

TRAINING YOUR CHILD'S MIND

10 USEFUL TIPS TO DEVELOP CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN YOUR CHILD



We all want to raise smart children. No, we are not talking about exam smarts. Rather, the ability to evaluate information and situations and form opinions, at least at a level appropriate for their age.

Many adults assume that critical thinking is a skill that comes with age. This is not true. A good critical thinker must be trained from young. Only when it is intentionally nurtured can a child grow up to be an effective critical thinker, being resourceful and solving life's problems.

Young children are capable of exhibiting foundational critical thinking skills. Here are some tips on how to stimulate their thinking process and raise it to a critical thinking level.

1. The root of higher-order thinking such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation is the art of asking good questions. Start by having the habit of asking your children questions that do not have a definite answer. But do ask in a casual conversational manner as opposed to quizzing them.
2. Children pick up habits from their parents. Why not try to demonstrate the act of critical thinking implicitly. Think aloud as you ponder, say, on how you are going to get all your errands done with the limited time you have. Your children will observe how you evaluate your options and come to a conclusion.
3. It's no secret that young children are naturally inquisitive. They throw so many 'Why, Where, What, How' questions at you. Don't be too quick to answer them. Start a discussion by asking, "What do you think?" Get them to answer their own questions. Let them share their own take on the situation.
4. Don't be afraid to say you don't have all the answers. Acknowledging this tells your children that being smart is not about having all the answers. Being smart is about asking the right questions and knowing where to find the answers. Encourage your children to seek answers for themselves. Lead them to the right resource.
5. You don't have to buy special critical thinking kits and guides. Science is an excellent subject that inherently uses critical thinking in the process of discovery and experimentation. Collect science experiments that you can work through with your children. For example, germinate some green beans and as it grows, ask your children questions that make them think and lead them to the right answers.
6. When your child is working through Maths problems, don't be too quick to show them how to solve them. For a story sum, ask them questions to help them understand the problem first, such as, "Can

you read the question to me? Tell me what you can remember. What methods do you know already that can help you solve the problem?"

In fact, having a thinking framework for Maths and Science is critical in their ability to excel in the subjects at school later on.

7. Find ways to apply current knowledge to understand unfamiliar situations. This will help your children's understanding, evaluation and comprehension skills. For example, ask your child, "Can a flowering plant produce different types of fruits? Will your shirt change size over time?"
8. Once in a while, offer wrong answers. Get your children to think, analyse and evaluate whether it is right or wrong. Encourage them to explain the reasoning for their evaluation. This will help your children to start examining information, events and scenarios with a probing mind.
9. Create a family environment where critical thinking is encouraged. Your children need to feel like they are being listened to. There are no silly answers. Be enthusiastic when answering questions.
10. You will realise by now that patience is an integral component of inculcating critical thinking skills in your children. Be curious yourself. Keep track of how your children's thinking skills are developing and adjust your activities accordingly. After all, you will, I am sure, agree that your child is unique and must develop in his or her own way.

Time and again, we have found that teaching children a thinking framework can have a significant positive effect on their performance in school. It outweighs the usual practice of making them sit through copious amounts of worksheets. So it is never too early to develop your child into a critical thinker.

Cedric Chai and Sunny Tan are specialist educators and authors of Mastering Heuristics Series that teaches students a thinking framework for Science and Maths. Students achieve breakthroughs in their academic performance after applying the thinking framework. They regularly conduct heuristics workshops for parents and educators. You can contact them through www.heuristics.com.sg