

TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking is an integrated way of examining information, ideas, and proposals. It involves:

- using your intelligence and knowledge to question, explore, and deal effectively with yourself, others, and life's problems;
- developing your own view of the world by examining ideas and arriving at your own conclusions;
- being receptive to new ideas and willing to analyze issues from different perspectives to develop greater understanding;
- supporting your personal views with reasons and evidence and understanding the reasons and evidence that support alternative viewpoints;
- discussing your ideas with others to test and enrich your thinking.

John Chaffee, *Thinking Critically*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988), p. 59.

Critical thinking allows us to make our own decisions regardless of the opinions of others. The critical thinking process is an integral part of decision making, and should be used during the decision-making experience. Thinking critically will ultimately result in a higher level of decision making, and provide the logic for a clearer sense of direction.

CRITICAL THINKING PROCESS: Testing existing ideas and/or solutions for flaws and errors. Being able to apply logic and make one's own decisions.

The steps of the critical thinking process are:

1. Identify and describe a problem or situation
2. Discriminate between fact and opinion
3. List possible solutions and their consequences
4. Identify personal and/or family values that conflict with the situation
5. Take a defensible position based on logic.

Some questions to ask yourself and use as a guide during the critical thinking/ decision-making process are:

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- Is it against the law, rules, or the teachings of my family or religion?
- Is it harmful to me or to others?
- Would it disappoint my family or other adults that are important to me?
- Is it wrong to do? Would I be sorry afterward?
- Would I be hurt or upset if someone did this to me?
- Is it within my value system?

Our attitudes affect the way we think about things. What happens from day to day can make some of our attitudes weaker or stronger. Other people and experiences often influence our attitudes; however, ultimately we are in control of our attitudes and decide how we will react to a situation. New experiences can often bring about change of an old attitude. When you change your mind about something, you are changing your attitude also. We are in charge of our attitudes--we choose to have them and/or hang onto them, or we choose to make changes and/or let them go.

Being prejudiced is an example of an attitude that blocks an individual's ability to think for himself/herself. The quote, "The greatest ignorance is to reject something you know nothing about," illustrates the folly of being prejudiced and the inability to think critically. (source of quote unknown)

Often, our ability to think critically and our attitudes are directly related to how we feel about ourselves. If we are insecure, we think that we will feel better about ourselves if we tear others down.

Opinions are related to attitudes, and can be influenced by the critical thinking process. Original opinions frequently differ vastly from secondary or subsequent opinions after the critical thinking process has been employed. Opinions are how a person feels about a given situation or issue. They develop over a period of time and/or through a series of events.

Our attitudes, opinions, and fears affect our ability to think critically. All of these things are influenced by other people, and other people are influenced by our attitudes, opinions, and fears. However, ultimately we, personally, choose whether or not to be in control of our attitudes, opinions, fears, and actions.