

# Tips for Parents: Thinking Skills

## Why are thinking skills important?

**Thinking skills are necessary for the future.** The future economy will require higher levels of reasoning skills and creative thinking. As the nature of society changes, requirements for jobs change as well. Critical thinking skills, as well as knowledge of reading, math, science, and writing, are becoming the most important qualifications for future employment.

**Thinking skills are necessary for everyday living.** Real-life problems require critical thinking and decision making. Without the proper skills, children often make decisions too quickly and without much thought. Often this results in ineffective and inappropriate solutions to problems.

## Types of thinking skills

Thinking skills can be divided into three general areas:

1. **Learning to learn skills**—general skills that apply to both school and non-school activities. For example, students are taught to monitor their attention levels, be aware of their attitudes, set goals, etc.
2. **Content thinking skills**—specific skills that are designed to increase a student’s ability to learn specific content. Students are taught to recognize patterns, organize and summarize information, simplify complex tasks, etc.
3. **Reasoning skills**—often described as “higher-order” skills. Students learn how to generalize, apply, evaluate, etc., using several sources of information.

## Parents can actually help develop children’s thinking skills. Here’s how:

**Create an environment that inspires and values critical thinking.** Encourage your child to ask questions and question your child as well. Don’t be afraid to acknowledge that you may not have all the answers. Often, there are several solutions to a single problem. Welcome the opportunity to explore various answers with your child.

**Serve as a role model for your child.** The ways a parent analyzes a problem and discovers a solution are of primary importance. When parents open doors to critical thinking and demonstrate thinking skills, they encourage their children to do the same. Explain how you solved a particular problem and ask your child to come up with a different solution.

**Monitor your responses.** Recognize that how you respond to your children’s questions, comments, or answers can advance or hinder the thinking process. Praise is obviously important, but should be selective and appropriate. When praise is offered too freely, children may become dependent on parental approval when solving problems. A more effective way to advocate the thinking process is to ask your child to explain a response in more detail. This will encourage your children to think more deeply and broadly about their decisions and solutions.

**Read with your child.** Ask questions about events or characters in the story. Throughout the story, ask your son or daughter to predict what will happen next. After completing the story, ask your child to write or draw a picture of another possible ending to the story. This is a simple and enjoyable way you can help promote creative and inventive thinking in your child.

### **Make thinking fun**

**Play games with your child.** Simple card games or board games can actually enhance thinking skills through the process of decision-making. Observe the choices your children make while playing a game. Ask them why they made a particular decision and ask if they could come up with an alternative solution.

**Create hands-on activities that inspire critical thinking.** For example, have your children help you prepare a meal. If a recipe says it serves four, what would they do if eight people were coming to dinner? In other words, use practical, everyday experiences to encourage higher levels of thinking.

**Use computer technology.** If you have a computer at home, look into purchasing software that stimulates critical thinking. Such programs are typically simulations of events or adventures that allow children to find solutions to problems.

### **Parents can make a difference**

Keep in mind that acquiring any type of skill takes time and practice. Learning how to think creatively and analytically will not happen overnight. Therefore, be patient and allow your child to work on a problem for weeks or even months. Remember that you can help enhance your child's learning ability and self-esteem by providing a nurturing and respectful environment.

For more information:

Anselmos, S. "R Is for Rainbow: Developing Young Children's Thinking Skills Through the Alphabet".

"Your Child and Thinking Skills: Here's What to Do". IOX Assessment Associates.

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