



LITTLE SNOOPERS

A Parents' Companion Guide to...

Critical Thinking Skills



Overview

We all face problems at one time or another. Some problems, as we learn, are more difficult to solve than others. Whereas we can plug old knowledge and old lessons into some of the more direct and more technical problems, the problems that challenge us most require us to think abstractly. These define our lives: how far we go in our careers, how well we build our relationships, and what we are able to accomplish.

No one, unfortunately, is born knowing how to solve every problem or how to overcome every obstacle. We need to observe the world around us to get a feel for solutions that are going to work and those that are not. These are the basis of our critical thinking skills. Your child needs these skills in order to navigate the world effectively.

These are the top 5 ways you can start teaching your child critical thinking skills today.

1. Abstract Situations

Very few people are able to thrive in high-pressure, creative environments because abstract thinking is such a tenuous concept. While most of us can learn how to carry out rote tasks, if we practice long enough, abstract thinking takes more of a willingness to make mistakes. You need to expose yourself to answers that could be wrong in order to find the answers that are creative and new. From mathematics to painting to athletics to entrepreneurship, abstraction is one of the most important tools for anyone who hopes to improve their critical thinking.

To teach your child how to abstract situations, encourage him or her to share any thoughts and opinions about any and all topics. When you watch a movie together, dig into the story past the plot. Ask your child what they think about the characters in the movie and what they think the director may want the audience to feel. These questions, because there is no right answer to them, stretch your child's mind past the bounds of normal, everyday thinking. You want to make it clear that you celebrate this type of thinking.

2. Follow Logic

You do not want your child thinking so abstractly, of course, that they lose all concept of sense and reason. While you are encouraging creativity and outside-the-box thinking, encourage logic as well. Draw the connection between concrete facts and cold, hard reason. If your child makes an argument based on a logical fallacy, point it out and explain what it is. Don't make the mistake of underestimating your son or daughter: children are never too young to start learning the principles of logic. You can hold off on lectures from Kant and Nietzsche and still impart a little understanding about a reasonable frame-of-mind.

There are several useful tools for teaching your child how to follow logic. You could introduce them to chemistry and physics, get them to practice their algebra and geometry, or even sit them down at a computer next to a book about coding. Each of these tools is fun, equipping your child with the power inherent to knowledge and education. Every step of the way, your child will be mastering the rules of logic and breaking away from the illogical thinking to which kids are otherwise so susceptible.

3. Let Their Creativity Flow

Yet another aspect of critical thinking, closely related to both abstraction and logic, is creativity. For many artists, creativity is like the whale in Moby-Dick, forever swimming away, tantalizingly out of reach. You can help your child avoid that mindset by recognizing that creativity is the natural result of flow. However you find your flow best, introduce that activity to your child. Encourage him or her to practice the same activity, every day if possible, and to learn what flow looks like and feels like. Gradually, the idea will start to click.

You may even choose to share this quote from Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the author of *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*: "The purpose of the flow is to keep on flowing, not looking for a peak or utopia but staying in the flow." Whatever you enjoy, turn it into a bonding experience over creative flow. You can show your child why you are always knitting or take them outside to play some basketball. Whichever you choose, you are passing along an important critical thinking skill. It may just seem like fun in the moment, but over time, you will see that it is also deeply productive.

4. Stay Objective

Another critical thinking skill, and perhaps the most difficult to learn, is objectivity. Each of us is, of course, seeing the world through a unique perspective. We grow up thinking from this perspective. Locked into place, we may at times struggle to recognize the illusions that our subjectivity impresses upon us. We run into trouble because we misunderstand other people's ways of thinking. It seems so obvious to us, the way that we see the world, and everyone else's seems anything but obvious. The trick that we learn, if we are fortunate, is that we need to put effort into staying objective. We need to commit ourselves to seeing past our own biases.

You can teach your child how to stay objective by reminding them that everyone's life experiences are different. If they seem too judgmental about someone or something, point out that other people have had to go through trials that they have not. It is also helpful to read news stories about places and people where bad things have happened – even if you have to gloss over some of the details to keep the stories kid-appropriate. To learn critical thinking, your child will have to face up to the realities of the world and learn to value objectivity.

5. Stick to the Scientific Method

Because critical thinking skills are always a work-in-progress and never actually complete, the scientific method can help to bridge the gaps later on. When you teach this process to your child, as well as the reasons behind it, you are equipping them with a tool that they can use when all of their other critical thinking skills seem insufficient.

Make sure that your child understands what a theory is, what a hypothesis is, and why neither of those things is equivalent to a belief or an opinion. This lesson will set any child apart from the crowd. There are always kits that you can buy as well, diving into experiments and research projects that demand the scientific method. These are like toys – fun but educational and sure to solidify the thinking behind the scientific method in your child's mind.

In Conclusion

Critical thinking is, like all of the other abilities that we develop going into adulthood, emotionally taxing at times. The skills that make it up tend to push our concept of ourselves, sometimes challenging our ideas about the world. You want to remain aware of that as you are guiding your child through every lesson about critical thinking. At the same time, remember that your child is strong, capable, and resilient. One tough lesson is not going to discourage them past the point of no return. There is always another day and more time for another lesson, as long as both of you are willing to keep coming back and reflecting on these all-important topics.