

## Topic: Conscious Decision-Making & Bias

**How to use this guide:** Spaced Education tests recall of job-related knowledge using weekly quiz questions. A child welfare professional/professionals in your unit has received six quiz questions related to the theme “conscious decision-making and bias”. This theme was chosen based on aggregated data trends from critical incident reviews in Wisconsin.

This guide is intended to support supervisors in one-on-one or team discussions to promote critical thinking, address potential bias in decision making and provide a more in-depth analysis about this topic.

The in-depth analysis will be supported by a critical thinking framework within the process of clinical supervision, materials to support understanding various types of bias and how they might show up in child welfare decision making, and specific application to the quiz questions presented in the Spaced Education experience.

Feel free to use the framework, resources and questions below in a way that works best for you and your team.

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**With each repetition, practice carves pathways in the mind,  
transforming knowledge into instinct and skill into second nature.**

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### Clinical/Reflective Supervision

Clinical supervision in child welfare uses a critical thinking framework to review and discuss particular cases in a reflective manner. The focus of clinical supervision moves beyond “case staffing” and reflects on the progress of the case by asking critical questions, providing feedback and coaching using the elements outlined above.

To be successful, a climate of mutual trust and respect is essential for clinical supervision, while using a critical thinking framework.

***\*For additional information about reflective supervision in child welfare, please review [“Task Centered vs. Reflective Supervision”](#)***

### Critical Thinking Framework

Decision-making science indicates that decision makers often rely on strategies involving cognitive processes to help them make choices. Given the complexity of the environment that child welfare decisions are made in (involving limited time, resources and information, strong family emotions, high expectations for accountability, high visibility, high caseloads and intense pressure), using cognitive shortcuts in decision making is understandable, although this may lead to bias and error.

***\*For additional information about the complexity of decision-making in child welfare, please review [“Decision Making in Child Welfare for Improved Safety Outcomes”](#)***

**Bias** – The definition of bias is simply “a feeling or inclination for or against something”. Everyone has biases and they can include beliefs, preferences dislikes, and fears. Implicit bias is a bias or prejudice that is present but not consciously held or recognized. Explicit bias is a personal and unreasoned judgement that we have about a person, place or thing on a conscious level.

# Spaced Education Discussion Guide



While bias is interconnected with our universal experience, it may influence decision making that is harmful to others (for example, bias may contribute to the disproportionality and disparity that currently exists in child welfare systems).

***\*For additional information about types of bias and examples in child welfare, please review [“Types of Bias in Child Welfare”](#)***

**Critical thinking** is essential to good decision-making and ethical practice (Gambrill, 2005). The process of critical thinking involves gathering data from multiple sources, analyzing the information through the process of reflection, and ultimately synthesizing this evidence to support decision-making (Lietz, 2010).

Critical thinking requires openness to considering multiple perspectives and creativity to uncover multiple options or responses using the following elements:

- **Suspending judgment**
- **Collecting data from a variety of sources**
- **Evaluating the quality of the evidence**
- **Managing personal bias**
- **Engaging in personal and interpersonal reflection to support decision-making**
- **Using evidence to articulate tentative conclusions**
- **Remaining open to contradictory evidence when it becomes available**

***\*For additional information about each of the elements of critical thinking, please review [“Elements of Critical Thinking”](#)***

Supervisors play an integral role in guiding and supporting child welfare professional's decisions that are grounded in critical thinking.

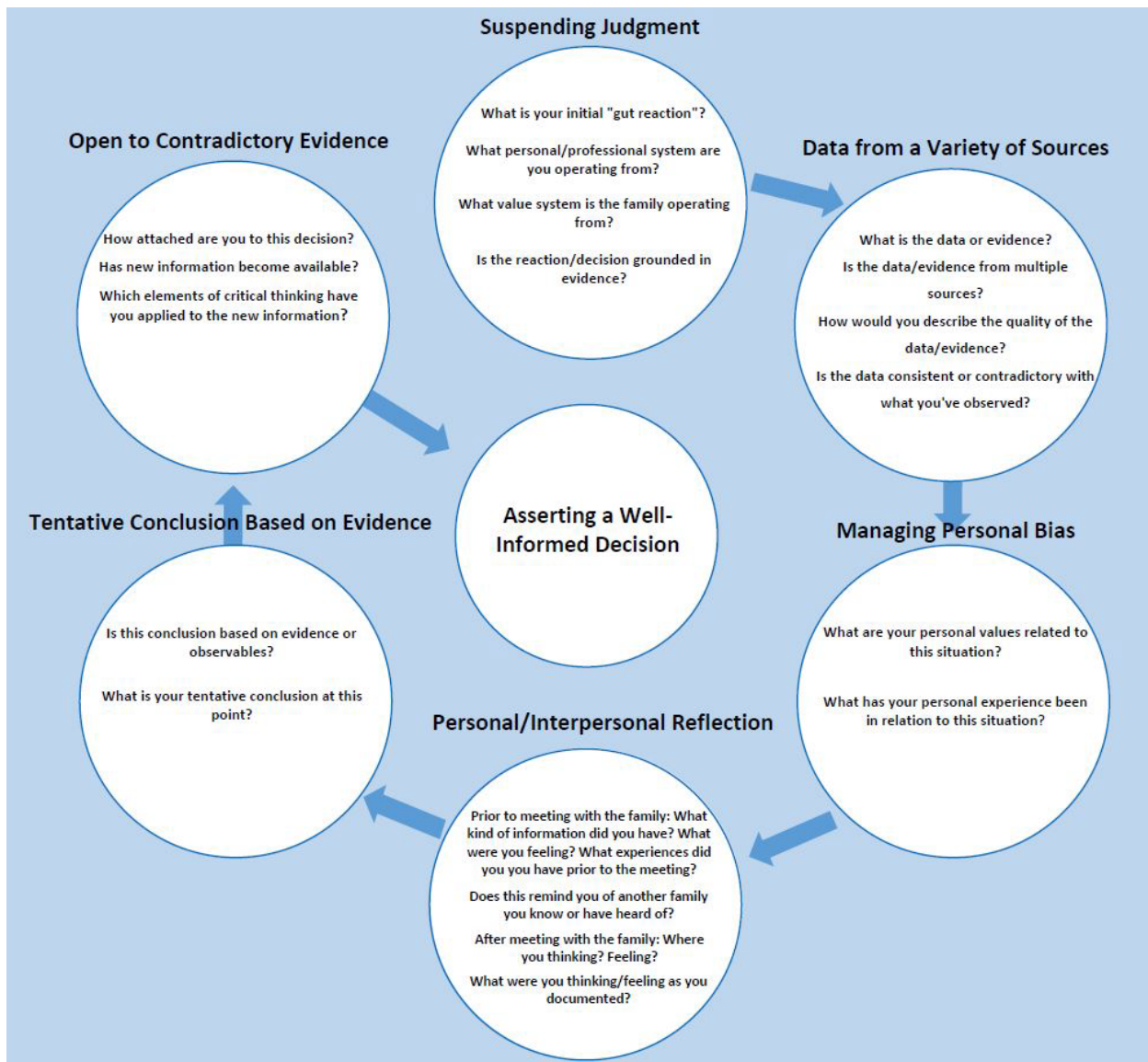
***\*To explore and assess your critical thinking activities with staff, please review [“Dimensions of Critical Thinking Quiz”](#)***

## **Critical Thinking Framework Tool**

The Critical Thinking Framework Tool uses the elements of critical thinking (described above) in an “easy to use” format that guides supervisors through relevant questions and talking points that can be used in reflective supervision with individual staff members or teams.

For the purpose of becoming familiar with the tool, it has been designed to start with the element of “suspending judgement”, moving through all of the elements clockwise and landing on “asserting a well-informed decision”. The tool is flexible - as you become more familiar with the elements and begin to recognize where in the process staff members need extra support, feel free to begin wherever it makes the most sense. If you are using this tool with a team, encourage colleagues to identify the element that may need to be explored and choose questions that are relevant to the situation (you may want to start with hypothetical situations or use those that are part of this guide until comfort with the tool and trust within the team are developed).

***\*[The Critical Thinking Tool](#) template is below and also available here:***



## Application of the Critical Thinking Framework Tool to Spaced Ed Questions

Ultimately, this tool was designed to support supervisors in reinforcing the learning from Spaced Ed: Conscious Decision Making and Bias.

This Supervisor Guide contains Critical Thinking Framework Tools with specific questions for each of the Spaced Ed scenarios.

The specific topics include:

- Access Call from an Anonymous Reporter (Access)
- Upcoming Family Court Custody Case (Access)
- Active Efforts – WICWA (Initial Assessment)
- Non-Household Parent is not Involved (Initial Assessment)
- Family Members are Cooperative and Likeable (Ongoing)
- Domestic Violence and Restraining Order (Ongoing)

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Each scenario contains information about the family specific to the topics listed above, along with a multiple choice or true/false question and the correct answer. In addition, you will find information about the specific bias that may be impacting decisions and information from the standards.

Review the scenarios with staff members who have completed Spaced Ed or your team and ask them to choose various “answers” to walk through the Critical Thinking Framework Tool as a way to reinforce the information learned, critical thinking skills, and trust in supervision or team meetings.

***Each of the individual Spaced Ed scenarios and questions, along with the related Critical Thinking Framework can be found here:***

## **Application of Critical Thinking in Conscious Decision-Making & Bias:**

- [Access Call from an Anonymous Reporter](#) (Access) – [Scenario & Critical Thinking Framework](#)
- [Upcoming Family Court Custody Case](#) (Access) – [Scenario & Critical Thinking Framework](#)
- [Active Efforts – WICWA](#) (Initial Assessment) – [Scenario & Critical Thinking Framework](#)
- [Non-Household Parent is not Involved](#) (Initial Assessment) – [Scenario & Critical Thinking Framework](#)
- [Family Members are Cooperative and Likeable](#) (Ongoing) – [Scenario & Critical Thinking Framework](#)
- [Domestic Violence and Restraining Order](#) (Ongoing) – [Scenario & Critical Thinking Framework](#)

## **Resources**

Resources to support **Decision-Making in Child Welfare:**

[“Decision Making in Child Welfare for Improved Safety Outcomes”](#)

Resources to understand **Bias in Child Welfare:**

[Types of Bias in Child Welfare](#)

Resources to support **Clinical/Reflective Supervision using a critical thinking framework:**

[Task Centered vs. Reflective Supervision](#)

[Elements of Critical Thinking](#)

[Dimensions of Critical Thinking Quiz](#)

[Critical Thinking Framework Tool](#)

Resources to support the **Application of Critical Thinking in Spaced Ed:**

- [Access Call from an Anonymous Reporter](#) (Access) – [Scenario & Critical Thinking Framework](#)
- [Upcoming Family Court Custody Case](#) (Access) – [Scenario & Critical Thinking Framework](#)
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