

# Fun Activities to Help Your Child Think More Flexibly

Jennifer Keluskar, Ph.D.

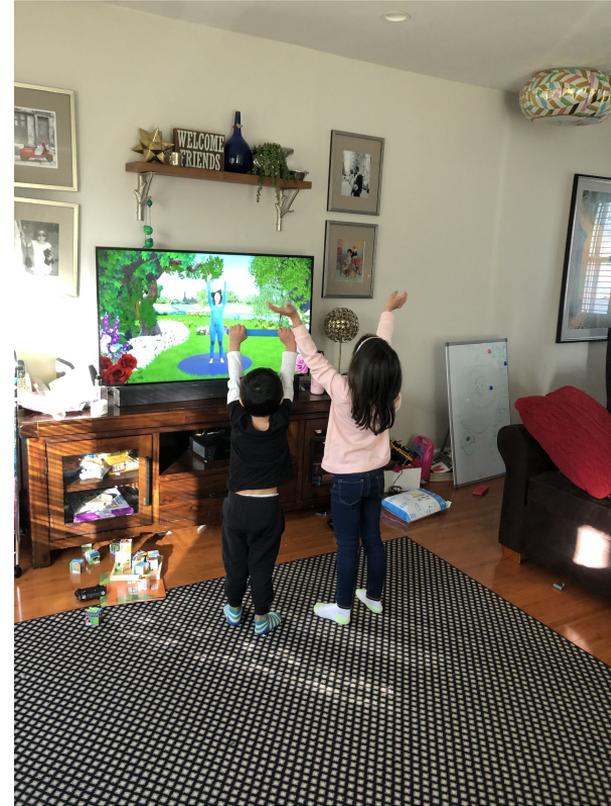
# What to Expect

- Benefits of Flexible Thinking and Doing
- Steps for Flexibility
- Fun games that inspire flexible thinking and problem solving



# Benefits of Flexible Thinking and Doing

- Inspires your creative and “out of the box” thinking.
- Allows you to generate more solutions to a problem, thereby strengthening your belief that you are capable of solving problems in ways that are effective.
- Facilitates self-soothing by making it easier to think of stressful situations in less catastrophic ways.
- When parents show flexibility, they have an easier time responding effectively when their child is in distress or showing maladaptive behavior.



# Steps for Flexibility

## Get the body in a flexible stance

By seeking physical comforts, we send our brains the message that we are open to considering multiple possible [perceptions, thoughts, solutions, etc.]. Seeking such comforts ideally requires minimal effort.

Examples include having a warm or cold drink; looking at photos of loved-ones; wearing a cozy sweater; listening to a relaxing song.

## Shift the Environment

Move to a different room, take a break in the bathroom, or just move period! Call a friend or relative or focus on one simple task that is unrelated to the problem.

Give yourself permission to put demands on hold for brief periods of time so you can “reset” your thinking.

Acknowledge bumps in the road, resolve to move on, and ask, “What are the different ways I can think about this? What else can I do?”

Acknowledge what you are getting “stuck on,” whether it is an idea that others disagree with, a disappointment, or a difficult feeling. Tell yourself you can still have a good day and be a good person. Moods are undulating waves that rise and fall. You can control how hard they crash. You can choose to have them roll softly by giving yourself permission to challenge rigid beliefs that prevent you from “turning the page.”

# Activity One: Ways to Eat a Cupcake

- Have your child list as many ways as they can think of that one could eat a cupcake.
- You can get them started with a couple of examples, such as saying “Some people like to eat the frosting first, whereas others prefer to eat the cake first. Some people might use a fork while others eat with their hands.”
- Write down their responses. It is OK to help your child by creating the list together, but encourage them to think of at least one example independently.



# Activity One: Ways to Eat a Cupcake

- If your child starts listing impossible ways, like sucking up the cupcake through their nose, tell them it's OK to say impossible ways, but that you are going to write down only the ways that are possible for humans to eat cupcakes.
- After the list is complete, reflect on how many different ways people might eat the same food. Ask what they would think if one were to say that one of the ways was the “only way,” or “the wrong way” to eat a cupcake. Reflect on how silly that would sound.



# Activity One: Ways to Eat a Cupcake

- Emphasize that one does not have to agree with ways of eating cupcakes that differ from their own. However, they can choose to their own way while still acknowledging that the other ways are possible.
- Transition to talking about real life events (start with hypothetical ones and then share some of your own) in which being open to different ways of accomplishing a task was helpful to you.



# Similar Activities

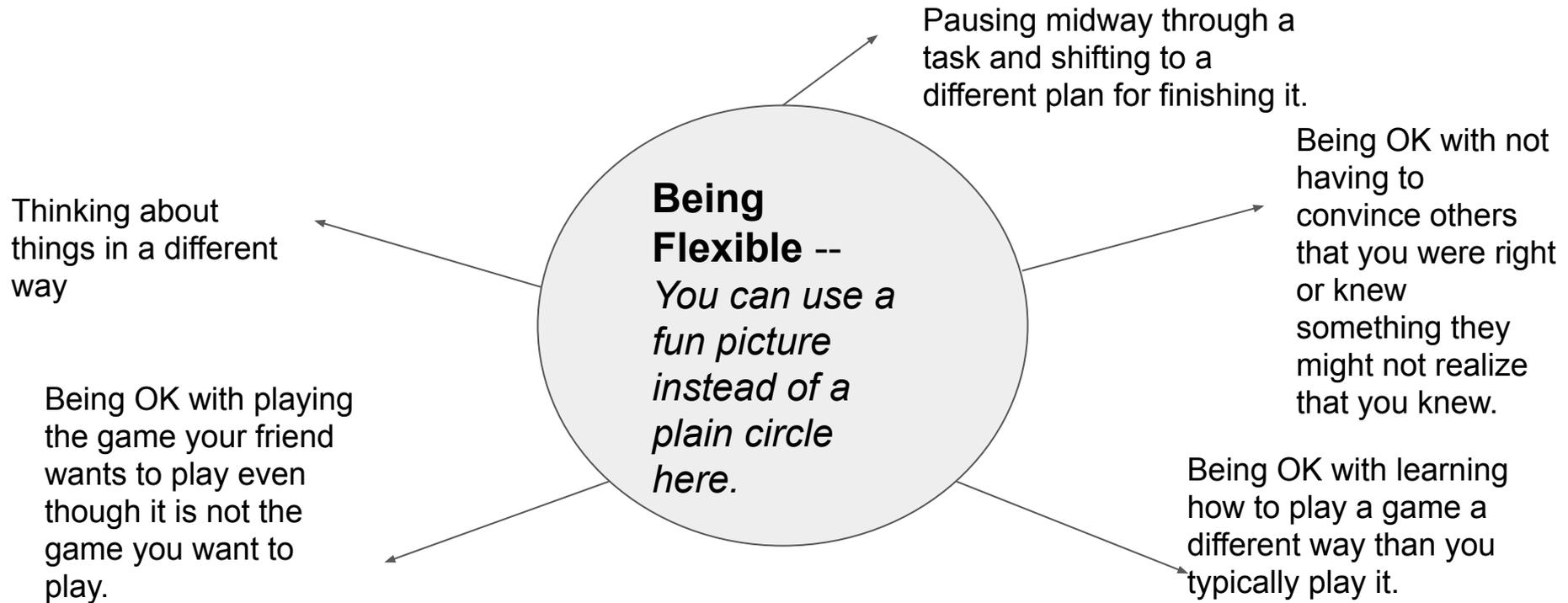
- 1. How many ways can you make a pizza (abcya.com has a free Make a Pizza game).
- 2. How many ways can you play [insert game]
- 3. How many ways can you lose or win?
- 4. How many ways can you do your work?
- 5. How many ways can you think about a problem?

# Activity Two: Create a Social Story

- Use photos to depict your child doing routine tasks, such as completing homework, eating meals, coloring a picture, or watching a television show episode in a “different way.”
- Explain why it is important to listen to adults when they request that a task be completed in a “different way.”
- Examples:
  - I can do half of my homework now and finish the rest after dinner.
  - I can use colors in nontraditional ways (e.g. purple grass).
  - I can eat food separately, mix different foods together, or both.
  - I can pause a show and watch the rest later.



# Activity Three: Create a Graphic Organizer to teach the concept of flexibility



# Activity Four: Incorporate flexibility into a visual schedule

- Use a whiteboard for your checklists or visual schedules, or affix pictures for a picture schedule with velcro.
- Encourage mixing up the order day to day and when the order is mixed up with the purpose of getting through the day easier, remind the child that it is OK and that we practice doing things a different way.