

## Supporting Children with a Thinking Preference

Does your child?

- Ask “why” and need to understand “why?”
- Tell the truth, sometimes hurting feelings of others?
- Like to solve problems?
- Demand competence in self and others?

Thinking and Feeling are two fundamentally different ways to make decisions. This preference guides how choices are made. Thinkers use objective information to decide, weighing pros and cons to make a decision that makes the most sense. They tend to question rules and demand that rules be both fair and logical. Constantly changing expectations are confusing and stressful for a Thinking child.

### Parenting a Child Who Prefers Thinking

#### Thinking Children Speak Directly

Thinking children, in their direct, honest approach, may bluntly say things that are hurtful to others. Sherry, a mother of a Thinking child, says learning that her son had a Thinking preference allows her to overlook some of his very direct, “from the shoulder” comments. Lori, another parent of a Thinking preference child, was listening to the car radio and singing along with the music. Her son told her, “You can’t sing, so please stop.” She realized he was not being mean, rather he was being “honest.”



A challenge for a person with a Thinking preference is to learn how to deliver a direct message in a way that another can actually “hear” what is said. Mabel, mother of a Thinking preference child, says it has helped to ask her daughter to think about what she said, rather than jumping on her right away. Remember, Thinking children can be very sensitive about their own feelings. It may help to have the child consider how they might respond to a message they just gave to you or another person. Also, help your child become aware of the tone of voice they use to deliver their direct messages. A loud, grating, or belittling tone makes it harder for the other person to hear the information they want to communicate.

### Thinking Children Expect and Value Fairness

Thinking preference children need to believe the rules and procedures are fair. Lynn, mother of four children, observed that her oldest child always wants things done fairly. For example, she (the mother) cannot just give out a handful of candies to each child. The son requires that she count out the candies so everyone has the same amount. It’s even better if they each get the same colors.

Creating an environment where rules are fairly and consistently enforced will allow your Thinking child to flourish. Thinking children may experience stress when a situation doesn’t make sense to them or has unfair rules.

## Praising a Thinking Child

Thinking children like to be praised for their achievement and competence. If you say, "You're wonderful," or "That's great," your Thinking child is likely to ask, "Why?" Thinking preference children want feedback about their competence. Praise has little meaning to a Thinking child if it does not give specific information about the "why." Bob, father of a Thinking child, praised his son following a soccer match, saying, "You were awesome!" His son asked, "Why, Dad?" Dad had to give specific information by saying, "You stayed in position. You passed the ball directly to the other players. And, you kicked the ball with your laces not your toes." Only then could his son actually feel the compliment.



Parents and caregivers need to support Thinking children to permit themselves to make mistakes, especially when learning a new skill. Thinking children may become frustrated while learning something new because they have high expectations of themselves. Thinking children will work hard to master a new skill, but may feel incompetent until the skill is mastered.

## Thinking Children Learn Trust through Respect

Marian reported that her daughter, who loved math, simply refused to do her assignments in math class. She thought the teacher was stupid and didn't know anything. Without respect for the teacher, this Thinking child thought she couldn't learn anything from the teacher. Thinking children find it nearly impossible to learn from someone they don't respect.

## Thinking Children Form Their Own Opinions

Thinking children use objective criteria to form opinions and judgments. If you ask a Thinking child if he is the best at playing ball, he can easily tell you who is best and worst on the

team. He can even place himself in the rank order of best to worst players. Thinking children independently form opinions and reactions about those around them. These opinions are formed, based on facts and information, and are not meant as personal attacks on others.

## A Feeling Parent and a Thinking Child

A Feeling preference parent may struggle with saying, "No," and being direct and firm. Yet, a Thinking preference child will want consistent, logical, and fair rules and decisions.

Feeling preference parents may find it difficult to "let go," allowing their child to be independent. Because Thinking preference children tend to rely on their own opinions, independent of those around them, this may be a tension between a Feeling parent and a Thinking child.

As a Feeling parent, you may want to have harmony within the family all the time. However, it's important to remember that conflict is natural. Thinking children learn by asking, "Why?" and sometimes appearing to "argue" with you. It's important to remember that Thinking children learn through questioning.

Feeling parents tend to encourage a child's development of sensitivity to others, ability to cooperate with others, and how to give appreciation. Thinking preference children who don't tend to come by these skills naturally will benefit from the modeling Feeling preference parents provide.

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