



What Does It Mean To Be A Living Thing?

When my daughter was 4 she asked me a really good question. She said, “Momma, are cars alive? I told her they weren’t. I then asked her if trees were alive and she said they weren’t either. I asked her why and she said “Because they don’t move, they just sit there. But cars move and they make a sound.” Would you have been able to explain to this 4-year-old why cars aren’t alive but trees are?

Science has come up with a list of things that help decide what’s alive and what’s not. They are:

- 1.Ability to move
- 2.Organization of cells
- 3.Homeostasis (maintains temperature and metabolic balance)
- 4.Uses energy
- 5.Reproduces
- 6.Grows and develops

So put some items to the test. Ask your very young children about what they think is alive. Ask the older ones how they would tell a younger child why a car is not alive but a tree is. Once you explain the rules for living things, put items to the test. Go on a nature walk and choose items to run through the list. Or stay in and use things in your home. Even if your kids are old enough to know that something is not alive, do they know how they know?

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