

Summary

We receive most of our information second hand. How can we tell the difference between facts and someone else's opinion? How can we recognise other people's assumptions in the information we are given? How can we spot the flaws in others' arguments? Critical thinking helps us to do this. It teaches us to think in a coherent and logical way, with a balanced approach. This advice sheet gives parents ideas to help improve their children's critical thinking skills and useful resources and websites.

Introduction

Critical thinking is a form of reflective judgement, a process that enables people to explore the accuracy and worth of information and knowledge rather than just taking someone's word for it. It teaches to provide evidence for own arguments and ask for evidence of others, before accepting their conclusion. It requires reflective, reasonable thinking and other higher order thinking skills such as evaluation, which would suit those with an enquiring mind.

The advantages of teaching critical thinking to children are that it broadens their horizons and stops them from seeing the world in black and white terms; it can enable them communicate their needs to others; they are less likely to be taken advantage of as they become more independent and it can help them act as good advocates for other people. They will also become able to assess their options and be better equipped to solve problems in stressful situations. Parents can encourage critical thinking in their children in many ways, start by trying the ideas below.

The Other Side

Encourage children to always consider the other side of the argument. Hold debates with family and friends. Encourage them to take the opposite stance to the one they believe in and plan an argument to try to persuade others to support this stance.

Positive, Negative, Interesting (PIN)

Think of an unusual 'what if' scenario, e.g. 'What if all door handles were made of chocolate?' or 'What if we had a third eye in the back of our heads?' Encourage children to think of something *Positive*, something *Negative* and something *Interesting* about this scenario. Try to use a what-if approach about issues that are significant to their life.

Challenging Stereotypes

Encourage children to consider why a statement or view is stereotype. What can they do to change the statement to reflect a more balanced view? Look at media headlines with them. Do they really mean what they say? How have they used emotive language to influence people's thinking? Are the things that headlines have said about 'hoodies' correct?

Analyse This!

Analyse an advertisement from the television. Distinguish between the facts, the myths, the opinions and the illogical statements made in the advert.

DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Analyse That! News and Views

Read news and discuss your views on it. For example, Is everything we are told about global warming and climate change true?

Go Ahead and Advertise!

Make up an advert. Choose an item or, better still, an idea and try to advertise this to others, so you 'sell' the idea to others and see if you can convince them. Think about the persuasive language used in commercials on TV.

The Illogical Third

It is said that one third of every sentence is illogical. Pay careful attention to your own and other people's sentences. Can you tell which part is illogical? For example, "You always say that when I ask if you want tea" Of course, nobody always says anything! It would be more accurate to say, "You often say that..."

Loaded Questions

Ask children to think about questions full of assumptions, usually emotive language is designed to get a particular response. Loaded questions can often lead to arguments. Think of a loaded question used by people around you. "Isn't that difficult for you?" is a good example. How can it be phrased differently so it sounds more balanced, more logical and less loaded?

Diversity

Encourage children to consider similarities and differences between themselves and people from other cultural background .Would children in a very different part of the world have the same views as your child on recycling, the environment and climate change? How and why might their views be different?

Philosophy

Have open-ended discussions with children where there are no right or wrong answers, so that they feel safe to express their views without being judged. This would give them the opportunity to question their own views and those of others.

The School Council

Parents could encourage children to get onto the school council, or if this is not possible they could feed suggestions into their school council. If there is no school council they could form one!

Further Information

<p><i>Read well, Think Well: Build your Child's Reading, Comprehension and Critical Thinking Skills</i> by Hal W. Lanse</p>	<p>Teacher trainer and literacy specialist Hal W. Lanse, Ph.D., arms parents with the necessary knowledge, strategies, and exercises they need to turn their kids into first-rate readers and thinkers.</p>
<p><i>10 Critical Thinking Card Games</i> by Elaine Richard</p>	<p><i>Easy-to-play, Reproducible Card and board Games That Boost Kids' Critical Skills and helps them succeed in tests.</i></p>

www.bbc.co.uk/newsround	CBBC Newsround website for resources.
www.headliners.org	Headliners is a national news agency, where young people aged 8-18 produce articles on issues that are important to them but of interest to everyone.
In the classroom - Global Dimension	Development Education Centres (DECs) can carry out projects with schools involving critical thinking, on social justice, diversity and environment issues.
www.sapere.org.uk	Website for Philosophy for Children that also has teaching resources.
www.criticalthinking.org	The Centre for Critical Thinking works under the auspices of the Foundation For Critical Thinking, an educational non-profit organization, to promote essential change in education and society through the cultivation of fair minded critical thinking.
www.firstnews.co.uk	First News - A weekly newspaper suitable for children aged 8 to 14.

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