

FOSTERING IMAGINATION IN OUR HOME

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I was recently listening to a podcast that was talking about what to do in the summer with children. The podcaster (who doesn't homeschool) mentioned that her children needed something specific to do nearly every day, so she was creating a calendar of their events. I started comparing this to our home, because we homeschool, summer is just an extension of our life, there is no major shift when the season changes, in some ways, summer is our everyday life. And our everyday life is intentionally filled with a large amount of down time. Hardly ever do my children say they are bored or ask for me to give them an idea of what to do, not to say it doesn't happen, but they fill hours of free time each day without me giving them any suggestions.

My daughter has had a great imagination from a young age, I remember one road trip we took when she was four years old, we were in the vehicle for about twelve hours on our way home and she spent a good portion of it using her imagination and playing with empty Woody and Buzz Pez dispensers.



I didn't fully realize how valuable it is for a child to have an imagination until we adopted my son when he was a year and a half and he had no idea how to play with toys or entertain himself. It was at this point that I started doing some personal research and discovery about imagination and how to help develop it in children. While I do think some children are born more naturally imaginative than others my son has been proof that it is entirely possible to help foster and develop imagination in children who do not have the natural gift.

In all honesty, my son may have been born with an imagination but the environment he lived in for the first year and a half, while loving, was not one to help inspire or develop it. He lived in a baby home with fifteen other children under the age of two around so there was always someone to play with, plus, while the home had toys, they were all stored in an unused crib and the children were unable to access them. Then to top it off, when you have more than a dozen children under the age of two to look after, some with serious special needs, the ability to have one on one time every day with each child is impossible.



Watching my son grow from a toddler who didn't have the faintest clue how to play with toys or on his own to the five year old who can see a toy, a game or a story in everything has been fascinating. Childhood imagination is not something I take for granted anymore.



HOW WE FOSTER IMAGINATION IN OUR HOME

MODEL IT

The most important thing is to model what an imagination looks like! Tell stories that start with "What if . . ." and use your imagination to finish it. Show them that any slip of paper can be currency, a credit card or a receipt. Show how toys can be used for different purposes, my daughter has been a great model of imagination for my son and one thing they love to do is use a large dump truck as a wheelchair.

ALLOW FREE TIME AND "BOREDOM"

It is very hard for an imagination to grow when a child has a schedule that is full or is constantly being entertained by different activities. The best ideas come when they are forced to entertain themselves, they may call themselves bored but if they are given time and space to push past the boredom that is when their imagination has the opportunity to truly shine.





PROVIDE SUPPLIES

My favorite part of an imagination is that anything can be used in the process! But I do like to supply my kids with a few extra supplies, such as dress up clothes and silk scarves that can be used as capes, hoods, slings and so much more. Lots of supplies can be found in nature as well, sticks have an endless supply of uses.

READ GOOD BOOKS

So much of our home and school revolves around reading good books. Much to my surprise, fantasy books have quickly become my daughter's favorite genre to read and listen to and they have provided a lot of the fuel for her imagination. Once children are exposed to good books they can pretend to be in the depths of the Misty Mountains with Bilbo Baggins, meeting Gollum for the first time, or tearfully peeking through the bushes with Susan and Lucy as Aslan is slain on the Stone Table. The books give children a ready-made world to enter into and from there they can use their imaginations to continue on in the world.

A FEW OF OUR FAVORITE FANTASY BOOKS

The Chronicles of Narnia by C. S. Lewis

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz by L. Frank Baum

The BFG by Roald Dahl

The Enchanted Castle by Edith Nesbit

Half Magic by Edward Eager

The Spiderwick Chronicles by Tony DiTerlizzi and Holly Black

The Green Ember by S. D. Smith

Goose Girl by Shannon Hale

The Hobbit by J. R. R. Tolkien



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chantel is a middle school teacher turned relaxed homeschooler, or what she calls "homeschooling as a lifestyle". She lives on the Canadian prairies with her husband and two children where they enjoy exploring the outdoors in the summer and curling up with good books and hot chocolate in the freezing winters while dreaming of traveling the world.

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