

# Give a child a problem... and you may get a great solution

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Children have amazing abilities to solve problems. Give a child a problem and you set the wheels of creativity spinning. An example was a recent “Invention Convention” in which third graders exhibited their inventions.<sup>1</sup>

There were three steps for each invention:

1. The student’s written description of “the problem”
2. A sketched idea of how to solve the problem
3. The invention — including a live demonstration of how it works and solves the original problem

Some of the students’ inventions included:

- A backpack with a built-in backscratcher
- A lipstick-like butter stick that applies butter smoothly to bread, corn and pancakes
- A “positive message” cube that displays phrases like “You’re the best!” and “You’re a star” each time you turn it
- A scratch-less DVD cleaner made of household items
- A machine that entertains cats when owners are too busy
- A simple watering system that keeps your plants watered while you’re away
- A hand-raising machine that — according to the young inventor — takes the wear and tear out of everyday classroom participation

## What did these inventions have in common?

Many were “out of the box.” When adults try to solve or invent, they often start from a familiar place. That restricts creativity because preconceived ideas can get in the way.

When kids solve or invent, their lack of experience can be an asset. They’re not used to being “in the box” like adults. Their ideas are often fresh, amazing, amusing and clever.

## How can we learn creativity from kids?

Children set a good example for grown-ups. Here are some of the things we can learn from them:

- **Don’t worry about being judged.** Throw out fears about what others might think and focus on the solution.
- **Don’t expect instant success.** Be open to refining your solution until it works. Or, be willing to scrap your first try and start all over if you need to.
- **Share ideas to help yourself and others.** Brainstorming can help when looking for solutions. Talk to friends, coworkers – and your kids – to get new thoughts and ideas.
- **Get support and advice.** Teachers provide education and support for children. Adults can look to mentors, advisors and peers for similar help.
- **Think of silly or fun ideas if they spark your imagination.** “Silly” ideas have led to many successes. They include the Roomba®, a robotic vacuum cleaner that moves across the floor on its own, Silly Putty™ and the Snuggie®, a blanket with sleeves.<sup>2</sup>
- **Keep trying.** If you ever doubt the value of resilience, just Google “famous people who failed at first.”

As adults, we teach our children many things. But let’s not overlook what our kids can teach us. Children can offer fresh, interesting ways to look at the world and create.

<sup>1</sup>South Orange School district, New Jersey

<sup>2</sup><http://science.howstuffworks.com>