The Thought Bubble Technique

Lynne Kenney, PsyD
Thinking, speaking or acting impulsively without planning or thinking things out poses social challenges for children. We can help children better manage their impulsive thoughts, words, and actions by using a storytelling activity we call *The Thought Bubble Technique*. In this visual conversation activity, we help children think, write, draw, and talk about what characters in a story might be thinking, saying or doing. The Thought Bubble Technique encourages children to use their imaginations while building their thinking skills.

Here is how you do it.

Open a book with vivid imagery such as a Dr. Seuss book. Let your child or student turn the pages until he discovers a page he finds interesting. Tell your child, "We're going to use our imaginations. We're going to imagine a thought bubble is over the head of each of the characters on the page. Then we're going to imagine what they might be thinking." "We get to make up our own story it doesn't need to be the original story in this book."

By looking at the images on the page ask your child to make up a story about what's happening on the page. What are the characters thinking? What are the characters saying? What are the characters doing? How are the characters feeling? Go one step at a time, this activity can be done over several days or therapy sessions.

Help the child "THINK OUT" how is the thought, feeling or action helpful or not helpful? How might the other characters respond? How can the characters shift their thoughts, words, feelings or actions so that each story has a happier ending?

The key is to use the creative exploration of the images to help the child thoughtfully reflect on how words, thoughts, feelings, and actions are prosocial, facilitating relationships or challenging causing self or others to feel uncomfortable, unhappy or withdrawn. Use your own creative license, adapt the "Cognitive Conversation" with the child to help him or her see things in a new way. Thoughtful exploration leads to the mindful development of new thinking skills.
The Thought Bubble Technique

This is what he is thinking

This is what he is doing

This is what he is saying

This is a helpful thought.
This is not a helpful thought.
This is why it's a good thing to think.
This is why it's not a good thing to think.
This is what else he could be thinking.
This is why this thought could get him into trouble.
This is how the other character is going to respond to him.
This is what is going to happen next.

These are words that are helpful.
These are words that are not helpful.
These words will make the other character feel happy.
These words will make the other character feel sad, mad or bad.
This is why it's a good thing to say.
This is why it's not a good thing to say.
This is what is going to happen next.

This is what he is doing.
This is why it's a good thing to do.
When he does this, the other character likes it.
When he does this the other character doesn't like it.
This is why he might have a problem.
This is why he needs to choose to do something else.
This is what is going to happen next.
The Thought Bubble Technique

This is what is happening

This is how this story could have a happier ending
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Growing Social-Emotional Literacy Through Art
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STUDENTS AGES 4-10 WILL REALLY DIG!

Dr. Lynne Kenney
Pediatric psychologist, author and international educator

Meg Garcia
Illustrator and bee wrangler

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Ages 3-12

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WENDY YOUNG, LMSW, BCD

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For Better Thinking, Self-Regulation, Learning & Behavior

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5 SIMPLE STEPS
To Teaching Children How They Think

The Quick Start Manual

Lynne Kenney, PsyD
Co-author of BLOOM: 50 Things to Say, Think and Do, with Anxious, Angry and Over-The-Top Kids