You're 96 Percent Less Creative Than You Were as a Child. Here's How to Reverse That

Sure, you can't be a kid again, but you can think like one.

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If you haven't said it yourself, someone has said it to you: "I'm just not that creative."

Most of us wouldn't mind being just a little more creative. Fortunately, you can. Not only are there proven ways to increase your creativity, but also, according to research, all of us have a creative gene.

In a longitudinal test of creative potential, a NASA study found that of 1,600 4- and 5-year-olds, 98 percent scored at "creative genius" level. Five years later, only 30 percent of the same group of children scored at the same level, and again, five years later, only 12 percent. When the same test was administered to adults, it was found that only two percent scored at this genius level.

According to the study, our creativity is drained by our education. As we learn to excel at convergent thinking--or the ability to focus and hone our thoughts--we squash our instinct for <u>divergent</u>, or generative, thought. The 5-year-old in us never goes away, though. Here are four ways to rediscover your creative genius.

1. Go for a Walk While Listening to Happy Music.
Unconstrained by judgment, kids are especially effective divergent thinkers. According to science, there are specific ways to facilitate divergent thinking. One is to listen to music. In <u>a recent study</u> by behavioral scientists at Radboud University in the Netherlands, researchers found that when people listened to happy music (defined as classical music with a positive mood) while performing a divergent creative task, they performed better than those who were not listening to any music. <u>In another study by Stanford researchers</u>, participants were asked to complete creative tasks. Over 81 percent of people were more creative when they were walking (on a treadmill or outside) than when they were seated. They next time you need to think creatively, drown out your inner critic with musically charged walk. Start by thinking about the obvious answers to your creative task, then push yourself to come up with twenty more solutions.

2. Let Your Mind Wander.
Kids are natural daydreamers, and studies have even found that those who

let their minds wander perform better in school. While it may seem

counterproductive, one of the best ways to focus on solving a creative

problem is to let your mind wander. In an experimentby UC Santa Barbara

researchers, people were asked to complete a series of creative tasks.

Between each task, some groups were asked to do demanding activities

while others were allowed to rest. The group whose mind could rest

between tasks performed significantly on the subsequent creative tasks

than the non-rest group. The next time you're faced with a creative task,

give it some serious thought. Then, allow yourself to zone out, just like

you did in elementary school.

3. Partner With Actual Kids.
To think like a kid, you may as well think with one. According to Ayse

Birsel, author of Design The Life You Love and fellow Inc.com columnist,

you can build your creative muscles through practice--the same way you

build the muscles in your body through weight training. In her list of 32

simple daily creativity-boosting exercises, two as well-suited for

collaboration with kids. One might be to use legos or other toys as props

while brainstorming. This will push your thinking beyond whatever you

might be able to write down on a piece of paper. Another exercise, inspired by the infamous <u>Marshmallow Challenge</u>, is one in which you might ask a kid to join you as you gather a number of materials like pipe cleaners, popsicle sticks, Post-it notes, and other miscellaneous items. Then, glue them together to build a structure. Once you're finished, go further to discuss all the uses for your structure.

4. Imagine the Best-Case Scenario.
Even in the "real world," there is a place for youthful optimism. Young kids care less about how they are perceived and more about immersing themselves in whatever activity they're pursuing. And this is good for creativity. <u>Studies have shown</u> that when we immerse ourselves in "joyous doing" versus "anxious mulling," we are actually more creative. During your next brainstorm, take some time to think about how each idea could go right instead of how it could go wrong. What is the best case scenario? What has to go right for this to work? In doing so, you can prevent yourself from throwing away nascent thoughts that could turn into effective creative solutions through further exploration.

We hear over and over that kids are more creative than adults. But don't let yourself forget that you were a kid once too, and while it might be difficult to get those years back, you can certainly recover some of that creativity.