

Parent (Teacher) Toolkit: Fast Creative Thinking

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This document is part of the YCISL Parent (Teacher) Toolkit Series which is aimed at empowering parents as teachers to develop youth creativity and leadership skills that support healthy learning.

One of the most profound questions about education was posed by Sir Ken Robinson in his 2006 TEDTalk “Do Schools Kill Creativity?” From that talk, it has become abundantly clear that individual students have to be responsible for protecting and training their own creativity. This creativity and the quick access to it enhances our ability to solve problems, interpret data and make decisions...as innovators and leaders.

BASICS: Our YCISL framework for fast creative thinking comprises three stages. The first is Getting Started which requires confidence and focus. If we can learn to eliminate self-doubt or thought filters during this process, we will have competitive advantage. The second stage is having a quantitative sense of our abilities to come up with ideas. We need to have a strategy to fully explore our creative imagination. The third and final stage concerns the speed and acceleration in our thinking. By getting up to speed and maintaining that speed, we learn to access unique ideas within our flow. A quick warm-up may be to work through 100 simple arithmetic problems in 25 problem chunks with 60 seconds allowed for each chunk.

BEGINNER: Let’s check our child’s tendency for self-doubt and thought filters. The goal of this exercise is to come up with as many ice cream flavors as possible. We will start by seeding flavor ideas by looking in the pantry or refrigerator for about 1 minute. Then start making the list and see how many different flavors can be created. Encourage your child to write down every flavor idea that comes to mind. Coach them to not self-doubt or leave out any flavor idea that comes to their imagination. A key factor is to re-start if it takes more than 5 seconds to write down the first flavor (think of this as a false start). A fast doubt-free start is necessary. When done, read the list together and talk about which flavors are the most unique and you would enjoy trying. Repeat this exercise with different themes such as pizza toppings or soup ingredients.

INTERMEDIATE: Aiming for quantity of ideas helps our creative thinking reach “outside the box” and “outside our comfort zone.” For this exercise, let’s use sticky notes to write down ideas (one idea per sticky note). Then locate a trash can (small or large) in or around your home. The objective will be to come up with as many ideas as possible for uses for that trash can. Take 2 minutes for the first pass getting those ideas onto the sticky notes. When the time is up, pause for a minute to count the number of ideas. Also make sure self-doubt and thought filtering is in check. Then take another 2 minutes to focus on more ideas, especially anything particularly imaginative. Were there fewer or more ideas in the second 2 minutes? Arrange the ideas along a line where one end is marked “ordinary” and the other end is “extraordinary.” How many ideas were closer to ordinary and how many were towards extraordinary? Do any of the ideas reflect extreme imagination?

ADVANCED: Flow (speed) is equal to volume divided by time. This exercise aims to reach optimal idea flow over various time spans. For example, do we have a few seconds or 1 minute or 5 minutes to solve a problem requiring fast creative thinking? Choose a trash can in or around your home. We are going to design a “better” trash can, create its main feature list, and give it a product name. First, take 5 minutes to list all the features of your trash can (eg, shape, material, capacity, dimensions, parts, functions). Be imaginative and give it useful added features like “self-cleaning” or connected to a smartphone app. Hybridize it with other useful products around the home (eg, a trash can/robot vacuum cleaner). Second, take 1 minute to describe the top features (minimum three) of your innovative trash can design. Write the features in a way that allows a prospective user to imagine how it would fit in their worldview (eg, UV air-filtration system removes odor, dust and germs for a healthier home.) Lastly, use keywords from your feature descriptions to come up with several product names within 30 seconds. Create variations by combining words, changing the order, capitalizing, changing spellings, and using acronyms. How many did you come up with? Was there one that you liked? If you would like to take one more step to finish this exercise, design a poster advertisement for your new product. Sketch your product, list the top features and highlight the product name. Create a story around your product idea.