

ENLISTING PARENT SUPPORT FOR MINDFUL LANGUAGE

Since parents, grandparents and caregivers are children's first teachers, it is critical that students encounter these language patterns at home as well as school. Following are some helpful suggestions for parents. We are grateful to the Eau Claire Public Schools for permission to reprint their parent handbook.

HOW TO REALLY LISTEN TO YOUR KIDS

Habits of Mind are modeled by parents and caregivers at home. Following are some simple tips that can serve as a reminder:

1. Start listening early when your children utter their first sounds. Never stop listening. Communicating with your children is a little like staying in shape for a particular sport. You would never expect to be able to play a good game of tennis without a lot of practice. Listening and conversing with your kids works the same way.
2. Be patient. Don't try to pull words out of your children's mouths. Allow them to finish their sentences.
3. Face your child when you speak and when you are listening. Make eye contact.
4. Be a passive presence. Sit on the side of the bed or sandbox. Watch a music video together. Read something aloud. Linger at the foot of your child's bed as you tuck her in for the night. Most children will ramble on just to keep you there.
5. Angry? Wait before you open your mouth to speak.
6. When you go to run an errand, take one child along for the ride. Private conversations increase your chances of hearing wonderful revelations.
7. Ask the right questions. Starting with the word why will always put someone on the defensive, especially a child.
8. Let your child in on something that happened to you. Request an opinion.
9. Think back to what happened in your child's life yesterday and follow up: "How did it go on the playground?" "What did your teacher say about your art project?"
10. Establish a time in your busy life when your child knows you will be available to him. Working moms may want to consider an after-school telephone break, for instance.

11. if you fail to understand why they're upset. Think back to the last time you were in tears about something and another adult said, "Oh, I really wouldn't worry about it." You have a right to your emotions, and so do your children.
12. Put down your newspaper. Turn off the TV. Stop doing your chores for a moment. Put aside all other thoughts and concentrate on the speaker
13. Overlook mispronunciations or grammar mistakes. Listen, instead, for the point of the story.

SKILLS FOR A LIFETIME

BUILDING THINKING SKILLS IN YOUR HOME

The Eau Claire Area Public Schools in Eau Claire, Wisconsin developed a handbook for parents to enlist their support for the Habits of Mind at home. They have translated the Habits of Mind into vocabulary and in situations often found in home life. Grateful appreciation is expressed for allowing it to be reprinted here:

WHAT'S IT ABOUT?

Do your family members...

- explore the consequences of their actions before they decide to do something?
- try to see things from other people's point of view?
- tackle problems and try to figure things out for themselves?
- talk together about situations, asking questions and listening to each other?
- speak up (in a courteous way) for what they believe is right, even when it's not popular?
- realize that they can't believe everything they hear read, or see on television?
- work hard, and not give up on tough problems, puzzles, homework, jobs?
- examine assumptions on taken-for-granted ideas?
- develop a "plan of action" before they launch into a project?

That's what Critical Thinking is all about!
HOW DO YOU DO IT?

How can you create a critical thinking climate in your home? Consciously use language that will help family members think deeply.

- How shall we decide which movie to rent? How would you compare these two?
- You say Andrea is lucky. Could you give me some examples?
- Now that you will be using the family car, what evidence can you give us that you will be a safe driver?
- I wonder how Jeremy feels about moving to Maine. What do you think?
- Which of these two cereals do you think is more nutritious for our family? Let's analyze them.
- I know you're angry with Liz, but what do you predict might happen if you call her and yell at her?
- This is a tough math problem. What strategies have you tried so far?
- What is your plan of action for your Civil War project?
- Based on what we know about (current event), what do you speculate will be the outcome?

Your family members will automatically begin to use this kind of language if you model it. They may ask some hard questions of you. That happens when you promote independent thinking!

DECISION MAKING

Help family member make decisions about their own behavior. Help them think about their own thinking.

To promote critical thinking say:	Instead of:
The noise you are making distracts me. Is there a way you can work so I won't hear you?	Be Quiet
Jane where can you find another place to do your best work?	Jane, quit fooling around and get to work.
I like it when you take turns	No interrupting!
Thank you for the way you came in quietly and got right to work.	Good Girl
What do we need to remember to take with us when we go to the movie?	We're going to the movie, so get your jacket, hat, money and mittens
What do we need to fix lunch?	Get out the bread, butter, lunchmeat, tomatoes, and milk.
What might happen if you don't have that assignment ready tomorrow?	You're going to be in big trouble, Buddy,
Tell me what you do to help yourself remember.	Did you forget <i>again</i> ?
Help me understand why you chose to stop working on the school newspaper.	What? You dropped out of the school newspaper. What a quitter!

From your point of view, explain the fight you had with your sister	Stop fighting! Leave each other alone.
When you say everybody is going to the party, who exactly do you mean?	I don't care if the Queen of England is going. You're not.

HOW DO WE KNOW WHEN IT'S IMPROVING?

When you hear or see family members using deeper thinking, you know that your language and your modeling are paying off. What might you see or hear?

- Your son sticking with his model of the tropical rain forest until he's really pleased with the result.
- Your daughter taking notes and planning the pictures before she starts her pop-up book on giraffes.
- Your son saying to a friend, "Okay, we'll try the game your way. It's a good idea"
- Your daughter, co-editor of the school newspaper, saying, "This issue turned out well, but we had to stay up all night to get it done. Next month we're going to have a plan!"
- Your son checking his biology test to see which concepts he didn't understand.
- Your children asking questions, some of the hard:
 - I wonder why some plants are meat-eaters
 - Why does Joey get to ride his bike to the Y? I didn't at his age.
 - How can countries settle their problems without wars?
 - Why did I get in free, Dad? It says, "Twelve and under, no charge." I'm *thirteen*.
 - What do you mean, Mom, when you say I'm just like my dad?
- Your daughter, at a slumber party with friends, saying, "Let's see how many ideas we can come up with for next week's party."

- Your child trying new activities, even though he/she isn't very good at them.
- Your child showing eagerness and curiosity to explore the world and learning to solve problems: digging in the garden, taking apart an owl pellet, fixing his/her own bike, collecting leaves and lightning bugs, building with wood or straws or toothpicks, and addressing community issues.

Learn to recognize these critical thinking behaviors within your family, and reinforce them.

In summary, how can you help create a climate in you home that foster critical thinking?

- Encourage looking at issues and situations from many points of view.
- Use language and questions that will trigger deeper thought.
- Give your child information to find a solution instead of telling him/her the solution.
- Ask your children to think and tell you about their own thinking.
- Help your child to use precise words instead of generalizations.
- Use "thinking words" such as compare, analyze, predict, classify, conclude, give evidence.
- Allow you children to look at a problem, decide what is needed and act.
- Let your child see you trying new things, learning, growing, and thinking through problems

Be thinkers together. We're always improving in our thinking, and we all have a long way to go!

Think on!

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