



# Counselors' Corner

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## Critical Thinking Skills Are Essential for School Success

By Dr. Kenneth Shore

Critical thinking is an essential tool for everyday living—as well as academic success. A key part of teaching children to think critically is helping them become better decision makers and problem solvers. Children with higher-order thinking skills can analyze problems, develop possible solutions, evaluate their merits, and anticipate consequences. Kids need these skills in school, on the playing field, in social situations, and on the job.

The good news is that critical thinking skills can be learned. This does not mean, however, that your child should take a course in reasoning. Critical thinking is best taught in the context of traditional subjects and real-life problems, as happens in many classrooms in New Jersey.

When it comes to critical thinking, parents may be their child's foremost teachers. Here are some strategies you can use to hone your child's thinking skills:

### Pay attention to your language

What you say to your child conveys important concepts. Using past, present, and future tenses helps him learn about sequence. Your use of "if/then" statements provides a lesson in cause and effect, and your use of new vocabulary challenges your child to figure out the meaning from the context. Using words such as "might" and "would" also introduces important concepts.

### Ask thought-provoking questions

This invites your child to engage in new ways of thinking. Rather than asking yes or no questions, or questions which begin with "who," "when," or "where," ask questions that begin with "Why do you suppose...?" If you read to your child, ask him what he thinks will come next and how he would have ended the story. At the same time, be careful not to bombard your child with questions.

### Foster independent thinking

Encourage your child to be intellectually curious and to think on his own. Show respect for his ideas, opinions, and questions. Encourage her inquisitiveness by praising her questions and offering a serious response. By showing respect for your child's thinking skills and promoting confidence in her ability to figure things out, you're helping your child to become a strong, confident thinker.

### Use real-life situations to enhance your child's problem-solving skills

Your child will no doubt face many situations calling for him to make decisions—from what kind of birthday party to have to how to deal with teasing. Allow your child to grapple with these and other issues; show confidence in his ability to deal with them by not intervening too quickly. If he gets stuck or seeks your assistance, help him think through the problem by analyzing the situation, evaluating the alternatives, and having him choose the best solution.

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For further details or information contact your child's guidance counselor:

**Mrs. Kelly Blessing-Maire**

Angelo L. Tomaso School  
(908) 753-5300 x 5305  
[kblessing-maire@warrentboe.org](mailto:kblessing-maire@warrentboe.org)

**Mrs. Patricia Morris**

Central School  
(908) 753-5300 x 5205  
[pmorris@warrentboe.org](mailto:pmorris@warrentboe.org)

**Mrs. Susan Tully**

Mt. Horeb School  
(908) 753-5300 x 5405  
[stully@warrentboe.org](mailto:stully@warrentboe.org)

**Mrs. Diane Langworthy**

Woodland School  
(908) 753-5300 x 5505  
[dlangworthy@warrentboe.org](mailto:dlangworthy@warrentboe.org)

**Mrs. Midge Johnson**

Middle School- 8<sup>th</sup> grade  
(908) 753-5300 x 5005  
[mjohnson@warrentboe.org](mailto:mjohnson@warrentboe.org)

**Ms. Helen Scully**

Middle School - 7<sup>th</sup> grade  
(908) 753-5300 x 5007  
[hscully@warrentboe.org](mailto:hscully@warrentboe.org)

**Mrs. Lauren Regal**

Middle School – 6<sup>th</sup> grade  
(908) 753-5300 x 5009  
[lregal@warrentboe.org](mailto:lregal@warrentboe.org)