

Helping New Graduates with Critical Thinking Skills

What is Critical Thinking?

A simple definition of critical thinking is that it is reasonable, reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do. In nursing, critical thinking for clinical decision-making is the ability to think in a systematic and logical manner. We know from evidence that new nurses can be effectively coached to become better critical thinkers. A strong critical thinker can do the following:

- Remain open-minded and mindful of different alternative actions.
- Prioritizes what matters most in clinical situations.
- Desires to be, and is, well-informed in the nursing literature.
- Able to effectively judge the credibility of the evidence.
- Asks appropriate clarifying questions.
- Can explain reasons for actions that were taken.
- Seeks second opinions when unsure about clinical judgment.

Coaching Questions to Promote Critical Thinking

1. **To Organize Care** – Talk me through how you will organize care for these five patients. What should your first actions be?
2. **To Clarify Thinking** - Can you explain more about this situation? What do you think the issue is here? What do you think will happen if you take that action?
3. **To Inspire Reflection** - Why do you think you were successful in that situation? Could you have used another approach?
4. **To Challenge Assumptions** – How do you know that your assumptions are correct in this situation? Is there another way to view this problem?
5. **To Build Accountability** – Based on your nursing experience, what do you suggest that we do here? What changes would be in the best interest of your patients right now? How could you have managed this situation differently? What would great look like right now (if a service recovery issue with a patient)?
6. **To Develop a Growth Mindset** – What would you do here if you knew you could not fail? How could this situation help you to grow? What have you learned about yourself as a professional?