

Flexible Thinking.



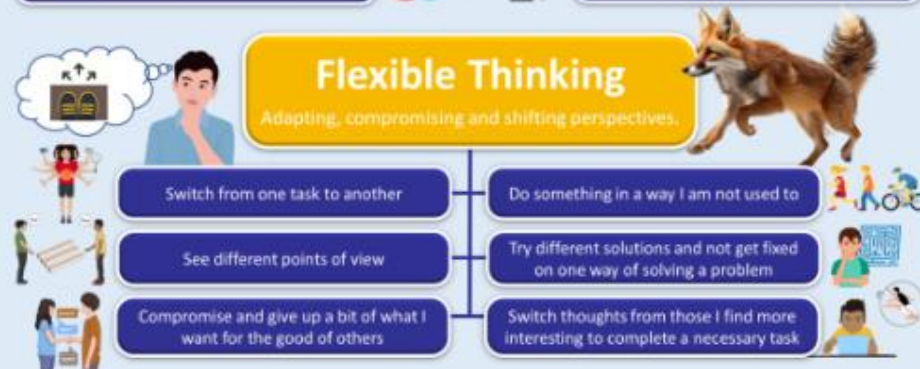
No 3: Flexible Thinking



What is Flexible Thinking?

Flexible Thinking is the skill of being able to fit easily into new situations and manage when things change. Flexible thinkers are great at giving up a little bit of what they want so everyone is happy. They can see things from different points of view and switch easily between different tasks.

Here's a mind map to explain more about Flexible Thinking:



Control Centre Skill No.3: Flexible Thinking



What is Flexible Thinking?

Flexible thinking is one of the six important Control Centre Skills. Experts sometimes call it 'Cognitive Flexibility'.

There are 6 main Flexible Thinking skills:

1 Shift from one thought or activity to another (set shift)



2 Tolerate newness & uncertainty & adapt to change



3 See things from different and multiple perspectives



4 Problem solve creatively



5 Compromise



6 Be emotionally flexible



If you are good at Flexible Thinking you will be able to:

1 Shift from one thought or activity to another (set shifting)

- Switch tasks without thinking e.g. when cooking, keep an eye on different saucepans and answer the phone without burning things!
- Switch types of thinking when changing from one task to another, e.g. from using visual skills to creating stories with words.
- Switch places and be able to move happily from one place to another.
- Switch company and be able to change the way you act and speak to suit the situation.
- Stop something you are enjoying to get on with a task you need to get done.
- Shift thoughts away from something you really want when it is not possible at that time.
- Shift thoughts away from something you find really interesting to thinking about something else you find less interesting.



If you are good at Flexible Thinking you will be able to:

- Have a go at doing things in a different way and let go of your usual way of doing them
- Solve problems and get on well with people.



- Be ok with a change to what you were expecting

- Listen to what other people want and compromise so it is good for both of you



- Understand and accept other people's point of view when different to yours

- Think of another way of doing something when you get stuck.



Flexible Thinking



Donkeys are great at:

- Keeping to what they believe in and staying loyal to a cause or passion
- Keeping going and staying on track, even when others change their mind
- Persuading people and getting jobs done
- Sticking to the rules and making sure things are fair
- Doing things properly and being exact and accurate about things

Flexi Foxes are great at:

- Adapting to change
- Compromising
- Seeing different perspectives
- Changing from one task to another
- Trying different ways of doing things
- Giving new experiences a go
- Meeting new people

Is Flexible Thinking always the best sort of thinking?



No. Sometimes Flexi Foxes can be too flexible! They can find it hard to stick with one thing until it's done and can get distracted by new, interesting ideas.

They can also chop and change from one thing to another and find it hard to stick to what was agreed.

Sometimes it is better to use more rigid or what we call 'Determined Donkey' Thinking. Let's explain a little more about that.

Some people aren't so good at Flexible Thinking, but they are good at being determined and persevering. We call them 'Determined Donkeys'.

Determined Donkeys are great at:

- Sticking up for what they think is right and being loyal
- Sticking to what they believe and being passionate about a cause
- They might also be good at sticking to the rules, whatever someone says
- Sticking to one thing to get it done



Determined Donkeys can be rigid in their thinking

This can cause some problems as they find it harder to:

- Manage when things change
- Listen to another person's point of view
- Find solutions when things go wrong
- Compromise so everyone is happy



Donkey Thinking would be good to use when:



- You have a piece of homework to finish and your friends want you to come out straight away.
- You want to run the Run in the Park 5K and need to keep going with your training three times a week.
- You want to get a t-shirt signed by a hero of yours after a concert and there is a long wait in a queue.

Rigid Donkey thinking would be good to use when:

- You are stuck on a bit of homework
- Your friend wants to do a different thing than you do one evening and you need to find something that suits you both
- You were expecting to go on a special visit which you were really looking forward to and it's just been cancelled

Which is best? Flexi Fox or Determined Donkey Thinking?

Neither. They are both useful in different situations.



Helping yourself with Flexible Thinking skills

If you are a slower, stronger thinker, there are lots of things that can help:



What you can do to help yourself

1. Find out what you will be doing in the next week and prepare ahead of time (Prep4Best) so you feel in control and certain.
2. Think of ways to link any problem solving to real situations whenever you can. Have a Plan A, B and C to fall back on so if things change, you already feel certain about what will happen and what you can do.
3. Practice seeing things from different points of view.
4. Use the Control Centre Skills checklist to work out what aspects of Flexible Thinking you are great at.
5. Use the checklist to work out which parts of Flexible Thinking you find tricky.
6. Use the Scaling Tool to decide where you are at now for Flexible Thinking.
7. Decide if you want to get better at Flexible Thinking.
8. Work with an adult you like and trust to work out exactly **which** Flexible Thinking skills you are going to practice and **how** you are going to practice them.

Helping yourself with Flexible Thinking skills



What you can do to help yourself

9. If you want to improve your Flexible Thinking, trying new things and meeting new people will make a big difference.
10. The first step is to work out what interests, groups or clubs you might enjoy. There are lots of classes and groups to try.
11. You will probably feel anxious about starting something new and feel it is easier and more comfortable to stay at home.
12. If you keep going, step by step, you will find things easy and it will help you to feel happier in life too!
13. Keep using the Scaling Tool and the checklist to see if you are improving.
14. It will help to get an adult or good friend to help you make a plan and think through what would help you to follow your ideas through.



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How **others** can help you with Flexible Thinking Skills



How others can help you

1. When something is abstract, they can give you examples based on real life that are meaningful to you.
2. Let you know ahead of time what to expect and explain the reason for things.
3. Give you timings for how long tasks will last and when they will stop. This will help you to shift your thinking rather than feel you have been put on the spot.
4. Discuss any changes before they happen – especially if it means what they expect from you is going to change too.



5. Teach you some strategies for Flexible Thinking such as Plan A, B and C; Big Deal, Little Deal; Chair Swap.
6. Give you simple choice and decision-making as much as possible so you don't feel forced against your will.
7. Help you to improve your Flexible Thinking skills e.g. by supporting you in trying new experiences. (See attached document: Improving Flexible Thinking Skills for more guidance on improving Flexible Thinking).

How **others** can help you with Flexible Thinking Skills



How others can help you

8. If you have difficulties in Flexible Thinking, it may be hard for you to see things through when they are unfamiliar.
9. You may panic and freeze when you experience what we call 'Green Stress' (green stress doesn't feel nice at the time but if we work through it, it gets us to a better place).
10. Coaching support from an adult you really like will help you to start noticing when something is helpful green stress and to find it easier to follow things through.



See also the section on supporting physical and emotional needs to help you to learn, live and socialise at your best.