

How to start your kids collecting as a hobby

Ten great ways to spend real quality time with your children collecting stuff together

By Chris Barnardo

Collecting bugs, rocks, leaves, baseball cards, stamps, coins, Barbie dolls, or in fact anything, is a part of childhood. Of course it can be a big part of adulthood too. So do you have a collecting passion you would like to share with your children? Or would you just like to spend some really high quality time with them

over a longer term project that you can both learn about and get enthusiastic over?

As parents we all have an innate desire to teach our children, to give them the tools to survive and prosper in the world as they grow up. Collecting is a wonderfully pain-

free way to learn about the world together while having fun.

(This article was inspired by a dadcando visitor, Bill Harvey who makes display cases for serious collectors and wrote to dadcando suggesting that we do an article on collecting. Thanks Bill, this is a great suggestion.)

Be creative and start your children off on their collection

If your child hasn't already started a collection, you can start them off, it's a great shared activity. Pick something that you both like, or more importantly, something that you know they will like, and that you can become interested in, and suggest it to them and maybe start them off with a few examples.

Finding out about things and putting them in order is fun, almost whatever you are collecting. Be creative. Be as creative and original as you can. Of course the collection might be action figures or crystals, but it could just as easily be hair grips, matchboxes, or shrunken potato crisp (chip, US) wrappers, paper clips or rubber bands.

You could start the collection as a summer project, in which case it will need to be of something simple and easy to collect, with the target of the collection to put all the things in rows in a nice display box frame to hang on the wall, for example at the end of the summer. You never know this little project may go on to be a life long passion of theirs.

Consider the opportunities for learning and increasing their general knowledge

Consider the link between collecting and any educational elements of the collection, i.e. stamp collecting and geography or history, or game card collecting and cultural influences for example. Collecting is part of a strong in-built desire in all of us to categorise and organise our experiences and learning so that we can make sense of the world. Take time to consider how your child's collection can increase their knowledge of more than just the collection itself.

Consider the opportunities for their personal development

Collecting anything, and finding out about it, develops a whole range of important life skills which we will carry through to adulthood. It is a discipline with a brief and parameters; the collection provides a framework; it teaches presentation skills; it promotes the pride of ownership that extends beyond the mere cost of an object and teaches children to plan and consider what they need to do to achieve their goals.

Learn facts about the collection

Learn the basics about what your child is collecting. For example, if your children are collecting Pokemon figurines (or cards), learn the names and special powers of a few of the important creatures, or learn the basic attacks. This will help you appreciate what your children like about their collection and what parts of it are important to them. In a wider sense, get interested in what they are interested in, often getting interested in something is all about understanding it more, and once you are on their wavelength you'll understand them more as well and have some more shared experiences.

Note: Commercial products designed to collect are not necessarily the most fun or the best value for a special collection or a collecting project that you can both share.

Don't take over

Remember this is your child's collection, support him or her and be involved but don't start a better collection and become competitive. It would be all too easy with your age and resources to be able to build a better collection, all this will do is demotivate the child. Let them have something which is truly their own.

Don't over-indulge your child

Collecting is all about slowly building up a collection of related things each with its own special story and providence. It's much too easy to go out and buy all the latest things, but there is little reward in that, and the resulting collection will have little meaning.

Make the hunt, or bargain hunting part of the thrill of collecting. The best collections are those that take time to build up and where there is a rewarding and interesting story to be told about each item in the collection. Use ebay, garage sales, car-boot sales, or scour second hand and charity shops. Remember life is as much about enjoying the moment, the search should be as exciting as the acquisition and can become a great shared pastime.

Don't allow it to become an obsession

Kids tend to obsess about things in general and they can become obsessive collectors. Obsession is something that we should grow out of by the time we are adults otherwise it can have a damaging effect on our lives.

Conversely don't become obsessed with the collection yourself. Even though you have fun working on the collection together, make sure that you don't make everything you do somehow related to the collection, otherwise your children will quickly become sick of it.

Help make something for the collection

Make and decorate a scrap book, make a box for the game cards, make an index file, make a filing system on the computer, design a simple web page for the collection so that you can share the findings with others or build a box frame or display case for the collection. This will build other skills and guard against the obsession becoming too one track focussed.

Supply reference material on the collecting subject

Supply materials and reference materials to enable the collecting and increase the knowledge about the collection or the background of the collectable. Lookout for books on the subject i.e. rocks or crystals, seeds bugs, photography for example, in the local charity shops.

Put on a collection show

Get your child to put on a show of their collection, organise this for friends and family or just you and your child's brothers and sisters. Better still suggest that they do a presentation at school in their class. Help them in organising this by suggesting it to their teacher. Most schools have a time each week, or at least once a term for children to do a "show and tell", and this is a great opportunity for them to show off their passion and demonstrate their wider knowledge of their specialist subject. Help them prepare and if they are presenting at school, make sure they practice their presentation in front of you first.