

# Improve Social Thinking



Photo Credit: [Siena College](#)

Social thinking is the ability to label and describe the feelings of yourself as well as the feelings of others, and realize the causes of emotional experiences. This skill helps an individual to recognize the needs of others and is very important in seeing things from the perspective of another. This skill is also essential for cooperation in social settings. In order to improve Social thinking requires the ability to read non-verbal cues, understand social conventions, and show care and concern for others.

## Home and School Situations Requiring Social Thinking

- Completing group assignments or projects
- Understanding why a sibling or peer is upset
- Modulating one's attitude to be appropriate for the setting
- Helping a parent to clean or do chores
- Letting another child borrow a possession, such as a toy

or pencil

- Helping a teacher with classroom chores
- Being a member of a sports team or club

## Hints and Strategies to Improve Social Thinking

1. Help your child set up a play date with a friend. Prior to the friend's arrival, try to anticipate some of the friend's needs and interests. Have your child prepare activities that their friend is expected to enjoy. Additionally, have your child help you in preparing for other house guests, such as grandparents, cousins, or family friends, with a similar theme in mind.

2. Use a digital camera or digital video camera to record a range of social interactions. Later, review the pictures or video with your child, while asking him/her to describe their observations of these social and emotional cues. Provide your child with hints and specific observations, such as facial expressions, physical gestures, tone of voice, eye contact, or movements that may have predictive value.

3. Watch DVDs or a television show without the sound to discuss nonverbal cues. Help your child to create a "script" to what (s)he is seeing as practice for understanding social situations. For example, asking your child to predict what will happen next in a particular scene can be very useful.

4. Find opportunities to discuss what others might be thinking. For example, discuss how another child might be feeling before giving a speech in front of the school, putting on a performance at a dance recital, or staying home alone for the first time. Find other opportunities to discuss how people are feeling. Some examples of other opportunities may include the following: when people learn about an accident, or while observing someone earning an award for an accomplishment.

Initially model and verbalize your experience or feelings while engaged in a joint activity, and then ask your child to briefly describe their thoughts or feelings.

5. Practice complimenting others and being positive. This is an important skill that can help your child to get along with others because it is encouraging to others. Model this behavior and praise your child when they make an effort to compliment someone.

6. Have a Family Game Night. This can be done using either traditional board games or interactive games such as games for the Nintendo Wii. Board games such as "*Monopoly*" and "*Boggle*," are available electronically, as well as interactive family video-games such as "*Rock Band*." All games have multi-player modes in which cooperation and encouragement are necessary. These games also offer great opportunities for your child to praise others who are on their team, demonstrate how to use the electronics so others can understand them, or learn how to give advice or suggestions in a helpful fashion.

7. Require participation in at least one after school group activity per week. Many children who struggle with social thinking skills do not have opportunities to practice these skills due to avoidance of social situations or difficulties they have experienced in the past. It is best for them to be involved in an after school activity in which they have a distinct interest and some expertise. Practice and training prior to involvement in the after school program will help your child to have some type of expertise to offer peers and will also serve to enhance your child's self-esteem. For example, a child who joins a computer club should be given opportunities to use computers at home, and directed to learn about computer-based activities in which peers are likely to share an interest.

8. Find after school activities that are welcoming to children who have experienced some difficulties in social thinking

skills. One such activity is cross-country teams, particularly at the elementary and middle school levels in which a child's individual performance is highly unlikely to have an impact on the overall team performance. This is a good example of an activity in which all children receive encouragement from their peers. Involvement in theater activities often requires stage crews, lighting, and technical support that are done behind-the-scenes which would be appropriate for children who have difficulties in areas of social thinking. Volunteer activities which provide community service are also opportunities to improve self-esteem and social skills in a non-competitive fashion.

## **Games and Activities That Can Practice Social Thinking**

*Wii Games (e.g. "Wii Play," "Wii Sports," etc.)* – Playing Nintendo Wii games with a friend or sibling allows your child to practice taking turns, making conversation, sharing techniques, and accepting defeat in a face-to-face setting.

*"The Sims"* – In creating characters, your child has the opportunity to initiate and observe characters interacting socially with one another. "The Sims" also offers a variety of ways for characters to socialize with one another, including networking, acting friendly, and using ice breakers, which allows your child to experiment with different social mechanisms.

*"Rollercoaster Tycoon"* – Customers of your child's rollercoaster park will report their likes and dislikes, forcing your child to make appropriate changes based on this feedback in order to maintain the park successfully.

*"Webkinz"* – This site allows your child to chat and interact safely with other pet owners online.

Joining a sports team or club (e.g. Little League, Scouts) – Joining an organization, such as a sports team or club, provides your child with the opportunity to interact with a diversity of peers, offering an outlet to practice introductions, perfect social skills, and plan play-dates.

*“Apples to Apples”* – This game allows your child to interact with friends and family members in a face-to-face setting. It also emphasizes trying to predict what other players will like, allowing your child the opportunity to practice recognizing what others are thinking.

*“Guess Who?”* – This classic guessing game offers your child the opportunity to interact with a peer, while recognizing facial expressions and physical features on the cards and reinforcing effective verbal and conversation skills.

*Visiting or volunteering in an unfamiliar environment* – The unfamiliarity will help your child to gain practice in making conclusions based on her own observations and also to practice introducing herself and interacting with any strangers encountered in these settings.

*Taking on different roles during make-believe play* – Role-playing will allow your child to learn to take on the roles of others during imaginary play, hopefully allowing him/her to extend this skill to real-life settings.

## **Websites and Articles on Social Thinking**

[LearningWorks for Kids](#): The premier resource for executive function information, offering a detailed explanation of social thinking, tips for parents, and activities to improve this skill.

[Everyday Health Network](#): Author provides five tips to help children, specifically those with ADD/ADHD, successfully

develop their social skills.

## Books on Social Thinking

[Attention, Girls!: A Guide to Learn All About Your Ad/Hd](#) by Patricia O. Quinn, MD. (Ch. 9)“Contains practical ways to improve organization, focus, study and homework skills, as well as information on making and keeping friends, dealing with emotions, improving self-esteem, overcoming sleep problems, understanding medication, and managing anxiety.” – Amazon

[Bright Kids Who Can't Keep Up: Help Your Child Overcome Slow Processing Speed and Succeed in a Fast-Paced World](#) by Ellen Braaten, PhD, and Brian Willoughby, PhD. (Ch. 7)“ Filled with vivid stories and examples, this crucial resource demystifies processing speed and shows how to help kids (ages 5 to 18) catch up in this key area of development.”- Amazon

[Communication Skills for Teens: How to Listen, Express & Connect for Success](#) by Michelle Skeen, PsyD | Matthew McKay, PhD| Patrick Fanning | Kelly Skeen.(Ch. 2-7)“Communication is an essential life skill that every teen must learn. Based on the New Harbinger classic, Messages, this book will teach you the necessary skills—such as assertiveness, active listening, and compassion—to become an effective communicator for life.” – Amazon

[Executive Functioning Workbook for Kids: 40 Fun Activities to Build Memory, Flexible Thinking, and Self-Control Skills at Home, in School, and Beyond](#) by Sharon Grand, PhD, BCN. (Ch. 4,5) “Help kids grow their executive functioning skills with activities for ages 6 to 9!”- Amazon

[Fighting Invisible Tigers: Stress Management for Teens](#) by Earl Hipp. (Ch. 5)“Fresh edition of a popular title offers teens straightforward advice on stress management, anxiety reduction, and digital well-being.”- Amazon

[Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence](#) by Daniel Coleman (Part 3)“In Focus, Psychologist and journalist Daniel Goleman, author of the #1 international best-seller Emotional Intelligence, offers a groundbreaking look at today’s scarcest resource and the secret to high performance and fulfillment: attention.”- Amazon

[Just As You Are: A Teen’s Guide To Self-Acceptance & Lasting Self-Esteem](#) by Michelle Skeen, PsyD, Kelly Skeen. (Ch. 4)“Stop comparing yourself to others—you’re special just as you are! In this fun, practical guide, you’ll learn how to silence your nit-picky inner critic, cultivate self-compassion, and discover what really matters to you.” – Amazon

[Knowing Yourself, Knowing Others: A Workbook for Children with Asperger’s Disorder, Nonverbal Learning Disorder, and Other Social-Skill Problems](#) by Barbara Cooper, MPS, Nancy Widdows, MS.(Activity 31-36)“Knowing Yourself, Knowing Others includes activities that will help kids with Asperger’s disorder and related conditions learn how to read social cues, avoid meltdowns, understand others’ needs and intentions, resolve conflicts with friends, build basic nonverbal skills, and more.”- Amazon

[NurtureShock: New Thinking About Children](#) by Po Bronson & Ashley Merryman (Ch. 9)“With impeccable storytelling and razor-sharp analysis, they demonstrate that many of modern society’s strategies for nurturing children are in fact backfiring—because key twists in the science have been overlooked.”-Amazon

[Raising Independent, Self-Confident Kids: Nine Essential Skills to Teach Your Child or Your Teen](#) by Wendy L. Moss, PhD, and Donald A. Moses, MD. (Ch. 7)“In this book, child development experts Wendy L. Moss, PhD, and Donald A. Moses, MD, examine the key skills parents need to help their kids emerge as confident, and capable adults.”- Amazon

[The ADHD Workbook for Kids: Helping Children Gain Self-Confidence, Social Skills, and Self-Control \(Instant Help Book for Parents & Kids\)](#) by Lawrence E. Shapiro, PH.D. (Section 3)“The ADHD Workbook for Kids offers a simple way to help children with ADHD learn these critical skills in just ten minutes a day.” – Amazon

[Too Stressed to Think: A Teen Guide to Staying Sane When Life Makes You Crazy](#) by Annie Fox, M.Ed., and Ruth Kirschner. (Part 2)“Quotes from real teens remind readers that they’re not alone—that stress affects everyone, but it doesn’t have to ruin your life. Includes resources.” – Amazon

[Tween You & Me: A Preteen Guide to Becoming Your Best Self](#) by Deb Dunham. (Ch. 2,3) “In this positive and empowering book, Deb Dunham, tween self-esteem expert and mentor, provides the tools you need to feel really good about yourself.” – Amazon

Visit the [South County Child & Family Consultants](#) website for more great articles!