

# Curious Creatures Facilitator's Guide



## The Big Picture

This program values and seeks to promote curiosity over the recitation of facts and values the contributions of all families and family members. This program was designed to answer the question:

*“How might we create inclusive and accessible opportunities for connection that foster and develop a sense of wonder and curiosity around the world of arthropods?”*

While all families are welcome at MBHI, not all families *feel* welcome and comfortable in museum spaces. “Curious Creatures Family Learning Adventures” endeavors to combat this perception and discomfort. By intentionally aiming to make all families feel comfortable and welcome in this program we hope to increase the numbers of families who feel comfortable taking advantage of our educational resources and opportunities more broadly. Focusing on sharing this opportunity with ALL families allows us to have the greatest possible positive impact on our community.

The focus on curiosity is intentional as well. There are extensive benefits that come from being curious. Students who are curious about one topic are better at retaining other, unrelated information at school. Being curious also triggers the parts of your brain responsible for memory retention and feelings of pleasure and reward. Being curious makes people of all ages more likely to remember new facts while also making them excited to learn new things. Check out the further reading section to learn more about the science of curiosity.

But how can we accomplish all of these lofty goals? This is where you come in! Program facilitators are the most powerful tool we have to make sure families feel welcome, included, and valued. How we interact with families sets the tone for their entire experience with us. This guide is designed to support you as you work to be the best facilitator you can be.

## Best Practices

### Beware of the “Curse of Knowledge”

The “Curse of Knowledge” is a cognitive bias where you assume that everyone else knows everything (has all the knowledge) that you do. This makes it harder to communicate or explain certain topics at a more accessible or understandable level.

- Science can be an intimidating topic for some adults and we don’t want to contribute to any feelings of insecurity or inadequacy by talking “at” them as if they have the same background information we do. Try your best to avoid technical terms if a better alternative is available. Read the room and adjust the level of your conversation as needed.

### Kids and Adults are BOTH the Target Audience

Many adults are used to being the facilitator’s of learning for the children in their lives as opposed to being the learners themselves. This program aims to flip that script. You can help by 1) making eye contact with kids **AND** adults and 2) avoiding any kid specific language.

# Curious Creatures Facilitator's Guide



## Use Proper Family-Inclusive Language

- Families come in all shapes, sizes, colors, and make ups and we want our language to reflect that. Check out the “Inclusive Family Language” chart from Margaret Middleton at the end of this guide for details.

## Fun is Key

- This program is not meant to be serious or “school like”. Feel free to make jokes and laugh with families but be aware of idioms, sayings, or jokes that are culturally specific or inaccessible to people not from your own culture or background.
- Do your best to smile and be as friendly and welcoming as possible. Let families know you’re genuinely excited that they’re here.

## It is OK to Bend the Rules a Bit

- If a family is struggling and the thing holding them back isn’t hugely important to the overall learning goals of the activity, let them bend the rules a little bit. At the end of the day your goal is to foster a sense of curiosity about the world of arthropods and a sense of connection between family members. That goal is firm but the means of reaching it are flexible. If that means bending the “rules” a little bit, so be it.
- Each family is unique and has their own dynamics. Honor that individuality but allowing them to complete the activities in a way that best meets their needs.

## Thank Families for Attending

- Families have a lot on their plates and a lot of options. Thank them for making the time to join the program.

## Foster Conversation Among Family Members

- Parents may instinctually look to you for answers. Try to foster communication between family members to help them answer their own questions. Can you answer their question with a follow up question that gets them closer to the understanding they’re looking for?

## Further Reading

Want to learn more about the cognitive science behind these practices or the design of this program? Check out the following resources:

- The website **Engage Families** from Lynn Dierking and the USS Constitution Museum has great resources for museum professionals looking to develop and facilitate family learning experiences. Their work has inspired much of the content of this guide. [engagefamilies.org](http://engagefamilies.org)
- The Greater Good Science Center** at the University of California, Berkeley is a great source to learn more about the benefits of fostering curiosity. [greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)

# Family-Inclusive LANGUAGE

| avoid                                                  | why?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | instead                                      |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| <p>“parents”<br/>“mom”<br/>“dad”<br/>“mom and dad”</p> | <p>Not everyone accompanying a child is a parent. Grandparents, step-parents, and nannies may not identify as parents.</p> <p>Not all children have a mom and dad.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <p>“grownup”<br/>“adult”<br/>“caregiver”</p> |
| <p>“son”<br/>“daughter”</p>                            | <p>The children in someone's care could be grandchildren, nieces, nephews, godchildren, etc.</p> <p>You may also not want to assume the gender of a child.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <p>“children”</p>                            |
| <p>“extended family”</p>                               | <p>The term is usually meant to include grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins but for folks of many cultures this isn't “extended” family—it's just family</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <p>“family”</p>                              |
| <p>“family resemblance”</p>                            | <p>We're conditioned to look for similar features in family members so you may see resemblance where there is none. Many families include step-parents, adoptive parents, or parents who conceived with donated eggs or sperm.</p> <p>Inversely, don't assume that a child who doesn't look like their caregiver is adopted—many multi-racial children resemble one parent more than the other.</p> | <p>keep it to yourself</p>                   |
| <p>“members of a household”</p>                        | <p>Families don't always live together. For example, families with divorced parents or incarcerated parents.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <p>“family members”</p>                      |

2014 Margaret Middleton @magnidd