

Encouraging Critical Thinking in Teens



Five Tips for Better Reasoning in Children Aged 13 and Up

The ability to think critically and independently is at a premium in today's world. Below are five tips for developing critical thinking for children in their teenage years.



1. Embrace the Teen Perspective

Teenagers have a strong drive to show their independence. This is, of course, a healthy step in their development, as well as for our society as a whole, which thrives on new and diverse perspectives. But adolescents are usually not ready to live on their own right away, and the tension between their drive for independence and their continued reliance on parents can lead to conflict and worrisome behavior.

A strong critical thinking background can help ease this transition since it allows teenagers to assert their unique perspective within an established framework. Adults can aid this transition by having discussions with children on a variety of issues and showing that they value the child's perspective. Don't simply accept flawed views, of course, but rather challenge kids to improve their reasoning and arguments.



2. Learn a Better Way to Criticize

The need for independence often comes out in an unrelenting criticism of adults and "society" in general. To a certain extent, this is a normal reaction to the pressures and conflicts of teenage life.

Adults should do their best not to be too defensive or dismissive. Don't take criticism too personally and escalate the conflict. Try to set an example of patience, curiosity, and openness for children to follow.

Know Your Teen.

As children enter their teenage years, they begin to form the personalities and perspectives that they will carry with them through adulthood. This process can involve a number of growing pains, for parents as well as children, as both try to manage a changing relationship.



Teens also become more and more capable of adult-level reasoning. These emerging skills can help them better cope with social pressures, their own individuality, and the quest to understand and find their place in a complicated and imperfect world.



3. Help Analyze Sources

Teens need guidance to deal with an increasingly complex and often misleading media environment.

Adults should spend time discussing the kinds of questions teens should ask of various media sources. Is the piece meant to be news or opinion? Is this source reliable? Who is putting out the material? Is the content sponsored? Who is the author? What are his or her credentials? What are his or her possible biases?

Such questions will help teens be more critical consumers. They will begin to develop habits of active reading and find greater satisfaction and nuance in learning about the world around them.



4. Support Improved Reasoning

After the age of 13 or 14, children are ready to tackle formal logic. Adults can work on helping young people understand concepts like premise, conclusion, validity, and soundness together with their children.

Training in logic will help teens also analyze step by step many of the arguments they encounter in books and media. They will be better able to identify flawed and purposefully misleading reasoning and evaluate different viewpoints.



5. Find Purpose and Progress

As teenagers become better able to formulate views about society, they often begin to develop deeply held interests and beliefs. These views are indispensable in helping them decide how to continue their educations in college and beyond, and prepare for fulfilling and impactful careers.

Adults should support these views — within reason, of course. Such views are vital for our society as a whole, which achieves genuine progress only through the independent and critical thought of its members.

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Read the Full Critical Thinking Guide Online at [Reboot-Foundation.org](https://reboot-foundation.org).
Together with some of the world's leading researchers, the team at Reboot pulled together a comprehensive guide to supporting the development of critical thinking in children. Read more online.