

SUPPORTING CRITICAL THINKING IN PRETEENS!

The ability to think critically and independently is at a premium in today's world. Below are five tips for developing critical thinking for children in their preteen years.

1. Fun With Logic

As they near their early teenage years, kids become able to reason logically at a more abstract level. But children need practice and challenges in order to hone these reasoning skills. Adults can introduce them to logical concepts and exercises, and play games that involve logical deduction — like Clue, logic puzzles, or brainteasers. Preteens also become more capable of expressing their views and arguing about complicated problems. Adults should make an effort to include them in conversations at home about current events, culture, and ideas.

2. Navigating a New Social Life

As they make their way out of elementary school and gain new independence and responsibility, kids enter new friend groups and begin to detach more and more from their parents. This is obviously an important step, but it can be difficult for kids to deal with the new pressures that arise. Children are more susceptible to peer pressure and groupthink than adults. This can be a difficult time for parents as well, as kids begin to detach and the parent-child relationship changes. But if parents are helpful, kids will come to see them as a resource for negotiatin.

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3. Coping With Adolescence

Puberty introduces a whole new range of emotions, anxieties, into the lives of preteens. These changes are, of course, positive. But if they become overwhelming they can distract from cognitive development, school work, and children's interests. Good critical thinking skills can help kids put these changes in perspective, better manage impulses, and bring balance to their lives. Parents can support their children by having open discussions, encouraging them to set goals, and pointing out when distractions are preventing them from meeting those goals. They should always be sure to emphasize that the changes their children are going through are universal and positive.

4. Overcoming Cognitive Biases

Bias is an unavoidable part of thinking. We see things in a particular way, but fail to step back and think more clearly. One of the most common cognitive biases is confirmation bias, which leads us to view new information in a skewed way so it fits in with previously held beliefs. As they begin to reason in more advanced ways, kids will begin to encounter bias in everybody. In order to overcome bias that leads to poor judgments, kids first have to know about it. Parents can introduce the concept of cognitive bias and work through examples.

5. Managing Screen Time

The internet presents kids with a wealth of useful information and educational tools. But these positives can easily get buried under a sea of distractions. It's vital that kids develop healthy screen habits, learn how to identify toxic influences, and make time spent online worthwhile. Guide your kids through web searches and talk to them about how advertising and other influences manipulate emotion. Be explicit about the consequences excessive time browsing the internet can have on development and help them work on building structure into their relationship with technology.

