



Strong critical thinking skills help students solve problems

Your child is feeling overwhelmed by a big history project. Or she's gotten stuck while trying to figure out a math problem. What do you do?

Helping children understand *how* they think and solve problems is some of the best help a parent can provide. Strong critical thinking skills will help your child in school—and give her the ability to solve problems in the real world.

Help your child:

- **Become aware of *how* she thinks.** Educators call this *metacognition*, or the ability to think about the thinking process. Good thinkers have a plan before they take action. They know if they need more information in order to make a decision. And if they get new information later, they adapt their plan. Before your child starts a project, say things like, “Let’s think this

through.” Also help your child see her strengths and weaknesses as a problem solver. “Remember that sometimes you tend to rush in before you make a plan.”

- **Draw on past knowledge** to address current problems. She may not have had to do an assignment just like this history project, but she has done other big projects. What did she learn about how she works best?
- **Focus on effort.** “It’s not that I’m so smart,” Albert Einstein once said, “it’s that I stick with a problem longer.” So when your child gets discouraged, encourage her. Help her see the progress she has already made, and let her know she *can* reach her goal.

Source: A.L. Costa, *Developing Minds: A Resource Book for Teaching Thinking*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Planning ahead is a challenge for most kids!



Your child can’t do his homework if he left the book at school. He can’t turn in homework if it’s ... well, who knows exactly where it is?

Parents know that most kids have a very hard time planning ahead. Here are three reasons why—and what you can do about each:

1. **Most kids have trouble** resisting the temptation to do something fun instead of something hard. Make a rule: No TV or games until homework is finished.
2. **Most kids lack organization skills.** Create a big calendar for writing everything down. Establish a “launch pad” where book bags “live” and where homework is returned after it’s finished.
3. **Most kids have very little sense of time.** Often, they really do think that one day is enough time to finish that big project. Help your child break big projects down into smaller steps.

Source: M.L. Kutscher, M.D. and M. Moran, *Organizing the Disorganized Child: Simple Strategies to Succeed in School*, HarperCollins.

Tackle social problems before they affect school performance



“I thought she was my friend!” Unfortunately, the classmate who seemed so friendly only wanted to copy your child’s homework.

Learning how to deal with “friends” who turn out not to be friends is a tough lesson. And it’s one that can affect your child’s performance in school and distract her from learning.

Talk to your child about the qualities that make a true friend and encourage her to stay away from classmates who seem:

- **Selfish.** Does the person seem to think and talk mostly about herself? Is she using your child in order to *get* something?
- **Phony.** Does the person say one thing ... and then do another?

- **Dishonest.** Someone who is friends with your child only because she wants to cheat on a test is not really a friend at all.
- **Unreliable.** Did she say she’d walk home with your child after school, but then headed off to someone else’s house instead? Remind your child that she is worthy of *real* friends and should stay clear of those who are not.

Source: R.M. Kidder, *Good Kids, Tough Choices: How Parents Can Help Their Children Do the Right Thing*, Jossey-Bass.

“Truly great friends are hard to find, difficult to leave, and impossible to forget.”

—G. Randolph

When parents talk less, their children actually listen more!



When your child was younger, it was important for him to hear you talk a lot. It’s the way he learned the language that describes the world around him.

Now that your child is older, he needs a lot less narration. Yet many parents of elementary schoolers find themselves talking on and on ... even while their children are listening less and less.

Of course you still want to talk with your child about his day. You want to have conversations about what he did in school and what he’s thinking about. But if you’re like most parents, you’d like to spend less time talking about whether

it’s time to feed the pets or why his clothes are still scattered all over his bedroom floor.

Here are three effective ways to communicate with your child:

1. **Make infrequent requests.** As much as possible, help your child develop a routine for things like homework and daily chores.
2. **Keep the volume down.** Your child doesn’t hear you any more clearly if you yell.
3. **Keep it short.** When you do have to give your child directions, see if you can limit them to five words. So instead of saying, “Jack, I need you to get to the car. Don’t forget your backpack. Do you have your homework?” try saying, “Jack. Homework. Backpack. Car.”

Are you teaching your child how to be resilient?



All students face obstacles. Encouraging resilience helps kids overcome them. Resilient students deal with challenges in positive ways—at home and at school. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are helping your child develop resilience:

- ___ 1. **Do you give your child opportunities to make decisions?** It’s a skill that improves with practice.
- ___ 2. **Do you talk to your child about how you find a solution when you are faced with a problem?**
- ___ 3. **Do you talk to your child about her strengths?** Children draw on their strengths when facing challenges.
- ___ 4. **Do you remind your child when she’s struggling how she has handled tough situations in the past?**
- ___ 5. **Do you listen to your child when she is trying to make a decision without solving the problem for her?**

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are helping your child become more resilient. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

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Parents
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Help your child learn about presidents, values and more



February 15 is Presidents Day in the United States. Try these engaging activities to help your child learn more about

U.S. presidents, money and values:

- **Find a book** with pictures of U.S. presidents. Have your child match those pictures to the faces on coins and bills. Give her pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters. She can also match pictures to one-, five- and twenty-dollar bills.
- **Ask your child** to imagine she's president for a day. Then help her write a short essay, answering several questions: What is her day like? What would she do if she were president? What powers

should a president have? Who is her vice president?

- **Share the famous legend** of George Washington cutting down the cherry tree. Talk about how Lincoln was known as "Honest Abe." Discuss the value of honesty. Ask your child what other qualities a president needs.
- **Take a virtual tour** with your child of Washington's home. Visit www.mountvernon.org/the-estate-gardens/the-mansion/mansion-virtual-tour.
- **Find crafts, coloring pages**, word searches and more fun activities to do with your child at www.dltk-kids.com/crafts/presidents.html.

Raise a responsible student who takes school seriously



One of your child's biggest responsibilities is being a good student. Doing well in school is a key to enjoying life!

It's hard to imagine paying bills without knowing math, for example, or voting in an election without understanding history.

In order to be effective students, kids must take the job seriously—and that requires parents' support. It's important to:

- **Make learning a priority.** Explore the world with your child. Visit the library, try new foods and take nature walks. Play games (such as Monopoly) to build important skills. Show your child that learning is fun.
- **Encourage perseverance.** Kids need parents' encouragement to keep trying when homework

and other tasks are tough.

When your child is tempted to give up, provide guidance and a positive outlook. "Let's review the instructions again. I know you can do this!" Compliment effort and progress.

- **Enforce routines.** Children need help creating and sticking with routines that lead to success, such as going to bed, waking up, reading and studying at the same times each day.
- **Wonder together.** Instead of providing answers, let your child take charge sometimes. If he asks you, "Who was the second president?" show him how to find the answer. Use it as an opportunity to learn about other things, too. "I wonder who the second vice president was. Let's go online and see if we can find out."

Q: My son is quite overweight. I have talked with his doctor, and we are working on improving our diet at home. But meanwhile, his grades are dropping and he has almost no friends. What can I do to help my child?

Questions & Answers

A: Your son is not alone. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than one-third of children under the age of 18 are overweight.

Studies show that overweight kids often do poorly in school. Many overweight children don't speak up in class because they are afraid the other kids will make fun of them. They may also lack confidence in their abilities.

Kids who are overweight are also more likely to spend time by themselves. And when they're alone, they're often watching TV, eating—or doing both at the same time.

First, help your son focus on the right thing. He shouldn't worry about the number on the scale. Instead, he should concentrate on establishing habits that will help him feel healthy and strong.

Next, encourage him to get active. Plan frequent family walks. Look for things you can do on the weekends. Go to a park and kick a ball around.

Follow the guidelines your son's doctor sets for his diet. But don't turn yourself into the "food police." Instead, make healthy changes for the whole family, like drinking water instead of soda or juice with dinner.

Finally, talk with your child's teacher. Ask her to support your son in school. She may also have ideas about students your son could spend time with.

It Matters: Motivation

Motivation leads to your child's school success



You don't just want your child to learn. You want your child to *want* to learn! Motivation is part

of being a successful student.

Thankfully, studies show that parents can help if they:

- **Stay involved.** When parents are involved in education, kids do better in school. Make sure you monitor study time and communicate with the teacher regularly.
- **Have a positive attitude.** Let your child know you believe she can succeed in school. And if she struggles, work with the teacher to find solutions.
- **Promote independence.** Give your child age-appropriate freedoms. Let her choose between two places to study, for example.
- **Correct mistakes** in a positive way. Don't say, "You are a poor speller." Try, "You spelled everything right except these two words! I bet you can fix them!"
- **Give specific compliments.** It's better to say, "Your report is so neat. I can read the whole thing," than, "I like your handwriting."
- **Add more to learning.** Let school lessons spark *your* imagination. Visit some interesting, safe, educational websites with your child. Take a trip to the state capital, do a science experiment or figure out a waiter's tip together. The key is to have fun!

Source: E. Pomerantz, Ph.D., "Six Principles to Motivate Your Child to do Well in School," Academia, niswc.com/elem_motivate.

Ask yourself three questions when setting expectations

Studies link high expectations to high accomplishment. But how can you tell if your expectations for your child are also realistic? After all, you want to motivate him, not set him up for failure.

When setting expectations, ask yourself these three questions:

1. **Are they appropriate?** Take your child's development into consideration. In addition to his age, think about his personality and maturity. Goals shouldn't be too easy or too difficult for him to reach.
2. **Are they easy to understand?** State expectations in simple, clear terms. "I expect you to start your homework at 4:00 each day."
3. **Are they important?** Choose expectations that focus on the behaviors you want your child



to develop. If you want him to be respectful and to succeed in school, for example, set expectations that promote those outcomes.

Source: K.V. Thompson, M.S.Ed., "Setting Realistic Expectations for Children & Adolescents," Texas A&M University, niswc.com/elem_expect.

Encourage your child to study and do homework every day!



Sometimes getting kids to do homework is tougher than the homework itself! To increase your child's motivation:

1. **Develop her organization skills.** Help your child devise a system that works for her. She might use a homework folder and make daily to-do lists.
2. **Stick to a routine.** Kids resist less when they're used to working at the same time every day. Let your child choose a quiet, comfortable place to work. And call it "study time" instead of "homework time." If your child doesn't have assignments, she can use the time to read or review.
3. **Help without taking over.** Encourage and guide your child through tough problems. But don't *ever* do the work.
4. **Be a role model.** While your child studies, finish important tasks yourself, such as paying bills or tidying up.
5. **Offer praise, not prizes.** This helps your child become self-motivated—not motivated by things. You might say, "Wow! You kept trying and it paid off!"