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Flow is the mental state in which you are fully immersed in an activity. Your focus is laser-like. You feel lost in the activity — fully absorbed in what you are doing. Time stands still. You are "in the zone." When in flow, people describe deep concentration, a sense of being in control, and that the activity itself is intrinsically rewarding. Flow is deeply satisfying and brings a feeling of joy.

Michelangelo likely felt flow when painting the Sistine Chapel. A quarterback probably feels flow when he is evading a sack or throwing a perfect spiral. I feel flow when I am teaching and writing. My son, Jacob (13), is in flow when he is doing drum performances. My daughter, Shayna (6), describes being in flow when we took a long bike ride through the mountains.

The tricky thing about flow is that you can't force it. It seems to just happen. There are, however, certain conditions that researchers point to that are critical for flow.

1. You must have a clear goal in the activity. (Jacob wants to perform the drum solo without mistakes)
2. The task must be challenging and require you to use your skills/talents fully. If the task is too simple, you will be bored. If the task is too difficult, you will be anxious. (The mountain path required Shayna to fully concentrate and use her skills but it was not so difficult that she would be unable to master the experience.)
3. The task must give immediate feedback so that you know how you are doing and can adjust your behavior accordingly. (When Shayna's bike starts to tip too far to the left, she can adjust her balance.)

People find flow in a broad range of activities: playing music, doing sports, cooking, solving problems. When are you in flow? Think about the questions below to help build your awareness of the activities that bring you to a state of flow.

- When do you lose track of time?
- What activities do you engage in that require you to use your skills and talents to the max?
- What do you do that you find rewarding in and of itself?
- What goal have you set for yourself that you find deeply gratifying when you are working toward it?

Activity for Kids — Finding Your Flow

Flow is not something you can schedule or put on your To Do list. However, there are ways that you can help your child to enjoy the experience of flow. We can help our children experience flow by working with them to identify the activities that require them to use their strengths, skills, and talents to the max. Remember, flow comes when the challenge of a situation requires us to stretch and use our abilities fully. Too much challenge leads to anxiety and feeling overwhelmed; too little leads to boredom. So the goal is to create activities that require our children to engage fully. Complete this Finding Your Flow Chart with your child. Start by making a list of the activities that your child engages in regularly. For each activity, list the skills, talents, and strengths that he uses when doing the activity. Identify when the activity is too easy and leads to boredom; when the activity is too hard and leads to frustration or feeling overwhelmed; and then identify how to make the activity challenging enough that your child has to totally invest!

My son, Aaron (13), and I completed the chart below as an example.

Once the chart is completed, encourage your child to do some of the activities identified in the Finding Flow column. Leave empty rows on the chart, so that your child can add to it when he discovers a new activity in which he feels lost in time!

Finding Your Flow

Activity	Skill/Talent/Strength	Too Easy (Boredom)	Too Hard (Overwhelming)
Guitar Playing	Musical ability, creativity,	Playing chords	Playing melody and rhythm
Basketball	Athletic ability, perseverance	Right handed lay ups	Playing against my cousin
Making slide shows	Creativity, artistic ability,	Only adding photos	Trying to use too many effects

Adding text in creative ways and using new slide transitions

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