



## THEORY OF MIND: WHAT IT IS AND HOW YOUR CHILD CAN DEVELOP IT



BY HEARING FIRST TEAM | SEPTEMBER 21, 2017  
LSL DAY BY DAY | LSL OUTCOMES, LSL STRATEGIES, PARENT ADVICE, CELEBRATE LSL

What are your thoughts about thinking? If your child is deaf or hard of hearing, it's important to incorporate language about thinking and feeling into your routines and conversations to teach something called Theory of Mind (ToM). Learn why it's important to teach the ToM process to your child with hearing loss and how to support development from day one!

As our children learn to understand their own thoughts and emotions, they are also learning to think about what family members, friends, pets, even book characters are thinking and feeling. However, we can't see the thoughts, feelings and ideas of others, so how do we understand what people are thinking? It turns out; we engage in a process called Theory of Mind (ToM) where we make 'theories' or guesses about what others are thinking by matching our own experiences with subtle linguistic cues, actions or facial expressions of others.

### What is ToM?

Theory of mind is the ability to recognize and put into language our own unique thoughts, feelings and beliefs and to understand that other people have perspectives, thoughts and beliefs different from our own. This skill is the foundation of our social relationships and is instrumental in higher level thinking and literacy skills and is especially important for children with hearing loss, who can sometimes unintentionally miss subtle incidental conversation and linguistic cues. Though this skill typically

emerges around age four, the learning process begins in the early months of infancy as babies observe, listen, learn and interact with their family members. For more information on ToM development, see: [“Tuning In” to Others: How Young Children Develop Theory of Mind](#)

### **Why is ToM Important for Children with Hearing Loss?**

Historically, children with hearing loss have shown significant delays in the development of ToM due to reduced auditory access to the conversational language around them. These developmental delays of key Theory of Mind skills can negatively impact their future social relationships and academic achievement. The good news is that, with improved early and full-time auditory access through hearing technology and parents’ use of intentional “thinking” language, children with hearing loss can develop ToM in tandem with their hearing peers. Helping your child build ToM can enable them to:

- Build conversational skills
- Better understand subtle social and linguistic cues
- Increase understanding of figurative language, verbal reasoning and critical thinking
- Support narrative comprehension and development
- Establish and maintain lasting social relationships

### **How You Can Support Your Child’s ToM Development**

Using language about thinking and feeling in your daily interactions can help your child hear and develop vocabulary for their own thoughts and emotions and learn to listen, look and think beyond concrete actions to understand the thoughts, emotions and motivations of others. You can integrate ToM language into reading time, while watching movies and during your everyday conversations and interactions at home and in the community. Download our handout containing age-specific tips to help you support your child’s development and teach them Theory of Mind from day one:

Teaching your child to think and use the language of thinking and feeling will help them to a bright future of conversational, academic and social success. It’s a way of thinking!

### **Additional Resources:**

- [http://changingminds.org/explanations/theories/theory\\_of\\_mind.htm](http://changingminds.org/explanations/theories/theory_of_mind.htm)
- <http://leader.pubs.asha.org/article.aspx?articleid=2615504>
- [https://www.ted.com/talks/rebecca\\_saxe\\_how\\_brains\\_make\\_moral\\_judgments#t-339005](https://www.ted.com/talks/rebecca_saxe_how_brains_make_moral_judgments#t-339005)
- <http://www.hanen.org/helpful-info/articles/tuning-in-to-others-how-young-children-develop.aspx>
- <http://www.kidsdevelopment.co.uk/youngchildrenstheoryofmin>