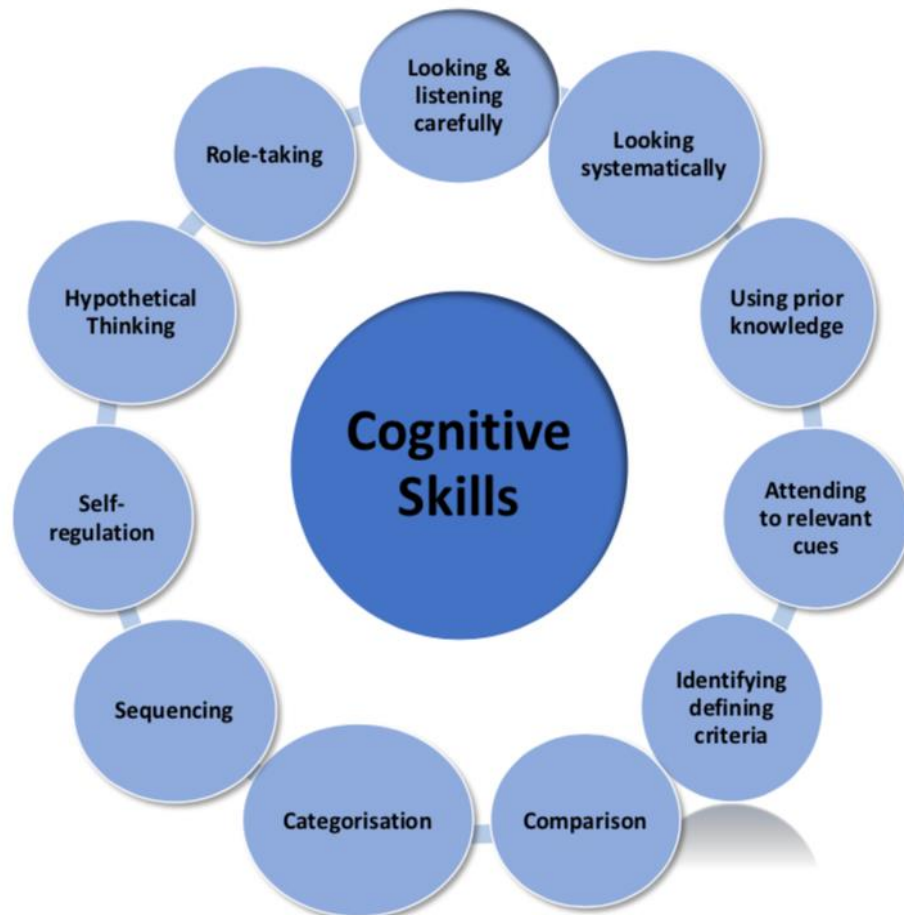


Cognitive Skills Information for Parents

What are Cognitive Skills?

Cognitive skills are brain based abilities that have more to do with the mechanisms of how we learn, remember, problem solve and pay attention. Cognitive skills underpin all aspects of learning. They are divided into these areas:



Looking and listening carefully

Encouraging children to focus and concentrate on a certain task i.e. questions about a story or when you out on a walk ask your child about your surroundings. Make sure your child is focussed on listening to your answer and looking at you when you are talking. Model this behaviour to your child and show them how to listen inventively.

Looking systematically

Developing looking systematically helps in all aspects of the curriculum. A simple example of how looking systemically can help our learning is knowing that reading and spelling words happens from left to right. This means when the children are writing words/sentences they know how to organise themselves and the only thing they are having to think about is the sound. The rest has been learned prior. Another example of looking systematically can be completing a technology task where they have to build something- they need to be able to organise their thoughts and plan what steps need to be in what order.

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Using prior knowledge

Encourage your child to remember previous learning. At the start of every topic we ask the children what they already know. When introducing a spelling sound or moving on to new area in maths – we remind the children of things we have done in the past and how they can help us with what we are learning now.

Attending to relevant cues

It is essential for your child to be able to focus on relevant cues that is going to help develop their learning. For example, the parent/teacher saying “have you got your listening ears on?” indicates to the child that you are going to tell them something important and they have to concentrate in listening. If you say “look carefully”, they are going to be looking for something important. In relation to reading comprehension if it says ‘on page 12’ then the children go straight to page 12 and look for the answer and not look through the whole book.

Identifying defining criteria

It is very important that we help children with this important thinking process. We ideally want the child to be able to realise what we are wanting them to do/learn. For example, when writing a sentence we might be looking for at least one connector, therefore this is the learning aspect of the day, do they understand and use connectors correctly. This is identifying what our expectations are and what we want them to be able to do. It is also good skill for themselves whilst completing evaluation or peer assessment. This can also be used when comparing items – do they themselves have defining criteria that helps them compare and categorise.

Comparison and Categorisation

These two can be put together as it a very similar skill. Have conversations with your child about a variety of things. Can they compare colours/food/toys etc heavy/light, hot/cold, big/small. Can they compare these more to then categorise items. They can talk about their toys or foods that they like, dislike and why. Think about their toys, can they say which toys are big and small and then categorise them i.e. got wheels/no wheels, talks/doesn't talk. This can help the children organise things in their heads. Topic related ideas could be talking about minibeast. Can the children categorise different minibeasts using certain identify criteria, and then compare those minibeast based on their findings.

Sequencing

Again sequencing from an early age can help with organisation of thoughts and ideas which continues to develop as your child gets older. Support your child by laying down 5 different coloured blocks and put them in a straight line and see if they can copy your pattern when they can do this the next step is to put up a piece of card between you and child and see if the remember the sequence. You could do this with numbers or coding apps too.

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Self-regulation

This cognitive skill allows us to self-regulate our body and our behaviour making sure we are focussed and able to concentrate. Self-regulation means we can stay on task and focus our attention. A simple way of doing this is playing games like 'Simon Says', the child must jump, but if you only say "Jump" and somebody jumps that person must sit out for the rest of the game. The last person standing wins. This shows the children have to listen carefully too. Children are constantly using their self-regulation cognitive skills in school, at home and with their friends. Think about a turn taking, waiting in line, not hitting people, staying in their seats whilst working, not wandering about etc. etc.

Hypothetical thinking

This cognitive skill is all about being able to predict or imagine what might happen. Developing this skill can help us consider relationships and people's feelings, it can help us with decision making, problem solving activities, and can encourage an enquiring mind. A good strategy for developing this skill is asking your child to imagine if they were invisible "where would you go?" and then ask them "why would they go there", or ask your child what they think might happen 'what will happen when you add hot water to the ice?' etc or 'how do you think ... would feel if they heard that?' etc

Role taking

Role taking has been theoretically linked with empathy because role taking increases one's cognitive understanding of other's feeling and therefore increases the likelihood of an emotional or deeper response. You can also ask them to take on the role of the 'teacher' can you show me how you made that – or 'you tell me why that happened?' This means that they are having to explain their ideas and thought which might make them understand them more.