

READY TO USE

NO
PREP!

LESSON 10

Ages 7-9

Flexible vs Rigid Thinking

I can try it
a different way.



Flexible Thinking

I can't!



Rigid Thinking

Lesson 10: Flexible vs Rigid Thinking

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TEACHER GUIDE

Ages: 7–9 | SEL – Self-Regulation & Problem-Solving

Lesson Goal

Children learn to notice the difference between rigid and flexible thinking, especially when plans change, and practice responding to change in a supportive, non-judgmental way.

This lesson focuses on awareness, not correctness. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers—only noticing how we respond.

Key Skills Practiced

Cognitive flexibility
Emotional awareness during change
Problem-solving & adaptability
Reflective thinking
Self-compassion

Materials Used (attached)

Visual cards:

Rigid Thinking / Flexible Thinking / Trying Another Way

Only One Way / More Than One Way

Stuck Thinking / Willing to Try / Not Wanting to Change

Scenario cards (everyday changes):

Plans changing, new seat, cancelled activity, different teacher, etc.

Worksheet: “Flexible or Rigid?”

Reflection Page

Teacher Notes & Guidance

✓ What to Reinforce

Flexibility is a skill, not a personality trait

Rigid thinking often shows up when feelings are big

Needing time ≠ doing something wrong

✗ Avoid

“You should be flexible”

Praising only flexible responses

Turning the worksheet into a test

Differentiation Tips

Allow verbal answers instead of writing

Let children point or gesture instead of speaking

Model your own thinking:

“I felt disappointed, and I tried another way.”

Closing Thought (say aloud)

“Everyone has rigid thinking sometimes.

Flexible thinking grows when we feel safe and supported.”

Lesson 10: Flexible vs Rigid Thinking

STEP 1-3

Warm-Up: What Is “Thinking”? (5 minutes)

Teacher says (child-friendly language):

“Thinking is the way our brain tries to understand what’s happening. Sometimes our thinking is stretchy, and sometimes it feels stuck.”

Ask:

“Have you ever expected one thing, and something else happened instead?”

“How did your body feel when that happened?”

➔ Normalize all answers. Avoid labels like good/bad.

Visual Teaching: Rigid vs Flexible Thinking (10 minutes)

Show the thinking cards.

♦ Rigid Thinking

Use visuals like Only One Way, Stuck Thinking, Not Wanting to Change.

Explain:

“Rigid thinking means our brain says: ‘It has to be this way.’

When things change, this can feel really hard in our body.”

Optional prompts:

“What might this child be thinking?”

“How might their body feel?”

◆ Flexible Thinking

Show Flexible Thinking, More Than One Way, Willing to Try.

Explain:

“Flexible thinking means our brain says: ‘This is different, but I can try.’

Flexible thinking does not mean liking the change.”

Key message (say clearly):

“You can feel upset and still be flexible.”

Scenario Cards: Noticing Responses (10 minutes)

Use the everyday change scenarios.

For each card, ask:

“What changed?”

“How might the child feel?”

“What would rigid thinking sound like here?”

“What might flexible thinking sound like?”

⚠ Important:

Do not force children to choose the “flexible” response.

Emphasize: We are noticing, not fixing.

Lesson 10: Flexible vs Rigid Thinking

STEP 4-5

Worksheet: "Flexible or Rigid?" (10 minutes)

Hand out the worksheet.

Instructions (say aloud):

"There is no right or wrong answer.

Put a check where you think the child's response fits today."

Explain columns:

Flexible Choice → trying, adjusting, staying open

Not Flexible Yet → feeling stuck, needing time

Let children work independently or with support.

➡ Walk around and observe without correcting.

Reflection Page (5-10 minutes)

Children may draw or write.

Read questions aloud:

What was one change we talked about today?

How did that change feel for you?

What might help next time something changes?

End by reading together:

"It's okay to need time when things change."

TEACHER NOTES

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Rigid Thinking



Flexible Thinking



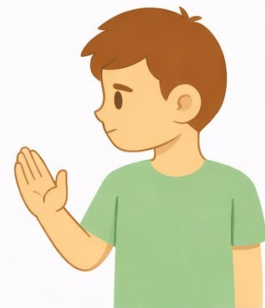
Trying Another Way



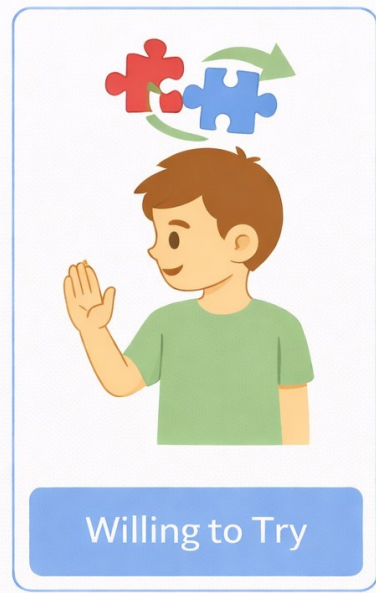
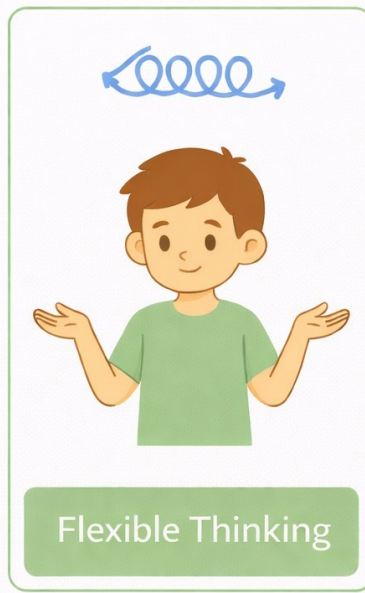
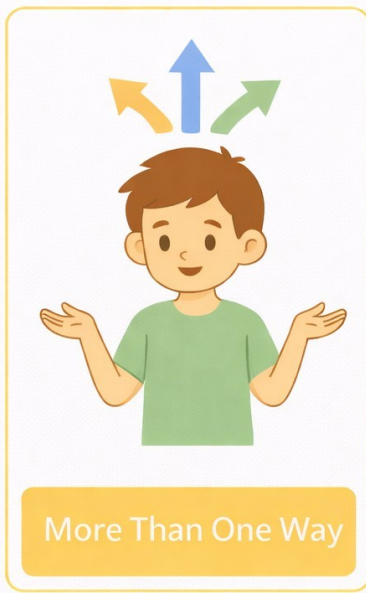
Only One Way



Stuck Thinking



Not Wanting
to Change





My plan changed.



A different teacher today



Plans are cancelled.



I sit in a new place.



The activity is cancelled.



Things are different today

Flexible or Rigid?

There is no right or wrong answer.
We are just noticing how the child responds to to change.

Check the column that best matches how you might respond today.

	 Flexible Choice	 Not Flexible Yet
 Soccer is canceled.	☐	☐
 The child has a new seat today.	☐	☐
 The child's ice cream melted.	☐	☐
 The class will do a different activity today.	☐	☐
 The game is a little different than expected.	☐	☐
 The schedule looks different today.	☐	☐

Talk about how the child might handle the changes better, if needed.



Reflection Page

Let's think and talk about how things went today.

Fill in your answers below. You can draw a picture or write your answers. 🍌

1. What was one change we talked about today? ☐ draw ☐ write



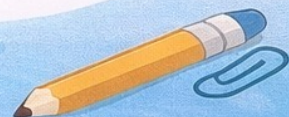
2. How did that change feel for you? ☐ draw ☐ write



3. What might help when something changes next time?



It's okay to need time when things change.





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