

Teaching Critical Thinking

Kirk Durston

A. The importance

1. Research shows the importance of re-teaching your child in the teen years the values, morality, spiritual knowledge and other vital wisdom that you formerly taught only as rules. This time, you teach the underlying reasons, how to make morally responsible decisions, and how to think through things.
2. Without this second, deeper teaching, there is a good chance the young adult will drift away from what had been taught in childhood.
3. The appearance of 'why' questions is an indicator of readiness, of a need to understand, and an opportunity to teach.

B. Teach them how to present a good argument

1. Argument: a series of premises that, when put together, lead to a logical conclusion.
2. The premises should be acceptable. A logically valid argument built upon premises that the other person does not accept will not be very persuasive. It is best to start with premises that the other person grants, even if you do not grant those premises, but can reason to the conclusion you desire.
3. Why teach your children how to present a cogent case for their beliefs?
 - a) Christian faith is not a blind leap in the dark, there are good reasons for the Christian faith, so your child can have a solid basis for their beliefs and faith.
 - b) So that they can explain and defend their beliefs to other people (1 Peter 3:15)
 - c) So that they will be in a better position to recognize and expose a faulty argument
4. Learn and teach the five basic types of arguments:
 - a) *Modus ponens* (If p then q. p is the case. Therefore, q)
 - b) *Modus tollens* (If p then q. q is not the case. Therefore, neither is p)
 - c) *Disjunctive syllogism* (Either p or q. p is not the case. Therefore, q)
 - d) *Hypothetical syllogism* (If p then q. If q then r. p is the case. Therefore r is too.)
 - e) *Constructive dilemma* (If p then q. If r then s. Either p or r is the case. Therefore, either q or s is also the case.)
5. Construct fun examples and pose them in the form of riddles.

6. Ask older children to present their requests in the form of an argument (e.g., why they should buy such and such).
 7. Incorporate critical thinking skills resources into your curriculum (see appendix)
- C. Teach them how to recognize faulty arguments
1. Teach them what an assertion is ... an unsupported statement, a conclusion without any supporting argument. (e.g., 'did so-and-so give any reasons for saying that?')
 2. Teach them to ask one of the golden questions, 'why do you believe that?' (teaches them to put the onus on the person making the assertion.)
 3. Teach them the most common logical fallacies using available curriculum.
 4. For older children, find bad arguments or assertions, ask them to summarize the argument, and tell you what is wrong.

Appendix

- <http://www.christianlogic.com/articles/read/learning-logic-at-home/>
- [The Fallacy Detective](#) teaches logical fallacies and introduces the idea of an inquiring mind.
- [The Thinking Toolbox](#) develops good critical thinking skills including how to analyze opposing viewpoints and the scientific method.
- [Introductory Logic](#) video series by Nance and Wilson covers traditional categorical syllogisms from a Christian perspective.
- [Intermediate Logic](#), by James B. Nance, student text
- [The Art of Reasoning](#) by David Kelley is a standard college-level textbook covering all of logic, including inductive reasoning.