

# MIND in the Making

The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

## Executive Function Life Skill: Critical Thinking

Critical Thinking is the ongoing search for **valid and reliable knowledge to guide beliefs, decisions and actions.**

## Suggestions for Promoting Critical Thinking



### Tip:

Edgar is careful about how he gathers information about the disappearance of Slurpy (the fish) and other stolen items. He observes, interviews people, asks questions, takes notes, and develops theories. Talk with your child about the process Edgar used to try to solve the mystery:

- “What clues did Edgar use to try solve the mysterious disappearance of so many things from his classroom? What clues did his classmates use?”
- “Their teacher Mrs. Herschel reminds the children that a shoe print near the crime doesn’t mean that the shoe print belongs to the criminal. Which clues were most effective? How about Edgar’s conclusion that eyeballs never lie?”
- “Can you step back and describe the process the children used to solve the crime?”
- “Who did you think the thief was as you read this book? Why?”



### Skill:

When you talk about the character’s actions in solving the mystery, you are pointing out the **decision-making process used to gather information** to think critically, including **creating and testing theories**, which call on **Executive Function** skills.



### Tip:

Mrs. Herschel says. “I suggest we keep our minds open. Use your powers of observation. Consider all of the possibilities. Remember the culprit is sometimes the opposite of who you’d expect.” Talk with your child about a time he or she thought something was one way and then—after getting more information—came to a new conclusion.

## Edgar Allan’s Official Crime Investigation Notebook

By Mary Amato

*Edgar Allan’s Official Crime Investigation Notebook* begins with the theft of a fish in his fifth grade classroom and a poem left as a clue. Other thefts and mysterious clues follow, that Edgar, often in competition, sometimes in cooperation with his classmates, become passionate about solving.



High-quality books and educational resources from First Book supporting research-based Life Skills from *Mind in the Making* by Ellen Galinsky



Find more books and materials on the First Book Marketplace, a resource available exclusively to educators and programs serving children in need. [www.fbmarketplace.org](http://www.fbmarketplace.org).

You will notice that these tips promote two child development principles: **Serve and Return** and **Executive Function** skills.

**Serve and Return**, like game of ball, involves a back and forth conversation between you and your child where you listen, then build on and extend what your child says or does to promote learning.

**Executive Function** skills are skills you use to manage your attention, your feelings, your thoughts and your behavior to reach your goals.

They include being able to pay attention, remember information, think flexibly and exercise self control.

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### Suggestions for Promoting Critical Thinking

#### Skill:

By connecting your child's personal experience to the lessons from this book, you are reinforcing the importance of seeking more information to get the best results. This is very important in Critical Thinking, which is the **search for valid and accurate information.** The back and forth conversation you have with your child is what researchers call "**serve and return.**" Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

#### Tip:

In the beginning of the book, Edgar doesn't feel very good about himself. He writes, "I am a failure. I am giving up." By the end of the book, much has changed—he feels, "THIS IS THE LIFE!" And he writes that even his older brother looked at him with respect. Ask your child:

- "What led to Edgar's changed feelings?" How do you feel when you try something really hard and keep going?"

#### Skill:

The pursuit of knowledge can affect our feelings about ourselves. Talking with your child about why **self-directed learning can be so powerful** broadens his or her understanding of learning.

#### Tip:

The teacher Mr. Crew writes, "A Poem is a Gift." He also makes the point that "every poem is a mystery waiting to be solved." By the end of the book, the children are writing and appreciating poetry more. Ask your child:

- "Did this book affect your views about poetry?"

This book is written on many different levels. The names of the characters have meaning, for example Edgar Allen is named after a famous poet. Take a look at the bonus mystery questions at the end of the book and enjoy them with your child.

#### Skill:

**Answering one question often leads to pursuing other questions.** You are helping your child understand this through your discussion with him or her.

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