



How to Build Critical Thinking Skills

Critical thinking is the disciplined approach of actively and skillfully analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information in order to form a judgement. Below are some strategies that can be incorporated into activities to build critical thinking skills in youth.

Strategy	Description	Examples
Ask Questions	Ask open-ended questions that prompt deeper thinking and exploration.	The beginning of the program, when you are still getting to know youth, is a great opportunity to ask questions to get to know them. Ask questions that require more than a yes or no response, such as "What do you do for fun?" or "What are your 5-year goals?" Need some ideas for questions? Use the Check-in Generator at https://checkin.daresay.io/ .
Evaluate Information	Critically evaluate the credibility, relevance, and reliability of information sources. Identify biases, assumptions, and logical fallacies in arguments and evidence. A few questions to ask youth to help them evaluate sources include "How does the source contribute to the overall understanding of the topic?" and "Does the source present a balanced and objective view of the topic, or is it one-sided?"	Gather articles from a variety of sources such as the New York Times, Huffington Post, and The Onion. Remove any source information. Have youth evaluate the information for credibility, relevance, and reliability. Encourage youth to use this information to help them evaluate sources that may pop up on their social media feeds.
Analyze Arguments	Analyze and deconstruct arguments by identifying claims, evidence, reasoning, and counterarguments. Evaluate the strength and weakness of arguments and consider multiple perspectives.	Find an editorial or op-ed article. Have youth evaluate the strength and weakness of the arguments made in the article. Have them support their arguments with facts and statistics.
Practice Problem-Solving	Provide opportunities for youth to engage in activities that require them to identify and	Create an escape room for youth to do. An escape room is a set of activities that



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	analyze problems, generate creative solutions, and evaluate their effectiveness.	participants must complete to solve a problem and escape the room. While there are actual venues set up for this type of activity, with some alterations it can be done with youth in your program space. A source for some free activities is https://teambuilding.com/blog/escape-room-puzzles .
Encourage Reflection	Encourage youth to reflect on their thinking processes, strategies, and assumptions and how they have evolved over time.	At the end of activities encourage youth to journal and reflect on their thinking processes, strategies, and assumptions, and consider how they can improve. When done over time, youth can start to see how their thoughts and perspectives have changed.
Promote Collaboration	Develop activities that require youth to work as a group to solve problems, analyze information, and evaluate ideas. Collaboration can help youth gain different perspectives and learn from each other's reasoning processes.	Teambuilding activities are a great way to promote collaboration. They are designed to encourage individuals to work together as a group. Lost at Sea is an activity where youth imagine that they are lost at sea and have to rank the importance of what they want to save from their ship. Then, they get together in a group and rank those same items as a team. This activity helps individuals to listen and understand different perspectives. Lost at Sea: https://insight.typepad.co.uk/lost_at_sea.pdf
Use Socratic Questioning	Ask probing questions that are open-ended, challenge assumptions, stimulate discussion, explore alternatives, and encourage deeper exploration of ideas.	Bring in a speaker to host a seminar on healthy lifestyle choices where youth engage in guided discussions around living a healthy life. Encourage the speaker to ask



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	Some Socratic type questions include "Can you provide examples to illustrate your point?" and "What have you learned from this discussion?"	open-ended questions that encourage critical thinking, exploration of ideas, and examination of assumptions.
Provide Diverse Perspectives	Expose youth to diverse perspectives and cultural backgrounds to help them develop empathy and open-mindedness.	Create a role-play scenario that encourages youth to take on different perspectives, roles, and viewpoints. Encourage them to engage in discussions, negotiations, or decision-making processes based on their assigned roles. Topics for role-play scenarios include being involved in community activism, the decision on whether to go to college, or dealing with a disagreement in a workplace setting.
Engage in Debates	Organize debates or structured discussions where students must defend their positions, evaluate opposing arguments, and construct well-reasoned arguments based on evidence and logic.	Set up a debate around a current event for your youth. Split the group in half and assign each group a different side of the argument. Encourage youth to research the pros for their side and the cons for the other side. Youth should back up their arguments with facts, evidence, and logic. Once the research is complete, give time for each side to present their argument and then allow them to rebut the other side. This document can help structure a debate.