

The difference between Thoughts & Feelings

Once children understand how their thoughts are different from their feelings, they need to see how they are connected.

Explaining thoughts and feelings is useful to help children manage their emotions and behaviours.

When it comes to worry and anxiety, its not the feelings that are the problem, it's the thoughts that go with them.

Our minds will try and analyse our feelings and often go down a path of "doom and gloom".

If we help children notice the difference between thoughts and a feeling, they can then begin to learn to challenge the thoughts that are not helping.

To put it simply so they can understand-Thoughts can make a feeling better or worse.

So the feeling could be **sad and/or bored** : The body notices the feeling and then the mind kicks in and tries to explain it.

"I thought, she was my friend, she doesn't like me anymore, I bet she's been talking about me. I'm always on my own. Everyone else has lots of friends."

"I'm feeling sad. Maybe It's because I'm missing my friend. I've not heard back from her. Maybe she's busy with family and not got her phone on."

Noticing how they can begin to choose to help change the thoughts, so that the feeling does not seem so bad, is something we can help them with.

Separate Thoughts & Feelings

The ideal place to start is to help children separate thoughts and feelings. Most children don't realise that feeling angry is different than thinking "I'm going to knock my desk over". Thinking "I'm going to fail my test" is different than feeling nervous.

First to help children to tell the difference between thoughts and feelings, we have to explain them.

Thoughts are words we say to ourselves.

Thoughts happen all the time and often without us realising.

Two people can have different thoughts about the same thing.

Feelings will be more familiar, but it is helpful to check a child's feelings knowledge (see previous email on feelings). Do they have basic vocabulary, such as angry, happy, sad, surprised, scared?

How can you expand on their feelings knowledge, such as excited, furious, nervous, annoyed, unsafe, giddy, terrified?

It is so helpful to have visuals or even mirrors so they can see the difference between emotions on their face.

Activities

Once you define thoughts and feelings, give children the opportunities to practice spotting each one. Try some of these activities:

Sorting Tasks: Write down thoughts or feelings on cards and have them sort them and maybe play a game too. Acting out each feeling in a simple

charades type game can be a powerful way of educating children on emotional health.

Read stories together and stop when a characters shares a thought or a feeling. See if they can spot what the thought or emotion is and how to recognise.