

Let's Discuss - *Lateral Thinking & Problem Solving Skills for Children*

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Children think laterally or divergently when they play

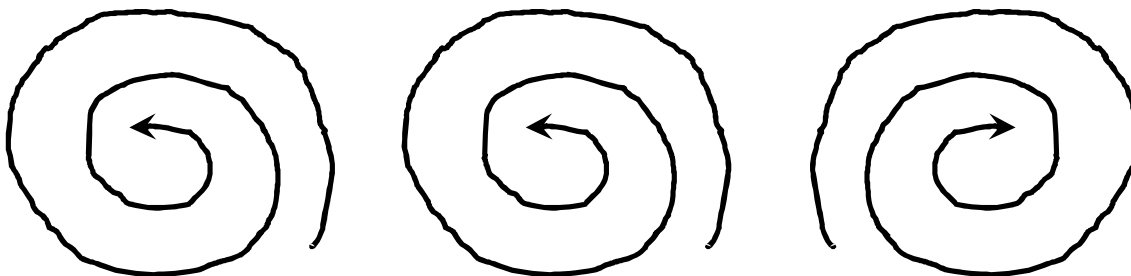
Lateral thinking can be known by a different name, “divergent thinking”. This is thinking that is open ended with many solutions that can be sought for one task.

Children tend to think this way when they are playing or exploring. They use their imagination and turn an everyday object such as a cardboard box into a house, car or plane, and will spend hours redesigning it and exploring alternative uses.

Lateral Thinking Activities

Try these lateral thinking activities with the children. Ask the children to either write down their answers, or one by one call out answers and write a list on the board.

- ◆ Ask the children in groups how many uses they could find for a blanket?
- ◆ Ask the children in groups to identify all the things that are red?
- ◆ Ask the children how many uses they could find for an empty tin can?
- ◆ Ask the children how many uses they could find for a wire coat hanger?
- ◆ Ask the children how many uses they could find for a 2 metre length of string?
- ◆ Ask the children what they think this picture could be:



- ◆ Which is the odd one out?

Learning to think laterally is fun!

The ability to think laterally will help children to find solutions to the problems that occur in daily life.

These skills will help them to deal with more challenging problems that may occur in later life.

Encourage children to be creative and use their imagination.

The Importance of Problem Solving

As a child care professional working with primary school age children, you may have noticed that not all the children in your care have the ability to problem solve. They give up easily, even on a minor problem, or get angry or frustrated, and then may feel a failure and in turn resentment because they haven't been able to find an answer. If this is happening now to a child of say 9 or 10 years of age, imagine how those feelings will manifest when the child is say 14 or 15 years or even older.

Teach children problem solving techniques as they will be a valuable life skill for the child, now and when they are in their adult years.

- ◆ Encourage children to persevere with a problem to try to find an answer.
- ◆ Encourage children to recognise that one problem may have a number of possible answers.
- ◆ Help children to understand that some problems do not have an easy answer. That is just life. It is not a failure on their part.
- ◆ Help children to master the art of lateral thinking, as this will help them to find creative ways to solve their difficulties and in turn will encourage the child to feel good about themselves, and develop high self esteem.

Problem Solving Activities for Primary School Age Children

The first 2 activities need to be closely supervised and are best conducted in a large open room.

- ◆ Ask the children to work out how each child can get from one side of the room to the other without touching the floor? (No climbing on furniture) *Answer—walk on sheets of cardboard or newspaper.*
- ◆ How can two children get their friend from one side of the room to the other without touching their friend? (Safety issue for the playleader—ensure 2 bigger children are with their smaller friend, and remember to tell children to bend at their knees when lifting.) *Answer—carry their friend using a fireman's lift with cloth over their arms.*
- ◆ Ask the children to work out if you have 8 sausage rolls and there are 24 children, how can you ensure each child has an equal share? *Answer—cut each one into thirds.*
- ◆ Children in pairs—each pair to decide who is going to get a KitKat bar. The only rules are that they are not allowed physical contact (violence) during the discussion period. If they cannot decide who is to collect the KitKat it is to be returned to the playleader. *Answer—encourage children to negotiate why they should get the bar i.e. "I am thinner and need more nourishment" or "I need more energy because I'm going out to play football" - perhaps they will decide to share the bar*

We read in the news of teenagers not being able to cope with a problem that they may consider to be of epic proportions, when really if they had been taught lateral thinking and problem solving skills at a younger age, they would be in a better position to manage the day to day challenges that life throws at them.

Being a teenager has never been easy, and today is no different, so anything that can help them to survive has to be good.