

“In Between” Thinking

The Aim of the Game



Some children are ‘all or nothing’ or ‘black and white’ thinkers, and it can be difficult to get them to see the ‘grey areas’. You might notice:

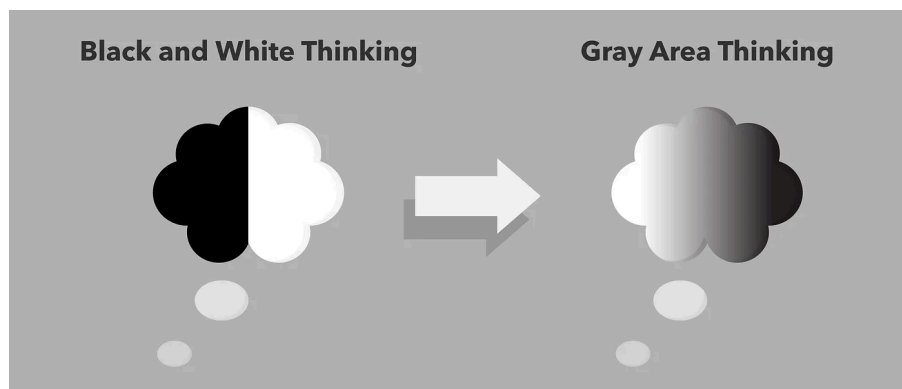
- Lots of talk about being “good” or “bad”
 - Difficulty accepting the word “no”
 - Big emotional responses to negative feedback (like thinking they’re a “failure” if a teacher suggests a change in their work)

The aim is to use our words to show children that there can be “in between”

Why it Happens

Black-and-white thinking can feel like it makes sense, and it can be calming because it puts things into easy categories.

That is why children need modelling to show that the answer could be somewhere “in between” and that is okay.



If we challenge the thoughts directly, it can make children 'dig deeper' into that thinking. Instead, we can show them the range of other possibilities by **doing 'think alouds'**...

Ways to Do It

Wonder aloud about some alternative explanations. Use sentence starters that signal in-betweens like:

e.g. *"**Maybe** they don't want to play that game because they want to be outdoors for play time"*

e.g. *"**Sometimes** I feel sad for a while, but it changes when I get into the day and my brain gets busy"*

When you hear "I can't", use 'growth mindset' scripts such as:

e.g. *"I don't know all my 7 times tables **yet**... but I will one day if I will keep practising them"*

e.g. ***I am learning to** skip with a skipping rope"*

When praising or correcting the child, use **specific statements** (instead of telling them they are being "good" or "bad"):

e.g. *"I loved it **when** you noticed your friend was hurt and went to check on them"*

e.g. *"You did some great writing **because** you remembered your finger spaces".*

e.g. *"You were a good boy **because** you listened to dad say there was 5 minutes left and finished playing"*

Saying 'no' in a different way:

e.g. *"**When** you have done your teeth and put your clothes on, **then** you can play Lego"*

E.g. *"**First** get to the end of the worksheet. **Next**, you can have some free choice time"*

e.g. *"I can tell you really want to talk. I am going to the staffroom, **but instead** you can walk with the duty teacher".*

e.g. *"Hm... we need to go now **but we can** take it with us" instead of "no, you can't stay and play with that toy".*

e.g. *"**Not now / not today**. We can do it <give another time>"*

Showing the child how to repair situations, so they know they can make recover from mistakes and make a 'bad' day 'better':

e.g. *"Oh dear. You've made a big mess! **We can make it better by** cleaning it up together"*

e.g. *"Oops. You made a mistake. That is okay. Mistakes grow our brains. **What can you do to fix it?**"*

e.g. *"**Next time...** <describe what you want to see instead>"*