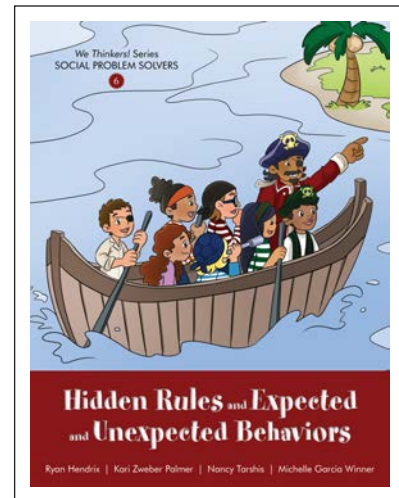


Unit 6

Hidden Rules and Expected and Unexpected Behaviors



Family Letter and At Home Activities

Every social situation has “hidden rules” or a range of social behavioral expectations that are implied while at the same time being understood by the majority of people. Hidden rules are not usually stated or explicitly taught, yet most of us recognize when someone is or isn’t following them.

Doing what is **expected** means understanding or figuring out those hidden rules and aligning our behavior (what we say and do) with the expectations of the situation. For instance, a hidden rule at a birthday party is that the birthday boy or girl opens the gifts. We understand that when we’re around other people, we adapt our behavior to keep others feeling comfortable and having good thoughts about sharing space with us, which ultimately keeps us feeling comfortable too.

It’s important to note that doing what is expected isn’t always fun. We all have to do things that we don’t enjoy, but that are expected of us to be part of a classroom, family, or community. Things like waiting to take a turn, putting away clothes, clearing the table, or cleaning up toys might not be fun,



but they’re all expected to move forward with the plan for the day or to get to the fun activities. Putting away clothes might not feel good, but being done with the task, having a clean space, getting positive praise from others, and having more time to play *does* feel good.

Doing what is **unexpected** means not figuring out and/or following the hidden rules for the given situation. When what we say or do is unexpected, people feel uncomfortable and don’t have good thoughts about sharing space with us. Ultimately this makes us feel uncomfortable too.

When we're involved in social situations we don't always get our own behavior right. It's expected that we'll make mistakes; that's being human. At times we all do, or say things that are unexpected, and make others feel uncomfortable. What's important is what we do about all those "oops" moments. When we figure out that we've done something unexpected and created an uncomfortable thought and feeling in someone else, it's expected we make the effort to try to fix or change those thoughts.

As you engage with your child in different settings, talk about the hidden rules of the situation. Kids with social learning challenges don't have the social radar to figure these out on their own, even hidden rules that to you might seem obvious. And even some kids without social learning challenges (adults too!) need help understanding them. Help your child observe expected and unexpected behaviors they notice in others! The more we can help our children become better observers of social information the better equipped they will be to develop social awareness and social self-awareness!

Social Thinking® Concepts Introduced*

In the storybook *Hidden Rules and Expected and Unexpected Behaviors: Pirate Adventure*, Evan, Ellie, Jesse and Molly take an adventure on the high seas. They board a pirate ship and learn about the hidden rules of being part of a pirate crew. They explore what is expected and unexpected when sailing on the ship and looking for buried treasure. When the kids are following the hidden rules, everyone on the ship feels comfortable and has good thoughts, including the kids!



Ways to practice these concepts at home

- In the teaching unit associated with the story, a green thought bubble is paired with good/comfortable thoughts, while a red thought bubble is paired with uncomfortable thoughts. Images to create these props are included at the end of this letter. Simply cut them out (one for your child and one for you) and glue or tape both to a ruler so you end up with one prop that's two-sided: one side green and the other side red. Have fun using them!
- Look at characters in books, comics, TV shows, movies, etc. and figure out how they are feeling. Talk about how the expected/unexpected actions of one character impact another character, the thoughts they might have, the way they



feel, etc. Work with your child to problem solve ways the characters could have “fixed” things they did that made others feel uncomfortable. Talk about how the characters would feel once the unexpected behaviors had been changed. Use your red and green thought bubbles while you watch a TV program to visually reinforce that you’re having a comfortable/uncomfortable thought about what a character is doing.

- Do anything out of the ordinary or unexpected in your family routines. Have fun and be silly! You’re giving your child lots of practice in noticing expected/unexpected behaviors in others and building social observation skills. For example: get in the bath with your clothes on, put shoes in the kitchen sink, or put a plant on a plate and serve it for dinner. Label the actions as “unexpected” and talk with your child about why they’re unexpected. Remember, something is unexpected because it is breaking a hidden rule for the situation and/or the people around you.
- Keep context in mind! Hidden rules are context specific, meaning a rule may not be a rule across all settings, so avoid being too general in talking about hidden rules with your child. For instance, it’s a hidden rule that kids don’t remove their shoes and socks and walk barefoot at a grocery store. But that may be perfectly expected behavior at home. How about at a friend’s house, or Grandma’s house, or at a picnic? What’s the hidden rule for shoes and socks there? Always think about the situation when you’re talking about hidden rules and expected/unexpected behavior.
- Doing what is expected isn’t always fun. To be part of a group it’s expected that we all think about others and that often translates into doing things we might not think are fun. Model this thinking for your child by talking out loud about the things you have to do that you don’t love but that you *are* happy to do and/or get done.
- Encourage your child to talk about what others are doing in their environment and label those behaviors as expected/unexpected. Provide praise when their observations are accurate. Remember that part of learning good social skills is having greater self-awareness of what is happening to people around you! It’s often easier for kids to notice the behaviors of others rather than turn inward to look at their own behaviors. Self-reflection is a higher-level social thinking skill. So at first, focus on others’ behaviors.
- After a while, build self-awareness in your child of his/her behaviors. Point out times when your child is doing things that are expected and making others feel good. Describe how the child’s behaviors made you or others feel. Label your emotions and connect them to your specific thoughts. You can also talk about times children are doing something unexpected and the feelings others may be having in response. Don’t stop there, though. Help them figure out how they can change what they are doing by brainstorming some alternate choices. It’s important that children learn it’s possible to change others’ thoughts and feelings!

A word of caution! When talking to your child about his/her behavior, point out **lots** more positive than negative examples to keep your child feeling good about using the vocabulary and learning these concepts!

- Use the vocabulary regularly and often! Catch those everyday moments when people are doing things that are making others feel good about being together and playing/working with them. Talk about other family members, friends, neighbors, etc. to help your child understand that we are all having thoughts about each other all of the time!
- You can also talk about times you have done things that were unexpected and how you changed (or didn't!) your behavior and the consequences that followed. We all make mistakes, we all try to repair them, we all keep thinking about each other!
- One final word: don't get caught up in unexpected! Behavior change is typically on the mind of any parent or educator faced with an individual who is continually demonstrating unexpected behaviors. It can also be fun to spot unexpected behaviors in others and it's often a lot more obvious, so examples can be easier to find. Just keep your observations and conversations balanced and give equal attention to noticing situations where people are doing a great job following the hidden rules and showing expected behavior in a situation. After all, isn't that what we're all striving for – to help our children learn to be part of a group in a way (expected) that everyone feels good about being together?

*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.

