

# KNOW! HOW TO BUILD CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN YOUTH

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Critical thinking is more important than ever for today's youth. Young people today are surrounded by information, especially online. It's estimated that teens spend [an average of 4.8 hours a day on social media](#), during which they encounter messages from friends, influencers, news outlets, companies, and many others. With so much information coming from so many sources, it's important to help young people learn to question, interpret, and evaluate the claims they encounter both online and offline.

Strong critical thinking skills support communication, empathy, and problem-solving, while helping youth recognize misleading information and understand different perspectives. Caring adults can help build skills at any age. Check out the tips below to start the conversation!

## ENCOURAGE CURIOSITY

Critical thinking begins with curiosity. Asking "why" and "how" helps young people dig deeper and develop a better understanding of the world. Encouraging curiosity means making space for questions and exploration, even when the answers aren't immediately clear.

Support your child's curiosity by exploring their interests together and working together to find answers using books, the internet, or trusted people. Showing enthusiasm for learning reinforces that asking questions is valuable and worthwhile.

### TALKING TIP

Use your child's interests as a starting point. For example, if they love video games, ask "how are they created?" even if you know the answer. Encourage them to brainstorm ideas, research, and ask follow-up questions. You might discover something new together.

## ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

The questions we ask can shape how young people think. Open-ended questions encourage deeper thinking by inviting discussion and helping them reflect, explain their reasoning, and consider other possibilities.

When your child asks a question, try responding with one of your own, like "What do you think is happening?" or "Why do you think that?" Give them time to process and develop their own ideas.

### TALKING TIP

Try asking "why" more than once to encourage deeper reflection. For example, if your child calls someone lazy, ask why they think that, then ask again to help them consider other possibilities, like health, transportation, or other commitments. This can help young people move beyond their initial assumptions and be more thoughtful.

## WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING?

Critical thinking is the ability to thoughtfully analyze information and consider different perspectives before forming a conclusion. It includes a [variety of skills](#) that help us decipher, evaluate, and understand the information that we read, see, hear, and think. These skills allow young people to ask questions, look for evidence, and think carefully about the messages they encounter.

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## PRACTICE CRITICAL THINKING TOGETHER

You don't need to have sit-down lessons to build critical thinking skills. Look for everyday teachable moments that can spark conversation and deeper thinking. Talking about things your child already sees and experiences helps them learn to evaluate information more carefully.

Think about where your child gets information—TV, social media, friends, or ads. These can all provide helpful starting points for discussion. For example, you can talk about an ad on TV and ask what message it's trying to send, whether the claims seem believable, and how they might check if it's accurate.

### TALKING TIP

Spend time engaging with the media your child already enjoys. You might ask them to teach you how to play their favorite video game, compare your social media "for you" pages, or explain what is going on in a show they are watching. Ask them about how the media they're consuming makes them feel and what message they think it is trying to communicate.

## BE A ROLE MODEL

Young people learn from watching caring adults in their lives. One of the most effective ways to teach critical thinking is to model it in everyday situations. When you encounter a problem, try thinking out loud as you work through it. This helps children see the steps involved in reasoning, evaluating options, and making decisions.

For younger children, hearing your thought process can help them develop patience and persistence when solving problems. For older children and teens, you might demonstrate how you find reliable information, compare sources, or consider different perspectives before forming an opinion.

### TALKING TIP

When a problem affects both you and your child, try solving it together. Walk through each [step of the process](#) and invite your child to share their ideas. Afterward, talk about what worked well and how the same approach might help solve other challenges in the future. Try to use the same approach when handling other problems in your life. If your child sees you putting these skills into practice, they will be more likely to try it themselves.

## Sources:

- [Encouraging Critical Thinking | Step Together](#)
- [Critical Thinking For Kids | Bright Horizons](#)
- [The Importance of Critical Thinking for Young Children | Michigan State University](#)

## Resources:

- [Parents' Guide to Critical Thinking | The Reboot Foundation](#)
- [Problem-solving steps: pre-teens and teenagers | Raising Children Network](#)
- [15 Critical Thinking Questions for Kids | The Hun School of Princeton](#)

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