

Social Thinking® Vocabulary for the Early Learner

- **Thoughts and feelings** - Social learning is all about thoughts and feelings. The ability to think about others, play collaboratively and establish friendships is all about thoughts; knowing our own, sharing them with others and taking others' thoughts into account as we act and react. We introduce these concepts first because all subsequent concepts and vocabulary lessons are tied back to thoughts. (What are you thinking? What do you think I am thinking? What is the group thinking about?) We make the connection to feelings because what we think and what we feel are inseparable.
- **Group plan** - We talk about “the group plan” as a way to help children know what they are expected to think about and do when they are part of a group. When everyone is following the plan, we are all thinking about each other. When we all think about each other, everyone feels good.
- **Thinking with your eyes** - When you think with your eyes you are engaging in an active process that helps you determine what others are thinking, how they are feeling, and subsequently how to respond. It is more than just “looking” at something. Thinking is involved! Expressively we use our eyes to show others what we are thinking about. We look at people to let them know we are thinking about them, listening to them, talking to them, and/or sharing an experience with them. Receptively we use our eyes to gather information about what other people are thinking about, what is happening around us and what might be someone else's plan.
- **Body in the group / Body out of the group** - Keeping your body in the group means maintaining a comfortable physical presence around others – not too close, yet not too far away. When your body is in the group, it sends the nonverbal message that you are interested in others and that you are following the same plan. The opposite is also true. If your body is out of the group (too far away), it sends the message you are not thinking about the group.
- **Whole body listening** - Whole body listening is when your eyes, ears, mouth, hands, arms, legs, and feet are calm and quiet. When you listen with your whole body it helps your brain to be available to gather and make sense of information, such as what people are doing around you, and it shows others you are thinking about them.
- **Hidden Rules** - Every social situation has “hidden rules” or a range of social expectations that are implicit, and not usually stated or explicitly taught.

- **Expected behavior** - Doing what is **expected** means understanding or figuring out those rules and aligning our behavior (what we say and do) with the expectations of the situation. We adapt our behavior to keep others feeling comfortable and having good thoughts about sharing space with us, which ultimately keeps us feeling comfortable too.
- **Unexpected behavior** - Doing what is **unexpected** means one does not figure out and/or follow the hidden rules for the given situation. When what we say or do is unexpected, people feel uncomfortable and do not have good thoughts about sharing space with us, which ultimately makes us uncomfortable too.
- **Smart Guesses** - A smart guess is when we take what we observe (what we see and hear) and combine that with what we know to make a guess.
- **Flexible thinking** - Flexible thinking means we can change our plan, try a different solution to a problem, change what we are thinking or give up what we want based on the larger plan of the group. A flexible thinker can also understand what other people say and do based on different points of view or contexts.
- **Stuck thinking** - Stuck Thinking is being unable to change what we are doing or thinking based on what is happening around us. If we are a stuck thinker, we might have only one way of seeing a problem or situation or we might follow one rule all the time, no matter where we are or what is happening around us. Stuck thinking also makes it hard to understand or interpret subtle or different meanings in language, and other people's motives, intentions and nonverbal language.
- **Small Problem, Medium Problem, or Big Problem?** - Problems come in different sizes and our emotional reaction should relate to the size of the problem. Small problems can be taken care of quickly and can be solved on your own or with the help of another person. Kids can help other kids solve small problems. Medium problems take more time to solve and more help. Usually adults need to help solve medium sized problems. Finally, big problems take a lot of time to take care of and a lot of help from others. When big problems happen, even adults need help from other adults.
- **Sharing Imagination** - When we engage in creative and interactive play and conversation, we often imagine what others may be thinking. This allows us to share an idea, in our heads, so we can create and sustain the interaction with contributions from all of the play partners. To share an imagination, you have to coordinate your ideas, goals and interests with someone else's to pursue a common plan.