

Teaching Children

by Harry

There is no age limit to collecting. The need to collect is inherent in the human psyche. Children are born collectors. They love to handle objects, are filled with curiosity, and surround themselves with what they love, cherish and save. New collectors, whether adult or child, need to be nurtured. They should not be directed but rather left to develop their own collecting personality.

The antiques and collectibles trade thrives when there is a continuous influx of new collectors. Today's children are our future. With this in mind, here are 12 suggestions on how to nurture a child who wants to collect:

1. Allow the child to decide whether he or she is ready to collect; do not force a child to collect. Starting to group like objects together or showing an interest in a particular object group are signs of a child's interest in collecting. This often happens naturally between ages 2½ and 4.
2. Let the child decide what he or she wants to collect. Parents make a major mistake when they dictate what their child should collect. Parents must resist the temptation to be judgmental. A child's interests should differ from those of his or her parents, if for no other reason than to prevent rivalry and comparison.
3. A child's collecting interests will change dozens of times during the toddler and juvenile years. Be prepared to shift with them. Remember, you are nurturing a concept—preparing the child to become an active member of the adult collecting community. Children's collecting interests are influenced by many things such as peer pressure and television. Collecting is as trendy at the juvenile level as it is at the adult level.
4. As a child's collecting interests shift, preserve their collections for them. When the child becomes an adult and looks back fondly on his collecting history, he or she will be thrilled to learn that his collecting past is more than just memories. Adults tend to become nostalgic in their late 30s or early 40s. The antiques and collectibles market is fueled in part by individuals buying back their childhood memories, either real or wished for. Some resist the urge until their early 60s. Few escape.
5. Make collecting fun. Nothing destroys the joy of collecting quicker than becoming serious, and, even worse, competitive. Make collecting an adventure. A sense of excitement should fill the air. make collecting a family activity but avoid rivalry.
6. Teach patience. Resist the temptation to rush out and buy your child dozens or hundreds of their favorite collectible. Allow the child to unearth his own treasures. The story behind the acquisition enhances the perceived value of any object to the collector. Further, collecting is a great deal more fun when it stretches out over decades rather than months. Avoid allowing collecting to become an obsession or, worse, an addiction.
7. Encourage your child to use his or her own money to buy objects for his collection. Not only will he value them more, he will also begin to understand that collecting requires sacrifice. Ideally, collecting should be discretionary-income driven. Allow your child to make condition mistakes. Initially, a child

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Rinker will overpay for an object based upon its condition. Learning to grade condition properly and relating it to value is a complex concept that takes time to develop.

8. Discourage a child from thinking of the objects as investments. It breaks my heart to see a group of young boys pouring through a sports-card price guide. They do not understand that the prices are retail, i.e. what they would have to pay to buy the card on the open market and not what they would get if they sold it.

9. Let a child play with objects he collects. Love comes from and memories are created through handling objects. Concepts such as preserving the period packaging and mint in the box are best introduced at a later date.

10. Provide shelves and cabinets in which your youngster can store and display the items in his collection. Objects packed away are no fun.

11. Encourage the child to learn about the objects he collects. Objects are inanimate. They come alive by the stories they tell. Consider visiting a factory where the objects are made. Buy a price guide, but emphasize that the real value of the book is found in the history found in the front. If a collectors' club exists, consider a gift membership for the child.

12. Assist your child in learning that one of the greatest joys of collecting comes from sharing knowledge with others. The greatest collectors are great storytellers.

[from the Allentown Morning Call, July 11,2003 - courtesy of Donna Longenecker,PA. Harry Rinker writes a collectibles column for the paper and also appears on Home & Garden Television (HGTV)]