

Figure 5.5:

Strategic Questions to Promote Your Child's Thinking

In our families, we most often ask questions in order to get children to think. We don't merely want children to give us the right answer. Changing how we pose a question significantly affects whether or not children are really invited to think or simply reply with what they think we want to hear. Rephrasing our words to *Take some time to think*, *Share your thinking*, and *Think about some possibilities*, more accurately conveys the clear expectations to children that we want them to engage in higher-level thinking (Dillon, 2015).

Children mentally engage and use language more elaborately when asked to explain or describe. They benefit substantially as they think through their responses and figure out ways to express what they feel, understand, or want to say. Our children's responses to our open-ended probes help us discover what they know and how they feel.

Let's consider eight attitude adjustments to incorporate during family occasions when questioning can promote children to risk thinking instead of retreating.

- Be *communicative* not *combative*. To encourage children to engage, convey a spirit of information seeking and interaction rather than interrogation.
- Understand that vocal tone and context are important. A pleasant inflection in

your voice helps children understand that you are quite interested in their ideas.

- Ask questions children cannot answer with a simple *yes* or *no* or an instant check on the Internet.

Yes or no questions relate to known information from the past. Open-ended questions require children to think more deeply and connect new ideas for their future learning habits.

- Rely on questions that begin with: *why*, *what if*, *who*, *when*, *what do you think about*, *in what ways can you*, *where*, *what*, or *how*.
- Do not accept, *I don't know*, as a response from your child. Many kids have learned to use that response as a way of disengaging and getting off the hot seat (Shrum, 2015). Follow-up with a probing question, such as *What might be the first step?* or *What do you think we should do*.
- Ask probing questions to promote higher cognitive responses and deeper understanding. For example, when your child answers with a simple response, sometimes probe further by asking, *How did you figure that out?* or *Why do you think that?*

- Practice *wait time* by allowing children time to think. Questions that children can answer instantly are often simple rather than inquiries that invite deeper levels of thinking.
- Dedicate an adequate amount of time so kids can process this more complex thinking task and express their learning in original ways rather than simply aim for quick answers.

The following questions are variations of nine strategic questions some teachers use to promote higher cognitive responses and deeper understanding. These easy-to-remember questions work in a lot of different situations and can help you facilitate higher thinking responses at home.

Use them when:

- ✓ Talking about work from school.
- ✓ A homework problem develops.
- ✓ Reading with your child and discussing the meaning of the story.
- ✓ Power struggles emerge.
- ✓ You want to engage children in describing and explaining information more than merely expecting them to conform and follow a command.

These simple yet strategic questions can foster your child's thinking and personal perspective. Skim these nine questions to determine if one or more seems natural to your style. Then, keep your selected questions in mind as you encourage your child to go beyond simple, basic, quick answers.

Nine Strategic Questions that Promote Deeper Thinking

1. What are one or two things you can tell me or show me about this?

Nonjudgmental questions are effective interactions when reviewing school work with your child. It helps take the focus off of just earning the grade and emphasizes the child's perspective and learning. It may also prompt feelings and attitudes.

2. What did you learn doing this?

This is an important response to your child's homework or projects. It indicates your confidence in their ideas and encourages them to actively engage rather than passively wait for your opinion. It also conveys our clear expectations for advanced children to continue to learn rather than merely perform with high grades. As with the previous question, this may prompt related feelings and attitudes.

3. What do you notice?

This question might be useful as you discuss your child's schoolwork, watch an informative video, spend time in the car, or read together. Children often see connections that adults miss. Asking this question validates the merits of observation, signals that we are interested in their perspectives, and invites kids to visually monitor their work and environment.

4. How did you figure that out?

In some instances, this response can be more significant to children's future learning efforts than merely possessing a correct answer. This question prompts them to analyze their process and bring their strategies to a conscious level. Identifying strategies enables them to refine and more effectively apply that process in other learning situations.

5. What else can you tell me or show me to help me understand?

This follow-up question validates to children that they have information that interests us and can benefit us. It encourages them to elaborate, think more extensively, and offer evidence for their reasoning.

6. Why do you think that is valid?

Valid is an important word to use in context and explore with all ages of children. Substantiation of credibility is important in this digital age of rapid access to information and opinion.

7. How could this be changed to make it better?

Many gifted kids comment that if they had more time or knew what they now understand, they could have done something differently. Rather than just suggesting that a response is flawed, this question invites children to think both critically and creatively about current accomplishments and future directions.

8. What's next?

Use this question as an invitation for children to identify and share their ideas for future projects or goals. It relates to them that we are interested in their continued learning.

9. What questions can you ask?

Sometimes we learn more from our children by the questions they ask rather than the answers they provide. Kids posing their own questions may tantalize their curiosities and set them on a quest to learn.

Questions requiring *yes* or *no* or simple answers will remain a staple in family interactions due to the demands of day-to-day life. However, adopt the goal of incorporating more questions that lead children to think critically and creatively. Ask questions that invite children to analyze and adapt current information to construct new connections. Be a family who engages one another in high-level thinking as a problem-solving habit.

References

- Dillon, J. (2015). *The tyranny of the "right" answer*. Retrieved July 22, 2015, from <http://smartblogs.com/education/2015/07/22/the-tyranny-of-the-right-answer/>
- Shrum, D. (2015). Einstein's 55 minutes. *ASCD Express*, 10, 9.