

A main goal of teachers today is to teach students the skills they need to be critical thinkers. Instead of simply memorising facts and ideas, children need to engage in higher levels of thinking to reach their fullest potential. Practicing Higher Order Thinking (HOT) skills outside of school will give children and teens the tools that they need to understand, infer, connect, categorise, create, evaluate, and apply the information they know to find solutions to new and existing problems. Consider the following example to distinguish between memorisation of facts and actually engaging in thoughtful ideas:

After reading a book about Martin Luther King or studying the Civil Rights era, you could choose to ask a child a simple question such as “Who is Martin Luther King, Jr.?” When answering this question, the child can simply provide facts that s/he has memorised. Instead, to promote critical thinking skills, you might ask them “Why do you think that people view Martin Luther King, Jr. as a hero of the civil rights era?” to elicit a more well thought-out response that requires them to apply, connect, be creative with and combine information they previously learned.

What to Do Families can play a significant role in encouraging higher order thinking with their children and teens, even when having a casual conversation. Asking open-ended questions that don't have one “right” answer gives children confidence to respond in creative ways without being afraid of being “wrong.” After reading a book together, a parent might ask their child a question such as: “If you were that character, how would you have persuaded Timothy to turn himself in?” rather than something like “What was the main character's name in the book?”

Below are more examples of questions to ask your child to spark discussion, make them think critically, and encourage higher order thinking.

- When reading a book: “What do you think might happen next?” “Does this remind you of anything from your life?” “Can you tell me about what you read today?” “Why did he/she act that way?”
- When visiting an unfamiliar place: “How is \_\_\_\_\_ similar to/different from \_\_\_\_\_?” “Can you explain/show me that in another way?” “What if \_\_\_\_\_? (you can ask anything here to promote interesting discussion) e.g. every town looked exactly the same, same shops, same type of houses etc
- When making an important decision: “How would you prioritise \_\_\_\_\_?” “How do you imagine \_\_\_\_\_ would look?” “What do you think a solution might be?” “Why did you decide to choose \_\_\_\_\_ over \_\_\_\_\_?”

Try asking children and teens these questions at home and in a variety of educational and noneducational settings. Rather than just having a conversation, you can also ask your child to respond to these questions in writing. Be prepared to respond to your child's answers with even more thought provoking questions to continue to encourage higher levels of thinking, also opening up the lines of communication between parent and child.