it's contagious and then they ask more questions.

Now, here is another thing that's really interesting. There are different kinds of questions. Up until about aged 30 months, children are asking a lot of what and where questions. So this would be something like, what is this or where is my bottle? Where is my stuffed animal? Where is dad? Where is grandma? But then when kids get to about age three, they shift in their question asking and they start asking more how and why questions. Now, how and why questions are really great because they allow kids to go deeper with what they're exploring and what they're learning about.

And we want to model these how and why questions for our children that are ages three and older. So the questions we're asking up to age 30 months, the what and where questions are kind of fact based questions. They have the quick and easy answers that kind of kill curiosity because we just answer it very, very suddenly. It's kind of as if your child comes and asks you, "How long do ladybugs live?"

And you go to Google and you say, "How long do ladybugs live?" And you don't even have to click on a website to find the answer because Google is so convenient that it will pop up a little excerpt from its top ranked article on the subject to tell you exactly how long ladybugs live. And then we have the answer, this is how long they live. And then we're done talking about it and it ends. And it kind of kills the curiosity around that. And so what we want to do is not give quick, short, easy answers.

We want to create more mysteries and less puzzles. Puzzles are fun for our brains, our brains love puzzles because they are solvable. And there is a beginning and an end. And we know the answer and we are done. But here's the problem, how often do you redo the same puzzles over and over? If you have a puzzle that you have done once, are you going to pull it out and redo that same puzzle over and over again? Probably not because you've already solved it and so you're not having a huge need or urge to go re-solve the same puzzle.

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But when we create mysteries, things that don't necessarily have an answer then we want to keep going with it and that's where curiosity can flourish. So with our children, when they come and they say to you, "How long does a ladybug live?" Instead of just Googling it, you could say, "That's an interesting question. I wonder how long they live. I wonder, can they live through the winter? What do animals do that live through the winter?" And you could talk about maybe there is animals that hibernate. There are some that have thicker fur and that's how they survive winter.

But what about ladybugs? And suddenly you've kind of opened this whole thing around how different animals can survive throughout winter. And you're getting a lot deeper than just answering this quick and easy answer of how long ladybugs live. We want to create mysteries in what we're doing. So you might be saying, "Amy, that's great, but when do I fit this into my day with the kids that I work with, or the kids at my home?"

So I wanted to share a couple of my favorite suggestions with you whether you are working with kids in a classroom or whether you have children of your own that you are asking more questions to. So here are a couple of my favorite tips. One of my favorite places to practice question asking is in the car. So I get to take kids in carpool, and it is a perfect time to start asking questions. Your children when they're with you in a car are noticing things around them. They can see things. You have a conversation time where there are less distractions typically.

You might not have a lot of electronics in your car and have a really good chance to have a good conversation with them. And so this is a great time to ask and answer questions. Sometimes I really like to ask ridiculous questions because they're funny and they create connection with the children. But also because they allow space for failure which is one of the greatest ways to encourage creativity. And we'll be talking about that in an upcoming episode with our neuroscientist.

But I love asking ridiculous questions. So one of them is, what if we were trying to hang a 20 foot octopus pinata, how would we hang it? What would we hang it from so that kids could swing about at it and hit it? And what kind of candy would

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we fill it with? And then you have this conversation in carpool, and kids have to think about how they would do that and what that could look like. And it's so ridiculous that there's really no failure point because you can just throw anything out there and just use your imagination and it's wonderful.

So your how and why questions don't always have to be incredibly smart or very logical. They can actually be kind of silly and ridiculous but they get your kids brains thinking and working which is wonderful. Another place that I really, really like to practice question asking is when we are reading stories together. Every time you read stories with a child I highly recommend asking questions as you do it. And I've seen teachers do this so beautifully and parents as well.

And it gives you an opportunity to ask, "I wonder what they were thinking or how they were thinking. I wonder how might they be able to solve this problem? Or why do you think that they feel this way?" And you can start asking questions like that in your reading of stories. So not only does this help with their reading comprehension, which is really important. It helps them get actual knowledge from the books that we are reading to them.

But it also models that question asking that we want them to learn how to do and to start picking up more of and doing more because it's contagious. And we want this so that again, we can help them with that number one important contributor to future success which is giving them more knowledge and information by the time they're six years old because it is such a helpful thing for their future.

Thank you so much for spending some time with me today and listening to this episode of the Raising Healthy Kid Brains podcast. We are a brand new podcast which means we are harder to find than the perfect LEGO in a big box full of LEGO. And we need your help so that we can reach more moms, and parents, and teachers with this information about their children's brains. So how can you help? You can follow this podcast wherever you listen to podcasts and leave us a rating and a review. That would mean the absolute world to us.

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