

## **Web-Based Radio Show**

### **Improving Levels of Thinking**


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Thank you for joining us this morning. We have a very important topic today. We have been talking about the levels of thinking and helping children with attentional problems and overall their ability to regulate sensations coming into their bodies and plan their actions and how improving the levels of thinking improves the child's ability to focus and attend and also self-regulate.

Today, we're going to talk about how to enhance the levels of thinking. It's particularly challenging sometimes when an older child, let's say a seven, eight, nine, or ten year old - not old by ordinary standards, but older when we're working with two and three years olds or even one month or four or five month olds. It's particularly challenging to help a slightly older child - a grade school child or even an adolescent, the junior high or high school child, or an adult, make up for some lost ground. Often we find that some of the foundations for thinking are compromised, are not as we say "cooked as well as they should be." So, for example, we may have a seven year old who is verbal, can interact, and seems pretty typical when they are calm and relaxed, and we can have nice conversations with them, but actually on closer evaluation, we find that this seven year old youngster is not as creative as we'd like to see him - one of the important foundations of thinking; the creative and imaginative part of thinking is a little more constricted or a little narrower in a sense than we want it to be. There is not a rich imagination or a rich amount of creative juices stirring. Or, we may find, that the same youngster is not as strong on reading the emotional expressions of others, so preverbal back-and-forth interactions using facial expressions and gestures, doesn't go on as long doesn't get read and responded to as well as we would ideally like it to. They may be there a little bit, but not as much as we like it ideally to be, so that piece needs a little strengthening.

Or we may find that the child is engaged and related but not as deeply intimate with his caregivers - his mom or dad or grandmother - who may be living at home, or in




peer relationships so that the capacity for engagement with others may be getting there, but not as strong as we would like it to be.

Or, we may find a child that doesn't use their senses together when they try to focus and attend. The team doesn't play well as a whole team, or, if they were to again, to use a metaphor of the ballet, all the dancers are not in synchrony with one another, so they're not using vision and hearing and movement and smell and touch all in harmony with one another. So, we may find that there are some missing components to the foundations for learning to pay attention and learning to be better and better at self-regulation, which are important components in the child's abilities to carry out the kinds of activities we expect of an eight, nine, or ten year old, or even a six or seven year old, to be able to sit, focus, attend, take in information, think about it, plan what they're going to do next, and then carry out organized strategies. But, this may be very, very difficult simply because some of these foundations are weak and shaky.

So, we may have a child, I'm going to use another example, who's moving into what we call multi-causal thinking – can give you many reasons for something – who can't do it when they're upset, or when they're disappointed, or when they're feeling overly excited about something, and then they, instead of giving you many reasons for something, just talk about what's on their mind, never answer your “why” questions; never get into causal thinking. So, they have the capacity for the higher level of thinking but its not broad-based; it can't cover a wide range of emotions, and that may be because one of these foundation steps that I've just been illustrating or describing briefly, is not as strong as we want it to be.


Therefore, in working with an older child, or grade school child, or junior high, high school, or even adult, as we were talking earlier, we need to pay attention to all the developmental levels of thinking. We have now discovered the pathway to thinking, in other words, the steps that lead to more and more advanced thinking, which strengthens the self-regulating and attentional activities of children, and as we do this and carry this out, and as we help younger children master these steps when they're developing them for the first time, we also want to be mindful of how to help an older child go back and strengthen some of the steps that may have been only partially mastered.

Children with special needs who also have attentional problems in addition, may have major challenges in some of these early steps like engagement, or reading and responding to non verbal emotional signals, or using words, or using words in an imaginative situation, whereas, children without special needs but with just some attentional learning challenges may have minor difficulties in some of these areas.



Therefore, next we're going to elaborate on a number of principles that will assist the parent, educator, other caregiver, mentor, or really somebody who's trying to help a youngster with attentional problems or with self-regulation, improve their thinking capacity and work at the early levels as well as the levels more appropriate to their age or the highest level they're capable of.

So, here are the principles we want to pay attention to. First, we want to always work with the youngster at multiple levels at the same time up to the highest level the child is capable of. So always harness the highest levels or the highest level. So let's say, again, that there's a seven year old beginning to do some multi-causal thinking – harness that level. Ask “why?” questions and seek out multiple reasons for things. At the same time, look at how well the child is “cooking” at all the earlier levels and work with as many earlier levels at the same time as is possible. So, let me give an example. Let's say your seven year old has come home from school and is looking a little discouraged or says something about not wanting to do the homework right away or talks about math being hard that day or just simply says something like, “I want to go out and play.” What's useful to do at that point is to mobilize that multi-causal thinking to strengthen that capacity is to ask them, “Why? Oh gee, sounds like a good idea, but why?” If they want to go out and play, “but why?” “Oh it's because I need some fresh air, or I've been sitting in school all day, I need to do something else, or the kids are outside, playing, and I want to join them.” “Are there any other reasons?” “Oh yeah, they're playing baseball and that's my favorite game.” “Well that sounds pretty good.” Already you've stirred some multi causal thinking. The child gave you two reasons for something. But, at the same time, while you're doing that, you're looking at your child and you're listening to your child and you're kind of animated or moving in rhythm with your child, and you may be asking, “Well, where are you guys going to play?” and your child is pointing outside to the lot at the corner of the block. So your child is using their vision. They're looking at you, they're listening to you, they're pointing, and they're using actions. You may say, “Where is that?” “You know, mom, the lot, the corner of the block where we always play baseball.” “Oh, okay.” So the child is getting their whole orchestra working together, and they're focusing, even if the child has difficulty focusing, they're focusing because they're interested in the topic. You're picking up on their natural interest to go out and play baseball with their friends and they're describing it to you and they're using their whole orchestra and their whole mental team together to describe that. Also, because you're animated, joyful, the gleam in your eye, and you're picking up on their interest, following their lead; our Floortime philosophy of always following the child's natural interest when trying to promote higher levels of thinking, the child is very engaged, also you're very animated, so you're exchanging gestures and




facial expressions. The child is gleaming with delight, you're smiling and the child is smiling, and then let's say you raise a question, you say, "But sweetheart, when will you have time for your homework if you do that now?" The child looks back at you and changes their expression to a little bit of a frown, "Oh do I have to that today?" "Well, you know, you have to do it some time." "I guess when I get done." Then you exchange some more serious looks and head nods, and somehow you're gesturing with each other and exchanging emotional expressions.

Then, let's say you want to get the creativity stirred along with logical thinking and causal thinking. So you say, "Before you run out and play with your friends, I haven't played baseball in a while, I haven't seen it either, if you were, I'm just curious, inventing a new style of baseball, would you do anything new or different?" "Well, mom, no, and I have to go." "Just one thing, just something to make the game more interesting." "Okay, well I'll tell you one thing, and then I have to go with my friends. I would put the person who pitches the ball to the batter, I'd put them back further to give people like me, who aren't great hitters a little more time to swing and see the ball coming." "Oh that sounds like a great idea, sweetheart. Ok well, go have a good time and make sure you're back by five and I'll see you in a little bit." Ok, so now you've stirred the creative part of thinking.

So, in this brief example we've seen how you, as a parent, or the parent in this example, has strengthened all the foundations while promoting multi-causal thinking; while helping the child be logical. And that's the first principle, the first goal: to work at as many levels as possible up to the highest level the child is capable of.

The second principle is, when working with the child at multiple levels, always start with doing it around the child's natural interests; always follow the child's lead. In other words, here, the child wanted to play baseball, so the conversation took place around that and we saw that this youngster was able to focus and attend and use all their senses and their motor system around that, engage around that, and interact with emotional signaling around that. So we'll have a much better chance at strengthening the child's capacities by starting where the child is, around their interests, the Floortime philosophy, to follow the child's lead, to follow their interests. But, we also saw in this example that you can then throw in other emotions. You don't have to stay only with the child's interests, so the mom mentions homework and we see the child be able to continue the conversation because it was related to his natural interest to play baseball in spite of the fact that a sore topic was being brought up, that homework will have to get done later and at sometime during the day, and they got through it and the child still stayed on subject, stayed on topic, and did it nonverbally with their gestures as well as




later verbally. Now, whether or not they'll follow through and actually carry out the program and do the homework without a fight remains to be seen in this example, but nonetheless, we got the thinking levels going, which is our focus for now. So always follow the child's lead, follow their natural interest, make that the starting point, but it doesn't have to be the concluding point. It doesn't have to be filling all the middle part of the conversation. You can throw in different emotions by raising different questions and different issues and you want to do that gradually. So that's the second principle.

The third principle is that there are certain areas with children who have attentional problems or self-regulatory problems, that almost always need particular emphasis in strengthening the foundations that are at the earlier levels of thinking with a school-aged child or older. These are the following: the ability to use all the senses and the motor system together in harmony, getting all the team players working together. So here, we want to particularly focus on looking, listening, moving, and doing, touching, and sometimes even smelling and even tasting all working in harmony on solving a problem. We want to create situations where the child is doing that, like the mother saying, "Where is that lot, again where you're going to play?" so the child has to point, take action, as well as use their vision and hearing simultaneously. So, that's very, very, very important.

Also, almost all the children with attentional problems are not able to have what we call continuous flow of back-and-forth emotional signaling easily. You'll notice often there are short bursts of back-and-forth exchanges of facial expressions and gestures and other signs of emotional signaling as well as verbal conversations. These occur more in short bursts than they do in terms of long, ten or fifteen minute dialogues. So, here what we want to do is promote long interchanges, so that's why this mother so skillfully was very animated and raised an issue that would lead to a frown and then raised back into optimism, "Well, we can do it later." And they had a longer conversation that actually lasted ten minutes or so than just a one minute or thirty second brief interchange, "Mom I'm going to go out and play baseball." "Okay but you have to do your homework" as the child walks out the door. So, engage in long conversations for the verbal child and also long exchanges of gesturing because the children have a hard time with their preverbal communication and gesturing.


Also, in these long conversations, make sure that it's covering many, many different areas of emotional signaling so you're not just gleeful, nodding, and smiling as this mother did, she raised some issues, she raised a question about homework. So, we want to have a nice, back-and-forth interchange with lots of gesturing and emotional expression and exchange of words. This is always an area that needs strengthening: long



back-and-forth interactions and conversations, both nonverbally and verbally. It's a very, very, very important principle because almost all the children are a little weaker in this capacity. In just a second, we'll come back and elaborate some more principles.

Let me backtrack a little bit – this isn't a new principle, it is part of the areas where the children have special challenges, so it is a principle in a sense, is to increase the range of emotions that the child can mobilize and tolerate. This means the child can express these emotions and also deal with them as challenges when life brings them to the forefront in a flexible manner. So, disappointment, frustration, anger – these are all emotions that are very, very difficult for children with attentional and/or self regulation difficulties. They often make children more active, they often make them more inattentive, you'll see topics being changed, you'll see some children becoming daydreamers and staring off at the tree outside the classroom because the teacher has raised a challenging math problem or a challenging reading assignment or mom or dad have asked the child to do something they don't really want to do, so they “space out” as many children have described it to me. Some children with a big smile say they are masters of being “spaced out” and “forgetting.” Others get active and even get aggressive, or some have “meltdowns” or tantrums. This all is because they can't handle these more difficult emotions. For some, it is excitement and happiness and just too much of it, for some it may just be too much noise or too much touching because they're sensitive to touch or sensitive to sound or bright lights. They get overexcited and overwhelmed because they are very sensitive to what they see visually. For others it may be a complexity that overwhelms them or an inner sense of fear of failure or other fears and anxieties. So, we want to increase the child's flexibility at many of the levels of thinking. The first one is what we have been talking about – long chains of interaction without even worrying about the words, just in terms of the child's ability to express through the facial expressions these different feelings rather than through actions like looking angry is better than hitting. Looking sad is better than doing something self destructive or withdrawing. Looking frustrated and annoyed is better than just changing the topic.

So, we want to pay attention to the child's facial expressions and not be scared to show those expressions ourselves, so it's a back-and-forth interchange of facial expressions. Even with an empathetic comment, “I know this may be frustrating or hard...” or “I know when I was little, how do you think I felt when I couldn't do a math problem?” or “I'll bet you felt sad or disappointed or frustrated, well how do you feel, Johnny or Susie?” But, the child's verbal expression is not as important as the child being able to experience the feeling. So we start off through gesturing with experiencing




the feeling and that's just part of the animated back-and-forth interaction so the child is experiencing the feeling, and then, if it's a verbal child, describing the feeling. We have to cover the whole gamut of feelings: anger, disappointment, frustration, sadness, fear, anxiety, happiness, gleefulness, adventure, curiosity, etc. – the full range of feelings. So, we want to always enhance the child's flexibility. We do this gradually. We don't have every discussion incorporating all the feelings, but there will be natural opportunities where in a long conversation, in a long back-and-forth interchange this occurs, and where, you, as the adult, or the mentor or the parent, you will bring it up as part, again, of just a natural conversation.

So, with the child who is, again, about to go out and play baseball, homework looms around the corner. What about the homework is going to bring up the frustration? Talking about school after talking about the child's favorite song or the favorite music or the favorite TV show will bring up moments of frustration.

For the fairly verbal child, a very nice verbal game to play, which I call the "Thinking About Tomorrow" game, is where the adult and the child together picture tomorrow or picture later today, picture good things that'll come up, how they'll feel – happy, excited, gleeful; how the other person involved in that, if there's another person involved in it, how they think tomorrow will feel, what they routinely do, are there any alternatives they want to consider? With the child being the talker, you're being the Socratic teacher raising the question or the issue, but the child is talking two thirds of the time. When the child needs some help, you may give up a little vignette from your own childhood.

Then, you get into the frustrating or difficult situations of tomorrow, things that will bring up the negative emotions. Again, you want to help the child become a poet of his or her feelings – all the feelings that are going to occur. That's the most important part of this whole discussion. Verbally, but also with a lot of animation and you can help the animation, the expression of it so the child experiences it in their gut, in their body, the feeling tone, by being a very good, animated, empathetic partner. If your face mirrors the feeling that they're having, they'll be more comfortable experiencing that feeling if they see that you can experience it with them as a partnership. So, here, we have the parent or the caregiver and the child experiencing this wide range of feelings at two levels: the level of verbal interchange but also the level of the preverbal gesturing, an area that's very, very hard for the children with attentional problems and self-regulating problems. So, whatever level the child is capable of, we want to really work on this one so the child, over a period of time, months, sometimes even years becomes a flexible thinker across the full range of human feelings from the experiencing side of it, the




reading and nonverbal interchanges that occur around this feeling, which keeps them from putting this feeling into action. Two, really problem solving with it in the Thinking About Tomorrow Game because the last question in the Thinking About Tomorrow Game is, “What are some other ways we have of coping?” Let’s say the child is going to feel very frustrated and angry and therefore they are going to hit someone. Or, therefore, they’re going to just watch TV. What other ways can we think of for dealing with that? That’s very, very important, to think of alternatives.

We want to enhance the child’s flexibility, we want to enhance the child’s capacity for experiencing the full range of emotions both preverbally and verbally because that’s almost always difficult for children with attentional difficulties and difficulties in self-regulation.

Another area that’s challenging for most of the children is the range of creativity and imagination. Some of the children do what I call “escape into fantasy.” The children who are not so active but tend to have attentional problems in a more passive way by just “tuning out” will often “escape into fantasy,” which means they will want to do pretend play or just in their own mind, they’ll start thinking of their own alternative story; start daydreaming about being a great baseball player, or great football player, or great dancer, or great actress, or a new gown they’re going to buy, or new game they’re going to invent, or new computer game they’re going to play. They just drift off into another universe.

But, many of the children are not as strong on the, what I call the “shared use of constructive imagination and fantasy.” So with an eight or nine year old you may not want to do pretend play on the floor like a three year old, where its easier to stir fantasy and go from the simple soap opera to the grand epic by trying to go into the character’s feelings about what’s going to happen next and why it’s going to happen that way, etc. We can help the child in an age appropriate way; we can challenge a child to invent a new game if they love computer games. What would you invent? What would be a great computer game? What kind of computer characters should we have? If the child loves sports, what kind of twist change would they make for baseball or football? If they were coaching their local football team, what would they do if the players were nine or ten or eleven year olds? So we can stir creative thinking in all ways and again, when we’re doing creative thinking in all the emotional areas, not just mastery and victory but fear and people who are attacking other people like in many of the computer games, how the characters feel, etc, etc. All kinds of dramas can be enacted again, following a child’s natural interests, but the adults should then throw in curveballs, throw in conflicts, throw in situations that will stir different feelings. If the child has trouble with losing,




occasionally, daddy will come up with a superpower that's even greater than Johnny's superpower. How does Johnny feel? "How does the superhero feel now that I have a better superpower?" "I DON'T LIKE IT," little Johnny's character might say. "I'm going to take those away!" So, we can play out all kinds of scenarios. So, creative thinking is also a foundation piece that can be strengthened.

And, when doing the creative thinking, always keep a logical dialog going so it makes sense. It can be pretend and imaginative, going off to strange and new, distant lands that are created by people with magical powers, but these should be based on a logical sequence. In other words, the magical power works because of A, B, C, or D. So, the child is not just going from one topic to another topic in a disjointed way.

Also, another area where children with attentional problems have is the tendency to thinking in fragmented pieces rather than connecting all the dots. We described this earlier when talking about sequencing abilities, but it's a part of being a causal thinker; part of being a logical thinker where the child can answer why they want to go play baseball. "Because it's fun" or give you multi causal reasons for something, "Because it's fun and because my best friend is there and because it's a nice day outside, etc." But, we also want to help the child go beyond that, we want to help the child always connect the dots together, particularly if they get fragmented or change subjects. When you bring up homework, for example, they may just start talking about their favorite TV show. So, here, to help them connect the dots together, don't just bring him back to the subject and say, "Wait, let's finish talking about homework." Try, "Wait, I'm confused, I thought you were telling me about homework and now you're telling me about this new computer game, I'm confused." So the child now has to now connect the dots, "Well, mom the homework made me think about the computer game because the homework is about math and the computer game is about how many points you can get, which you have to count, and that's about math, too." Now the child has just come up with a creative connection between his math and the computer game, which is very good, so he's learning to connect dots, even if its not the original reason why the child changed subjects. But it's putting the burden on the child, or the challenge on the child, to connect their thought patterns together. In this way, the child becomes stronger at becoming a big picture thinker, at seeing the whole forest, not just getting lost in the trees, or not using tree-thinking, you know, for avoiding certain frustration. So always help the child connect the dots together.


Now, another area, and maybe this is another principle in its own right. The way we should think about these on reflection is that the areas that are tough on almost all children with attentional problems and self-regulatory problems, each of these foci that I



an emphasizing should be a separate principle in its own right in the way we describe these. So another principle, another component that's hard for children is what we call gray area thinking. Another principle where children with attentional problems have a real challenge is what we call gray area thinking. You remember, that's where the child can not only give you many reasons for something, but if they are comparing A versus B – why they like Harold better than Johnny to play with, they can tell you to the degree to which they like Harold better than Johnny. Maybe they like Harold because he's a better baseball player and he's a better friend and loyal and doesn't run to the other group when the other group is teasing me and he's a much, much better friend than Johnny. If I gave Johnny two points as a friend, I'd give Harold eight points as a friend. Sometimes he's not able to play when I want to play, that's why he doesn't get ten points on the friendship scale. So they can tell you the degree of things. If they are angry, they can tell you "I'm just a little bit angry today" or "I'm very, very angry," or "I'm really fuming and ready to explode."

Gray area thinking is hard for children with attentional difficulties and self-regulating problems because they tend to operate as all-or-nothing thinkers. The world is all good or all bad or today was a great day or today was a terrible day, not in shades of gray. Today was okay, today was a little better than yesterday because of 'blah blah blah' or today was a little worse than yesterday. Tomorrow should be a really super day, even better than today because we get to go on a trip to the museum or the zoo or see the new baseball field being built for the professional team, etc. So, the gray area thinking can tell you the degrees of things.

Not surprisingly, this builds on that capacity for lots of back-and-forth emotional signaling, lots of animated conversations which have a strong nonverbal, facial expression, emotional communicative components with lots of gesturing back-and-forth and long conversations because these help a child be regulated. Remember, to be a gray area thinker, you have to feel emotions in small degrees. You can't go from zero to 60mph all at once and that gets learned for the first time, really, between one and two years of age. But for older children who haven't learned it, you can learn it at any age. So, if mom or dad or your teacher's very empathetic in helping you express and experience different emotions in different degrees – a little frustration, a little more frustration, a little more frustration, a little happiness, a little more happiness, a little bit more and more and more, and anger and sadness in degrees through the way you experience it in your body through this back-and-forth rhythm of emotional-expressive interchange. Here, the only thing I think I need to mention in terms of practical advice is be very animated yourself and make sure you're not a zero to 90mph person when you




interact with your son, going from calm to explosive rage and tantrums or anger yourself. Be very graduated in your responses for all the different emotions whether its happiness or sadness or annoyance. Your son or your daughter will eventually learn to do this as well. So this is the forerunner of them being able to do this verbally; describe shades of gray. But, you can't do it unless you experience the world that way. So you need to be a gray area experiencer as well as a gray area thinker. So, a gray area thinker, remember, can tell you the degrees to which they are angry or sad. It is helpful to play the Thinking About Tomorrow Game, which we described a little bit earlier. We not only want to become a poet of our feelings, but to help the child in anticipating feelings before they're overwhelming, but to tell you the degrees of the feelings. All babies start off with catastrophic emotions, all-or-nothing emotions. We want to help them become more graduated, which, again, can normally happen between the first and second year of life, but can happen at any time, even adults have to work on this. We all have our buttons, and children are no different than adults, so there are certain emotions that will be tougher for all of us, where we become all-or-nothing thinkers, we go back to those catastrophic emotions of infancy, which leads to the more polarized, all-or-nothing thinking. Some may argue that there are certain absolutes in life that are all-or-nothing like you don't hurt other people, and I wouldn't argue with that. Many religions in cultures may have all-or-nothing principles, but I'm not talking about that here. Here, I'm talking about the areas which benefit from gray area thinking, where we don't have to have an all-or-nothing attitude. It's the ability to make that distinction that we're talking about.

Lastly, the principle that's probably the hardest for all of us, especially children, we can't expect this until the child is ten or a little older, is reflective thinking. It is especially hard for the child with attentional and self-regulating problems. Just as we shouldn't expect gray area thinking until the child is seven or eight to be fully developed, although we may see forerunners of it even in a five or six year old, or even four year old sometimes, we can't expect reflective thinking fully developed until the child is above ten. It continues throughout life, getting more and more complex. This is where the child can remember, as we described earlier, saying things like "Gee, I'm angrier than I should be in this situation" Or, little Sally can say "Gee, I don't know why I'm so sad today, usually I'm feeling more positive, but I woke up feeling kind of down. I wonder what it is."

This is where they can use their skills academically to compare two authors and whose background is more similar to their own and the reason why they like this author better than the other author and prove their point. This is where they can evaluate their

own work: “Gee, I did a pretty good job today.” Or, “Not as good as I usually do” or “I was a little tired while I was writing this essay and it’s not as coherent.” They can evaluate their own work. This ability to think about your own thoughts, to evaluate yourself allows you to plan master strategies to help you stay on task, to help you focus and attend. If you’re a procrastinator, you can say “Gee, I tend to be a procrastinator, I tend to delay things, what can I do to motivate myself to get it done early? What kind of rewards can I promise myself so that I’ll get this task finished and completed?” This is not easy. Caregivers and parents can promote this by, one, promoting all the levels of thinking that lead up to it, this builds on gray-area thinking and multi-causal thinking and logical thinking and being creative and being able to have a continuous flow of back-and-forth interactions with a lot of emotional signaling and being very engaged and using your whole mental team together, this one solid orchestra or one solid ballet or one solid great basketball team.

So, it builds on all the others, so we have to make sure that all the pieces are in place, but then we can promote it by always asking the child’s opinions and helping the child be an evaluator. “Well, what did you think of what mom and dad did? What do you think of the essay?” In other words, don’t just say that this is good or this is bad or I like this or I would change this or this is where you went wrong on the math problem, but “What do you think, sweetheart?” “Well I don’t know mom, I don’t even know where to look.” “Here, look at the first paragraph, what would you say your main point is, and what is your very next paragraph talking about?” “Well, I did kind of stray and not stay on my main point.” “Well, how come?” “Well, I guess I wasn’t thinking.” “How can we help you stick to your main point?” “Well, I could make myself do it or I could maybe list all the points that I want to support my main point and then use that as a reminder.” “Well, that is a great idea! You could put your main point in a box or a circle – how do you want to do it?” Then the child can design little arrows and little visual designs with their main points in a circle or box and then sub points under them starting with the most important ones and going to the least important ones and having another box for the conclusion. Keep checking as they do each paragraph against their diagram. They can, with your challenges, create the timetable for when they are going to do the homework assignments. Then they can check themselves off and where they are. Then instead of just saying, “Come on, go do your homework,” you can say, “Hey, buddy, what have we not done so far today?” “I don’t know, mom. I think I have done everything.” “Well, how can we check ourselves?” “Well, we can look at the little diagram in my room that we listed earlier.” So you go back into the room, look at this big visual design on the door or bulletin board, and ask what he has checked off and what he hasn’t checked off. Little Johnny or little Susie can kind of evaluate themselves – how




they are doing and how they are cooking in terms of their game plan for the day. “Well, I think we’re going to have to put this one off for the weekend and change it, but I’ll have time then.” So you change the boxes and change it to the weekend assignment sheet, so be it. The child has made a strategic decision and if they really do have time on the weekend, they can do it, but this is what a good self evaluator thinker does and it allows the, to stay on topic.

Reflective thinking is enhanced by really, I guess, the last principle we’ll talk about, which comes back to one of the earlier principles: Using all the senses and the motor system – the whole mental team together. But now we are using it together to enhance reflective thinking. So we have the diagram because it is visual support. We talk about it – that is verbal. We write things in the diagram, that is verbal written. We take actions, consistent with what we have planned. And we may even do something very sophisticated with our reflective thinking; with our diagram, our discussion – we put next to each of the tasks that we are planning to do, if we have attentional problems or we have difficulty with self regulation it may be admittedly hard, how much we want to do it. What emotions are attached to it? Frustration, feeling like a failure because I don’t do this well, wanting to avoid, we are going to look for escape routes, glee, happiness, and I’m going to be successful and I know I’m going to get an “A.”

What are the expected challenges, what are the expected positive emotions and negative emotions, what is my motivation? How much do I want to do this? If we list that and write this out next to each task, we are helping the child and the child will do this, figure out why certain things they are going to avoid and certain things they are going to embrace, and they do it before they are actually confronting a situation where the emotions get so strong that they just lapse into the pattern. Most of us, for example, who are forgetters and avoiders or procrastinators, kind of lapse into it when we are confronted with a strong emotion of a fear of failure or fear of success of the moment. But if we do it before we are confronted with that the day before, we have an easier time of it. Helping the child do that; becoming an evaluator of their own feelings and use their whole mental team in doing it helps them focus and attend much more effectively.

Now again, every time we are helping a child with reflective thinking or gray area thinking or with their creativity, we are always using vision and hearing and movement and a lot of facial animation, we are always very engaged with the child, always following the child’s natural interests as a starting point and then getting into more difficult terrain, but being as creative as possible as part of the agenda. And we are always helping the child make sense when they don’t connect the dots; when they get off topic – “Wow, I got lost here.” So we are always building the foundations as we get into



the higher levels of thinking – the multi causal thinking, gray area thinking, and finally and importantly, reflective thinking. Reflective thinking becomes enhanced with more experiences – we broaden it all to new areas as we learn new things and as we experience life in more complex ways through adolescence and adulthood.

We are going to conclude on that note and these are some ways to enhance thinking that will enhance self regulation and attention. This compliments what we have talked about a little bit earlier in terms of how the different levels of thinking can help contribute to better and better attentional capacities.

Thank you for joining us today and next time we will have another interesting topic for discussion.