

Stage 6: Logical and Emotional Thinking

30-48 Months

Goal: Building bridges between ideas. Challenge your child to connect her ideas together by seeking her opinion, enjoying her debates, and enlarging her pretend dramas.

Learning to Think

Help your child learn to think by holding long conversations with her in which you seek her opinions rather than simply trade pieces of information. For instances, when she expresses a desire to “Go out now!” you can ask her what she wants to do once she’s outside. When she replies, “Play on the slide!” she’ll be linking her wishes with your thoughts and ideas. Try and pose open-ended questions to get her thinking, such as “Why do you like this color so much?” rather than “Which is your favorite color?” Enjoy debates about everything from bedtime to ice cream flavors! When your child clamors to stay up later, and you ask, “Why should you be allowed to stay up so late?” she’s likely to give you a lawyerly response of “Because you let (big sister) stay up late and I’m almost as old!” Also, as you continue to be a pretend partner, try and come up with new plot twists. You might explore the dolls’ feelings or let her be a mommy while you are the child.

Stage 6 Do’s and Don’ts

- Do rely on jointly creating elaborate pretend dramas that have logical plots. For example, tea parties and school scenes and trips to Grandma’s can be woven together.
- Do rely on enjoyable debates about everything from food and clothes choices to sharing toys.
- Don’t simply tell your child what to do; explain why you want to do something. Discuss the pros and cons, and give your child plenty of time to argue her viewpoint. A good rule of thumb is that if your child’s answers don’t frequently surprise you, or if you have a single correct answer in mind, you are probably over-scripting.
- Do rely on reflective discussions. When your child wants something, don’t simply say yes or no. Instead, ask “What/when/why/how...?” In this way, you’ll help your child give an opinion and reflect on her own wishes – the foundation for abstract thinking.
- Do carry out these activities in peer, sibling, and small play groups. Children can debate each other or make funny pictures.
- Don’t solve problems for your child; let her solve them herself. Your role is to help her brainstorm or to offer any needed encouragement.
- Do create experiences involving quantity, time, and space concepts that engage your child’s strong feelings of the moment.
- Do expose your child to a rich range of activities and encourage her natural interests and abilities. All these experiences will strengthen her ability to think abstractly.
- Do enjoy stories, reading, puzzles, and other traditional activities as part of a vibrant back-and-forth discussion
- Do enjoy helping your child use words to describe all the different feelings of life, from anger to closeness, Discuss feelings during both pretend play and reality-based conversations.

Games to help your child master Stage 6:

- **The Director Game**
See how many plot shifts or new story lines your child can initiate as the two of you lay make-believe games together. After the tea party play becomes a little repetitive or lacks direction, you can subtly challenge your child to thicken the plot by announcing something like “I’m so full of tea my tummy’s sloshing! What can we do next?”
- **“Why Should I?” Game**
When your child wants you to do things for her, gently tease her with a response of “Why should I?” and see how many reasons she can give you. Then, offer a compromise, such as “Let’s do it together,” when she wants you to get her riding toy out of the garage, or pick out a new outfit to wear, etc.