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Thinking or Feeling? How Does Your Child Make Choices?

Which better describes your child?

- Is more truthful or more tactful?
- Prefers harmony or wants things to be fair?
- May neglect or hurt other people's feelings without knowing it or is aware of and takes into account other's feelings?
- Enjoys pleasing people or wants to be valued for their competence?

Your answers to these questions begin to reveal a preference your child may have for *Thinking* or *Feeling*. According to the Myers-Briggs Type Personality Indicator (MBTI), a personality profile indicator, each of us has a preferred way to chose.

Thinking people prefer to make their decisions in a logical and objective way. Thinkers value competence in themselves and others. They need to understand why rules exist. Thinkers use logic to prove their point.

Feeling people prefer to make their decisions based on personal values and how they impact others. These children value harmony and enjoy pleasing others.

Those with a *Thinking* preference try to prove they are right, while those with a *Feeling* preference try to persuade others of their convictions. *Thinking* and *Feeling* are two fundamentally different ways we have of making decisions. Both are rational.

There are observable behaviors that give clues to differences. Go over the list, deciding if your child has a preference of *Thinking* or *Feeling*. Check items from each list that you think describe your child. (You will probably check items from each list, but you will likely find that your child has more characteristics from one list than the other.)

Knowing your child's preference can help you in your interactions with your child. Your loving acceptance of your child's preference builds your child's self-esteem.

Children Who Prefer Thinking

- Express themselves directly, with honesty and clarity
- Are more truthful than tactful, if forced to choose
- Are most convinced by logic
- Want fairness and justice
- Want to be praised for their independence and achievements
- Are able to determine if they have done something well
- May argue or debate for fun
- May neglect and hurt other's feelings without knowing it
- Expect others to be responsible for themselves
- Spontaneously find flaws in ideas, things, or people
- Are more likely to be male (65%)

Children Who Prefer Feeling

- Express themselves with warmth, diplomacy, and tact
- Are more tactful than truthful, if forced to choose
- Are most convinced by their personal values
- Want harmony and affection
- Want to be praised for their personal contributions and cooperative spirit
- Need feedback and rely on others to tell them how they have done something well
- Avoid arguments, conflict, and confrontation
- Are aware of other people's feelings
- Work at developing and motivating others
- Spontaneously appreciate the good in people
- Are more likely to be female (65%)

Praise

Feedback to feeling children is extremely important. To a feeling child, no feedback is equal to negative feedback. If the child has done something special, the adult needs to express appreciation or the child will feel slighted. Parents who say, "They know I love them," or "They know I'm proud of them." does not understand the needs of feeling children. A general rule is that you can't tell feeling children too often that you enjoy their company and that you appreciate them.

Children with a thinking preference also value praise. However, they want praise about their competence and achievements. Praise must be specific. Statements such as, "You are super!" have little meaning to the thinking child unless you can explain why. In fact, if you offer general praise to a thinking child, that child may ask, "Why?" Instead, say to a thinking child, "That was a heavy load. Thanks for helping," which allows the thinking child to internalize the praise and conclude that he/she is a "good helper."

Express Opinions Differently

Thinking children tend to say what they think. They are direct. What is socially acceptable is not the issue, the truthfulness of the statement is.

Children with a feeling preference find it difficult to say things directly so they will soften the message using a lot of words or very gentle words.

Truth vs. Tact

A mother was on her way out when her thinking daughter stopped her and said, "Mom, that outfit looks terrible on you." Then her son, with a feeling preference, walked by and said, "Mom, that's a nice outfit, but don't you have something else to wear?" The mother stopped in her tracks, and decided her children were right. She would look better if she changed her clothing. Later in reflecting about her children's comments she realized her son's comments were more tactful while her daughter's comments were more truthful and direct.

It's important to remember that a thinking child is not trying to be hurtful. Expressions from a thinking child are NOT PERSONAL. (Try not to

take their comments personally.) It is the objective truth, as they see it.

When parenting the thinking child, avoid responding immediately to their direct, and sometimes critical comments. Ask them, "Do you really mean that?" Then, give them time to consider how their words affect others.

On the other hand, feeling children are more subjective, taking into account other people's feelings. For a feeling child, EVERYTHING IS PERSONAL.

When parenting a feeling child, avoid allowing the child to always "please" you. If the child asks what to wear, eat, or do, turn the question back to the child. Ask, "What is it you want to do?" Challenge the feeling child to consider their own needs as well as the needs of others. Feeling children may still want your input, but you are encouraging them to also "please" themselves.

Both Preferences Want Rules to Be Fair

Children with a thinking orientation have a difficult time when they think things are unfair. They expect rules to be fair and to be enforced the same for everyone.

One mother said her oldest child is always saying, "It's not fair." She is sure he has a thinking preference. For example, she cannot just give a handful of M&M's to each child. Her son insists that she count them out so everyone has the same amount. It's even better if they each get exactly the same colors.

Feeling children do not seem to mind bending the rules if the situation warrants it.

A group of children were playing baseball. When the youngest player "struck out," the feeling pitcher suggested the batter get another chance. He wanted the younger player to feel successful and was willing to bend the rules.

Sources:

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