

Understanding That “You” and “I” Think Differently

To really appreciate the thoughts of others, your child has to see the difference between himself and someone else. In other words, he has to understand that there are two sides to every story. Two people don't always want the same things, know the same things or hold the same opinions. Children must understand this before they can begin to grasp what's going on in the minds of others.

The ability to understand that other people's thoughts and feelings differ from our own is sometimes called “theory of mind.” We call it a theory because no person can ever know exactly what's going on in someone else's head.



Many common English expressions describe this basic ability. “Tuning in” to others is just one. “Being on the same page,” “standing in someone else's shoes,” “reading a person's mind” and “he knows me like a book” are a few more.

In Chapter 2, you read about all the things a child can do when he learns to read people's faces and body language. He can understand how people feel. He can understand the meaning behind words people say. He can predict what people will do. And he can respond sensitively to people, based on their messages.

But useful as these skills are, they're limited without the basic insights and vocabulary that let us really tune in to others. Read on to learn how to help your child take his first steps in this direction.



Liam is starting to tune in to what's going on in his big brother's mind. He isn't sure whether he should believe him because he knows how his mother feels about watching TV, and he knows how much his brother wants to watch TV.