Flexible Thinking for Parents

What is Flexible Thinking?

Flexible thinking is the ability to adapt to changing situations or demands [1,2]. This allows children to think about things in multiple ways. This is useful in problem solving and learning [3]. Flexible thinking helps children adjust when things don't go as planned. For example, say the internet crashes in the middle of your child's favorite video; flexible thinking helps your child "go with the flow" and find something else to do instead of throwing a fit.

Supporting Flexible Thinking

You can help your child develop flexible thinking skills. Here are a few ideas from *Understood.org* [4].

- **Play the "What's This?" game**: Choose an everyday object and see how many ways you can think of to use it. For example, you could use a block as a hammer, doorstop, or pretend camera. This helps children see things in different ways.

- **Switch up the rules:** Help your child "think outside the box" by changing up the rules of a game. For example, climb up the slides and slide down the ladders in Chutes and Ladders. Or run the opposite way around the bases in a game of t-ball. Have your child do the opposite of what Simon Says. For example, sit down when Simon says to stand up.

- **Encourage self-talk**: Help your child solve problems with self-talk. Teach your child to state the problem and think out loud to consider possible solutions. This helps your child think creatively, builds problem solving skills, and reduces frustration.

Citations:

[1] Diamond, A. (2013). Executive functions. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 64, 135-168.

[2] Lewis-Morrarty, E., Dozier, M., Bernard, K., Terracciano, S. M., & Moore, S. V. (2012). Cognitive flexibility and theory of mind outcomes among foster children: Preschool follow-up results of a randomized clinical trial. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 51(2), S17-S22.

[3] Colé, P., Duncan, L. G., & Blaye, A. (2014). Cognitive flexibility predicts early reading skills. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5.

[4] Morin, A. (n.d.). *7 tips for building flexible thinking*. Retrieved from https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/learning-at-home/homework-study-skills/7-tips-for-building-flexible-thinking?view=slideview