



Introduction to Social Thinking

What is Social Thinking?

Social thinking is a user-friendly term for social cognition. Social thinking is required prior to the development of social skills. Successful social thinkers consider the points of view, emotions, thoughts, beliefs, prior knowledge and intentions of others (this is often called perspective-taking - considering the perspectives of others). This is for most of us an intuitive process. We can determine the meanings behind the messages communicated by others and how to respond to them within milliseconds to three seconds! Social thinking occurs everywhere, when we talk, share space, walk down the street, even when we read a novel and relate to our pets. It is an intelligence that integrates information across home, work and community settings - something we usually take for granted!

In neurotypical (so-called normal-thinking) people, social thinking is hard-wired at birth and learned intuitively from infancy onward. While most of us develop our communication skills as we grow up, steadily observing and acquiring social information and learning how to respond to the people around us, many have great difficulties with this process. These difficulties with learning and applying social information is often considered a social learning disability.

A Challenge for Individuals with Asperger Syndrome, High-Functioning Autism, ADHD, Nonverbal Learning Disorders and Other Social and Communicative Challenges

Many people can score high on IQ and standardized tests and have quite limited social skills. In fact, the research published by the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* indicates that Social Thinking methodologies are successful at teaching the ability to interact socially in people with social limitations who have *near-normal to way above-normal* intelligence. In addition, the Social Thinking strategies that have helped children and adolescents have also helped adults. Because social thinking is so important to learning throughout life, professionals and parents are using social thinking methods to assist an increasingly broad range of individuals.

The Social Thinking Program - Dynamic to Meet Individual Needs, No Diagnosis Needed

Over a decade ago, Michelle Garcia Winner, MA, CCC-SLP, coined the term Social Thinking and developed the related treatment approach for individuals with high-functioning autism, Asperger's and similar challenges. In 2008, she received an award of Special Congressional Recognition for her on-going innovation of the Social Thinking curriculum and treatment approach. Michelle, Tony Attwood, Carol Gray, Barry Prizant, Kari Dunn Buron, Diane Twatchman-Cullen, Cathy Pratt, Brenda Smith Myles have all contributed to Social Thinking and related treatment methodologies. However, much of the growth of Social Thinking, both nationally and internationally, can be attributed to its use by **professionals**, parents and other caregivers who modify strategies for their settings and student needs. The term Social Thinking now encompasses many treatment programs broadly described as "teaching social thinking and related social skills." These strategies share common traits and differ from "social skills" teaching by getting at the thinking behind being social.



Social Thinking strategies teach individuals:

- How their own social minds work - why they and others react and respond the way they do;
- How their behaviors affects those around them;
- And from this, how behaviors are affecting their own emotions, responses to and relationships with others across different social contexts.

For individuals being treated, the objectives of these strategies include the ability to:

- Recognize the different levels of their own and others' social minds;
- Navigate their behaviors for more rewarding social outcomes, which include considering how others perceive and respond to these behaviors;
- Learn to adapt to the people and situations around them, across contexts, from formal (classroom, workplace, etc.) to casual settings (hanging out, recess, etc.).