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## Preschoolers' Inquiry-Based Learning Experiences

### INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with the video, "Early Childhood Series - Inquiry Based Learning," from Austin Parks & Recreation. The questions and activities in this handout could be used in a work session (e.g., professional learning community, professional development session), for individual coaching, or for self-reflection.

### Goals

- ◆ Discuss the benefits of engaging preschoolers in inquiry-based learning experiences.
- ◆ Discuss effective strategies for engaging preschoolers in inquiry-based learning experiences at home and within the learning environment.
- ◆ In partnership with families, plan an inquiry-based project to support preschoolers' inquiry skills.

### Activity

- ◆ Watch the video.
- ◆ Use the questions below to reflect on effective ways to support preschoolers' inquiry skills.
- ◆ Implement your plan and adjust as needed to support preschoolers' inquiry skills.

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**Inquiry-based learning can build the foundation for formal education and encourages children to think critically and solve problems in creative ways.**

**Austin Parks & Recreation**

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ What caught your attention from the video? What made that fact, excerpt, or example meaningful to you?
- ◆ The video highlights several benefits of inquiry-based learning such as promoting children's critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills. Reflect on your current practice.
  - What inquiry-based experiences are preschoolers engaged in at your learning environment? How do you think those experiences have benefited the preschoolers in your care?
  - Have you discussed the benefits of inquiry-based learning with families?
    - If so, what have families shared about their children's inquiry skills?
    - If not, how can you connect with families to discuss the benefits of inquiry-based learning and learn more about their child from their perspective?
- ◆ The narrator also emphasizes the role of adults as facilitators/co-learners in inquiry-based learning experiences.
  - Why do you think it is important that adults function as co-learners in promoting children's inquiry skills?
  - Some families may have concerns about not having an extensive science background to answer children's questions and promote their inquiry skills. How can you be intentional about encouraging the sharing of ideas and co-learning during inquiry-based learning experiences?
- ◆ The narrator shares several co-learning strategies for educators and families in any environment. Some examples include asking open-ended questions, narrating observations and discoveries with enthusiasm, and engaging in reflection.
  - How can you encourage families to use these strategies as co-learners as they engage in inquiry-based experiences at home with children?
  - What methods of sharing strategies/tips works best for families? How can you ensure that every family has access to this information?
- ◆ Plan an inquiry-based project based on the children's interest, in which educators and families function as co-learners in promoting preschoolers' inquiry skills. Note that some family members may feel more comfortable observing as you model the inquiry strategies while others may want to immediately participate as co-learners.
  - How can you involve families in developing an inquiry-based learning project?
  - What preparation might families need to make the most out of the experience (e.g., background information about the topic, examples of questions to ask, skills to encourage)?
  - How will you encourage families to engage as co-learners with children during the experience?
  - Implement the steps identified, monitor children's progress, and adjust the plan as needed to support children's inquiry skills.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about supporting preschoolers' inquiry skills:

- ◆ **Source:** CECE Early Childhood Videos at Eastern CT State University
- ◆ **Video:** Investigating Balls
- ◆ **Link:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZ3ynCkQufk>
- ◆ **Description:** In this video, preschool and toddler educators describe how children engaged in a variety of art, science, and play activities while investigating the properties of balls. Use this video to support families in planning and engaging children in inquiry-based projects at home.
  
- ◆ **Source:** Oregon Association for the Education of Young Children (ORAEYC)
- ◆ **Blog:** Supporting Preschool Children's Inquiry
- ◆ **Link:** <https://www.oraeyc.org/single-post/supporting-preschool-children-s-inquiry>
- ◆ **Description:** This blog shares strategies for supporting children's inquiry skills. It also outlines how adults can facilitate questioning, investigation, and reflection. Consider ways to share these strategies with families so they can support their children to make observations and draw conclusions during inquiry-based projects.
  
- ◆ **Source:** PBS SoCal
- ◆ **Article:** Inquiry Projects: Start with a Child's Question and Let Curiosity Lead the Way
- ◆ **Link:** <https://www.pbssocal.org/education/inquiry-projects-start-childs-question-let-curiosity-lead-way>
- ◆ **Description:** This article shares strategies that educators and families can use to get to know children's interests, promote questioning, and facilitate inquiry-based projects.