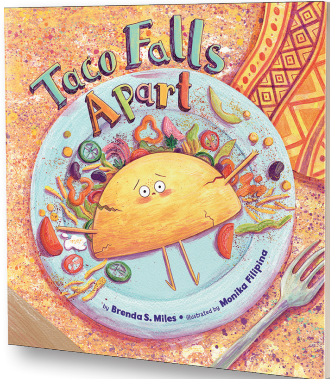




Helping Your Child Overcome One-Sided Thinking

by Brenda Miles, PhD



This excerpt from *Taco Falls Apart* explains how thoughts, feelings, and actions are connected and provides strategies to support your child as they learn about this connection.

You can purchase the full book with 20% off and free domestic shipping [here](#). Enter code **MPKIDS20** at checkout.

How the mind works—with thoughts that can't be seen or touched—can be difficult for children to understand. But young children can benefit from the wonders of neuroscience when complex ideas are made more concrete. What we know about the brain and mental health is indisputable; thoughts, feelings, and actions are all connected. In other words, what we think, what we feel, and what we do all work together. When Taco thinks he can't do something at the start of the story, he feels sad and defeated, and he doesn't try to be all the taco he can be. In the end, changing his thoughts changes the outcomes. Taco thinks he can be a terrific taco, so he stands tall and pulls everyone together, including himself!

Thoughts, feelings, and actions move in multiple directions

Research shows that children as young as 5 or 6 years of age understand that changing thoughts on purpose can help improve feelings. This sequence is featured in the story. In life, the relationship is more complicated with thoughts, feelings, and actions affecting each other in multiple directions. For example, how you feel can affect what you think and what you do. What you do can affect how you feel and what you think. What you think can affect what you do and how you feel, and so on.

When you speak with young children, it's probably easiest to start with the sequence featured in the story: thoughts → feelings → actions. If young children can understand this specific sequence—and research suggests they can—then speaking about changing thoughts to change feelings and actions is a solid next step. Beyond that, it takes quite a bit of cognitive flexibility to understand how thoughts, feelings, and actions can influence each other in multiple directions.

Children can benefit from knowing about the thoughts → feelings → actions sequence, without knowing about all the other directions. Talk about think-feel-do as a trio, a loop, a circuit, or a combo where all the elements stick together, to keep complex ideas accessible for your child. If your child needs further support understanding, talk about other things that go together in a trio like rain, clouds, and rainbows!

One-sided thinking

Thoughts are big influencers in the think-feel-do circuit. That means it’s important for kids to take a closer look at what they are thinking. Thoughts that make us feel badly about who are—or very worried about the past, present, or future—are often one-sided, untrue, and unhelpful. One-sided—and often inaccurate—thoughts tend to fall into specific categories. Here are some common examples. It’s not always easy to slot a thought cleanly into one type of thinking. Often, one-sided thoughts will fit into more than one category.

ONE-SIDED THINKING	
Future-For-Sure Thoughts	Thinking you know what is going to happen—for sure—in the future <i>Example: I’m going to forget my dance routine at the recital tomorrow!</i>
Ignoring-the-Good Thoughts	Ignoring or downplaying positive events that happened, and focusing on negative events or what went wrong <i>Example: We won, but I missed 10 shots in the soccer game today.</i>
Ever-Never-Always Thoughts	Thinking about situations—or yourself—in extreme and unchangeable ways, using words like never, ever, or always <i>Example: I can never do anything right!</i>
All-Eyes-On-Me Thoughts	Thinking that everyone is watching you, thinking about you, and judging you—usually in negative ways <i>Example: Everyone is staring because no one likes my style.</i>
Making-It-Big Thought	Taking a small situation or concern and making it much bigger in your mind <i>Example: Sally didn’t play with me today, so I guess she doesn’t want to be my friend anymore.</i>

Encourage some detective work

Changing one-sided, unhelpful thoughts can reset the think-feel-do circuit and produce more positive outcomes. Seeing both sides is crucial. But how? First, help your child understand these thinking styles. They can be tough to recognize and remember, so consider writing them down and have your child add some drawings to help make them memorable. This could be the start of a Thinking Menu described below. When your child is upset and you suspect one-sided thinking, consult the chart together. Discuss the thought, consider the style, and start playing detective. Together, search for evidence that 1) supports the thought and 2) doesn’t support the thought. If your child’s brain has lots of ignoring-the-good-thoughts, encourage your child to acknowledge the positive and find evidence to support a new perspective. “Sure, you missed some shots, but did you score any goals? And did you keep trying no matter what?” Give your child time to generate some evidence independently to challenge unhelpful thoughts. Your child’s think-feel-do circuit is more likely to reset when key ideas are generated from your child’s own brain.

This Article’s Author

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