Wisdom and knowledge. Some people mistakenly use these terms interchangeably. Knowledge is the state of familiarity, awareness, or understanding gained through experience or study. We know something because we have taken information in through our senses or mind.

Wisdom is the ability to discern or judge what is true, right, or lasting. Wisdom is common sense and good judgment. In the words of Henry David Thoreau, “It is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things.”

In positive psychology, wisdom and knowledge are defined by five character strengths—creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, and perspective. When we can observe these strengths in a person, we know that the virtues of wisdom and knowledge are being served.

How do we help develop these strengths?

**We prepare an environment where self-directed exploration and activity are encouraged.** How many companies in the U.S.A were started by garage inventors? Wisdom and knowledge are nourished with the freedom to explore and try new and different things.

**We want a place that arouses curiosity.** Reading *Little Women* I came across the term medicinal leeches. Asking my mother, she simply said, “Oh, I can’t tell you at the dinner table. It’s too gruesome.” Boy, did that get my curiosity going all the way to the encyclopedia.

**We need to nurture creativity.** Thomas Edison labored years to design the incandescent light bulb. Of his work Edison remarked, “Results? *Why, man, I have gotten lots of results!* If I find 10,000 ways something won’t work, I haven’t failed. I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is often a step forward... “ To nurture creativity, we need to allow exploration and failure as important learning and strength building activities.
We need to model open-mindedness. A friend of mine brought up in France loves to take the opposite point of view in a discussion. At first I thought she was argumentative until I came across an article that explained how the French educational system encourages debate and discussion on every topic. The favorite pastime in France is to analyze and discuss a subject from all angles. For Americans that method may not seem practical, efficient or necessary. Being able to articulate a perspective other than your own nourishes an open and curious mind. Another friend seems to answer any suggestion with ‘Why not?’ His question creates an opening to gain a fresh insight into an issue.

We need to foster a love of learning. A buzzword in schools today is ‘life-long learners’. People who are open to growth and change give themselves high ratings on the happiness scale. Happiness in this case was defined as feeling that you are being and acting your true self. When we are creative, curious, and open-minded, being open to learning seems to be a natural development.

We need to develop multiple perspectives about our lives. We need to develop the art of the long view, along with short-term strategies. We need to marvel at the scene under the microscope and be overwhelmed with the constellations. As we survey the world from small to large, present to past, and back again, perhaps we can begin to understand how our situation fits in the overall picture of humanity.

Knowledge and wisdom expand in the world when we provide opportunities for our children, our families and our communities to be curious, creative, open-minded, excited about learning, and have perspective. With knowledge and wisdom, peace follows. Why not?