

I'm stuck; I don't know what to do. Asking the right Questions can Transform Your Paralysis into an Effective Clinical Approach.



As a new nurse, your focus is on understanding the basics of delivering responsible patient care. And as your experience grows, more complex clinical decisions will require you to go beyond the basics in order to respond effectively. Here is a list of recommendations to help you move from the basics to an advanced critical thinker.

1. Self-assessment: get into the habit of doing ongoing self-assessments. Assess what you are doing well and where you are struggling. When you identify your challenges, you can begin to explore where you get stuck and why.

2. Questions to support skill-building efforts:

- a. What are the specific clinical situations where my ability to reason shuts down?
- b. Is there a specific clinical context that I am unable to respond to effectively? If the answer is 'yes', then ask why is this happening?
- c. Do I tend to respond in a similar way to most clinical situations? What other alternative responses can I imagine using? What might happen if I respond in a different way?
- d. What emotions get in the way of using sound clinical judgment? What do I need to do to manage debilitating emotions when they surface and interrupt my ability to think?
- e. What assumptions do I rely on that hinders my ability to think in a more detailed, expansive way?

3. Learn from experienced nurses: many experienced nurses welcome the opportunity to share their thinking process when making complex clinical decisions. Observe your more experienced counterparts as part of your education. If you have a good relationship with your (current or former) preceptor, ask his or her assistance regarding how to go about asking the right type of questions in order to make sound clinical decisions.

4. Ongoing self-assessment: keep self-assessment on your front burner; stay focused on asking questions related to your clinical judgments. The more you engage in this process, the more natural and normal this process will feel to you, and the more skilled you will become.

5. Look for signs of improvement: as you notice improvement in your decision-making capabilities, permit yourself to enjoy your new competencies and share them with others who can benefit learning from you.

Turning fear and a feeling of paralysis into action is a very empowering step for a new nurse. And, remember, you can use this experience in the future when fear

rears its scary head again; just stop and remind yourself of the steps taken in the past to move from fear to action, and you will be on your way!

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