

MIND in the Making

The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

Life Skill That Promotes Executive Function (EF): Critical Thinking

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

Suggestions for Promoting Critical Thinking for Ages 9-12

Tip:

The search for clues about the suitcase was partly prompted by questions from the children at the Tokyo center, such as what it would be like to be an orphan or to be sent away from your friends. Ask your child:

- “When you first heard about Hana, what questions did you have about her and her experiences?”

Skill:

Critical Thinking is promoted by **asking questions and then seeking the answers.** This 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:

There were many times when Fumiko Ishioka, the museum director, faced obstacles in her search for Hana’s story. She didn’t know where to turn next for clues or whom to ask when so many were unable to help her. She was concerned that she didn’t have enough time in Hana’s hometown, Nove Mesto and in Prague. Ask your child:

- “What kept the museum director going, even when she faced challenges? Why was it so important for her to pursue this goal?”
- “Have you ever had a goal that seems unreachable and yet you succeeded? What did you do and what did others do to help you?”

Skill:

When you talk with your child about what it takes for the museum director to find answers to her questions, you are helping your child understand that Critical Thinking requires **being able to pursue clues by thinking differently, stay focused** and **not go automatic to get the answers.** **Executive Function** skills are driven by goals.

Hana’s Suitcase

By Karen Levine

Hana’s Suitcase is a true, sad, yet joyful story that spans 70 years and three continents. Told in alternating chapters. Fumiko Ishioka, the director of a newly established Holocaust center in Tokyo, acquires Hana’s suitcase from a concentration camp and then relentlessly pursues Hana’s story to find out who Hana was and what became of her. Her goal is to share Hana’s story so that every child in Japan can learn about the Holocaust.



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.

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

Serve and Return, like a 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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Tip:

The Museum Director took a chance in writing Hana's brother in Canada. As she wrote to him "Please forgive me if my letter hurts you by reminding you of difficult past experiences." In doing so, she shared her larger purpose of letting the children in Japan know about Hana as a person by Hana's brother sharing "anything that feels close to you and Hana, to understand what prejudice, intolerance, and hatred did to young Jewish children." She told him that she wants all children in Japan to learn about the Holocaust. Ask your child:

- "What the Museum Director's approach a good one?" Why or why not? What would you have done to raise a painful issue with someone in the hopes of uncovering the truth?"

Hana's Suitcase contains many original photographs and documents, including the Museum Director's letter to Hana's brother. Ask your child:

- "Did seeing what happened many, many years ago through these documents and photographs make a difference in your feelings and thoughts about this story?"

Skill:

Sometimes the pursuit of valid and reliable information leads people to **deal with difficult emotional issues** (think of the detective shows children may have watched). Understanding how to manage those situations is a part of pursuing Critical Thinking—just as it was for the author of this book to tell Hana's story in a way that makes it come alive.

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