

In-the-Moment Teaching

of the Important Ideas from *Thinking about Thinking*

Thinking about Thinking introduces basic, important concepts about **thinking**. The content is visual, direct, and interactive to foster learning. *Thinking about Thinking* is meant to be a springboard to help kids be more active thinkers. We are passionate in our belief that active thinking helps kids build all kinds of communication, social, coping, and problem-solving skills and abilities.

Because certain kids with autism struggle to understand abstract concepts, in-the-moment teaching will be critical to the learning process of *Thinking about Thinking*. Many kids will need help to be able to relate personally to thinking concepts. This is where parents come in! They can turn even the most routine activity into a quick opportunity for connecting these concepts to a child's own life experiences.

In addition to the in-the-moment teaching examples we include in *Thinking about Thinking*, here are more. In all of them, parents use some combination of **our favorite strategies for teaching thinking concepts**:

- **Describe** what a child is thinking.
- **Compare** what people are thinking.
- **Respond** when a child communicates.

Always consult with your child's team on your efforts to help your child make progress on communication, social, coping, and problem-solving. Show them our examples.

Additional examples of in-the-moment teaching on *Thinking about Thinking*

At the playground, while Riley is climbing up the ladder for the slide, he says, “Go up.”

Mom responds, “Yes! Riley is going up. Riley is thinking about going up the ladder.”

→ Mom describes what Riley is thinking to help him better understand what the concept of **thinking** means. We realize it sounds awkward or odd to say out loud to a child what she/he is thinking. However, this kind of real-time describing, when done frequently, will often make a big difference in getting abstract concepts “to stick” for a child.

Dad is with Hunter and Grace who are both painting intently and quietly.

Dad says, “*Hunter and Grace are both thinking quietly while they paint. Hunter is thinking he wants his tree to be green. Grace is thinking she wants her tree to be purple. You two are having different thoughts about the color.*”

- Real-time comparison of thoughts is often the best way to help a child truly understand that others think differently than she/he does. So many kids with autism struggle with this; it's not uncommon for a child with autism to assume that others think the same way as he or she does.

At dinner, Caleb says, “*Mmm. Mac n' cheese!*”

Dad responds, “*Caleb says, ‘Mmm, mac n' cheese!’ Caleb, you are thinking you love mac n' cheese! I love mac n' cheese, too! We are thinking the same thing about mac n' cheese!*”

- If your child has expressive communication challenges and/or is not social, it is very important that you make every effort to respond quickly and enthusiastically when your child makes a spontaneous communication.

Mom and Mia are getting ready to leave the house.

When Mom tries to put on Mia's hat, Mia pushes it away.

Mom says, “*Mia is thinking no hat. Mommy is thinking yes hat because it is so cold outside. Mia, first hat, then playground.*”

- Note: In addition to doing some in-the-moment comparing of what she and her daughter were thinking, Mom also took advantage of what would motivate her child (going to the playground) to get her to agree to wear the hat. The use of **first ..., then...** with kids with autism (or any kid for that matter), can be a very useful tool for parents. **First ..., then ...** is also a natural part of the routines and happenings of daily life. Yet this extremely important concept can be hard for children with autism. If your child does not understand it, talk to your child's team about a plan for helping your child learn the concept (a visual support can be very helpful).

Annie has just told Ella she is stupid for liking a particular video, because the video “is so bad.”

Dad says, “*Ella thinks the video is good. Annie, you think the video is bad. Annie, it is okay that Ella thinks a different thought about the video. Let’s look at your ‘MooBoo for Me’ right now. See, it says right here that it OK when people think different thoughts.*”

- There is a visual of the important ideas from LEARN (in the *Printables* download that is included in your purchase). Keep this *MooBoo for Me* in a handy location. As you do in-the-moment teaching, point to the important idea(s) you are covering.

Mom and Dad are talking in front of Jake, and they pretend to disagree about who will take out the trash. They use humor to engage him.

Dad says, “*Mommy thinks it’s my turn to take out the trash. But I’m so tired. I’m too tired to take out the trash. I’m going to lie down on the floor right now and take a nap.*” [Dad lies on the floor, closes his eyes, and makes loud snoring noises.]

Mom then says, “*I think Daddy is pretending to sleep so he won’t have to take out the trash. Nice try Daddy, time to get up and take out the trash!*”

- For kids who like to laugh, humorous role play can be an awesome form of in-the-moment teaching.

Note that all children learn at a different pace. Some children will catch on very quickly. For others, understanding and connecting personally with abstract concepts will happen more slowly, through patient, repeated in-the-moment teaching. If despite your efforts, your child is not making progress, talk to your child’s team.

