

Common Errors in Critical Thinking (Gambrill, 2005; Gambrill & Gibbs, 2009)

Mistake	Definition	Result in practice
Predigested Thinking	Oversimplifying complex concepts can lead to errors and get in the way of further research (i.e. further assessment of a family if you think you have a general understanding of some risk contributors). Creates a false sense of understanding and inhibits pursuit of deeper understanding.	Overgeneralized or surface-level assessments. Assessments do not include adequate information about family strengths and needs to develop a meaningful service plan.
Doubtful Evidence	Conclusions are accepted even though premises (or arguments) are questionable or vague.	Failing to dig deeper to gather all facts, or not reach out to collaterals for confirmation.
Confirmation Bias	Tendency to seek only information that supports initial beliefs and ignore information that may be contradictory.	Considering only supporting information in assessments.
Relying on Newness/Tradition Fallacy	Idea that the old way (or new way) of doing business is the best way because it has been practiced for a long time and yet there is no data to suggest it is effective.	Failing to learn new/different/best practice strategies because of comfort with old way (i.e. failure to accurately apply SACWIS and CAPMIS because of familiarity and comfort with FRAM and pen & paper).
Groupthink	People who seek agreement are dominant in a cohesive group and it overrides realistic appraisal of alternative courses of action.	Agency practice as a whole is challenged because of this (i.e. do not do voluntary out of home safety plans because they never work).
Irrelevant Appeals	Focus on background, habits, associates, or personality are attacked or appealed to regardless of the facts or relevant information. The assumption that a person's character or habits are passed on to descendants- the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.	Assessing people based on their personalities, backgrounds, etc. without consideration of the individualized specific facts for each person's situation.

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Relying on Testimonials	Relying on one or a few people's testimony that something benefited them.	Choosing services because there are a few people who "testify" to the benefits of a particular service that may not actually be supported by evidence.
Appeal to unfounded authority	Using irrelevant or perceived authority to sell a point or position.	Accepting law enforcement or court claims about children and families because of their authority without considering personal expertise or assessment information or best practice.
Ad Hominem	Attacking or praising the person rather than examining the substance of the argument or information.	"This family has a good job, well-off and a nice home, they don't abuse their children."
Stereotyping	Oversimplified generalization about a group of people.	Believing that all members of a cultural/racial/ethnic group are the same and using this information incorrectly in assessment, engagement or service planning.
Manner of Style	Believing an argument because of the apparent sincerity, speaking voice, attractiveness, stage presence, likeability, etc.	Include or believe information in assessment or fact gathering activities because of the way or manner a person presents.
Fundamental Attribution Error	Tendency to attribute behavior to personality traits and overlook environmental influences.	Incomplete or inaccurate assessments that result in service plans that do not address concerns or reduce the risk of future maltreatment to children.
Framing effects	Posing a decision in a certain way to influence—posing it in a way that only emphasizes positive affects...	Framing case conclusions positively or negatively without attending to other information in assessments.
Overconfidence	Inflated belief in the accuracy of your judgements.	Years of experience and subsequently not looking at each situation completely.

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Law of small numbers	Belief that because you have knowledge of a few cases, you are an expert	I am a GLBT person so I know how all GLBT people are.
Omission Bias	Tendency to judge harmful actions as worse compared to taking no action.	When a perpetrator abuses a child and the NOP takes no action- fails to protect, we often judge the perpetrator more harshly than the NOP.
Anchoring and Insufficient Adjustment	Base estimates of the likelihood of events based on initial information and not adjust the estimate in the face of new information	Failing to gather additional and comprehensive information in assessment subsequent to the Initial Safety Assessment

References

- Gambrill, E. D. (2005). *Critical thinking in clinical practice: Improving the quality of judgments and decisions* (2nd ed.). Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley.
- Gambrill, E. D., Gibbs, L. E., & NetLibrary, I. (2009). *Critical thinking for helping professionals: A skills-based workbook* (3rd ed.). Oxford [England] ; New York: Oxford University.