

CURIOSITY



WHAT

WHY

HOW

What to Know About Curiosity

To be curious is to explore and discover, to take an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake. Curiosity is often described as novelty-seeking and being open to experience, and it's associated with the natural desire to build knowledge. It is fulfilling to journey toward an answer, to engage in a new experience, or to learn a new fact. To go to a new restaurant, visit a new city, meet a new person in your class, or to conduct an online search for a question can each fulfill your quest for new experiences and new information.

If you are particularly curious, you have a desire to pursue the new and the different, and at times, to explore the complex, the uncertain, and the ambiguous. Being open to new experiences is like a trademark for you and is a likely contributor to your personal growth. Your curiosity leads you to take an active interest in ongoing life experiences where you may be ready to explore virtually anything—new people, places, situations, and work. When you are at your best with curiosity,

your mind is on fire with wonder and interest. You actively seek information and ask questions that satisfy your driving curiosity while exercising the good judgment to control your questioning when it causes discomfort for others.

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Why Curiosity Is Valuable

Research findings on the benefits of the strength of curiosity include the following:

- Curiosity is one of the five strengths most reliably linked to satisfaction with life.
- Curiosity is associated with happiness, health and longevity, and positive social relationships.
- Curiosity can strengthen a marital relationship by keeping it new and interesting.
- Curiosity helps in seeking and finding greater meaning in life.
- Curiosity helps in embracing uncertain and new situations.
- Curiosity is often the entry point to many lifelong hobbies, passions, and pursuits.
- Curious people are more attracted to activities that offer opportunities for growth, competence, and a higher level of stimulation. Thus, they are likely to report having personal goals aimed at self-improvement, such as wanting to know more about their character strengths!

How to Ignite Your Curiosity

REFLECTING

Consider these questions as you reflect on your strength of curiosity:

- What are you most curious about?
- With which people or in what circumstances do you feel most comfortable or encouraged in expressing curiosity?
- Were you a curious child and adolescent? How has your curiosity been affected growing up? If it has changed over time, why is that?
- When you start to wonder about something, what gets in the way of your moving that curiosity into action? What helps you make the most of your curiosity?
- How does curiosity play out across the different domains of your life—family, socializing, work, school?

SPOTTING THE STRENGTH

Meet Georgio C., 28, an information technology professional:

My feeling is that the mental stimulation of asking questions and being curious opens the channels to do the thinking I need to do. Even when I was young, I was always asking questions.

I became really curious about computers when I was a teenager. Other kids would just play on their computers and not think about what was going on under the hood, but I was really curious. I opened it up, looked inside, wondered what everything did. I started reading about it, and asking questions. I drove people nuts with my questions. But that's what I do—when I meet somebody new, it's never a problem for me. I know I can always ask them one, two, or ten questions. There's always something that piques my interest. Every social interaction is an opportunity that may never be repeated. In every situation, you could have a gem.

I'm curious about animals, plants, minerals, planes, sports, pottery, meditation, and so on. Food and travel, though, are probably my favorites. Both teach me so much about people, other cultures, customs, and social interactions. They say you can never travel to the same place twice—that fits me and how I'm always seeing new places with fresh eyes. And don't get me started on food! There are an infinite number of food combinations and choices; sometimes I think my taste buds are the most curious part of me! I work in an office full of guys. You could walk in with a broken arm—I'd have a thousand questions and nobody else would say anything. I've been stumped why so many people are uninterested in other people's lives.

TAKING ACTION

In relationships

- Bring curiosity to your relationships by trying to understand what people are thinking and feeling. Ask them direct questions,

such as, “How are you feeling?” and “What are your thoughts about that?” Be curious about how others have approached challenges similar to those you are facing.

- Make a list of unknowns about one of the people with whom you feel very close. When you’re ready, ask them a question or two. Invite them to ask you questions in return.
- Ask someone close to you what they are curious about and find ways to explore the topic together.

At work

- Try asking “why?” more often on your team or with your subordinates and supervisors to express more curiosity at work. Don’t take what you’re told at face value if it doesn’t make complete sense to you.
- Practice being curious about a work activity that you dislike doing or have lost interest in. When performing the activity you dislike, look for at least three novel or unique features of this activity while you do it.
- Approach co-workers you don’t know as well as others. Ask them one or two questions about their work, how their week is going, or their personal lives.

Within your community

- Try a new food today or go to a new restaurant to explore different foods and places.
- Drive a different route home to explore a new area near where you live.
- Do an online search for community activities going on around you. Take notice of what piques your curiosity most.

Turned inward

- Be curious about yourself. Take an interest in reflecting on your values, your hopes for the future, and the positive you have brought into the world through family, work, and community. Try to learn something new about the motivations you have for doing the things you do. Take action driven by your curiosity that aligns with what matters most to you.

FINDING BALANCE

Underuse of curiosity

When you use too little curiosity in a situation, you can appear to others as bored, uninterested, tired, distracted, or self-involved. These are commonplace behaviors, so they tell us quite a bit about the natural rise and fall of curiosity in a typical day. Cues such as glazed-over eyes, looking away, passive body language, and distractibility are quickly sized up by people. You may decide that underusing curiosity is the right choice for you in that situation, but it can be important to monitor how you might be coming across.

It's also important to make sure you're not suppressing your curiosity in a situation where it might actually turn out to be helpful to you and to others. Some people dampen their curiosity in situations where there is a strong authority figure in charge or where they feel anxious, or in situations where it's expected to follow directions instead of asking questions.

When you feel disengaged from a conversation, project, routine, or task, you might be on autopilot, simply going through the motions of life, not paying attention to the details and nuances around you. You

might decide to allow yourself to stay there, but you might also want to consider using curiosity to pull yourself out of it.

Overuse of curiosity

When you don't keep your curiosity in check, you can offend others by being nosy or intrusive. It's natural to want to know what's going on in others' lives, to be curious about their secrets and their struggles, but expressing too much curiosity can make them uncomfortable and want to withdraw from you. Very curious people can be perceived by some as overly excited, or as rude or impolite.

You also might notice yourself getting distracted from the task at hand. The Internet can be particularly dangerous for the overly curious, who can find themselves searching for answers to whatever questions cross their minds instead of getting work done. When you're dealing with something uncomfortable or unpleasant, using your curiosity to help you cope with it can be a good thing. The saying "curiosity killed the cat" points to the dangers inherent in curiosity overuse.

Meet Jade S., 33, an event planner, shares about her curiosity overuse:

All my life people have called me nosy. I've gotten used to it. I've accepted it. I even wear it like a sort of brand or trademark. It's who I am. I'm highly curious. And I love people, so I start asking them questions. When they give me a little, my mind starts going a mile a second and I try to take more and more. I ask them about their work life, their personal life, their relationships, their pets, their interests, their travels. Some people really like it, and we

connect. But many people get turned off quickly and pull away, or make an excuse to end the conversation. Occasionally, I get people telling me to mind my own business.

It has led me to get new customers and to keep them returning. But I've lost customers too. My supervisor has talked to me about this—to not fire so many questions at people. I try to manage it a bit, slow my mind down, take a breath. But other times I just let it all out with reckless abandon! Fire away!

Optimal use of curiosity:
The golden mean

Curiosity motto:

“I seek out situations where I gain new experiences without getting in my own or other people’s way.”

Imagine this:

Imagine you are curious about the life of someone you are talking with. You have just met the person for the first time and are intrigued by them, by their story. You are interested in knowing what they think, feel, and have done. You ask them questions, and you give them time to share responses and stories about each one. You offer

similar sharing on your behalf as well in order to keep some balance in the conversation.

You realize that while questions are part of the ingredients of connecting more, not all questions are appropriate in this situation. As you talk with them, some thoughts pop up that seem a bit random and out of place. Out of curiosity, you share one or two of these to gather the person's opinion and impression on the topics.

As the conversation continues to be engaging, you realize you can keep it going with additional exploring and sharing. With other people, you might pause, change the topic, or explain that you'd like to talk more sometime. In this situation, you use your curiosity, along with other strengths, to keep the engagement level high. You see the elevations in your creativity as you come up with new topics to explore with the person and love of learning to dig deeper into each area. You notice your enthusiasm (zest) and positive feelings about a future connection with this person (hope) increase as well. Your strengths of perspective and prudence offer a balance to your curiosity as they help you see the big picture around building new connections: that it takes time and, to some degree, caution and reflection.