

**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. It can expand our minds and change the way we think in everyday situations. This factsheet gives ideas to help improve your child's critical thinking skills and gives useful resources and websites.

Critical thinking is a form of reflective judgement, a process that will enable your child to explore the accuracy and worth of information and knowledge rather than just taking someone's word for it. It teaches them to provide evidence for their own argument 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 children with an enquiring mind. You can encourage critical thinking in many ways; some of these are given below.

**The Other Side**

Encourage your child 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 (PNI)**

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 your child to think of something *Positive*, something *Negative* and something *Interesting* about this scenario. Try to use a 'what if' that is significant to their life.

**Challenging Stereotypes**

Encourage your child to consider why a statement or view is a 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.

**Analyse That! News and Views**

Read the news and discuss your views on it.

For example; Is everything we are told about global warming and climate change true?

'First News' is a weekly newspaper suitable for children aged 8 to 14. BBC Newsround website has interesting and sometimes controversial issues under 'Other Stuff'. Headliners website also has good information for young people.

**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? "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 your child to think about questions full of assumptions, usually with emotive language and 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 too 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 your child to consider similarities and differences between themselves and people from other cultural backgrounds. 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 your child where there are no right or wrong answers, so that they feel safe to express their views without being judged. This would also give them the opportunity to question their own views and those of others.

**The School Council**

You could encourage your child 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!

Critical thinking can help children to broaden their horizons and stops them from seeing the world in black and white terms. It can enable them to 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.

**Parent Voice**

“I really enjoyed this fact sheet. I’ve previously had discussions with my daughter and tried to get her to see differing points of view but this has given me some great ideas to work through, which I know she’ll enjoy.”

Mother of 14 year old girl

**Log On**

Website for AS level critical thinking that has useful ideas for critical thinking. [www.criticalthinking.org.uk](http://www.criticalthinking.org.uk)

Wikipedia website, Critical Thinking [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical\\_thinking](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_thinking)

BBC Newsround website for pupil resources <http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/default.stm>

Headliners is national news agency, where young people aged 8-18 produce articles on issues that are important to them but of interest to everyone. [www.headliners.org/](http://www.headliners.org/)

Development Education Centres (DECs) can carry out projects with schools involving critical thinking, on social justice, diversity and environment issues. [www.globaldimension.org.uk/CommunityandSupport/](http://www.globaldimension.org.uk/CommunityandSupport/)

BBC Climate Change Website for facts and figures [www.bbc.co.uk/climate/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/climate/)

Website for Philosophy for Children [www.sapere.org.uk](http://www.sapere.org.uk)

**Read On**

*Read Well, Think Well: Build Your Child’s Reading, Comprehension and Critical Thinking Skills* by Hal W. Lanse

*10 Critical Thinking Card Games: Easy-to-play, Reproducible Card and Board Games That Boost Kids’ Critical Thinking Skills* by Elaine Richard

*The Inconvenient Truth* a book and DVD by Al Gore

**Reflect**

- What could you do differently on a daily basis to foster critical thinking in your child?
- William Graham Sumner said, “Education in the critical faculty is the only education of which it can be truly said that it makes good citizens.” Will this influence your approach to your child’s learning?
- Will your newfound knowledge influence anything in your own life?