

5.3 Be Curious

Get in touch with the desire to understand.

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When you're in an emotional situation and find yourself tempted to judge or criticize, reaching instead for curiosity can be an antidote to the negative relationship mechanics that often play out when judgment and criticism take over.

It's hard to be both judgemental and curious. Curiosity conveys an openness to understanding another person's perspective, whereas judgment comes from a fixed perception.

You may also experience curiosity when someone is telling you a story or explaining something to you. It's easy to squash that natural impulse, perhaps due to a fear of sounding stupid, but there's usually wisdom in the questions that arise in us. Tuning into your natural curiosity can be a powerful and beautiful tool for navigating the world.

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- Choosing curiosity over judgment or criticism can encourage others to open up to you.
- You will learn more about other people and the world through being curious.

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- You may need to overcome shyness, a fear of looking foolish, or concerns over wasting other people's time.
- Some people strongly believe they already know what they need to know and find it difficult to connect with their curiosity.

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It's important to practice genuine curiosity—asking questions from a place of truly wanting to understand. To do this, you will first need to tap into your natural curiosity. This is innate in all of us. Spend some time with a young child, and you will soon find yourself bombarded with questions as they explore the world, how it works, and why.

As adults, we may suppress our curiosity, perhaps feeling that we should know the answers to important questions by now or that it's inappropriate to interrupt the direction of a conversation by asking. We may be anxious about bothering others with our questions or unwilling to appear vulnerable in an emotionally charged conversation. To cover for our vulnerability, we may leap to criticism, which can feel easier than acknowledging that we don't fully understand the situation.

If we deny our curiosity, we will remain in the dark and may, in fact, make more blunders. We may mistake what someone needs to feel safe or misunderstand how to perform crucial tasks. It's important to understand, however, that there's a difference between asking from a genuine desire to understand and wrapping negative sentiments in questions to create a facsimile of curiosity. "What on earth is wrong with you?" is not an expression of genuine curiosity. A more productive approach might be to say, "Help me understand. Why did you behave that way?"

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1. "11 Benefits of Being Curious":
<https://restless.co.uk/health/healthy-mind/benefits-of-being-curious/>
 2. "Stay Curious: The Importance of Continually Asking Questions":
<https://forbes.com/councils/forbescoachescouncil/2021/08/25/stay-curious-the-importance-of-continually-asking-questions/>
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