

9 flexible thinking activities for kids

By The Understood Team

Kids use flexible thinking for learning and everyday life. It allows them to think about situations in different ways and find solutions to new problems. For some kids, this skill comes naturally. But others have trouble with flexible thinking and don't see alternatives.

Playing games and doing activities that teach flexible thinking can help. Here are nine activities you can try at home or at school.

1. Play the Fannee Doolee game.

In this word game, Fannee Doolee prefers things that have double letters in their name to things that don't. For example, she likes bees but not bugs. She likes jelly but not jam.

Work together to come up with other things Fannee likes and dislikes based on that rule. Thinking of pairs of words that are similar but have a main difference helps kids learn to shift gears more comfortably.

2. Tell silly jokes and make puns.

Riddles and jokes that play with the meanings or sounds of words can be confusing for kids who struggle with flexible thinking. Show kids how different meanings of words can make people laugh.

For example, tell a joke like: "Why are fish so smart? Because they live in schools." Then talk about how the punch line uses two meanings of the word *school*. Encourage kids to come up with funny wordplay, too.

3. Make up new rules for games.

Kids who struggle with flexible thinking can have trouble seeing that there's more than one way to do things. Practice seeing alternatives by helping kids make up new rules for games.

For example, have players slide down ladders and walk up slides in Chutes and Ladders. Run the bases in reverse order in kickball. Once kids are comfortable with simple switches, try combining the rules of two games to make a new game.

4. Read *Amelia Bedelia* and other books that play with words.

Kids who are rigid thinkers may find it hard to understand that words can have more than one meaning. Help kids work on this skill by reading books like *Amelia Bedelia*.

Amelia takes everything very literally. For example, when she's asked to "draw the curtains," she draws a picture of them. Talk about what she should have done instead.

5. Play strategy and logic games.

Strategy and logic games help kids think about different ways to look at and solve problems and puzzles.

You can add to the benefits by teaching kids “self-talk” skills. Have them think out loud as they play and try to solve problems in the game. Doing that can help them see options and find strategies.

6. Play “What’s this?”

Help kids to view things in more creative ways by taking regular objects and seeing how many things you can pretend they are. For example, a funnel could be a party hat, a trumpet, and a unicorn horn. A whiteboard eraser could be a phone, a microphone, and a hairbrush.

7. Find more than one way to do everyday things.

Kids who are inflexible thinkers usually like doing things in a certain order. Making small tweaks to everyday routines can show them that there are different options.

For example, at home, kids might change how they make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches by spreading the jelly first. At school, they might map out a new route for getting from their classroom to the library.

8. Play theater games, like “Yes, and....”

Theater games help kids practice accepting and building off of another person’s idea. “Yes, and...” is a partner game, so kids play in pairs with another child or an adult.

To start the game, one partner sets the scene with a statement like, “It’s a cold day here in the mountains.” The other partner adds on to it. “Yes, and I can’t seem to find my winter boots.” Partners go back and forth making “Yes, and...” statements until the story reaches an ending.

9. Play “How many ways....”

Flexible thinking is important for doing math. Help younger kids build that skill by playing the game “How many ways....” Gather a pile of different objects like game pieces, crayons, and beads. Then say, “Let’s see how many ways we can make the number 10.”

Kids can pick objects from the pile to show different number combinations that equal 10. For example, they might choose two red beads, five crayons, and three yellow beads. If they don’t get through all the combinations, show them the rest. You can also take turns.

There are many ways to help kids build flexible thinking skills at home and at school. Families and teachers can share ideas and work together to help kids learn different ways to approach problems.

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