

Unit **10**

Sharing An Imagination



Family Letter and At Home Activities

Think about the last conversation you had with a friend. What did you talk about? To have the “back and forth” exchange of stories and experiences, you each had to share an imagination. Although you may not have realized it at the time, when your friend told a story—about work, for instance, you had to imagine his/her experience, even though you probably have never been employed at the same company or worked with the same people. You can still appreciate a funny (or serious) story about something that occurred there because you are imagining the experience!

Sharing an imagination is at the heart of conversation. But how do we learn to have a conversation? Conversation actually has its roots in play! Imagine a group of young children engaged in shared imaginative cooperative play. For example, think of a group of kids pretending to be a family in the dramatic play corner of a classroom. Each child has a role (mom, grandma, baby, etc.) and they work together to make and eat dinner. To join in and keep this kind of play going, the children have to share an imagination. They have to coordinate their ideas, goals, and interests with others to pursue a common plan (eat dinner!). This type of shared imaginative play “grows up” over time. As kids age, they gradually fade out the toys and props and connect through sharing ideas and imaginations. As adults, we call this conversation.

Many times our students with social learning challenges have difficulty joining and keeping this type of play and conversation going. They may have wonderful creative ideas and imaginations, but the difficulty comes because they can't figure out how to share in an idea if it was not their own. And,

they often don't realize that a verbal exchange is needed for other kids to know they are sharing the imagination of the group. For example, when building with blocks, a child might have a detailed and innovative design for making an airport. On his own, he can create a brilliant structure. Asking that same child to build the airport and share his ideas with others, however, can present a great challenge. Additionally, if the child's peer is also building an airport, it may be difficult for the child to imagine another's ideas and add his own ideas to the ongoing play so it unfolds in a cooperative manner.

When we are all doing something concrete together, like building, it is easier to see that we are all thinking about the same thing. Having a conversation, making plans together as a group, and even playing together is much harder because we are all thinking about something intangible, that we can't see. We have to *imagine* or hold in our minds a common thread (concept, picture, idea, plan, etc.) for it to be successful.

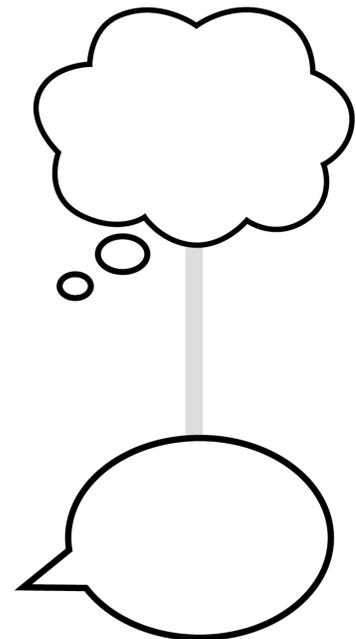
By encouraging children to practice sharing ideas and imaginations, we are helping them learn the same skills that are crucial for more sophisticated social interactions and conversation as students age.

Here are some ways to practice this concept at home:

- Make the Imagine and Share visual:

Cut out the thought bubble and talking bubble images at the end of this letter. Attach the thought bubble to the top of a tongue depressor or ruler and the talking bubble to the bottom. This visual is used to help your child make a connection between imagining an idea and telling others about it.

Many times, children have difficulty entering in play and sharing ideas. When playing together, use this visual. Consider the following example: You and your child are playing with play dough. You pretend to make a birthday cake. Hold up the visual so the thought bubble is close to your brain and the talking bubble is close to your mouth. Say, "I'm imagining this play dough is a birthday cake. You didn't know this was a cake until I told you. I can also show you my idea by pretending to blow out candles." Now have your child make something out of play dough while you watch. Using the visual, reinforce the concept. "I don't know what you're imagining until you either tell me or show me your idea!"



- Play together! Any opportunity to engage in shared collaborative play is an opportunity to practice sharing an imagination. Some ideas to get you started:
 - **Play a guessing game.** Tell your child, “I’m thinking of an animal. Let’s see if you can share my imagination and figure out what it is!” Then give clues (e.g., it has a long neck, is yellow with brown, and eats leaves). Once your child makes a correct guess, give positive feedback using the vocabulary. For example, “Yes! I was thinking of a giraffe. Now you are sharing my imagination and thinking of a giraffe too!” To extend this game, act out being a giraffe together reaching long necks out to munch on some leaves.
 - **Play charades.** Play the classic guessing game of acting out an object, word, person, or animal.
 - **Read the book,** *Not a Box*, by Antoinette Portis. In this delightful story a bunny pretends his cardboard box is anything but. It can be fun to share an imagination and act out the pages of the book together, pretending the cardboard box is a car or a robot or anything you can imagine!

*The storybook mentioned in this letter is part of *Social Problem Solvers*, Volume 2 of the *We Thinkers!* series, our Social Thinking early learner curriculum. Volume 1 (*Social Explorers*) and Volume 2 each consist of five storybooks that introduce social concepts through a themed adventure, and a curriculum book with units, activities and tips to teach the concepts. A music CD, *The Incredible Flexible You*, supports the curriculum with 12 songs, each of which relate directly to the Social Thinking Vocabulary concepts introduced in the two volumes. It’s not necessary to purchase any of these materials to work with your child on these concepts at home. The Family Letters share basic information and vocabulary and suggest some at-home activities. Also, there are many free articles on the Social Thinking website that describe the core philosophy of Social Thinking (www.socialthinking.com).

The music CD and each set of five storybooks are sold separately from the curriculum, should you like to extend your child’s learning at home. Parents purchasing either the storybook set(s) or the music CD for at-home use are eligible to enter discount code “storybooks10” at checkout to receive 10% off the retail price of those products.

NOTE: Volume 1 of *We Thinkers!* was previously released under the name, *The Incredible Flexible You*. The name was changed in early 2016, however the content in all materials in Volume 1 remained the same.

