

Shaping Perspective Taking in Parents and Children

This tip sheet will give you as a clinician some guidelines for when and how to support perspective-taking, drawing from the list of ideas in the flexible perspective taking chapter.

Flexible perspective taking can be helpful when parents or children are stuck in unhelpful stories that maintain rigid and inflexible patterns of behavior. You might shape this skill when:

- Parents need support in developing sensitivity and responsiveness to their children
- Children need support in developing theory of mind or empathy
- Parents or children have difficulty tracking how their behavior works
- Parents or children are “stuck” in a story about how things *should* be
- Parents or children are “stuck” in a story that is black and white; eg, “My child “always” or “never...”
- Parents or children are “stuck” in a story about their own shortcomings or those of their child

Tips about how to shift perspective: Calling upon Relational Frame Theory (RFT), we come to understand our “self” through understanding three key relations that have been reinforced over time as we are socialised: I – You, Here – There, and Then -Now. Using these relations, you may create experiential exercises that will help shift your client’s perspective. In the context of this shifted perspective, parents may be able to engage in more flexible behavior, and to better track their responses to their child. For example:

- Have parents imagine themselves in a challenging moment with their child...and then walk back in time to a moment when they felt they were parenting well...and have them notice that they are the same across these two time points (Then – Now).
- Have parents imagine what it might be like in their child’s shoes by first asking them to go back in time to when they were their child’s age, and to place themselves in a specific memory, describing it in detail... and then have them place themselves in their child’s shoes, looking out from their child’s eyes (I – You).
- Have a child who is struggling in school imagine him or herself in a situation in which they are feeling confident and skilled in another domain...and have them notice that they are the same person in each situation, with two very different experiences in these different situations (Here-There).

The ultimate goal of shaping flexible perspective taking is to help clients develop awareness of the Observer You, or Self-as-Context: that there is a safe and stable perspective from which one can observe the world and all of one’s experiences.