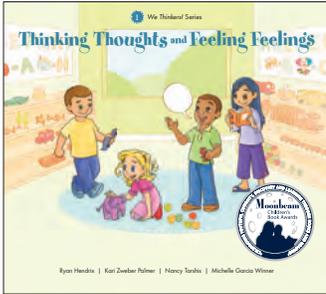


Family Letter

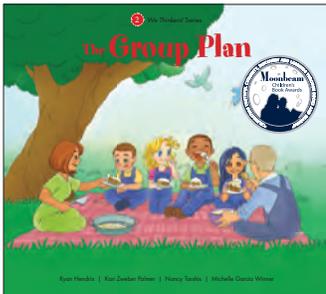
We Thinkers! Series Social Thinking Curriculum



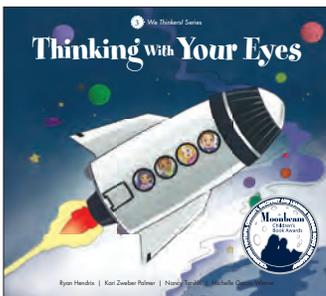
Dear Families,

Welcome to *We Thinkers! Volume 1 Social Explorers*, a Social Thinking® Curriculum for the Preschool and Early Elementary Years! Your child is beginning an exciting adventure in learning more about the social world. This letter is designed to introduce you to the curriculum and provide information about supporting your child's learning at home.

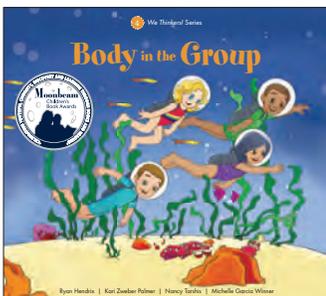
The aim of *We Thinkers!* series is to help young verbal learners develop the skills they need to be flexible social thinkers and social problem solvers. Through the experiences of four characters in the storybooks and the accompanying curriculum units and music CD, children will learn about the social mind and social expectations. They will also learn about their own thinking (and that of others) to help them make better decisions when in the midst of social play and interaction.



The curriculum is based on Social Thinking, a treatment methodology developed by Michelle Garcia Winner that teaches the “why” behind our social behavior. Winner created the Social Thinking Vocabulary and concepts as a way to break down, explain, and put into concrete terms the abstract concepts that make up our social world.

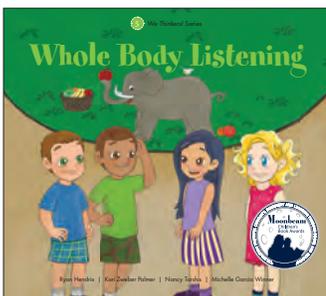


The *We Thinkers!* curriculum is divided into ten units that align with the ten storybooks in this teaching series. Each unit is designed to teach a specific Social Thinking concept via one of the vocabulary terms. You will be receiving family letters that explain the concept as it is introduced in the curriculum and how to support your child's learning at home.



As you embark on this social learning adventure together, please keep in mind the following points:

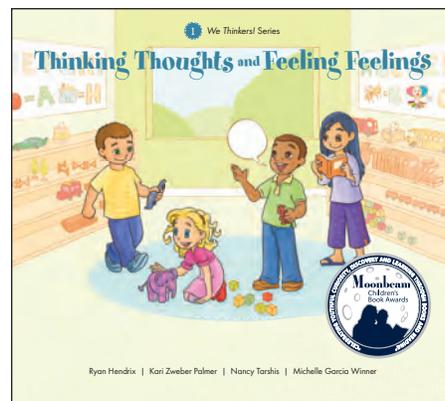
- Social learning is slow and deep! We do not expect children to master concepts quickly.
- Learn about the concepts your child is being exposed to and start to use the same vocabulary at home. Talk about the concepts when you are at home, at the store, in the car – anywhere and everywhere! The more you can make the vocabulary part of your everyday language, the better.
- Complete the “At Home Activities” included in each family letter.
- Be sure to enjoy the stories and songs that accompany the units. They're designed for the entire family.
- Don't forget to notice and mention when your child is being a good social thinker (positive reinforcement!) and keeping other people feeling good about being around him/her!



Please note that the curriculum is designed for children with listening and language skills strong enough to understand and discuss the concepts presented in the storybooks. While all children will benefit from exploring these concepts, students with special learning needs may need much more time to do so.

We hope you and your family will have fun while learning and practicing these all-important concepts.

Thinking Thoughts and Feeling Feelings



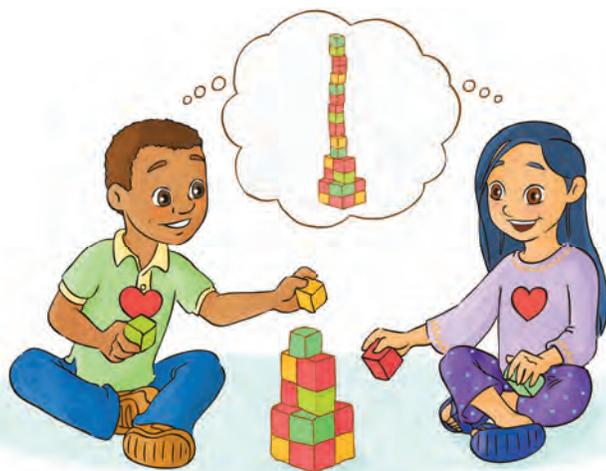
Family Letter and At Home Activities



Social learning is all about **thoughts** and **feelings**. The ability to think about others, play collaboratively and establish friendships is all about thoughts; knowing our own, sharing them with others and taking others' thoughts into account as we act and react. We introduce these concepts first because all subsequent concepts and vocabulary units are tied back to thoughts. (What are you thinking? What am I thinking? What is the group thinking about?) We make the connection to feelings because what we think and what we feel are inseparable.

In exploring thoughts and feelings, we begin by establishing a connection to body parts. Children are familiar with their

bodies and we are able to use what they know: that we all have many body parts and each part has a job to do. In most cases, we can see these parts and watch them do their jobs. For example, we can see hands clap, hold, and touch, and feet tap, jump and run. We then connect that information to the more abstract concepts of thoughts and emotions. That is, there are other parts inside our bodies that have important jobs too. Our brain and heart are two of those parts we use when we are around people. Our brain is our thought maker. We define a thought as an idea, picture, or words you have in your brain. To help us talk about thoughts we use words like *think* and *know*. Our heart is our feelings keeper. A feeling is something we feel in our body. To help us talk about our feelings we use words like *happy*, *sad*, *mad*, and *scared*.



In the first storybook in the *We Thinkers!* series, we meet the main characters, Evan, Ellie, Jesse and Molly. These four children go on many adventures to introduce and explore Social Thinking Vocabulary and concepts. In their first adventure, they learn all about two important concepts: thoughts and feelings.

At home, it is important to raise your child's awareness that s/he is having thoughts. We practiced this by drawing attention to examples that were big and exaggerated. When children saw us do something unexpected (out of the ordinary, silly,

etc.) we labeled the process by saying, “You are having a thought! I’m putting shoes on my hands, that’s silly! You’re having a thought about me.”

You can continue to reinforce this at home by doing anything that’s out of the ordinary or breaks the normal routine and labeling that process by saying “You’re having a thought.” Some suggestions include:

While getting dressed:

- Put socks on your hands. “You’re having a thought. I put socks on my hands. That’s silly. You’re having a thought about me.”
- Put pants on your head.
- Put a shirt on inside out or backwards.
- When leaving the house:
 - Carry something out of the ordinary to the door with you, such as the toaster. “You’re having a thought. I’m taking the toaster to work with me. That’s silly. The toaster stays in the kitchen. You’re having a thought about me.”
 - Put on a robe instead of a jacket, or slippers instead of shoes.

While the above activity exaggerates times your child would have a thought, it’s important to remember we’re always having thoughts, about things big and small. Contrast these over-exaggerated examples with times we’re having thoughts during the day that are not as obvious and more routine.

Some examples of day-to-day thoughts we might have are:

- “I like bananas. I’m thinking about eating my banana.”
- “It’s time for dinner. I’m thinking about cooking.”
- “I’m thinking about putting on my shoes.”
- “I’m thinking about reading you a book.”

Activity 1

Things I Like to Think About...

The following activity is included so your child can relate to this concept on a personal level and explore his/her own thoughts.

Instructions: Use the thought bubble handout at the end of the letter. Have your child draw a picture of himself or herself (or use a photo) and place it under the thought bubble. Then fill the bubble with pictures or drawings of things your child likes to do, play with, eat, etc.

Activity 2

Feelings Book

Begin by stapling four pieces of paper together on the left side, into book form. At the top of each paper, write a feeling word. Start with these feelings: happy, mad, sad, and scared. Either draw a picture or take a photo of your child making that facial expression. Together, talk about times the child has felt and experienced that emotion. Draw a picture, use photos from magazines, or personal photos of these times and add them to the page. Do not expect your child to be able to come up with examples independently. You may decide to make the book and then fill in the examples across time. For example, after a birthday party you might add a picture on the “happy” page.

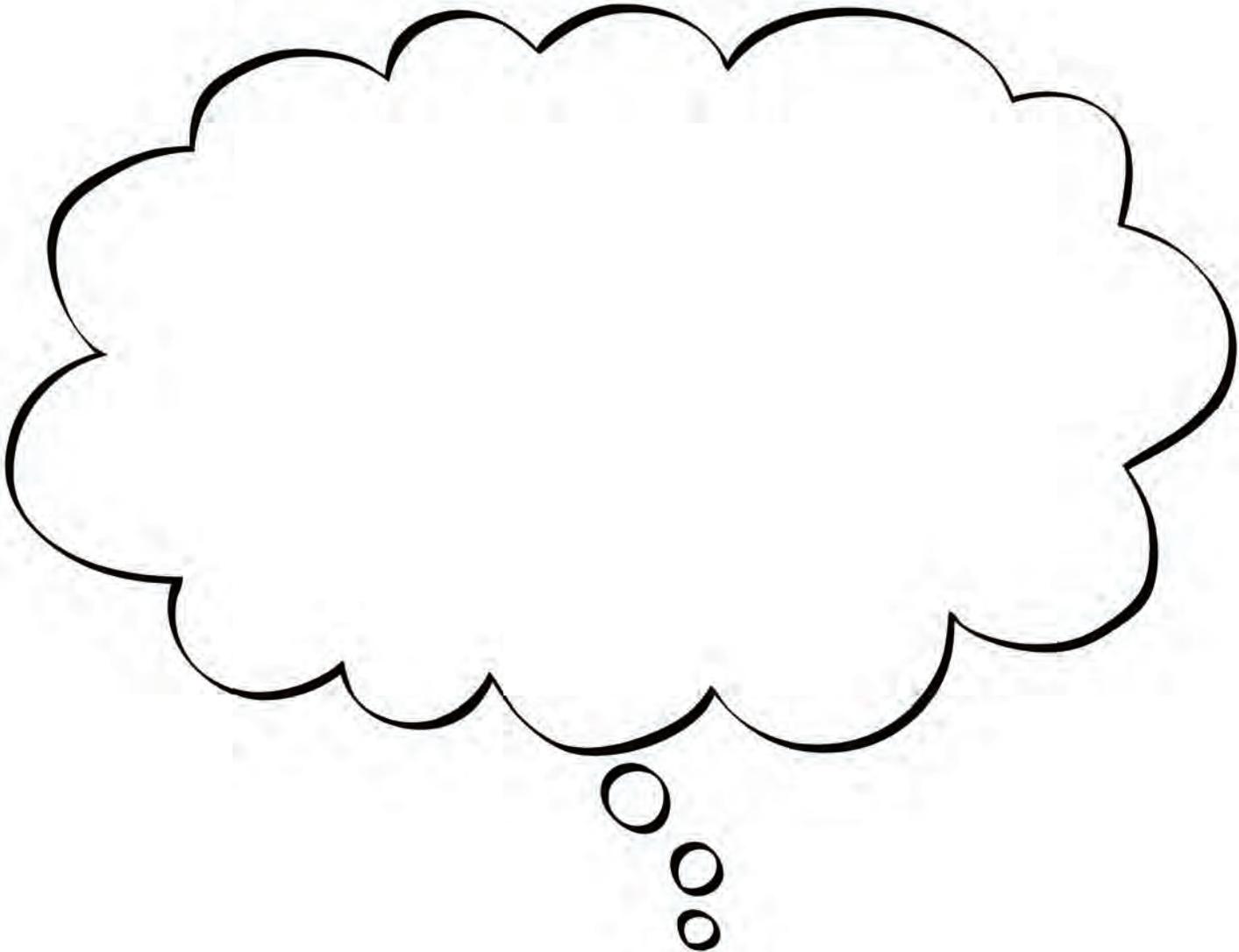
As your child begins to learn and identify more emotions, add pages to increase the child’s emotional vocabulary. Examples may include:

Proud
Disappointed
Frustrated
Excited
Worried

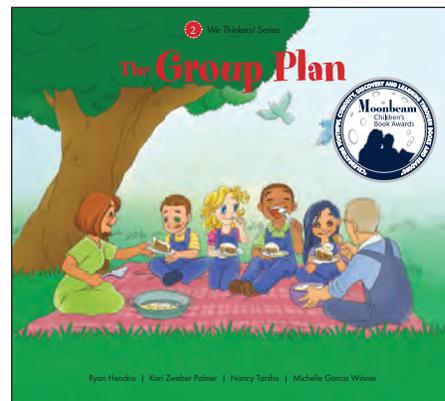
Comfortable
Uncomfortable
Curious
Confused
Calm

Jealous
Tense
Surprised
Grumpy
Silly

Things I Like to Think About...



The Group Plan



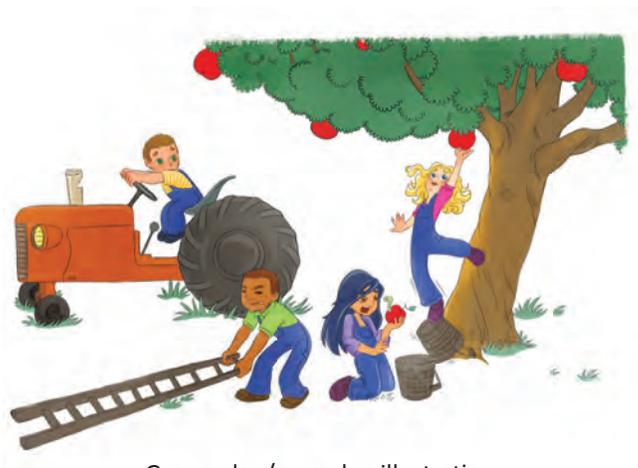
Family Letter and At Home Activities

In our Social Thinking group today we talked about the **group plan**. In our story, Evan, Ellie, Jesse and Molly take a trip to the farm to make an apple pie and ice cream. They learn the difference between following their *own plan* versus the *group plan*. When one person followed his/her own plan, the group could not accomplish their goal. When they worked together and followed the group plan everyone felt good and they ended up with delicious treats to share.

In our group we use illustrations to show everyone thinking about the group plan together versus a person who is thinking about his/her own plan. (See the illustration below.) We talk about “the plan” as a way to help children know what they are expected to think about and do when they are working in a group. When everyone is following the plan, we are all thinking about each other. When we all think about each other, everyone feels good.

Suggested ways to extend learning about the Group Plan at home:

- Talk about “the plan” and what you are thinking. For example, “My plan is to make a snack.” “The plan is to go to the grocery store.” “The plan is to get ready for bed! Time to brush our teeth; follow the plan.”
- Talk about what each person can say and do so all share the same idea/plan. Consider the following examples: “I’m thinking of the plan to go to the grocery store. I’m getting my coat.” “Sayida is thinking about the group plan. She is helping to set the table for dinner.”
- Point out the times when you are all sharing one plan. Talk about how that makes you feel. For example, “We are following the plan to get ready to go to school. I put on my shoes. You put on your shoes too! That makes me feel happy. Now we’re ready to go.” Or use pictures and words.



Group plan/own plan illustration.

In the story, the group plan was to pick apples. Evan followed his own plan and pretended to drive a tractor.

Activity

1

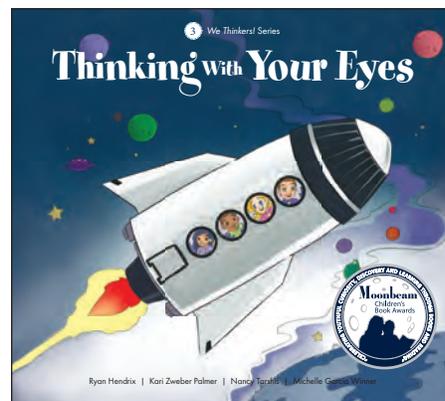
At Home Activity: Following the Plan!

Anytime we do something together we are following a group plan. Reinforce the idea that children follow a plan when they are at home too, not just at school. At home a group plan might include cooking and eating dinner, folding laundry, raking leaves in the yard, going on a bicycle ride, or going to the grocery store. There is a connection between our behaviors and other people’s emotions. When we follow a group plan, it makes other people feel happy and makes us feel good too!

Draw a picture or take a photograph of a time when you did something together during the week. Some ideas include: playing a game, making a snack, eating dinner, going to the grocery store, or even sorting laundry! Draw a thought bubble and adhere the photograph or drawing into the bubble. Then draw yourselves in the boxes below the thought bubble to show you are thinking about the plan and activity. See the example below.



Thinking With Your Eyes



Family Letter and At Home Activities

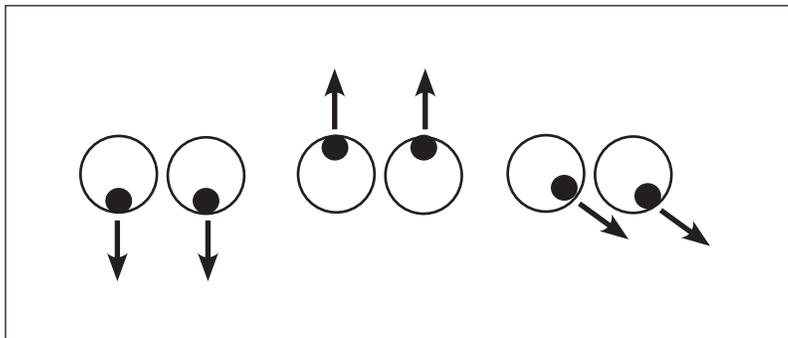
In our Social Thinking group today we talked about **thinking with your eyes**. Expressively we use our eyes to show others what we are thinking about. We look at people to let them know we are thinking about *them*, listening to *them*, talking to *them*, and/or sharing an experience with *them*. Receptively we use our eyes to gather information about what other people are thinking about, what is happening around us and what might be someone else's plan.

In the story we read, Evan, Ellie, Jesse and Molly take a trip in a rocket ship to outer space. They meet curious aliens. As the story unfolds, the aliens and children try to communicate but don't speak the same language. The children have to learn to think with their eyes to figure out what the aliens are looking at, how that connects to what they are thinking about and therefore, what they are planning to do next.

We will be using the term thinking with your eyes instead of behavioral directives such as "look at me" or "use eye contact." When children are taught to think with their eyes they begin to understand that there is a purpose for observing others and the environment. When you think with your eyes you are engaging in an active process that helps you determine what others are thinking, how they are feeling, and subsequently how to respond. It is more than just "looking" at something. Thinking is involved!

What a person is looking at is often what he or she is thinking about. We can use what others are looking at to make a smart guess about what or whom they are thinking about. For example, if you are talking with a friend and he is looking at you this means he is thinking about you and what you are saying to him. If we are looking at something other than the person talking to us, like a picture on the wall, we are sending the message that we are thinking about the picture and not the person who is talking, since looking equals thinking.

Eyes are like arrows, they point to what someone is looking at and most likely thinking about!



Activities to try at home

Activity 1 Cook something together and only use your eyes to think about the items you want or the ingredients you want to add. Make a cake, for example, and place all the ingredients out on the counter. Tell your child, “I am going to look and think about the ingredient I need.” When it is time to add the eggs, look at your child and then look at the eggs. Verbally prompt your child, “Think with your eyes: what am I looking at, what am I thinking about?” If you’ve got more than one helper in the kitchen you can use your eyes to think about whose turn it is to add the ingredient.

Activity 2 Use everyday opportunities to ask for something around the room using only your eyes. For example, you might be getting ready to leave home and notice your car keys on a table. Tell your child “I need help before I leave! Think with your eyes. Can you figure out what I’m looking at and thinking about?” Maintain your gaze on the keys rather than shifting it back and forth between the child and the object so as not to confuse them.

Activity 3 Play a turn-taking game and indicate whose turn it is, based on who you are looking at (to show who you are thinking about).

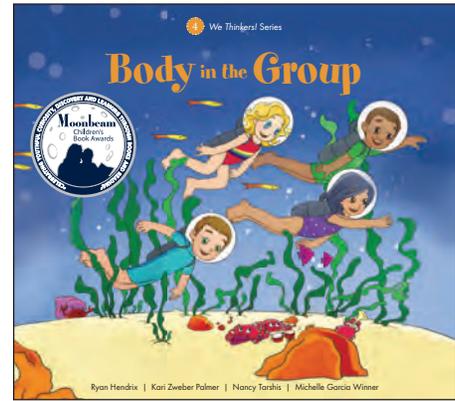
Activity 4 When giving your child choices, ask him or her to look at the desired object. For example, at the dinner table hold the milk carton in one hand and juice in the other. Ask your child to think with his or her eyes, “Show me the one you want by looking at it.” Then switch roles and have your child guess the drink you would like. Practice with everyone at the dinner table!

Activity 5 When you are reading books with your children, find opportunities to trace eye gaze and talk about what the character is looking at and thinking about. See the attached illustration from the book as an example.



Here, the kids are looking at space rocks and thinking about space rocks!

Body in the Group



Family Letter and At Home Activities

In the *Body in the Group* story, Evan, Ellie, Jesse and Molly take a trip to the ocean. The group plan is to find a shark tooth and they quickly realize they need to think about each other and keep their bodies in a group to find it. When they keep their bodies in the group they finally find the shark tooth ... and something they weren't expecting!

In our social thinking group we learned about the concept of **body in the group**. Keeping your body in the group means maintaining a comfortable physical presence around others – not too close, yet not too far away. When your body is in the group, it sends the nonverbal message that you are interested in others and that you are following the same plan. The opposite is also true. If your body is out of the group (too far away), it sends the message you are not thinking about the group. While we often realize the importance of language and what to say in a conversation, it is important to understand that physical proximity is also a key ingredient to successful social interactions.



Body in the group.



Body out of the group.

Activities to try at home

Activity 1

Use the body in the group vocabulary throughout your daily routines. Keep in mind that any time two people are sharing space, they are considered a group. Therefore, you can use the vocabulary when you and your child are alone, or when the family is together as a whole. Consider the following examples:

- “We can start our movie when all family members have their bodies in the group.”
- “It’s time for dinner. Everyone in the family has their body in the group, sitting at the table. We can start our meal together!”
- “When you leave the table, your body is out of the group. It makes me think you are finished with your meal.”
- “Remember to keep your body in the group when we shop together at the grocery store.”

Activity

2

Look through photo albums with your child. In the pictures, identify when people have their bodies in or out of a group.

Activity

3

Watch for opportunities outside the home to observe others with their bodies in or out of groups. At a restaurant, for example, many people have their body in the group. Don't restrict yourself to groups of people either! One preschooler, for example, took a trip to the aquarium with her family. As they watched the schools of fish, she said "Look mom, that fish has its body out of the group."

Activity

4

Music Activities

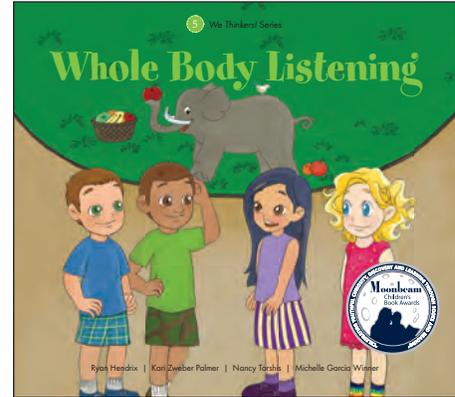
The Freeze

- Turn on some music and dance around. At random moments, pause the music and "FREEZE." Get the whole family involved.
- While "frozen" observe and discuss the physical presence of the people. Are you a group (about one arm's length away from each other) or is everyone all over the room? Whose body is still in the group? Who danced out? The object of the activity is not necessarily to stay in the group, but to observe and discuss what happened.

Hokey Pokey

Sing or listen to the "Hokey Pokey" together. In the song, each body part is placed in and out of the group! Sing and dance together while using the body in the group vocabulary.

Whole Body Listening



Family Letter and At Home Activities

In our Social Thinking group today we learned about the concept of **whole body listening** (Truesdale, 1990).

Whole body listening is when your eyes, ears, mouth, hands, arms, legs, and feet are calm and quiet. When you listen with your whole body it helps you pay attention to what people are doing around you and it shows others you are thinking about them.

Exploring this concept helps increase our awareness of how we listen when we are part of a group as well as the nonverbal messages we are sending when others are talking with and to us. Listening with our whole bodies, and subsequently focusing on and thinking about the group, sets the stage for successful communication and interaction.

In this adventure, Evan, Ellie, Jesse and Molly take a trip to the zoo. They learn that when all of their body parts are calm and quiet, it shows others they are thinking about them. When they listen with their whole bodies, they get to visit and learn about lots of animals, and everyone feels good about being together.



In this example, Ellie and Molly are not listening with their whole bodies.



Everyone is doing whole body listening. Even the Cheetah is happy now!

Activities to try at home

Activity 1 Help your child get ready to listen with his/her whole body! Before you begin activities together, such as reading, use language to remind the child to turn on his/her listening body, one body part at a time (ears, eyes, arms, hands, belly, seat, legs, and feet). “It’s time to listen with our eyes; that means you turn your eyes toward me.” “It’s time to listen with your hands; that means they are quiet in your lap.”

Activity 2 Point out times your child is doing whole body listening. “I can see you’re listening with your whole body. Your hands are listening, your feet are listening, your eyes are listening...” etc.

Activity 3 Help your child notice when s/he is not using whole body listening. “Oops, your eyes aren’t listening! I can see you’re looking at your toy when I expect you to think about me with your eyes!” Offer suggestions of what to do to use whole body listening. “Show me you’re thinking about me and listening with your eyes. Now your eyes are looking at me, your hands are still and you are facing me. Now I know you’re using whole body listening.”

Activity 4 Play a game or put together a puzzle that involves body parts. Mr. Potato Head is a great example. Place the body parts into a bag or hide them in a bucket filled with dry rice or beans. Have fun finding the parts and placing them into the body. Talk about how Mr. Potato Head can show he is using whole body listening. Make a point of how hard this is for Mr. Potato Head to do since his body keeps falling apart!