



## CREATING A CLIMATE TO FOSTER CRITICAL THINKING

1. **Identify 3 major benefits** that you aim to see by improving thinking---share these with all involved. Examples: Increased confidence, independence and efficiency; better outcomes, less back-peddling and wasted time.
2. **Get organizational support** from top to bottom. Come to a consensus on how critical thinking (CT) is best described in your particular setting. Don't settle for only one way (choose several ways, as CT changes with circumstances).
3. **Create a learning environment:** Get leader/learner/staff agreement on a code of conduct, building empowered partnerships, and developing a personality-sensitive environment. See Code of Conduct and other related handouts at <http://www.alfaroteachsmart.com/handouts.htm> . Also see chapter 6 of Alfaró-LeFevre, 2004.
4. **Stay focused on vision, mission, and values** and help learners/staff to do the same. Teach nurses how to empower patients. Discuss SPEAK UP® handout (<http://www.alfaroteachsmart.com/handouts/JCAHOSPEAKUP.pdf> )
5. **Discuss critical thinking indicators / competencies** with learners/staff early. Make the link to critical thinking explicit in assignments and performance evaluations. See <http://www.alfaroteachsmart.com/cti.htm> .
6. **Be sure they understand principles behind the nursing process**, as ANA standards state that it's a model that promotes an optimum level of care and that underpins all decisions made by nurses. (See Alfaró-LeFevre, 2006)
7. **Provide opportunities to explore individual style preferences** (e.g. personality & learning styles). Give opportunities to practice using strategies and tools that help make the most of brain power (using structured tools promotes being systematic and frees the brain to think of other important things).  
**Examples:** • Mind (concept) mapping • Practice, practice, practice • Checklists & Other Tools.
8. **Stay focused on common goals:** Foster a shared vision of what can be by inspiring learners/staff to care about improving their thinking *in their own way*. Be willing to take *calculated* risks, **keeping patient safety #1**.
9. **Include factors that motivate learners**/staff to *want* to think critically:
  - Refer to expected benefits of improving thinking frequently (see #1 above).
  - Find out what they want to learn first and how they want to learn it (consider using learning contracts).
  - Encourage learners/staff to voice concerns and suggest improvements (use a communications book or suggestion box (consider an electronic one).
  - Stress that success in today (and tomorrow's) workplace depends on CT ability.
  - Point out how much we learn from mistakes and from one another!
  - Change the word "learner" to "participant" whenever appropriate
10. **Model workplace requirements** (self-starting, accountability, collegiality, collaboration, patient care models). Differentiate between academic exercises and applied clinical exercises. Discuss a healthy work environment (see [http://www.aacn.org/aacn/pubpolcy.nsf/Files/HWEStandards/\\$file/HWEStandards.pdf](http://www.aacn.org/aacn/pubpolcy.nsf/Files/HWEStandards/$file/HWEStandards.pdf) .)
11. **Use reflective responses** and encourage learners/staff to do the same (e.g. use of silence, asking for clarification, and use of the word *suspect* --- ("I suspect what may be happening is..."). See Socratic Questioning handout.
12. **Identify what you're doing right.** Aim for small, incremental changes, rather than quantum leaps or radical change.
13. **Foster a collegial approach:** Avoid conveying an evaluative style. Be generous in communicating with staff/learners; make all expectations clear in behavioral ways (what behaviors you want to see---give them in writing).
14. **Remember the 80/20 rule:** Re-visit and prioritize. Post fun stuff around to keep the focus on critical thinking (e.g. cartoons or the CT Strategies handout at <http://www.alfaroteachsmart.com/handouts/2CTstrategies.pdf> )
15. **Learn how to give and take constructive criticism** (chapter 6 of Alfaró-LeFevre, 2004). Be a role model---think out loud. Admit human frailties and keep a sense of humor 😊!





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### References

- Alfaro-LeFevre, R. (2004). *Critical thinking and clinical judgment: A practical approach* (3rd.). Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders.
- Alfaro-LeFevre, R. (2006a). *Applying Nursing Process: A tool for critical thinking*. Phila: Lippincott-Williams & Wilkins *Critical thinking and clinical judgment: A practical approach* (3rd.)
- Alfaro-LeFevre, R. (2006b). Critical thinking indicators: 2006 Evidence-based version. Available: [www.AlfaroTeachSmart.com](http://www.AlfaroTeachSmart.com).
- American Nurses Association. (2004). *Nursing scope and standards of performance and standards of clinical practice*. Washington, DC: American Nurses Publishing

