

Critical Thinking in Today's World

YWCA Building Sustainable Futures



Prepared by YWCA Thompson as part of the curriculum of **Steps to Success**, the program documented for Phases Two and Three of the YWCA Building Sustainable Futures project.

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Critical Thinking – Today's Goals

- Explore what critical thinking is
- Practice using this skill to solve problems and identify solutions



About Critical Thinking

- What we're exploring in this workshop is NOT about “being critical” — finding fault—in something or someone.
- Critical thinking is about how to think carefully through an issue before coming to a decision.
- Critical thinking can help us make better decisions by:
 1. Identifying problems as they arise;
 2. Seeking out reliable sources of information to help us make the best possible decisions;
 3. Thinking through our choices and weighing the “pros and cons”;
 4. Coming up with effective solutions.

Warm Up – Getting to Know Each Other

- Please **take up to FIVE Smarties** from the bowl, but don't eat them just yet!
- Now **share one thing about yourself** for each of your Smarties.
- Some ideas for sharing: what's your favourite food, secret talent, dream job, etc.



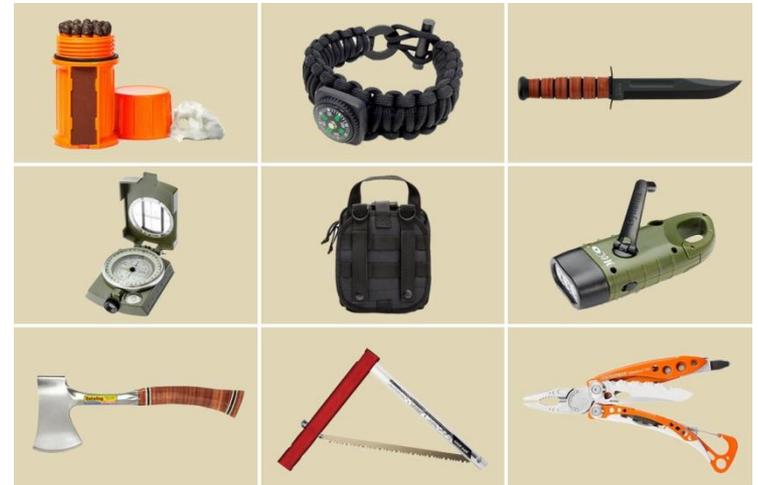
Shipwreck Activity 1

- Imagine that you and your group are on a sailing ship. Suddenly the ship starts to sink really fast. After just a few minutes, the entire ship is under water.
- Fortunately, everyone manages to survive and there's an island not far away. You all find yourselves swimming toward it...



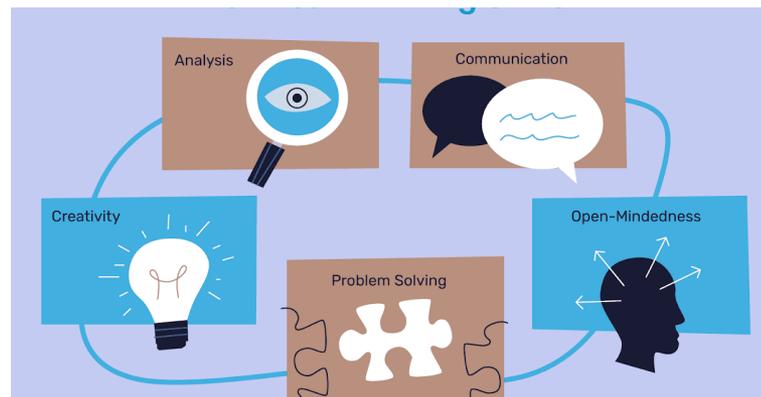
Shipwreck Activity 1

- While swimming to the island, you notice some items floating around in the water—tools that could be helpful to you on your island...
- As a group, choose FOUR TOOLS that you think will help you to survive on the island.
- Keep in mind that you know nothing about the conditions on the island at this time.



What is Critical Thinking

- Critical thinking is a process—of identifying, asking and answering the most useful questions before making a decision. A good decision is an informed one, meaning that you have carefully explored the “pros and cons” before you commit to it.
- YouTube Video: [What is Critical Thinking?](#)



Becoming a Critical Thinker

- This is a skill that we use every day without really noticing. Just like any other skill, we can learn how to get better at it by becoming more aware of how we use it.
- We can start by becoming more aware of ourselves and what influences how we tend to think about things in our lives.
- Here are some questions to ask, to help you to know yourself better:
 - What are your beliefs, your values, your biases?
 - What factors/people/sources of information most influence your thinking?

Becoming a Critical Thinker

A critical thinker:

- Gathers and examines information;
- Looks for inconsistencies—things that “don’t fit”;
- Questions logic—does one fact really flow from another? Does the information make sense?
- Remains open to new information that may change how they look at things;
- Arrives at a carefully thought-out conclusion.

Becoming a Critical Thinker

- It's important to feel comfortable about asking questions—and to continue asking them until we sense that we have a clear understanding of a given situation.
- Along the way:
 - Do some research;
 - Sort out the facts;
 - Consider the source—can it be trusted?



Exploring a Decision Making Technique – Pros and Cons

This technique involves making two lists side by side—one column for pros and the other for cons.

- **Pro**—show arguments in favour of something. Here, we write points that present benefits, advantages and have positive factors.
- **Con**—show arguments against something. Here, we write points that reflect negative impacts or consequences.

Weighing both perspectives should narrow down our thinking to help us identify what is most useful to solve a problem or make a sound decision.

Shipwreck Activity 2

When your group picked four tools earlier to survive on the island, you were already using critical thinking, even if you weren't aware of it!

Now explore your choices using the pros and cons list technique.

Discuss within your group:

- How did you choose and decide how helpful each item would be?
- What sources of information did you use to decide (assumption, past experience, knowledge, etc.)?
- Did you feel any differently about your choice of tools after listing their pros and cons?
- What type of information do you think would be needed/useful to make better choices?

Shipwreck Activity 3

- You will now get a Challenge Card. Each card presents a unique island scenario that you will need to consider carefully if you are to survive...
- You can now trade in the first tools you picked for up to FOUR new tools based on this new information about your island.
- Next, make a second pros and cons list for each of these tools, to rate how useful they are based on your island scenario.



Shipwreck Activity 3

- What is your island scenario?
- If you traded in any of your tools, which ones were they? And why did you trade?
- How did the new information about your island help you to choose?



Critical Thinking for Decision-Making

Now think about a situation in your life when you had to make a **big decision, one that you feel comfortable sharing with the whole group.**

1. What was the situation?
2. What questions did you need answers to, to help you decide?
3. How and where did you get the information you needed to make your choice?
4. How did you weigh the information?
5. Thinking back, would it have helped you to write down the pros and cons?

Lesson Closure

- What were some of the things that you feel you learned from today's exercise?
- How might you apply them in your day-to-day life?

