

7 Parent Tasks



That Help Children Learn to Cope

IF YOUR CHILD

If your child thinks they can't succeed ... they won't.

If your child thinks that others will never like them ... they won't.

If your child thinks that education is worthless ... it is.

If your child thinks that play is more important than study ... it is.

If your child thinks that it is okay to manipulate others ... they will.

If your child thinks that doing drugs will make life better ... they will.

And as long as they think that way, you can't bribe, scare,

or punish them enough to keep it from happening.

YOU MUST TEACH THEM TO USE "GOOD THINKING"

7 Parent Tasks That Help Children Learn To Cope

COPING: “The ability to experience a less than optimal situation, face it, accept it, and proceed forward with an adaptive response.” (Kendall, 1992)

Learning to “Cope” with life is the greatest skill you can teach a child. It starts with teaching them “Good Thinking” (self-talk) skills. This may take as much effort on you, the adult, as it will take for your child. Studies have shown that children are quick to incorporate irrational beliefs into their self-talk. Examples of these beliefs are, "Things should come easily to me" and "It is awful if others don't like me." It is easy to see how problems can occur when children incorporate these beliefs into their self-talk.

When children are very young, adults often try to remove most obstacles from their path. We feed, dress, and comfort them. They see themselves as the center of the universe. We assume that as the child grows older, their beliefs about life, themselves, and others will become more realistic and rational. We assume that children grow out of these irrational beliefs naturally as they mature. Unfortunately, this is not always true. For many children, they will not change these irrational beliefs and negative self-talk, unless they learn how.

This booklet is designed to help you, the caring adult, use these “7 Tasks” to help your children become the most confident, independent, caring, and considerate adults possible. It is easy for us to see the imperfections in others but “self-observation” is frequently a skill we avoid. So, our first task is one that will require that you lead by example.

Task 1: LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Are you thinking rationally about this or that situation?

Are you conveying a rational thinking, feeling, and behaving model
that will promote happiness and success?

Are you inspiring effort and positive personal qualities?

There is usually a reason for any “old saying”. The one that comes to mind here is “Do as I say, not as I do”. As adults we try to help children learn to think more rationally so their emotions will be more appropriate and their behaviors more effective. We often give them ideas on how to accomplish this, but we often fail to follow our own suggestions. This is where we use this “old saying” and assume that our work is done. Unfortunately, that rarely works. If we, the adults, continue to use our own irrational “Stinky Thinking”, we lessen the likelihood that the child will accept and adopt a new way of dealing with life or “Good Thinking”.

This may mean that you, the adult, will have to work just as hard as any of your children to change your habituated, irrational “Stinky Thinking”. This is a real challenge for most of us. We must be aware of our own thinking and we must be sure that we are presenting a rationally thinking, feeling, and behaving model, that the child can learn to adopt.

You have chosen to try and help children develop more effective coping skills. You may be a parent, teacher, or counselor who is motivated to take on this task. You now understand that you must present as an effective role model (Task 1). But how will the children understand why you are able to deal with life so effectively, when they (and many of the other adults in their life) cannot? This is why you must undertake “Task 2”.

Task 2: COMMUNICATING YOUR OWN “GOOD THINKING”

Life is full of difficulties, and children need to learn “Coping Skills” to succeed

"The reason I did....., was because I was thinking..."

“The reason I was thinking that was because....”

“Do you think that was Good or Stinky Thinking?”

Learning to identify and then share the “Why” of “Why I do what I do” is initially very difficult. The rational thinking (Good Thinking) that enables you to cope effectively, happens so quickly that you are often unaware of it. The same is true of your irrational thinking (Stinky Thinking). Stinky Thinking can be just outside of our awareness, but it still causes you to cope ineffectively.

As effectively coping adults, we do a disservice to others when we don’t share with them how we were able to not get angry (sad, scared, ashamed, etc.) and how we were able to deal with difficult situations effectively. To those children observing us, it may seem magical or at least outside of their ability to ever accomplish. “I could never do that”. However, by explaining how your self-messages (the things you told yourself) helped you deal effectively with the situation, they will be able to understand this “thinking-feeling-behaving” connection. They may even incorporate some of your Good Thinking self-messages into their own self-talk.

The child will see that a “problem” can be handled in a different (and more effective) way by simply changing the things they tell themselves about the “problem”. By sharing your “coping self-messages” you are giving them thoughts that they can incorporate into their own good thinking and can use for the rest of their life.

We must also accept and understand that even though we want to present as an effective role model, we are not perfect and that is okay. In fact, as uncomfortable as this next task may be, it is essential for this very reason.

Task 3: BE WILLING TO COMMUNICATE MISTAKES

Making mistakes is a normal part of life

"I did that because I was thinking... I was wrong in my thinking and if I had been reasonable, I would have felt and behaved differently."

"Help me to think of what I could have told myself that would have been better"

This third adult task is about your ability and willingness to share the irrational thinking that caused you to overreact emotionally and maybe even behave badly. Regardless of what you may want to believe, when you allow your "Stinky Thinking" to be in control, your children will be able to tell it is happening. They may not know what you were telling yourself, but they recognize that you handled the situation poorly. By sharing your "stinky thinking" with them, you let them know that you, as well as they, are "not perfect" and that it is okay. This is a learning opportunity for your children to recognize that even an adult, who allows their irrational thinking to control them, will engage in foolish behavior. But by communicating your mistakes, your children will also see an adult that is willing to accept personal responsibility.

In the second part of this Task, the adult can use this "teaching moment" and encourage the child to suggest more effective self-messages, for the adult to use, when something like this occurs again. Working together, in this way, develops trust and a sense of competence in the child. "If I can come up with a "Good Thinking" message to help someone else, then I can do it for myself as well".

It is important to recognize that children may be reluctant to make suggestions. The best you can do is encourage them, without demanding it. They may have good suggestions, or maybe "just adequate" ones, but it is best to encourage all of them. It is only necessary to correct the suggestions that are still irrational. For instance, if the child suggests, "Instead of getting angry with them, just tell yourself I will get even with them later". This may be different from your original self-message but is not rational or effective. Sometimes using open ended questions, can help children learn more effective self-messages, and it is part of Task Four.

Task 4: ASK "WHAT" AND "WHY" QUESTIONS OF YOUR CHILDREN

Be aware of “Targets of Opportunity”

“**What** were you thinking... (rational or irrational; ask in a calm, supportive voice)

when you...” (engaged in either good or bad behaviors)

"**Why** did you think that?" (Correct any irrational thinking and misinterpretations with more rational interpretation and reward with praise any rational thinking)

Most adults have used the phrase, “What were you thinking?” in an accusatory manner towards their child. Usually, this phrase will cause a child to “freeze up” because they know they are in trouble, and anything they say will probably not help the situation. This Task is not recommending that type of questioning. Asking, in a quiet and neutral tone, “What were you thinking when you...” does not illicit the same reaction. Children are instead taught the value of attending to their “self-talk”, and to recall their self-conversation. Once they can recall what they were thinking, you can then ask, “Why did you think that?” in the same calm and neutral tone. Your goal is for them to see the logic or lack of logic in their thinking.

If their thinking lacks logic, then it is “Stinky Thinking” even if it leads to the intended behavioral response, “He won’t look at me that way again”. The child may see that as a desired effect, but it may have a long-term negative consequence. You can point out the problems with their “Stinky Thinking” and suggest other more appropriate self-messages.

If there is logic to their thinking, then it is “Good Thinking”. You should encourage them to continue this type of thinking, even if it has some negative consequences. “He may not ever call me again.” Sometimes behaviors that seem inappropriate, may in fact be appropriate once you understand the “Why” of their thinking. Therefore it is important to ask the “what” and “why” questions. The next Task is one that often causes most children and adults anxiety. It is a “natural task” that many see as something to avoid.

Task 5: EXPOSE THEM TO "THREATENING" SITUATIONS

Coach children how to think and act in situations they find threatening (going to a party, apologizing.) and get them to confront “Their Dragon”. Avoiding fearful situations will only encourage irrational thinking, inappropriate emotions, and problem behaviors.

Children, by their very nature, are often fearful of new situations, people and even ideas. It is part of our biological design to avoid the new and the different. But in our modern world, this avoiding behavior is a recipe for failure and unhappiness. We may not live in a world where dangers are everywhere anymore, but our reaction to “normal” stressful situations, can cause us a response as strong as feeling as if we are facing a tiger in the jungle. These normal stressful situations can range from taking a test, to meeting someone new, to many other daily activities. Our irrational childhood beliefs can serve to intensify the response to these natural events.

Within reason, as part of this process of **Coping**, help children develop the skills to be happier and more successful, by encouraging to attempt a “Threatening Situations”. This does not mean encouraging them to walk down a dark street at two in the morning. The “Threatening Situations” may be talking to a classmate with whom they have had conflict, or asking a teacher for help, or trying out for a new sports team.

By starting with the “small fears” and gradually increasing the level of “scariness” your child will become more confident in their ability to deal effectively with life’s difficulties. They will learn more effective coping self-messages, such as; “What is the worst that could happen?”, and learn coping social skills; “I will encourage him to talk about what he likes, and see what things we have in common.”

Children often make bad decisions. Nothing new about that... just ask any parent. We want our children to learn about good decision making and the positive impact that can have on their life. This next task is designed to accelerate that process, but it does not mean that it will be easy or welcomed by your children.

Task 6: EXPOSE YOUR CHILDREN TO OTHERS WHO APPEAR TO THINK RATIONALLY (GOOD THINKING)

The more they are exposed to rational thinking, appropriate emotional reactions, and effective behavior, the more likely they are to adopt some of those skills.

It is normal human behavior to want to associate with people who “Tell me what I want to hear”. We often associate “friendship” with someone that will never challenge us or our irrational thinking, “I thought he was my friend until he told me I was wrong about the test being too hard”. Hopefully, most of us have had one or two friends that would tell us the truth, even if we might get angry or upset. I am sure very few of us, if any, have had five or more such friends. In our real world, with our real irrational thinking, we tend to shy away from those that challenge our Stinky Thinking (ignorant assumptions, prejudices, foolishness, and weaknesses). Instead, we tend to gravitate toward those that tell us, “You are right”, even if our “rightness” will ultimately cause us significant life difficulties.

This task is about helping children accept that associating with others who will, without ulterior motives, “Tell me the truth,” will help them be happier and more successful. This should be a quality we all look for in a friend. A friend’s commitment to tell you the truth will help you make good decisions, and to look for effective alternatives. Their commitment will help you become happier and more successful. Who are these people? They are those that are not trying to make themselves look better by making you look worse. They are also willing to accept the responsibility to always use “Good Thinking” and be truthful with you.

There is a popular commercial for a credit card company that has as its catch phrase, “I want it all and I want it now”. This sums up the way that many people feel. We want what we want, when we want it, and if it does not happen easily and quickly, we quit. The final Task tells us that this is not effective when attempting to develop “Good Thinking”, just as it is not effective in all of life.

Task 7: UNDERSTAND THAT GOOD THINKING IS A SKILL

As with any skill it must be practiced frequently. And you must ensure that it is "Perfect Practice" to ensure that your child is using Good Thinking.

Thinking about life situations in a rational "Good Thinking" manner is a worthwhile goal. This won't be easy; they may resist, but it will be worth it.

These tasks for helping children develop "Good Thinking" are not always easy to accomplish. The development of any new skill takes time and a lot of practice. In order to develop Good Thinking and Coping Skills, we must keep in mind that these tasks are not "quick fixes" but are the tools to guide you and your children. Staying consistent and committed to the tasks will lead you to accomplishing this goal and teaching your children how to cope.

These Tasks increase our ability to deal successfully with life no matter our personal skills or limitations. For some of you, even the Tasks of this booklet seem difficult, or that it will take a long time, but I can assure you that the effort is worth it.

PARENT'S POEM

**Some day when my children are old enough to understand
the logic that motivates a parent, I will tell them:**

**I loved you enough to ask you where you were going, with whom,
and what time you would be home.**

I loved you enough to be silent and let you discover that your new best friend was a creep.

**I loved you enough to stand over you for two hours while you cleaned your room. A job
that would have taken me 15 minutes.**

**I loved you enough to let you assume the responsibility for your actions even when the
penalties were so harsh, they almost broke my heart.**

But most of all, I loved you enough to say "no" when I knew you would hate me for it.

**Those were the most difficult battles of them all.
I'm glad I won them because in the end you won something too.**

All 7 of these tasks are highlighted and reinforced in our therapeutic fables “Adventures of Cosmos Crow”. To find out more about these fables and how they can help in your home, visit our website www.cosmoscrow.com and like us on [Facebook](#).