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**Concept #9: Size of the Problem**

- Presented by: Michelle Garcia Winner, SLP, MA-CCC
- Moderated by: Pamela Crooke, SLP, PhD-CCC

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Enjoy our *10 Concepts* webinar series:

- 10 webinars
- 10 months
- 10 Social Thinking concepts

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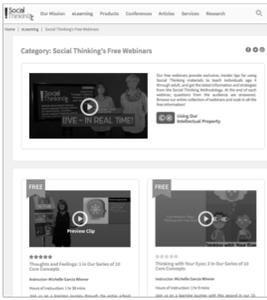
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View all our recorded webinars:  
[www.socialthinking.com/webinars](http://www.socialthinking.com/webinars)



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**What's problem solving?**

Math is not the only activity that requires problem solving; we're constantly problem solving socially when communicating with others, working in groups, doing homework, self-regulating, etc.

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**Virtually everything we do to self-regulate, share space effectively with others, and socially relate requires:**

- Considering others' perspectives
- Awareness of one's own thoughts and feelings
- Figuring out context-based social expectations
- Making smart guesses
- Thinking flexibly
- Problem solving

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Social Thinking's  
Social Competency Model

What's the role of **size of the problem**  
in developing social competencies?

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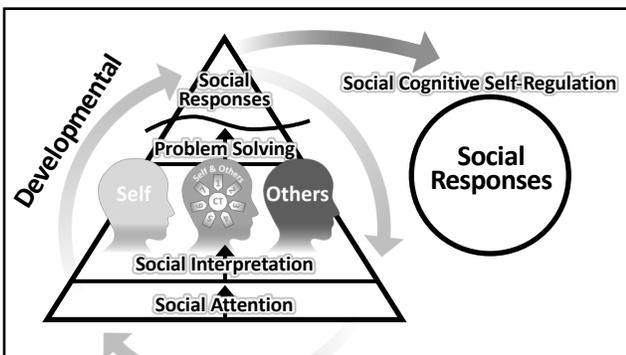
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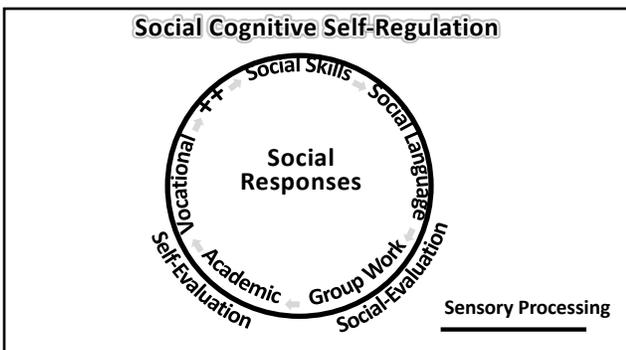
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For most of us, problem solving is a routine part of life and we don't even notice when we're doing it.

Unfortunately, the term "problem" can indicate many different degrees of severity. When many hear the word they think of a HUGE PROBLEM!!!

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Social problem solving always involves some type of self-regulation and co-regulation.

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**Social Problem Solving:** The process of figuring out how to proceed, based on how we attend and interpret social information (given our own and others' perceived social goals).

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As we continue to evolve the Social Thinking Methodology, we are defining all this as: *social cognitive self-regulation*.

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Three types of social cognitive self-regulation:

1. **Emotional self-regulation:** using strategies to enhance self-control in stressful situations
2. **Social self-regulation:** managing one's language and behavior to meet one's social goals (making a friend, blending into a group, etc.)
3. **Self-managed self-regulation:** carrying out one's personal organizational goals (e.g., staying calm to do the work, time management, turning things in, etc.)

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Example of social self-regulation:

A mature adult asks "Why won't my colleagues let me talk in meetings?"

I asked him to show me where people sit in the meetings by providing him wooden blocks to illustrate his dilemma.

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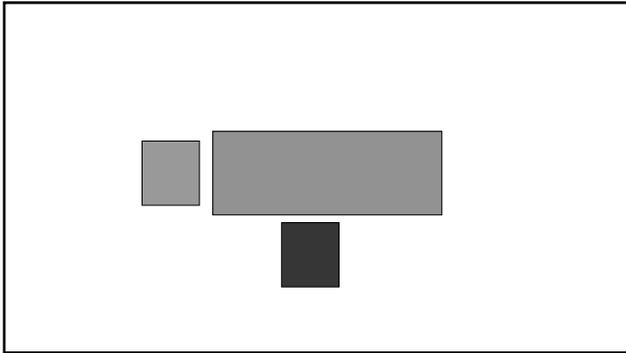
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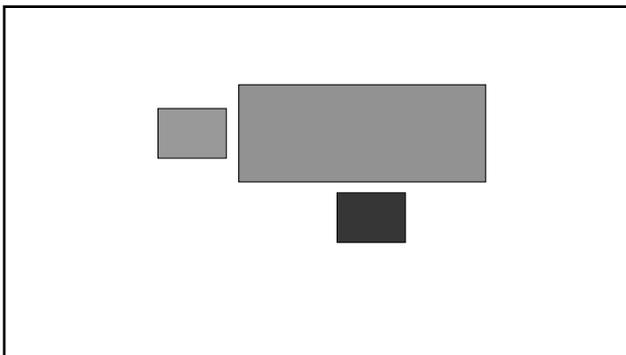
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**Other examples of social problem solving in order to socially self-regulate:**

- Should I play the game another kid wants to play or insist on playing the one I want to play?
- Should I raise my hand to speak in class?
- Should I say “hi” to that new person at school?
- How do I self-advocate when I feel so nervous?

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What someone does or says in the presence of others impacts how others feel and think (negatively or positively) which impacts how they react and respond to the *doer* of the behaviors.

The *doer* then has thoughts and feelings about how he or she is treated by others, which then impacts how they react and respond.

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This socially based self-regulatory boomerang effect is called:  
**The Social-Emotional Chain Reaction**

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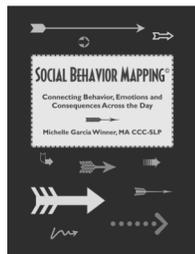
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When we problem solve, we should be considering this boomerang effect.

How we self-regulate does not just impact ourselves but others' emotional experiences as well as their perception of us—as taught in the book *Social Behavior Mapping*.



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In this process, we not only problem solve what each of us *should do*, but what we *shouldn't do* based our own and others' expectations tied to the context, such as being in a classroom, playing a game at recess, sitting in an office, etc.

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Executive functioning literature calls this *inhibition* or *inhibiting responses*

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The Social Thinking Methodology has many different treatment frameworks and strategies to help individuals learn to co-regulate and self-regulate across a variety of contexts.

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As students are taught cognitively to make sense of ourselves and others' perceptions/emotions, it helps to learn about ourselves first...our emotions, our sensory systems, what makes our brain go into fight or flight, etc.

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*The Zones of Regulation* helps us begin to learn about our own sensory-based arousal system and explore how this impacts our emotional experiences.

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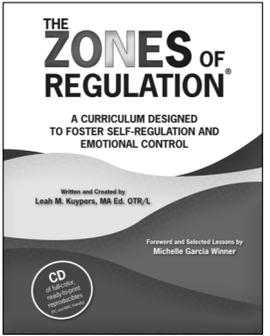
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The Zones of Regulation  
by Leah Kuypers (OT)

Check out the Zones apps!  
[www.zonesofregulation.com/apps](http://www.zonesofregulation.com/apps)



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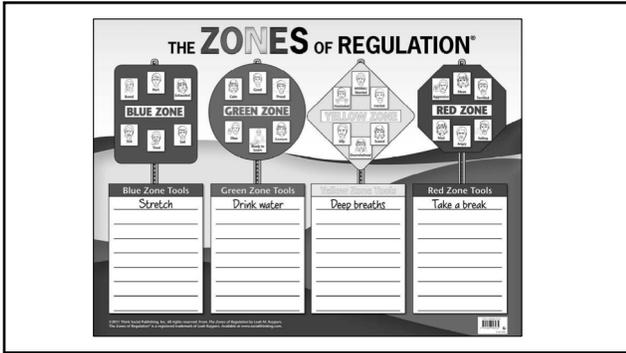
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We also need to teach that  
problems are not black and white.

Rather than think any problem is a  
*PROBLEM!!* we help kids learn that problems  
come in different sizes.

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*PROBLEMS!!* can trigger sensory  
overwhelm, negative emotions,  
and negative thinking.

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However, how a student perceives a **PROBLEM!!** may not be in alignment with how others perceive the same circumstance.

Hence, we seek to help students learn that problems come in different sizes.

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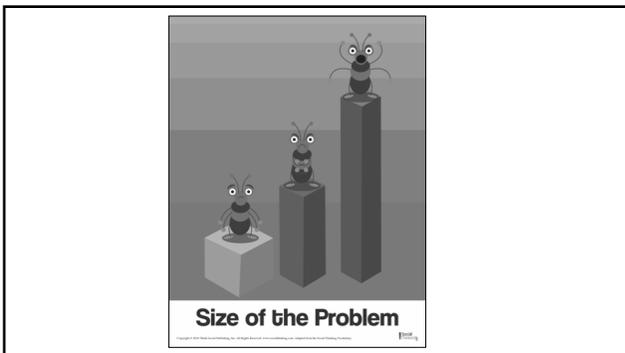
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To try and make sense of something really complicated, we created an imperfect definition to help our students sort out what type of problem merits what type of emotional reaction.

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**Small, Medium, and Big Problems!!**

- 1. Small problem:** a problem you can solve by yourself (e.g., a broken pencil lead)
- 2. Medium problem:** a problem you need help to solve, often from an adult (e.g., my science project was destroyed)
- 3. Big problem:** a problem even adults need help solving (e.g., fire, car accident, etc.)

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We teach children that the size of their emotional reaction should relate to the size of the problem.

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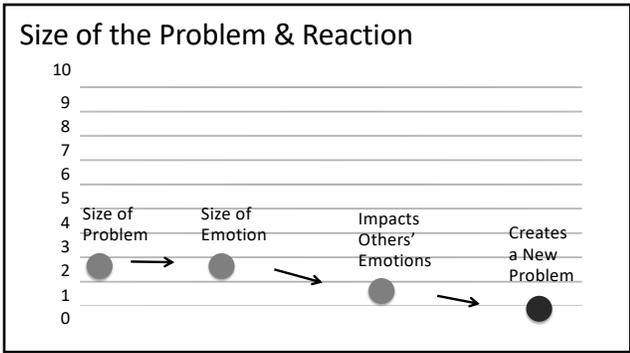
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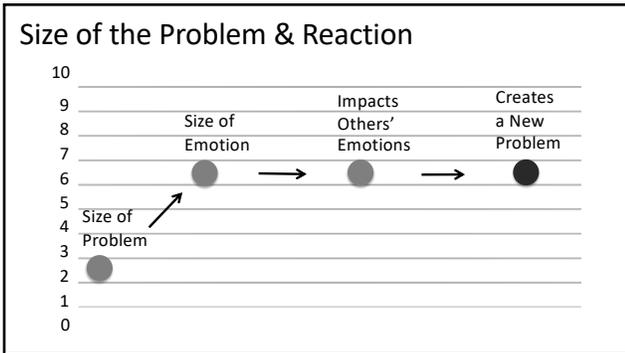
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**Size of the Problem poster**

Size of My Problem → Size of My Reaction

My Problem: Didn't get to go first in line

My Reaction: Yelled and screamed

People got upset with me

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However, as each of us ages, so do the expectations for how we manage our emotional reactions.

**Social expectations change with age.**

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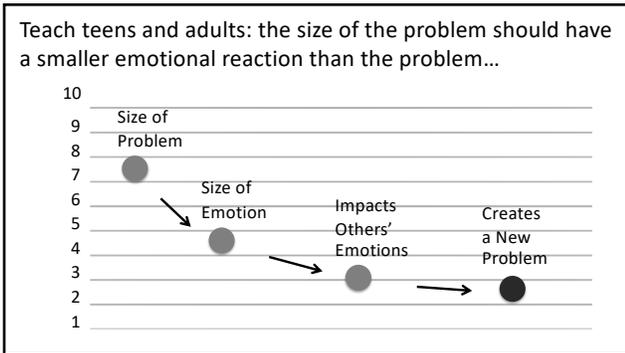
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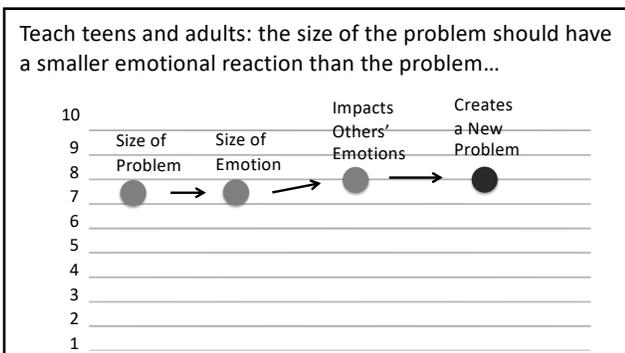
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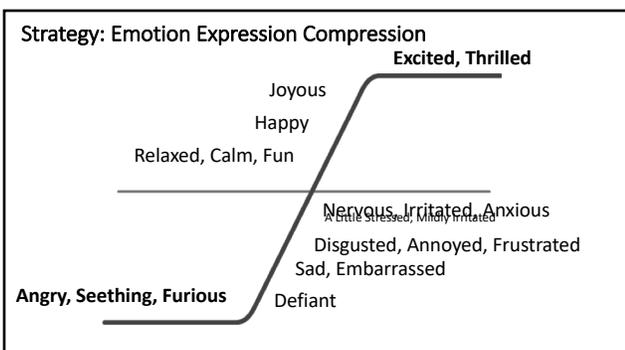
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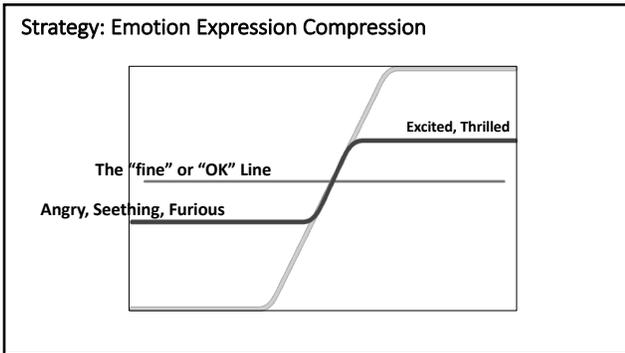
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Some kids and adults get stuck focusing on their negative emotions instead of solving the problem—which can cause even more problems.

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Their social learning journey includes discovering how their emotions and thoughts are different.

We really like the Mindsight Approach by Dr. Daniel Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson

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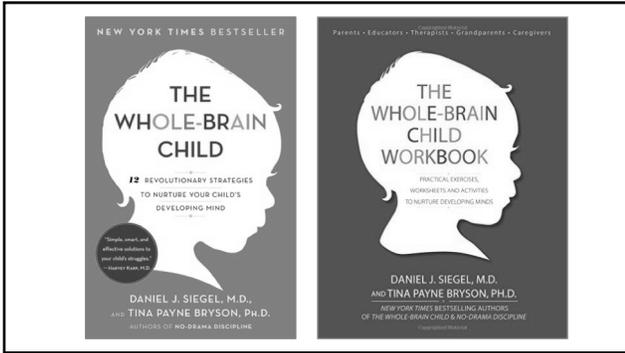
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Many core social-emotional learning concepts are taught through our developmental motivational tools.

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**We Thinkers! Vol. 1 & 2**  
2 curricula, 10 concepts, 10 storybooks, and loads of ideas for how to teach all this information.

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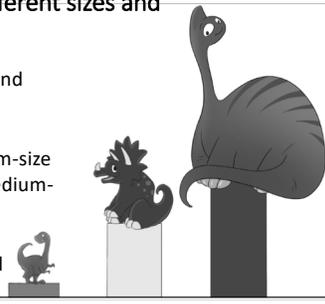
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Dinosaurs come in all different sizes and so do problems!

- Some dinosaurs are small and some problems are small.
- Some dinosaurs are medium-size and some problems are medium-size.
- Some dinosaurs are big and some problems are big.



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For kids age 8–10 we spend a lot of time on these two tools:



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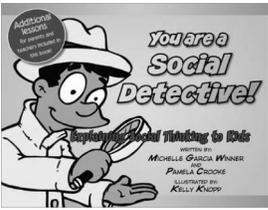
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Kids have to learn to attend and interpret social information...



(which is taught in *You Are a Social Detective!*)

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...before they can learn to problem solve how to respond, and figure out *what to do* and *what not to do* in social situations! Problem solving is taught in our Superflex series—but the teaching doesn't start there.



Teach *You Are a Social Detective!* before the Superflex Curriculum.

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Superflex lives within each of us, helping us learn super-flexible thinking (social competencies) by using strategies from the *Thinkables* to ward off the sneaky *Unthinkables*.

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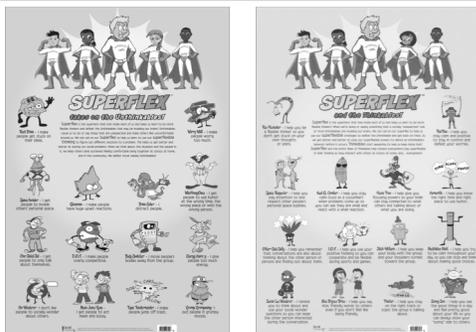
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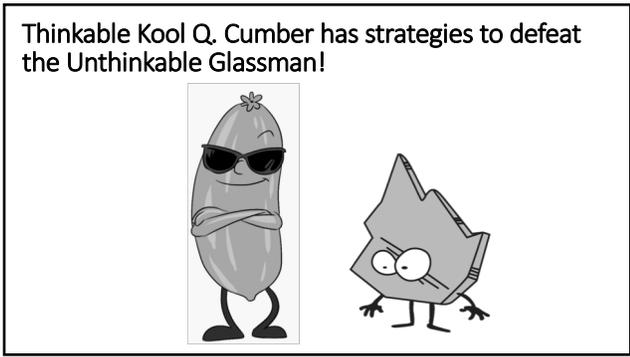
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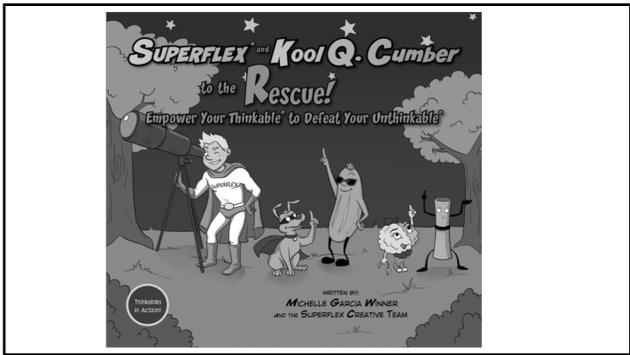
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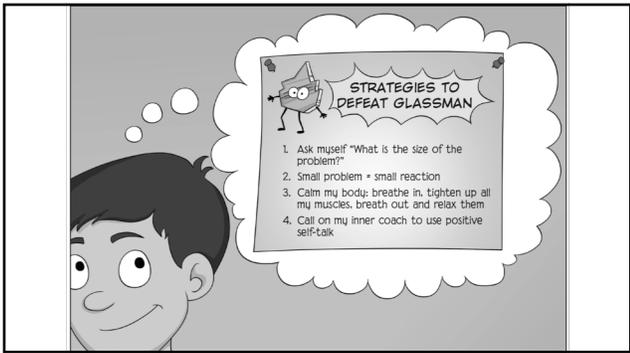
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Each of our Superflex powers helps us defeat the powers of the Unthinkables!

Step by "social learning, self-regulation" step...

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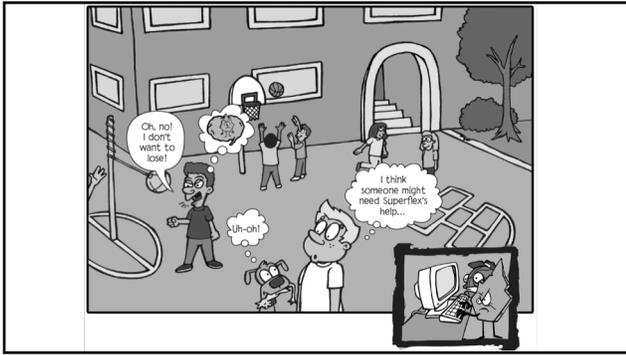
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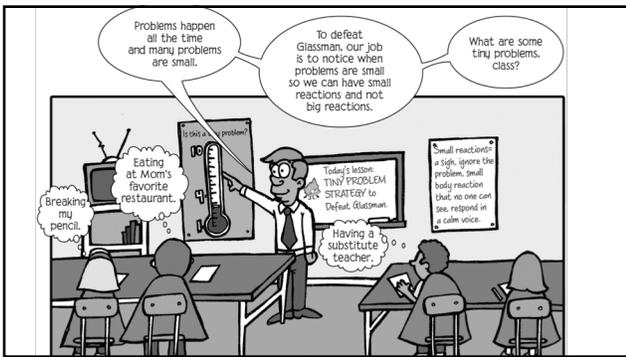
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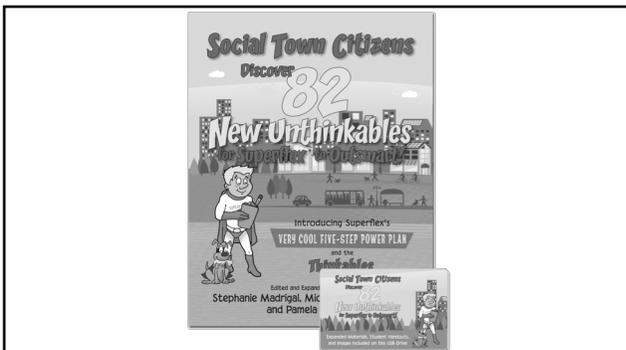
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Once ages 9-12 have outgrown Superflex, continue deep social-emotional learning by using the two-book set *Social Thinking and Me*.

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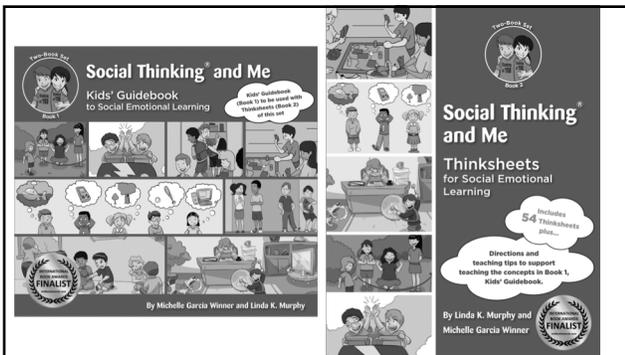
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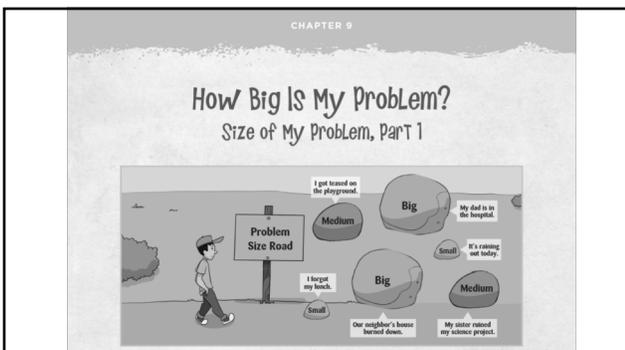
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Chapter 9: Thinksheet 1  
Page 2 of 2

### Identifying The Size of Problems

The Situation	BIG Problem	MEDIUM Problem	SMALL Problem/ GLITCH
8. My house floods after a big storm.			
9. I forget something at school that I wanted to bring home.			
10. I get hurt and need to go to the hospital.			
11. My friend is sick and can't come over to hang out today.			
12. I'm crossing the street and get hit by a person on a bicycle. We both fall and have some scrapes and bruises.			
13. I rip my paper.			

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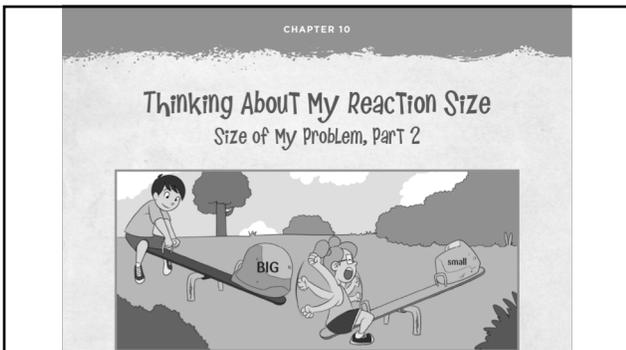
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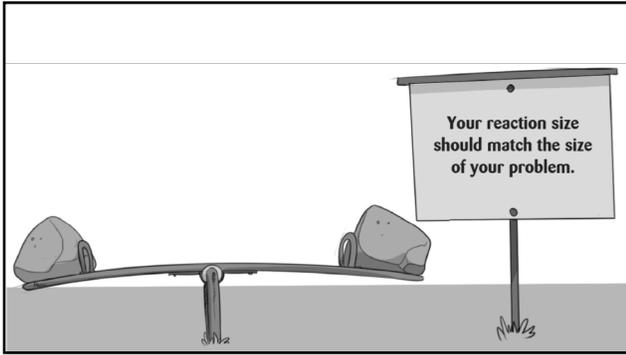
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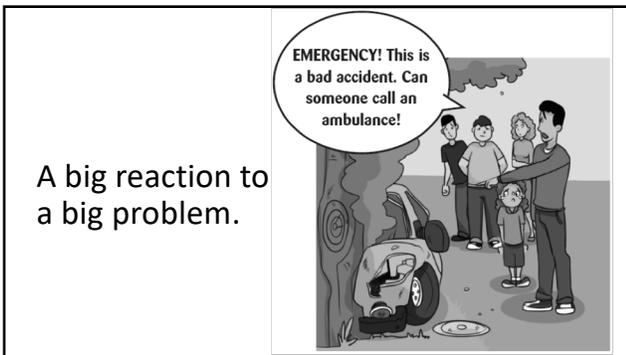
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A big reaction to a big problem.

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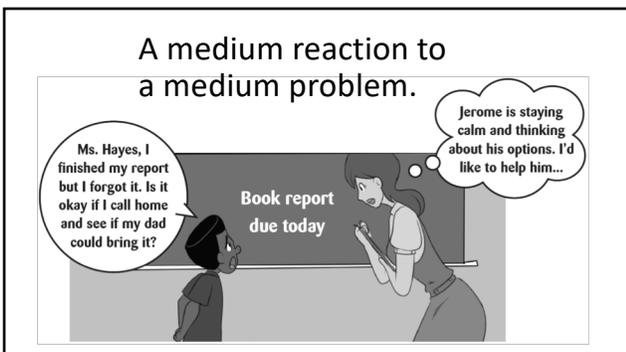
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A medium reaction to a medium problem.

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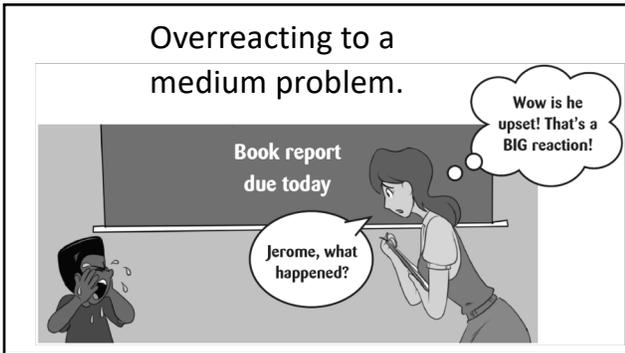
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We teach teens about the Social-Emotional Chain Reaction and Social Behavior Mapping.

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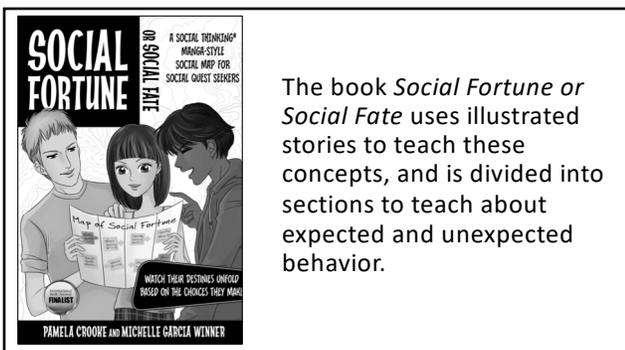
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The book *Social Fortune or Social Fate* uses illustrated stories to teach these concepts, and is divided into sections to teach about expected and unexpected behavior.

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**Social FORTUNE—It's Doomsday! (Or Is It?)**  
 SOCIAL SITUATION: Time to finish homework

Expected Behaviors— What you DO in the social situation	How others FEEL about what you did	How others treat you based on their feelings	How you FEEL about how they treated you
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Think about the size of the problem</li> <li>Take a deep breath and stay calm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proud</li> <li>Relieved</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage you</li> <li>Leave you alone</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Calm</li> <li>Proud</li> </ul>

Surviving the world of homework and chores and just about everything else means we have to figure out the size of the problem right there staring us in the face and then figure out how to react in a way that matches up. Rin got it by THINKING first about how big the problem really was—size 3 out of 10—and then reacting in a smaller way. Nice work on her part because she wound up getting exactly what she wanted in the end.

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**3 REALLY IMPORTANT THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW!**

- 1 THINKING ABOUT WHAT PEOPLE THINK ABOUT YOU
- 2 THE SIZE OF THE PROBLEM
- 3 EMOTION EXPRESSION COMPRESSION

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**PROBLEM SOLVING THERMOMETER**

Size of the Problem	Factors and Reasoning in a smaller way to mediate and small size problems
10 (BIG PROBLEMS)	
9	
8	
7 (MEDIUM PROBLEMS)	Factors and Reasoning for MEDIUM PROBLEMS (2-4)
6	
5	
4 (SMALL PROBLEMS)	Factors and Reasoning for SMALL PROBLEMS (1-3)
3	
2	
1 (VERY SMALL PROBLEMS)	Factors and Reasoning for VERY SMALL PROBLEMS (0-2)

Red is Big on the Inside (PBI) but Expresses it Better when in Public (EBP)

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A strategy code:

**FBI-ESP:**

(Feel it **B**ig on the **I**nside but **E**xpress  
 it **S**mall(er) when in **P**ublic.)

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One strategy people use when they are feeling really big emotions on the inside and know they need to keep the size of their expression smaller on the outside is to:

1. Take deep breathes
2. Think about the fact that others will have really uncomfortable thoughts if they emit a burst of emotion in public

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Unexpected Behaviors...What you DO in the social situation	How others FEEL about what you did	How others treat you based on their feelings	How you FEEL about how they treated you
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Big reaction to little problem</li> <li>Throw your papers on the floor and refuse to work</li> <li>Scream at others/complain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Frustrated</li> <li>Irritated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May lose privileges (e.g., can't go online)</li> <li>Yell you</li> <li>Mom may yell back</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awful</li> <li>Mad</li> <li>Stressed</li> </ul>

Problems come in all sizes and range from nice and cool (size 1-3: little problem) to frustrating/irritating (size 4-7: moderate problem) to red hot, boiling (size 8-10: big problem). Sometimes in the moment, each problem seems like it's a blazing 10, but it's really not. The first trick is to put your problem in perspective and figure out the actual size of the problem. You can do this by trying to think about how big others might see the problem. The second part is to realize that how you react to your perceived problem should be calmer than how the problem actually feels inside of you. This is especially true for small or medium size problems.

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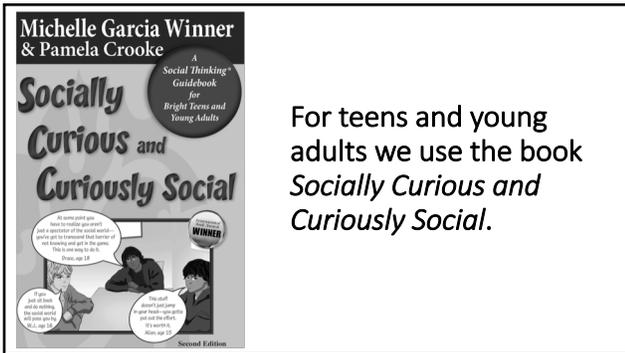
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For teens and young adults we use the book *Socially Curious and Curiously Social*.

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### Chapter 10 Problems: They Spread On Contact!

You don't live in a vacuum, which means that when you share space or coexist with any other person in any type of situation, what you do or say affects others. Your mood at the time, your opinions, the thoughts you have, the way you act—everything causes thoughts and reactions in other people. Even your personal problems have an effect on others, whether or not you notice it. Don't believe it? Keep reading.

Jordan could not get out of bed, or so it seemed. Every single day of his teenage years, his mom would bang on the door to his room and let out her morning screech! He always stayed there until his mom came back to his

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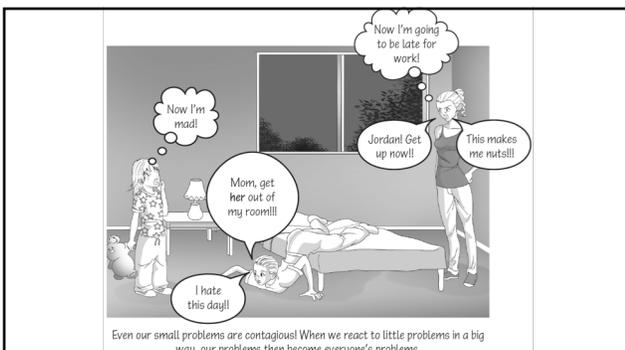
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Even our small problems are contagious! When we react to little problems in a big way, our problems then become everyone's problems.

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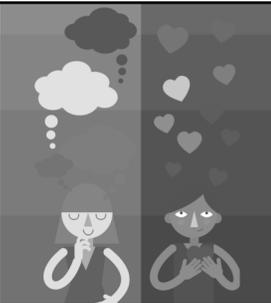
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1<sup>st</sup> webinar topic



**Thoughts and Feelings**

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2<sup>nd</sup> webinar topic



**Thinking with Your Eyes**

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3<sup>rd</sup> webinar topic



**The Group Plan**

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4<sup>th</sup> webinar topic



**Body in the Group**

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5<sup>th</sup> webinar topic



**Whole Body Listening**

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6<sup>th</sup> webinar topic



**Hidden Rules and  
Expected-Unexpected**

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7<sup>th</sup> webinar topic



**Smart Guess**

The illustration shows a boy and a dog sitting at a table with blocks. A thought bubble above the dog shows a tower of blocks, representing a problem-solving strategy.

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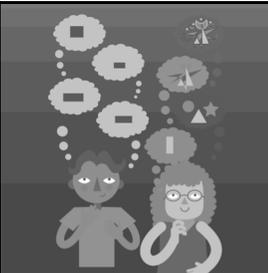
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8<sup>th</sup> webinar topic



**Flexible and Stuck Thinking**

The illustration shows two children with thought bubbles containing various geometric shapes, representing different ways of thinking about a problem.

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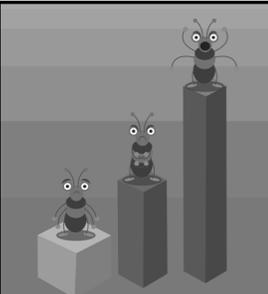
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9<sup>th</sup> webinar topic,  
today's webinar



**Size of the Problem**

The illustration shows three ants on blocks of increasing height, representing the concept of the size of a problem.

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10<sup>th</sup> and final  
webinar topic in  
this webinar  
series.



Sharing an Imagination

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**Learn more with eLearning!**  
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about problem solving:

Strategies for Kids: Brain Boss & Flex Camp: The  
Detective & Dragon Series

- 7 Steps of Social Problem Solving
- Brain Boards
- Problem Solving Templates
- Rubrics for Measurement

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LAUGH Module 1: Why Teaching Social  
Competencies Goes Beyond Social Skills Training

- Social Problem Solving Framework
- Related Thinksheet Handout

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Teaching Social Competencies—More Than Social Skills

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