

# Social Thinking-Understanding the Social Mind



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# The **I Laugh** approach

An acronym for the pieces of communicative effectiveness *and* personal problem solving...

I=Initiating novel activities

L=Listening actively

A=Abstracting & inferencing

U=Understanding perspective

G=Gestalt: the big picture

H=Humor & Human

Relatedness

# THE FOUR STEPS OF COMMUNICATION

For more detailed information about this, please see my book, Thinking About You Thinking About Me.

## **1. Thinking about people and what they think and feel.**

- a. Being aware of those around you or those you want to communicate with.
- b. What are they interested in?
- c. What do they feel about what you are saying?
- d. What are you doing to show you are interested in them when they are talking?

## **2. Being aware of your physical presence as well as the physical presence of others.**

- a. Your body position shows who you want to talk to or not talk to.
- b. Your body movements show what you plan to do next. This communicates messages to people, even if you were not trying to communicate.
- c. Your body language and facial expression communicates to people how you feel about things or people around you.

## **3. Using your eyes to think about others and watch what they are thinking about.**

- a. The direction of your eyes and other people's eyes lets people see what everyone might be thinking about.
- b. We use our eyes to help figure out how people feel, what people are thinking about and if they are interested in the other people they are with.

## **4. Using your language to relate to others.**

- a. Talking about things that are interesting to others.
- b. Asking questions to find out about people; making comments to show interest.
- c. Listening with eyes and ears to determine what people are really trying to say.
- d. Adding your own thoughts to connect your experiences to other people's experiences.

## **Perspective Taking:**

Thinking about how you think of other people, and how they think about you...even when just standing around without the intention to communicate.

Perspective taking happens even when people are not talking to each other. For example, when you are in line and other people are in front of you, or when you are on an elevator with a stranger. Perspective taking becomes an even more active process when you are talking to others.

- 1. I think about you, you think about me.**
  
- 2. I think about why you are near me, you think about why I am near you. (What is your intent?)**
  
- 3. I think about what you are thinking of me. You think about what I am thinking about you.**
  
- 4. I regulate my behavior to keep you thinking about me the way I want you to think about me. You regulate your behavior to keep me thinking about you the way you want me to think about you.**

## Social thinking vocabulary for Sections 1, 2 and 3: Being Part of a group: realizing expectations and mind, body participation.

Section 1: Vocabulary terms or concepts	Definitions of these terms
Expected – Unexpected behaviors	Every environment has a set of unwritten rules that people expect to be followed such as talking when it is your turn, respecting personal space, etc. When people follow these rules, some of which are not always explained to the student, then he is considered to be “doing what is expected”. Students who don’t follow the rules are doing what is unexpected and people may have “weird” thoughts about them.
You can change my feelings	People have feelings/reactions about other people’s behavior. Sometimes people have good feelings when people behave by doing what is expected and other times they have annoyed or angry feelings when others do what is unexpected. Students learn that their behavior affects other people’s feelings.
3 steps to playing	Playing involves 3 steps: setting up, playing and clean up. Many of our students take way too long setting up since they insist things have to be done a certain way. We want them to learn that this takes away from the play time which is what the students really want.

Section 2: Vocabulary terms or concepts	Definitions of these terms
whole body listening	The idea is the whole body (eyes, ears, mouth, hands, feet, bottom and brain) needs to be focused on others in order to listen and to show you are listening.
Think with your eyes	Using your eyes to figure out what non-verbal messages others are sending as well as what they might be thinking about. This provides more information than just telling the student to “use good eye-contact” or “look at me”.
Thinking about what others think (in terms of what they expect from others).	To consider what others are thinking as an important way to consider what they expect from you. We encourage students in classrooms and at home to be more actively aware of the thoughts of others. When we are aware that others have thoughts and we “think with our eyes” to watch people’s faces and eyes, we can begin to see some of the thoughts other people are having.

## Social Thinking Vocabulary for section 3: Self-awareness, Self-Monitoring of our behavior in a group.

Vocabulary terms or concepts	Definitions of these terms
Your body is in the group/ your body is out of the group.	We notice when someone’s body is turned into the group and they look like they are working as part of the group. We also notice when someone’s body is not in the group or is turned out of the group.
Your brain is in the group/ your brain is out of the group.	<p>We notice when someone’s body is in the group and their brain is actively paying attention; we think that person is really doing a good job participating in the group.</p> <p>We also notice when someone’s body is in the group but it <u>does not</u> appear that their mind is thinking about the same things as the rest of the group. When we see a student whose “brain is not in the group”, then we don’t think they are really paying attention.</p>
Being a Thinking of You kid verses a Just ME.	These are terms to define the difference between cooperating in a group versus focusing on one’s own needs. A “thinking of you” kid is one that cooperates by considering what other people need or want in a group. A “Just ME” kid is one that mostly just thinks about and acts upon primarily what he or she wants to do.
Good thoughts - Weird thoughts.	All people have thoughts about each person around them. Most thoughts are good or normal thoughts, but each of us also may do things each day which can cause people to have “weird thoughts” about us. Creating a small degree of weird thoughts each day in other people is totally acceptable, but when we create too many weird thoughts for others, they start to think that we may not be nice or safe to be with or that we just don’t seem to care about them.

Select from vocabulary in sections 1, 2 or 3: Select one or two concepts and explore, as a team, how to encourage students to explore their participation in the group through a lesson you can incorporate into your instructional day.

Use your creativity and consider how to introduce the vocabulary.

Plan how to infuse these concepts into the school day after they are introduced.

Plan how to share the information with other teachers and parents.

Social Thinking Vocabulary for section 4: Observing Others, the detective agency is born.

Vocabulary terms or concepts	Definitions of these terms
Figuring out other people's plans.	Observing other students means in part trying to figure out what they are planning to do next based on the actions of their body. (E.g. walking towards the pencil sharpener means that the person is likely to sharpen his pencil).
Smart guess /Wacky guess	<p>Guessing is an important part of participating in school lessons and communicating with others. There are two major types of guesses; "smart guesses" (same as educated guess) are guesses you have to make based on a fact or some information you have learned about a topic and now you just have to add one more guess.</p> <p>A "wacky guess" is a guess you may be asked to make when you have not been given any (or enough) information. For example, asking someone who has never been to my house to guess what color it is.</p> <p>In schools, teachers ask students to make "smart guesses".</p>
Identifying one's own feelings.	<p>Helping our students to identify that they have feelings and to communicate more clearly about what they are.</p> <p>Also helping students to understand that we can share feelings about the same event (earthquakes, hurricanes, etc.)</p>
Social Behavior Mapping	<p>This is a technique to help students to see that their behaviors impact how people feel about them and the natural consequences that arise due to people's feelings or response to such behaviors. A student's feelings about the people around him are often based on how people are treating him. Please ask for the handout that explains this process in more detail.</p>

# Social-Behavior Mapping

What's EXPECTED for:

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Expected Behaviors	How they make people FEEL	How People React To How They Feel About Your Behavior	How the person feels about him or herself.
1.	→	→	
2.			
3.			
4.	→	→	
5.			

# Social-Behavior Mapping

What's UNEXPECTED for:

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UNExpected Behaviors	How they make people FEEL	How People React To How They Feel About Your Behavior	How the person feels about him or herself.
1.	→	→	
2.			
3.			
4.	→	→	
5.			

## Social Thinking Vocabulary for section 5: Figuring Out What People Mean By What They Say.

Vocabulary terms or concepts	Definitions of these terms
Body Language and Spoken Language	Exploring how we communicate using these two systems. For younger students we call it “spoken language” rather than verbal language.
Literal Language and Figurative Language.	We describe “literal” language as being like concrete, it never changes. We describe “figurative” language as being something that your brain has to figure out.
Indirect language.	Exploring how we may state what we want by alluding to it rather than directly stating it. For example, a person who says “do you understand the math?” may actually be asking for help.
Figure out meanings using 4 groups of clues.	We try and figure out what people mean by what they say from considering: what they were thinking, words said; body language/ facial expression, and the environment/context in which it was said to help better define the meaning or relevance of the statement.
Figuring out people’s intentions.	All communication has a purpose. When we are talking to people we often try and figure out what their intentions are when they are talking to us. Once you figure out their intentions, you can then adapt your response to deal with their intentions how you best see fit.
Flexible brains	We talk about using our “flexible brains” when we recognize that a student has some choices to make or has different ways in which he can interpret the situation. We have a saying that “flexible thinking is social thinking.”

## Social Thinking Vocabulary for section 6: Exploring Imagination and Wonder to Fuel Our Thinking Regarding What Other People Are Thinking.

Vocabulary terms or concepts	Definitions of these terms
Synchronizing our movements/ responding to people's action plans.	When playing or just walking with others we have to plan our movements based on reading the action plans or thoughts of others.
Shared Imagination.	"SHARED IMAGINATION" is trying to imagine other's feelings and experiences based on our own experience of the world.
Wonder.	"WONDER" requires one to imagine while thinking with questions either stated verbally or non-verbally (curiosity). (In these tasks we are going to encourage the students to think their questions out loud, to each other.)
Science Wonders and Social Wonders.	<p>World Wonders are factual wonders that we each have about the world. Our own unique curiosity and individual interests.</p> <p>Social Wonders are when you wonder about the thoughts, feelings and emotions of others and you show you are interested in them by asking about things that are interesting to them.</p> <p>The purpose of this lesson is to appreciate the unique way we each think and then to show interest, curiosity, and imagination about other people's different thoughts and experiences even if we don't share the same sense of wonder about the topic.</p>
Asking social wonder questions.	Once we start to more actively consider the wonders and experiences of others, we have to ask people questions to learn more information about them. The more we show interest in others, the more they show interest in us!

## Social Thinking Vocabulary for section 7: Using Language to Relate to Others.

Vocabulary terms or concepts	Definitions of these terms
Social thinking	Thinking about the fact that all people like others to be interested in what they have to say.
Keeping friend files in your brain and opening them when you meet different people.	<p>Friendly files are the way we organize information about people in our brains. When we meet someone we are supposed to remember some things about them so that we can remember what that person may want to talk about the next time we meet them. However, not all files are “friendly”. Sometimes we have to remember when someone is not safe to be around!</p> <p>Opening the files simply means that once you store the information you have to call it up when you see the person. This makes the person feel good that you remembered something about him or her.</p>
Asking questions to people about other people.	This is very much the same as asking “social wonder questions” but this can also include asking for help or clarification. In general it is important to note that our students have a very difficult time asking questions to others about things they are not inherently interested in.
Add-a-thought	<p>When participating in a social interaction we can ask people questions, but more often we actually add our own thoughts and experiences to what someone has said. A comment a person said can make us think of something that is somewhat related to what we have thought or experienced, we then add our own thought and this shows people you are relating to them.</p> <p>The reality then is that we don’t maintain single topics in conversations, instead we maintain constantly shifting threads of conversations.</p>
Whopping topic changes (WTC)	This is when you say something and people cannot follow the conversational thread as to how you got to that topic. WTC’s can often confuse people or make people feel like you aren’t interested in them.
Follow up questions	When we are asking questions to others, it is best to listen to a person’s response and then ask a follow-up question related to the same topic. This is how we move from small talk (rapid questions about different topics) to a deeper discussion around the same topic area.
Supporting	These can be very simple responses such as “cool”, “nice”,

comments/responses	“bummer” or they can be non-verbal in nature showing body language and eye-contact simultaneously.
Bridging or baiting questions	These are questions to try and bait others into talking about what the speaker wants to talk about. An example of a bridging question is, “Have any of you been to the mall lately?” given that the speaker wants to talk about the mall. This is not a bad strategy to use as long as it is not over-used.
Our bodies are part of communication	Teaching students that keeping their bodies and brains in the group during active communication is crucial for good participation.
Clarifying needs and asking for help	Questions are not just for social wonder; they are also to help us gain information we really need to keep us working calmly.
Initiating Topics	There are 4 general categories for thinking about how to initiate topics with others by thinking about: 1) Shared experiences or memories, 2) Seasonal Topics, 3) News Events 4) General interests or thoughts
Rude Interruption/Acceptable interruptions	Not all interruptions are rude. Rude interruptions usually happen when someone cuts off your thoughts before you have really been able to state them, or they disregard your stated thoughts. Acceptable interruptions are those made before you finish stating all your ideas but your communicative partner has listened to your message and is highly motivated to add his or her thoughts on top of yours. Students have to determine the intention of the interruption before responding with anger or a reprimand to their communicative partner.
How long is too long to talk?	Communicative partners have to be aware that any one person’s talking time takes away from another’s opportunity to speak. Thus, we teach that the first comment or response should be relatively short (15-30 seconds). If a person is interested in what you have to say, then the second response is welcome but also fairly short, but if the person asks for even more information, the speaker is now welcome to provide a more elaborate, specific response as long as he or she continues to monitor the level of interest of the communicative partners.
Saying “nothing” gives people nothing to think about.	Language serves the purpose of giving access to our thoughts, experiences and feelings. People ask questions to others to promote a more elaborate communicative exchange. If a person is asked a questions about what they have done (or something similar) and this person responds by saying “nothing”, he or she is effectively killing the conversation by giving the communicative partners nothing to think about!

Select social thinking vocabulary from sections 4, 5,6 or 7: Select one or two concepts and explore, as a team, how to encourage students to use language to relate to others through lessons you can incorporate into your instructional day.

Use your creativity and consider how to introduce the vocabulary.

Plan how to infuse these concepts into the school day after they are introduced.

Plan how to share the information with other teachers and parents.

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**AND ALL THOSE OTHER MATERIALS YOU FIND HELPFUL THAT I HAVE NOT PUT ON THE LIST!**

Understanding the  
Social Mind

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**Michelle  
Garcia Winner**  
San Jose, California

Who am **I**?  
Who are **you**?

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I author my own books on the  
subject

They will be discussed as tools, but there are  
many free articles and ideas on my website  
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## Good Social Skills

The ability to adapt your behavior based on the situation and what you know about the people within it.

## Good Social Thinking

The ability to think about your own and other's thoughts, emotions, intentions even when you are not physically interacting with them.

## Social Thinking -Social Communication Scale

- Severely Impaired Social Communicator (SISC)
- Emerging Social Communicator(ESC):
- Resistant Social Communicator (RSC)
- Weak Interactive Perspective Taking (WISC)

## Defining Terms

Social Cognition = Social Thinking

## I LAUGH of Social Thinking

An acronym for elements of Communication & Problem Solving...

- I = Initiating
- L = Listening with eyes and brain
- A = Abstracting and Inferencing
- U = Understanding perspective
- G = Getting the Big Picture
- H = Humor and Human Relationships

Social Thinking® is the ability to:

- Predict
- Infer
- Conceptualize
- Determine motives/intentions
- Get organized
- Listen actively
- Speak coherently

...All are heavily grounded in one's **social thinking.**

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Social Thinking is embedded  
in our academic curriculums.

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## Pragmatic Standards : Listening

- 1.1.1 **Listen** attentively.
- 2.1 **Determine** the purpose for listening.
- 5.1.2 **Interpret** the speaker's verbal and non-verbal message/purpose/perspective.

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## Standards : Perspective in Reading

- 4.3.3 Determine causes for character's actions.  
Use of knowledge of situation, character traits and motivations
  
- 6.3.2 Analyze the effect of the qualities of the character on plot & conflict resolution.
  
- 9-10.3.4 Determine character's traits.  
What do they say about themselves in narrative, dialogue, etc.

## Sample Gestalt Processing : Standards in Writing

- 2.1.1 Practice Pre-writing skills.  
Create graphic organizer or outline.
  
- 4.1.2 Create multiple paragraphs, support with topic sentence and conclusion paragraph.
  
- 7.1.3 Impose structure on composition.  
Strategies of note taking, outlining, summarizing.

Social Play Skills

Academic Skills

Inseparable.

## Perspective Taking

Monitoring **your own** and **others'**...

- Thoughts and Emotions
- Physical motives / Language-based Intentions
- Prior Knowledge / Experiences
- Belief System
- Personality

Given **specific expectations** of the situation!

What Happens when you teach social skills without social thinking?

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Treatment Method  
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy  
(CBT)

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Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

1. Cognitive behavior affects activity
2. Cognitive activity may be monitored and altered
3. Desired behavior change may be effected through cognitive change

Dobson, K. & Dozois, D. (2001) Historical and philosophical bases of the cognitive-behavioral therapies. In K. Dobson (Ed.) Handbook of Cognitive Behavioral Therapies (pp.3-39). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

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TEACHING THE  
Social Thinking Curriculum

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## Two Significant Lessons

that span across **all aspects** of the social curriculum

The 4 Steps of **Communication**

The 4 Steps of **Perspective Taking**

## 4 Steps of Communication

1. **Thinking** about people who share your space or who you plan to communicate with.
2. Establishing a **physical presence** to show intention to communicate.
3. Use **eyes to think about others**.
4. **Language** to relate to others.

[see handout for more information]

## The 4 Steps of Communication...

...help to organize and prioritize what we teach about human interaction.



Human interaction can be as simple as standing in a group of people and NOT talking, or asking for help.

## 4 Steps of Perspective Taking

**Required in all groups:**

1. I think about you. You think about me.
2. I am aware of your motive/intention. Why are you near me? What do you want from me?
3. Since you are thinking about me, what are you thinking about me?
4. I monitor my behavior and possibly adjust it to keep you thinking about me the way I want you to think about me.

Social Thinking errs on the side of being practical!

Provide practical strategies the students can use themselves

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**I NEED HELP!**



On **PART** of it. On **MOST** of it. On **ALL** of it.

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**Pointless Work:**

At school we do a lot of work that seems pointless and useless like "power writes" and "journal writes." There is sometimes no relevance or meaning to pointless work and we may never use it in the future, but we do it anyway to be part of a group. We have to do pointless work for the rest of our lives. Completing pointless work makes us feel successful and it makes us feel good about ourselves. I can also keep up with all of my work!

So, when it comes to pointless work: **JUST DO IT!**

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## Organize Lessons

around "Social Thinking" vocabulary

**Student-friendly vocabulary concepts** to explicitly teach social expectations.

**User-friendly vocabulary for all teachers** and educators to use across all environments.

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T **7** Sections in the

## Social Thinking Curriculum

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- 1** Being Part of a Group:  
Realizing Expectations
- 2** How Our Body and Mind Help to Be Part of a Group
- 3** Self-awareness and Self-monitoring of Our Behavior in a Group

[continued next page...]

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- 4** Observing Others:  
The Detective Agency is Born
- 5** Figuring out what people mean by what they say:  
The Super Detective Agency
- 6** Imagination and Wonder to Relate to Others
- 7** Using Language to Relate to Others

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**1** **2** Being in the group: Brain and Body

▶ Key Social Thinking Vocabulary

Expected / Unexpected: encourage the students to recognize that they are aware of many of the rules.

You can change how I feel. [A.A. Allen / Michelle Garcia Winner / Time Times / V2 link](#)

Three parts of play

Thinking with our eyes

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**3** Self-awareness and self monitoring of our behavior in a group

▶ Core Social Thinking Concepts for Lesson 3

Your body is in the group. Your body is out of the group!

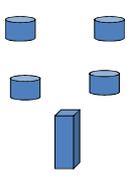
Your brain is in the group. Your brain is out of the group!

Just me / Thinking about you

Good thoughts / weird / uncomfortable thoughts (colored sticks)

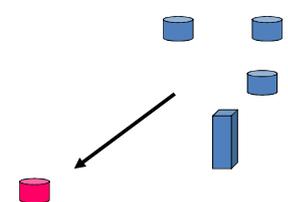
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Lesson on physical presence:  
Is your **body** in the group?



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Is your body **OUT** of the group?



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Is your brain IN the group?  
Or OUT of the group?

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What to try if...

Student is getting so much negative attention — **no point in cooperating**

**Remove from the room** (or the group, if leaving room is not possible). Work with him on behaviors to **earn** re-entering the room, or rejoining the group.

**Do not tolerate** obnoxious, purposeful behavior because the student has a diagnosis.

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Group Task:

- ▶ Pick one of the Social Thinking Vocabulary concepts for Curriculum Lesson 1-3.
- ▶ Build a Social Thinking Awareness Lesson related to it for use in your classroom or therapy room.

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Additional lessons for parents and teachers included in this book!

**You are a Social Detective!**

*Explaining Social Thinking to Kids*

WRITTEN BY:  
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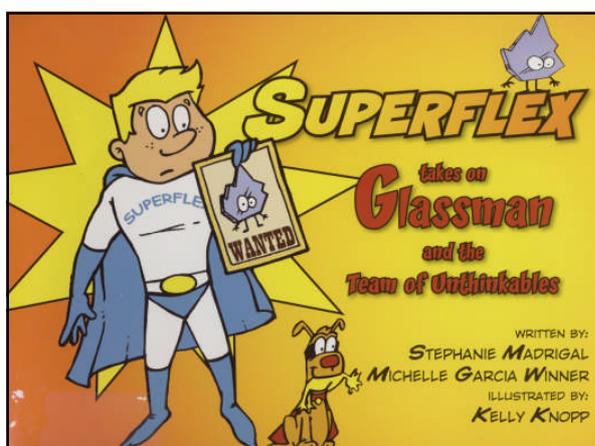
ILLUSTRATED BY:  
KELLY KNOPP

Pam's Research: Social Thinking Vocabulary

**Crooke, P.J., Hendrix, R.E., Rachman, J.Y., (2008) Brief Report: Measuring the Effectiveness of Teaching Social Thinking to Children with Asperger Syndrome (AS) and High Functioning Autism (HFA). Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, (38) 3.**

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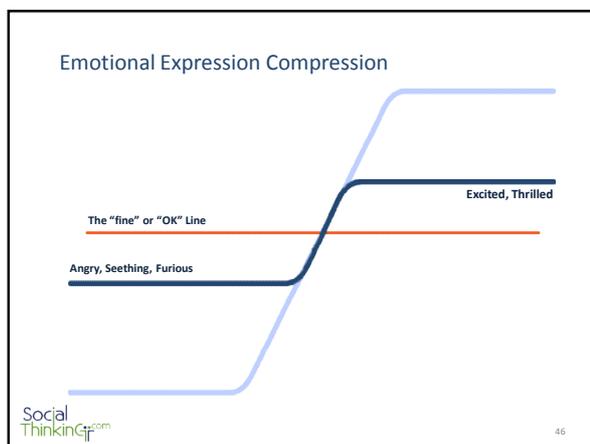
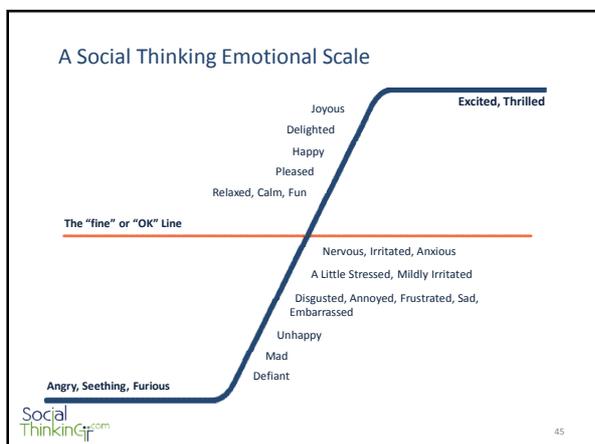
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- 4 Observing Others:
  - The Detective Agency is Born
  - ▶ Core Social Thinking Vocabulary
    - Figuring out other people's plans
    - Smart guess / wacky guess
    - Identifying one's own feelings
    - Social behavior mapping

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### Social Behavior Map

Behaviors That Are EXPECTED For...				Behaviors That Are UNEXPECTED For...			
Expected Behaviors	How They Make Others Feel	Personal Consequences New Experiences	How You Feel About Yourself	Unexpected Behaviors	How They Make Others Feel	Personal Consequences New Experiences	How You Feel About Yourself

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### Learning about my Calm and Stress:

My Incredible 5 point scale  
 (Buron-Dunn, Curtis, 2004)

Rating	Looks like	Feels like	I can try to
5			
4			
3			
2			
1			

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**The Incredible 5 Point Scale (Dunn and Curtis 2004)**

Cognitive behavior technique to help Students learn about personal behavior, emotions, controls

Helps Adults more deeply understand needs of students and related strategies

Blends well is Social Behavior Map.

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**5 What People Mean by What they Say: The Super Detective Agency**

- ▶ Core Social Thinking Vocabulary
  - Body Language and Spoken Language (verbal and non-verbal)
  - Literal and Figurative Language
  - Indirect Language
- Figuring Out Meaning Using 4 Groups of clues: Language, intentions, non-verbal, situation, eye-gaze, etc.

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**6 How Imagination and Wonder Contribute to Social Relations**

- ▶ Core Social Vocabulary Concepts
  - Singular imagination
  - Shared imagination
  - Science wonder — Social wonders
  - Social curiosity

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**7 Using Language to Relate to Others**

- ▶ Core Social Thinking Concepts
  - Keeping people files
  - Asking questions to people about these people
  - Add a thought
  - Whopping topic changes
  - Supporting comments (responses)

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**Group Task:**

- ▶ Pick one of the Social Thinking Vocabulary concepts for Curriculum Lesson 6-7.
- ▶ Create a lesson related to it for your classroom or therapy room.

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After This Big Dump of Information:

**7 Messages**

to Summarize Our Day...

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**1st Message**

Social Thinking and related social skills are not in addition to the standards, they are the infrastructure for the standards!

Without social knowledge, learning is trapped in rote based learning and responses.

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**2nd Message**

Professionals, paraprofessionals and parents need to work together to build a child's social thinking and related skills.

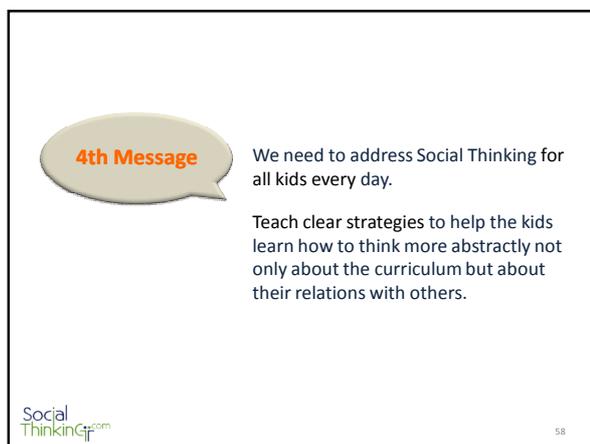
It is not just the job of the person running the "social group".

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**3rd Message** Different persons on the treatment team have different roles in the treatment process.

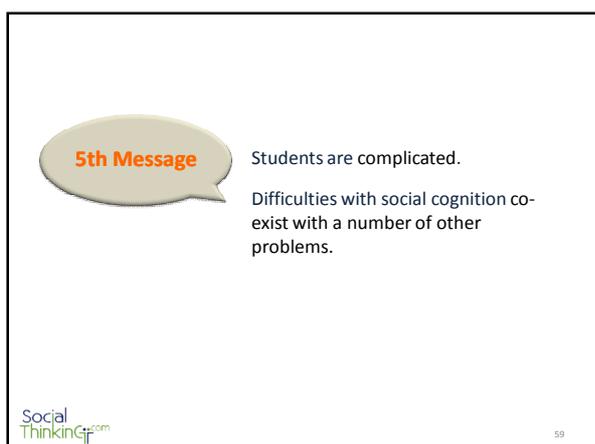
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**4th Message** We need to address Social Thinking for all kids every day.

Teach clear strategies to help the kids learn how to think more abstractly not only about the curriculum but about their relations with others.

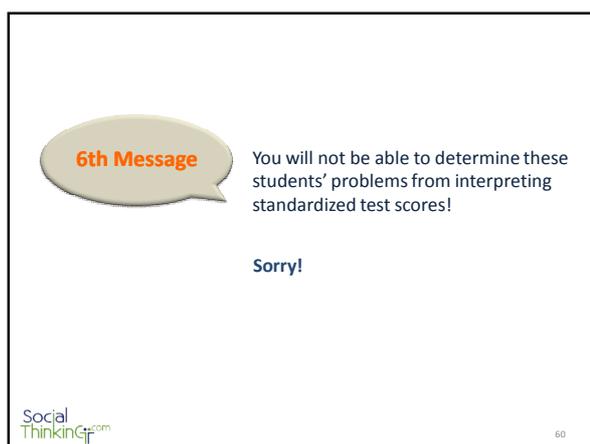
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**5th Message** Students are complicated.

Difficulties with social cognition co-exist with a number of other problems.

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**6th Message** You will not be able to determine these students' problems from interpreting standardized test scores!

**Sorry!**

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**7th & FINAL Message**

YOU CAN HELP.

The Social Thinking Program may need to begin with just you, but it counts!

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