

## A Brief GrownUps Guide to Inquiry Learning at Home over the Holidays (aka maintaining harmony in the home)

Start with an experience that is interesting and somewhat new. This might be a picture or book, a video or website, a task in the house or yard (believe it or not, chores can become more interesting this way) or perhaps completing an experiment or engineering challenge (there are loads of [examples](#) of these online). The richer the experience, the more scope it will give your child/children for their questions and ponderings.

Next, ponder out loud and encourage your child to ponder with you. With each experience and pondering, you will discover a new inquiry to delve further into. The development of learning cannot be planned for and should not be manipulated too much (use your adult discretion where appropriate), as we want the children to drive their inquiry. The grownup's job here? Pose thoughtful questions or gentle challenges to thinking that help the children along with their own ideas, pace the activities (they can extend over several days) and provide appropriate resources to support the learning.

### Example discourse between Hannah and her (imaginary) child:

**Hannah:** Hey Bob, have you ever heard of environmental detectives? Every good detective needs a partner, can you please lend me a hand? Go grab a hula hoop from the garage and put it on some grass in the backyard. I don't mind where... you choose!

**Hannah:** Great! Now we need the magnifying glass. It should be in the odds-and-ends drawer in the study. Grab it and inspect the hula hoop for at least 5 minutes. Detectives need to be observant so they can find clues. Don't forget to record everything you can see in the hula hoop, you know how bad my memory is! (*Depending on Bob's abilities, he may draw the objects, list them or even do a drawing with labels.*)

**Hannah:** I wonder if this is all that is in the hula hoop? I wonder if there are more insects or plants in this part of the yard? I wonder if there are as many bugs in the front yard as the back? (*That last question has sparked Bob's interest - I can see it in his eyebrows.*) What do you think, Bob?

**Bob:** I don't think there would be as many bugs in the front yard because the street is there with lots of cars and people walking past and the bus are probably shy because they're so tiny and we're so big.

**Hannah:** I like that hypothesis, Bob. I wonder how we can test it. What do you think?

**Bob:** We should do this but in the front yard too! I can make a new set of records. (*As Bob sets up a hula hoop in the front yard, he seems unsure of where to place it.*)

**Hannah:** What's up, Bob? Is there a problem?

**Bob:** I'm not sure where to put the hula hoop this time.

**Hannah:** Does it matter where you place it?

**Bob:** Yeah because I know there are heaps of ants by the broken concrete step so that would have more bugs than over here. There might be more somewhere else too, so I'm just looking around first.

**Hannah:** Hmm that's a good point. But did you do this in the backyard too? Is this a fair test? Should it be a fair test? How could we make it fair?

I won't bore you with more made up conversation, but this line of inquiry could very easily lend itself to:

- Fair testing and controlling variables
- Averages and data collection
- Observational drawings and record keeping
- Measurement and scale
- Creating and testing hypotheses for why there are more/less bugs in a space
- Categorising (insects, living/non-living, animal/plant)
- Researching what bugs need to live and good bugs for the yard (is this the same all over the world?)
- Evaluate options for increasing good bugs in the yard
- Designing a bug hotel for home/school
- Constructing a bug hotel for home
- So much more!

No matter the experience, the most important elements include:

- **Engagement:** make it something they care about. This doesn't mean more of the same, it's a great opportunity to broaden horizons, but engagement is key to preventing arguments!
- **Agency:** make sure there is scope for your child to make choices and make these choices real. Your child may not have questions to share with you at first (I hear kids can sometimes become shy when learning with their own family), but listen out for the ideas and questions, they may sometimes need rephrasing.
- **Experimentation:** mistakes are fantastic, wonderful, delightful! We learn so much from when things do not go as planned. Allow your child to experiment, even if you know it will fail. *Sure, let's try baking this cake without any flour to see what happens, that's a great idea!* The importance is to examine the outcome of the mistake and ponder some more.
- **Multidisciplinary:** life is complex and multifaceted, not segmented into hour-long blocks, requiring only one skill. Our learning is the same. For any inquiry-based learning experience, consider the different ways your child might engage with the topic. Can they:
  - Read, write, publish or present
  - Draw, paint, photograph
  - Design, create, construct, disassemble
  - Count, measure, predict, observe
  - Include movement, music or a (virtual) connection to others within or beyond our community - financial or social
  - Be creative, analytical, reflective