

*Beginning of credits*

ANSWERING THE CHILD'S WHY

Produced by

*Encyclopaedia Britannica Films Inc.*

In collaboration with

LAWRENCE K. FRANK

*End of credits*

- Our answers to the questions of children go far toward shaping their development as participants in our democratic society. HOW we answer these questions, therefore, is of vital importance.

*Here they are, today's children. Future citizens in our democratic society. They're lovable, they're often exasperating, and they're continually trying with all their minds to discover the meaning of what they experience. But in order to understand and live effectively in the world around them, they need our help. How we interpret it to them primarily shapes their emerging personalities. And helps to determine how they will develop as citizens.*

*This is Judy. She's a very inquisitive child, full of questions, questions her mother faces day in day out.*

“These are beautiful. Let's give the flowers a drink of water. They need water just like little girls do.

- I want to do it.
- All right dear.
- Just start over here.”

*Question after question. And Mother is the teacher. What Mum knows, right or wrong, she passes on to her child. And thus, Judy learns in her own way and under Mother's guidance that rain is nature's way of giving flowers a drink.*

*Every event becomes an exploration into the unknown.*

“So, darling. Mum wants you to hold this quietly onto your tongue.

- Why?
- Because it will show if you are well or not. And if you are, then you may go outdoors and play.
- Am I well, mummy? Can I get up?
- Almost well. I think tomorrow you may go for a walk with Daddy.”

*The child's never ending why's often concern matters that are difficult to explain.*

“Yes darling, they're taking Mr. John away today because he has been ill for a long, long time, and he died.

- Why did he die, Daddy?
- Well, you see, honey, when people get to be very, very old and they've been sick for a long time, they die.
- Mummy isn't old, is she?

- No, darling. Mummy and Daddy aren't old. We won't leave you."

*By facing such questions frankly, parents help children to accept confusing and often frightening experiences more easily. Every new event becomes a source for new questions. Who is this?*

"How are you?"

*Why does mother hug this stranger?*

"So, this is little Judy. Well, well, well. Come on, give me a kiss.

- This is Uncle Harry darling, give him a kiss.
- Why?
- Come on.
- Well, because he's my brother.
- No. I don't want to."

*"Brother?" wonders Judy. She knows only little girls who have brothers. But she can't understand that this big man could be Mother's brother. And she doesn't know what uncles are. Now, of course, forcing Judy to kiss this stranger might make her rebellious. Fortunately, Uncle Harry understands children. He realizes that it will take time for Judy to accept him and realize what relatives are.*

*This time, the question leads to an understanding about mothers and babies.*

"Mother, look what Kitty got.

- Yes dear, what is it?
- Where did Kitty get the kitten?
- Well, they're her kittens, darling. She's the mother.
- What are they doing?
- They're drinking mother's milk. Mothers always nurse their babies.
- Did you when I was a baby?
- Yes, darling, I nursed you."

*And not only little girls, but little boys love to ask questions. That is how they discover much of the world around them. On walks with Father, they can ask questions. Like this one:*

"What's this man doing?

- He's giving the man a ticket.
- Why?
- The ticket shows the man he was driving too fast.
- Oh."

*For the moment Jimmy seems to be satisfied. But then, he goes on thinking, which leads to more questions.*

"Daddy, why does the policeman do that?

- Because the policeman doesn't want that man to hurt somebody.
- Why?

- Well, son, 'cause policemen watch out for us."

*Now, that makes sense. And Father's answer makes Jimmy feel secure in a world of grown-ups.*

*But Bruce is having a hard time. Like many small boys, he wants to walk alone, like grown-ups. Grandmother insists that he gives her his hand. But that doesn't seem fair.*

"No, no!

- Oh yes, you will take my hand.
- No, no.
- Bruce, see that policeman across the street. He'll come and take you away if you don't take my hand.
- No, no.
- Oh yes, he doesn't like bad boys."

*He doesn't like bad boys? Why, poor Bruce! He doesn't understand why Grandmother is angry. Or why the policeman should think that he is a bad boy. Well, maybe policemen don't like little boys.*

*Meanwhile, Jimmy and Father are returning home. Jimmy has enjoyed his walk, and now he is ready to play. Remembering the policeman whom he saw this afternoon, he chooses his toy policeman to play with first. Children's play is creative. It stimulates the imagination. And it is also instructive because it lets them play out and rehearse the many new things they're learning about the world. His make-believe world and the real world are not clearly separated.*

"Oh, I'm going to milk the cow. Whoops! Papa falls down and here's the little one. Here comes Mother and steps on Father. And now it's Father up but Mother's sick."

*But through play and by asking questions, he shows how he is learning the meaning of all events. But soon, Jimmy is tired of playing alone.*

*Now, he has questions to ask and needs someone to answer them. And Mother is always around. Sometimes, Mother asks questions and Jimmy gives answers. And sometimes, it's the other way around. This too, Jimmy likes, because he feels so grown-up when he knows the answer. And every answer shows not only what Jimmy has understood about the world, but also what he is learning from his mother and his father about life.*

"Why do cows have to eat?

- To grow big. What is that cow doing?
- Well, it looks like he's resting. For the same reason.
- And I know why. So it grows big and strong.
- That's right.
- Mum, let's look at the police book.
- The police book?
- Uh-huh.
- All right.
- You know, I saw a policeman giving a man a ticket once.
- You did? Do you like policemen?
- Yes, very much.

- Why?
- They protect us and they have to watch out for us.

*But all children may not be as fortunate as Jimmy. Take Molly, here, walking home from school after a day of disturbing experiences which she is now reliving in her mind.*

“Boys and girls, you may take out your library books now and read them while I’m talking to Molly.

I have got the test papers here, Molly. Here is yours. I can see that you didn’t understand the test. Why didn’t you ask me about the questions that you didn’t understand? You know that I’m happy to go over those things again. Why, Molly? Why don’t you ever ask questions?

- I didn’t ... I didn’t want to disturb you.”

*When she was 3, Molly was always asking questions. She was a gay and happy child, eager to learn and to grow up.*

“Mother, Mother, why does this horse have stripes?

- Not now, Molly. Mum is busy. You’re going to spoil her cake.
- Mother, why?
- Please, stop asking ‘why’ all the time. Nice girls don’t ask their Mummies why when they’re busy. You never mind now, sit up on your chair and look at your book.”

*Molly’s mother doesn’t mean to be discouraging. She’s just a busy woman. And so, little Molly goes back to her books. But soon, she tires of them. There is no one to answer her questions and share her interests. Repeated experiences of this sort stifle her curiosity. A year later, she is what we call a “well-behaved child”.*

*Now, Molly’s father approves of his boy’s interest in cars.*

“What are you doing?

- Hi there, boy, I am fixing the carburetor.
- Oh!
- Cleaning it out. Been working on it all morning. You know these new gadgets are getting more complicated every year. When I was a kid, like you are, why, I could fix this with a penknife.
- Daddy, what are you doing? What makes the engine go?
- Oh Molly, don’t ask questions. Now, you run along, this isn’t for little girls. You run along and play with your dolls. You’ll get dirty.”

*And so Molly becomes what some people call a very good little girl, in fact so good and quiet, that she gives up questioning all together.*

“Then the rabbit grabs up his banjo and prances right into the party strumming in singing a song.

- Some folks travel fancy
- Some folks travel plain
- Some folk goes on horseback
- Others take the train
- Some folks has a carriage
- With a coachman on the back

- But when I goes to a party
- I travel in an old go-cart

I didn't know you all knew that. That's really wonderful. Now, I bet you can really answer the questions about the story. Isn't that a funny story?

- Yes.
- What were you gonna say Vicky?
- The rabbit..."

*While all the other children gaily break in with questions and volunteer answers, Molly just sits and watches, not quite daring to be like the others. She doesn't dare risk annoying her teacher, who substitutes for mother in school.*

"Goodbye. We'll talk about that tomorrow and we'll read the next story.

- Bye!
- Not yet, popsicles later.
- Bye!
- Good morning, Miss (..).
- Oh, hello, Mrs. (..). How are you?
- I'm fine, thank you. And how is Marly doing in school?
- She's a darling child and so good but very quiet.
- Marly dear, your mother's here.
- Molly is always such a good girl.
- She is a good girl, but she needs to be encouraged to play with the other children. I'm trying to get her to ask more questions, to interact more with the group.
- Well, just give her time, I always say. Just give her time."

"Why didn't you ask?

- I, I didn't want to disturb you.
- But, Molly, you don't disturb me. I want you to ask questions like all the other girls. I like what you say. I wish you'd speak more often in class. You take your paper and look it over. And then let's talk about it.
- Yes, ma'am."

*Molly is obviously an extreme case. Every child is frustrated at times by busy parents but when continuously discouraged at home like Molly, she may be handicapped in adjusting to the world. Now, Molly may regain her courage if helped by sympathetic persons, in school for example. It is essential that children in their earlier years be permitted to ask questions and be encouraged to explore the world with self-confidence.*

*Well, by answering the why's of children, we help them to understand our way of life and to learn, as personalities, to live in the world with others.*

*Beginning of credits*

The end.

*End of credits*

Transcription : Pauline Kochanowski