

Theory of Mind Overview for Families



Understanding how others think and feel is a developmental milestone and is critical for academic and social success. Children who understand others' perspectives are able to develop language quickly.

When students understand how others think and feel, they are able to improve their language skills and their understanding of the world around them. This can be taught to students as young as two years old.

Teach your child understand how others think and feel

What to Teach	Examples
Explicitly teach the vocabulary words for feelings and emotions.	think, feel, know, hope, sad, happy, guilty
Move from basic to more advanced vocabulary when discussing thoughts and emotions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instead of happy use joyful, playful, or content. • Many charts exist such as the feelings wheel (use QR code to access) which support teaching complex emotional vocabulary.
When reading, relate the emotions of a character in a book to a child's own feelings.	"When Lassie fell into the well, Timmy cried because he felt _____."
Guide children as needed to help them understand a character's behavior by referencing thoughts or feelings.	"Why did Timmy cry when Lassie fell into the well?"
Predict what a character might do next based on their thoughts or feelings.	"If Timmy believes that Lassie is in the well, what will he do next?"
Preteens and teenagers develop advanced ToM, as seen in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sarcasm • considering another's thoughts about someone else

Set up your child for success just by using emotion words and asking questions about thinking and feeling when you read and talk with them!



Access the white paper by TRRC Faculty Affiliate, Dr. Kristen Secora, to read more about the research support for ToM and how it can be taught.

