

## Fostering Critical Thinking: At Home and School

The window of opportunity presented during the children's first 5 years of life is an accelerated growth of a neurological web that as parents and educators must intentionally cherish. Numerous studies have emphasized the importance of building vocabulary, as well as retention of information and application in context. This system is interconnected to cognitive development and critical thinking, furthermore, in order to be able to solve problems, apply solutions, work in cooperation, be an innovative and creative thinker, vocabulary and application in context are imperative skills to the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner.

Building vocabulary is difficult, because it is not only about a list of words, but it is about context and application, which are essential parts of critical thinking. *What is critical thinking?* "Critical thinking comprises a number of different skills that help us learn to make decisions. It is the ability to evaluate information to determine whether it is right or wrong. To think critically about an issue or a problem means to be open-minded and consider alternative ways of looking at solutions" roots of action.com. In order to support language development and critical thinking in young children, intentionality must be part of the planning of activities and implementation of strategies at school and home.

### Here are some strategies:

1. Use every day activities to pose questions that encourage children to think. Questions are important to stimulate the thought process. Read storybooks with the child, pausing to ask questions such as, "What do we understand from this word?" "How does this make you feel?" "Why do we think the girl did that?" "Was that the right thing to do?" "What could she have done instead?" and "What do we think will happen next?" Open-ended questions are better for enhancing critical thinking than a multiple-choice question because we limit the thinking process of a child.

2. Help children learn reasoning skills in everyday activities. For example, if your child refuses to go to bed at a particular time, help him to reason out why it is important by asking, "What happens when..." types of questions. Encourage him to suggest alternatives and discuss whether or not they will work.

3. Have your child join activity classes to hone her skills in art, craft, music or sports. Creativity and critical thinking are closely associated with each other. Encourage her to try different ways of expressing her creativity.

4. Experiences –connect the story with your child's knowledge and experiences

When you relate what you are reading to something your child already knows or has already experienced, you help her better understand the characters' perspectives and why they think and act the way they do.

5. Explain –why things happen

It's important for your child to understand not only *what* is happening in a story, but *why* it's happening. This builds her understanding of cause-and-effect, as well as her understanding of what motivates the characters in the book.

6. Problem-solve – How to solve the problem in the book

To understand a story, your child needs to understand the problem that must be solved. Recognizing the problem and thinking of possible solutions builds the problem-solving skills she will need later when analyzing texts on her own.

7. Predict –what will happen in the future

A good reader uses her knowledge and experience to predict what will happen in a story. Children who are encouraged to predict what will happen next get into the habit of searching for meaning, which is really, what reading, is all about.



**"Do not indoctrinate your children. Teach them how to think for themselves, how to evaluate evidence, and how to disagree with you."**

**— Richard Dawkins,**

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