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Parenting the Preschooler

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Sensing or Intuiting? How Does Your Child Come to Know?

Which better describes your child?

- Is more imaginative or more realistic?
- Values things as they are or is interested in how things could be?
- Takes a random approach to learning or prefers step-by-step directions to learning?
- Uses toys the way they were designed to be used or invents new ways to use toys?

Your answers to these questions begin to reveal a preference your child may have for *Sensing* or *Intuiting*. According to psychological type as measured by the MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator), a personality profile indicator, each of use has a preferred way to learn.

Sensing people learn about the world primarily from the information they take in through their senses. Sensors pay attention to and remember the sensory information they collect, the facts, specifics, and details of their experiences. People with a sensing preference use their information to build the “big picture.” Sensors focus on the present.

People with a preference for *Intuiting* also take in information through the five senses but focus greater energies on the relationships and connections between facts, looking for patterns and possibilities. People with an intuiting preference need first to see the “big-picture” and after that take time to look at the details. Intuitives focus on the future.

Sensing and Intuiting are two distinct methods of taking in the world. This dimension identifies what kind of information you naturally notice and remember. There are observable behaviors that give clues to differences. Go over the list to see if you can determine your child’s preference for *Sensing* or *Intuiting*. (You will probably check items from each list, but you will likely find that your child has more characteristics from one list than the other.)

Knowing your child’s preference can help you in your interactions with your child. Your loving acceptance of your child’s preference builds your child’s self-esteem.

Children Who Prefer Sensing

- Are realistic and practical
- Like to use eyes, ears, and other senses to find out what’s happening
- Direct attention to the “here and now”
- Prefer step-by-step learning
- Work at a steady pace
- Are patient with details but impatient when details get complicated
- Dislike new problems unless there are standard ways to solve them
- Trust their past experience
- Focus on the present

Children Who Prefer Intuiting

- Are imaginative and enjoy stories and metaphors
- Like to use imagination to come up with new ways to do things, new possibilities
- Like to imagine what could be
- May appear to be sporadic and random in their learning
- Work in bursts of energy with slower, less productive periods in between
- Are impatient with details but don’t mind complicated situations
- Like solving new problems, and dislike doing the same thing over
- Trust their vision and fantasies
- Focus on the future

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Distinguishing Sensing and Intuiting

The difference between Sensing and Intuiting can be illustrated by the example of an apple. When the sensing function is used to perceive an apple, a person might describe it as “juicy,” “crisp,” “red outside and white inside with black seeds.” The focus is on the sensory attributes of the apple. When the Intuitive function is used to perceive the same apple, a person might say, “William Tell,” “How to keep the doctor away,” or “My grandmother’s famous pie.” Here the focus is on the associations and possible meanings stimulated by the apple.

Sensing

Sensing children tend to pay attention to and remember the sensory information they collect, the facts and details of their experiences. Their understanding is based primarily on past experiences. They quickly become accustomed to the way things are, and often like things to remain the same. They can be a bit mistrustful of events in the future or of experiences for which they lack a frame of reference.

Yolanda was an expert at creating mobiles with her Legos. But, when the direction book showing completed mobiles was misplaced she became upset. When her uncle suggested they create something out of their imaginations, Yolanda was frustrated. She wasn’t satisfied until her uncle suggested they make mobiles drawing from their memories. Yolanda and her uncle came up with many different mobiles.

Intuiting

Intuitive children are most interested in things out of the ordinary. They notice patterns and connections between seemingly unrelated objects or pieces of data. They love variety and learning new things and can become bored quickly with too much repetition or routine. Intuitives may be forever looking past what they have at the moment, or what they have had in the past, to what they might have. This tendency can make the child appear ungrateful. But for Intuitive children, it is always the possible that inspires and excites them, never the past—even if the past was wonderful. Also, Intuitives tend to think, talk, work and play in

leaps and bounds, rather than in a step-by-step fashion as preferred by their Sensing friends.

Luke was always thinking (dreaming) up new toys. He would take existing toys he had and adapt or add-on to them to make them uniquely his own. A frustration to his parents was that he would dream-up toys he wanted Santa Clause to bring him. When his parents asked about the toy, Luke told them Santa can make anything I ask for - even a toy I think up.

Adjust to Your Child’s Preference

The information provided by a sensing child will usually be much richer in detail than that given by an intuitive child. Notice the difference:

- Sensing: “I was riding my bike down Fifth Street when I saw these two dogs. They were big and I thought they were going to run after me but they didn’t. Then I went past the Clark’s house and they were painting it blue. When I got to the corner, there was a big pile of dirt on the road and I was going pretty fast so I put on my brakes and slid. I kept sliding around in circles until I skidded into the ground. I wasn’t hurt so I got back up and rode until I got to Mindy’s and told her what happened. She helped me clean up so we could play inside.”
- Intuiting: “I rode my bike to Mindy’s and fell down on the way.” Intuitive children don’t give as many details partly because they think in “leaps” and because they tend to assume that everyone knows what they know.

Parenting tips:

- Take time to listen to the sensing children’s wealth of details. Show you value all they have to share.
- Realize intuitive children are not withholding information, but sharing information the way they think—in “leaps.” Gently question for more information, if desired.

Sources:

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