

SUPPORTING CRITICAL THINKING IN CHILDREN

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 early years.

4. Begin to Reflect

Young children are not ready to tackle high-level logic, but that doesn't mean they aren't already reasoning. Children start reasoning — including coming to decisions, solving problems, and making predictions — at a very young age. In order to get better at this kind of reasoning, though, they have to first realize they are doing it. Adults can help by encouraging their children to think about how they're thinking and reflect on the steps they take to come to decisions. This will help them develop what's called metacognition, or thinking about thinking. Metacognition is a crucial step on the path to genuine critical thinking.

2. Experience New Perspectives

We all know that young children can be self-centered. It's a normal part of development. But in order to think clearly about the world around them, kids need to slowly be pulled out of themselves. To help, adults should ask kids questions that encourage shifts in perspective. So ask children to imagine what life is like for other people. Ask them how someone from another perspective might interpret things differently, or come to different conclusions.

#THINK CRITICAL

3. Build Confidence

Before they can question the world around them and try to change it for the better, children need the self-esteem to believe what they think counts. It's very important that young children be encouraged to try new things. They should learn early on that failure is normal and useful, and experience the joy of learning and improving. Adults should also resist the urge to be overprotective or to do too much for their kids. At the same time, they should also be realistic about what their kids can do on their own, without being overly critical. Balance is key. With challenges, encouragement, and positive reinforcement, children's confidence will take off.

1. Ask Questions

Young children are naturally curious. They ask puzzling and sometimes deep questions, and they're eager to learn new things. Sometimes children's nonstop curiosity can become bothersome to parents and other adults. But it's crucial that adults encourage a child's curiosity. Parents should make an effort to show they value what children have to say. They should also ask their children questions about what they think. Ask them, e.g. why they do or don't believe in Santa Claus. Children will begin to enjoy questioning, thinking, expressing themselves, and giving reasons for their beliefs. These habits of active thinking are invaluable.

2. Get Control Over Their Feelings

Young children experience their emotions intensely. Outbursts and tantrums are often the result, but children can sometimes also withdraw into themselves, failing to express their emotions at all. Being overwhelmed like this can stand in the way of clear thinking — in children just as much as adults. Experiencing emotions is, of course, healthy, but children must also learn to manage them. Sensible discipline from parents is needed, as are open discussions about how to express emotions and how to step back from them so that feelings don't determine behavior, decisions, and the way kids see the world.

