

# 11 Simple Ways to Promote Cognitive Flexibility in Children

TODDLER

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Help stimulate children's cognitive flexibility by encouraging them to think, speak, and express their feelings. Self-talks, toys, books, routines, and pretend play can also help them grow.

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*Developing cognitive flexibility enhances childrens' learning abilities.*

Cognitive flexibility is an essential executive function skill to nurture early in your children.

It allows them to change gears and think of problems in a different way. Developing cognitive flexibility enhances childrens' learning abilities by enabling them to let go of old learnings and embrace new ways of approaching things, which brings out the exceptional in your child.

According to educator and curriculum developer Mehgan Fitzgerald, here are some simple, day-to-day activities where you can nurture cognitive flexibility in your little one.

Ways to promote cognitive flexibility in children	How flexibility is developed	What your child does
Teach your child how to logically talk through a problem alone (e.g. self-talk)	Your child learns how to calmly think through a problem independently.	Self-talks through a problem independently. Teach your child how to logically talk through a problem alone (e.g. self-talk) Self-talks through "problems" in order to choose the best solution, instead of running to you for it.

**Ways to  
promote  
cognitive  
flexibility in  
children**

**How flexibility is developed**

**What your child does**

Use your gaze and motions to draw attention to different objects around your child

Your child understands how to shift his/ her attention rapidly (without losing focus), just by following your cues.

Uses toys from different sets (e.g. blocks, train tracks, dolls) that you provide one by one, to create one play scene.

Change the rules of a familiar game

Your child learns how to gracefully adapt to new situations.

Easily adapts to the new rules applied to the game and still shows that he/she is having fun despite the change in mechanics.

Read a variety of books

Your little one is encouraged to ask questions about new words, ideas and even spelling.

Reads a new book with you.  
Explores words with the same letter combinations, but different pronunciations (e.g. “tough” and “through) out of curiosity.

Tell jokes to your child

Your child will understand how one phrase or sentence may have many subtleties and nuances that are not immediately apparent.

Tells jokes to family and friends!

Mix up the routine

Unexpected events in a fixed routine help your child see that it's okay to do things differently.

Figures out how to adapt to this tweaked routine by asking questions and understanding why it's okay to have a variety in your day-to-day activities.

Play “what’s this?”

Your child learns that that one object might have multiple uses.

Finds as many ways as possible to play with one common household object—like using a placemat as a magic carpet.

Encourage your child’s effort even when they make a mistake

Your child gains self-confidence in his/ her own cognitive flexibility skills.

Tries a new challenging activity without hesitations.

Encourage pretend play

Pretend play develops your child’s cognitive flexibility by honing the ability to see things and situations from someone else’s perspective.

Acts out a real-life situation like pretending to be a fireman or garbage collector.

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Be a role model

When your child sees you engage in behaviours that are conducive to cognitive flexibility, he or she will mimic your actions.

Observes you attempt a difficult task.

