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### CRITICAL THINKING

What does it mean when it is asked, “**Does your child know how to think for himself?**” How do you help your child to think independently? How do you answer that in the everyday context of the home environment and why is that so important? In the Montessori environment children often think for themselves. This may be through the context of choosing materials to work with; the way the child works with the materials; and numerous other scenarios that arise throughout the course of the day. When a child is thinking independently she is using her brain to problem solve seemingly simple everyday “problems.” This is something quite common in the Montessori environment and beneficial for many aspects of life.

**How do you help your child achieve this at home? Ask questions.** The questions can be simple, but they will get your child’s mind working. For example, in the classroom a child might decide that he would like to make a beautiful hand written book of everyone’s name. He might come to the adult and share this epiphany. Considering there is no material entitled, “*How to Make a Beautiful Handwritten Book of Names,*” the child would have to decide how to go about making this book. As the adult, it is easy to say, “That sounds like a great idea! The paper you can use is over here. The pencils are over here and here is the ribbon to tie your book together. Here are the name tags for you to copy.” If the goal is to get the child to think for himself one could simply say, “That sounds like a great idea.” The child may contemplate this and then ask what paper to use, how to make everyone’s names, and what ribbon can he use. If the child was unsure how to start this work, to help him think and problem solve on his own, the questions could be asked of him: “Where is there paper in the classroom? What sounds do you hear when writing \_\_\_\_\_ name? Where is there ribbon available to be used?” It’s in the next moments that the child begins to ponder; process, and problem solve what steps are needed to get this task accomplished. Alas! He is thinking for himself! Anything the child can do in the classroom can also be done at home. This means we need to continue asking questions—and the environment needs to be prepared for him to be successful. For example, when the child exclaims that they have just spilled milk on the floor and stepped in it, pause for a moment and let their brains ponder and process. Leave the towel on the counter and the socks in the drawer. Ask what he can use to clean up the milk. Ask what he should do if he doesn’t like wearing wet socks. If a child states that she is thirsty, instead of rushing to get a cup and asking what she would like to drink, ask her what she should do if she is thirsty. Where are the cups in

the house? What is available for drinking? If you can't reach the faucet what can you use to help you? This also means that it is the adult's responsibility to ensure the environment will allow for him/her to be successful on his/her own. When something spills, the child needs access to a towel to clean it up; if his socks are wet, he should be able to reach his own clothes to change. When she is thirsty, the child will also need the ability to pour or access her own drinks independently. She needs cups for use within her reach. She will need a pitcher to pour her own drink or a stool to access the faucet. Although the ideas of cleaning a spill or getting a drink is simple, asking your child questions will allow his/her brains to work through the process and achieve a goal.

**Why is it so important that your child uses his own mind to achieve goals?** The ability to think independently is something that your child will carry with him throughout all aspects of life. It develops his processing, problem solving and critical thinking skills. Thinking for himself will also foster his independence and self-esteem. It will allow him to sequence through logic steps and foresee consequences of his actions. When one is better able to work through the steps logically, think through the scenario and see the outcome, the more likely one is to successfully achieve goals. This success in turn strengthens his/her self-esteem. As a child grows he will build relationships and encounter situations where critical thinking is a must to be successful. It's our responsibility as adults to help foster this invaluable skill to ensure the children in our care achieve their full potential.