

Lesson 1. Holding a Thought Inside Your Head

In this lesson we teach a student how to hold a thought inside their head without saying it out loud.

Tools needed: Two thought bubbles and two speech bubbles. While you might be able to purchase dry-erase thought bubbles online, you can also make your own:

1. Thought and Speech bubble
2. Print it and cut it out
3. Laminate with a laminating machine or cover with clear tape
4. Attach to a popsicle stick, straw, chopstick, or pencil with tape

People involved: The student and an adult (teacher or parent)

Dilemma: The student is learning about secrets and is learning to keep a secret (e.g., a surprise birthday party for someone). At this stage of learning the student is still unable to keep the surprise and tends to tell others without understanding the concept.

Lesson:

1. Introduce the concept: describe what a secret is.

“A secret means we know something that we are not supposed to tell other people. Basically, it is a thought we hold in our head.”

1. Give them a pencil and tell them you (the adult) are going to close your eyes and ask them to hide the object in the room where it can't be seen.
2. Tell them to keep their hiding place in their own mind (own thoughts) and not tell you where it is!
3. Once hidden, the adult continues to encourage them to keep the thought their own brain and not say it out loud.
4. Then, you should take out your thought bubble and explain that you have no idea in your thought bubble about where the pencil is hidden because you didn't see where it was hidden. Make sure to say that you also did not hear anyone talk about it since the student is not telling you because that is the point of the game.
5. Keep mentioning they are doing a really good job keeping the secret.

The reality is that many will find this very difficult! They will immediately tell you where it is hidden (“I am keeping a secret! I hid the pencil in the drawer!”).

1. When this happens, ask them to write where the pencil is hidden on their own thought bubble (“the pencil is in the drawer”).
2. They should also write on the speech bubble “the pencil is in the drawer.”

3. Have them hold the thought bubble by their head and the speech bubble by their mouth and say, “The pencil is in the drawer.”
4. Use a mirror or, if your site allows digital images to be taken and you have permission, take a picture of the student to show that when they know where something is, they are having a thought and that the speech bubble is showing how they said the thought aloud.
5. When they look at the picture of the two bubbles, explain that the bubbles help us to see what they were thinking and then what they said.
6. At this point, explain that if people say what they are thinking, then it is not a secret. That’s just telling people what you know.
7. Next, you should write what you learned about the pencil on your thought bubble “the pencil is in the drawer” and hold your thought bubble above your head. Tell them, “Your secret isn’t really a secret because I know where the pencil is hidden!” You can also write on your speech bubble, “the pencil is in the drawer” while saying it aloud.
8. You then need to go find the pencil.
9. Explain that there are times to keep our thoughts in our head, like when we are in class and other students get distracted if we say everything we are thinking. It makes other people feel calm when others around them keep their thoughts in their head, so they can focus on what they are doing! Teachers like it too when students keep their thoughts in their heads during teaching time, unless they are called on in class to answer a question or offer their thoughts.
10. Work with the student to help them learn that they can take control of their own thoughts by learning to keep them in their brain.

To teach this, ask the student to close their eyes tight. Hide the pencil somewhere else in the room, then write on your thought bubble where the pencil is hidden (without letting the student see what is written). Turn the thought bubble around backwards so all the student can see is the backside of the thought bubble (which is blank).

1. Ask them to open their eyes, then say, “I hid the pencil. I know where I hid it and I am keeping the thought to myself—it’s a secret for now. I wrote it on my thought bubble, but you can’t see my thoughts!”
2. Have them talk through why they can’t see your thoughts (because only the back side of the thought bubble is showing and it’s blank).
3. Explain you are doing a good job holding your thought in your head. Show that your speech bubble is blank too.
4. Then ask, “Would you like to know where the pencil is hidden?” Most will say yes.
5. Have them write their thought (“I wonder where the pencil is?”) on their thought bubble and also on their speech bubble. Once they communicate this, tell them where you hid it.

6. Have them try again to hold a thought in their head. Direct the student to do just as you did.
 - Ask you to close your eyes
 - Hide the pencil
 - Write the hiding place on the thought bubble
 - Turn the thought bubble so you can't see what is written
 - Tell you to open your eyes
7. Make sure to let them know they are doing a good job figuring this out but telling them exactly what they did well, "Wow, you did it! You kept your thought in your brain! I don't know where you hid the pencil! Great job keeping a secret!"

I've found that this simple physical act of having students turn their thought bubble from front to back helps them get a better idea of how they can have a thought but not share it and keep it to themselves. The use of the thought bubble helps them concretely get the idea of holding the thought in their head, and the physical manipulation of the tool seems to help this concept come alive.

1. Use a mirror or take another digital picture of the student's thought bubble turned backwards and their blank speech bubble. Point out that you can't see their thought and that nothing is on their speech bubble. This means the student is learning to keep their thoughts in their head!

Reviewing the digital picture can help a student visually put the pieces together so the teaching makes sense. They can concretely see that keeping a thought private involves 1) having a thought (written on the thought bubble), 2) learning that others can't see their thoughts (because the thought bubble is turned backwards) and 3) not saying their thought aloud (the speech bubble is blank).

1. You will likely need to adapt the above and practice this lesson repeatedly to help the very literal, socially unaware students how know what to express through their language and what should stay in their thoughts.

Important note: Please make sure to discuss that some thoughts and secrets are important to keep in their brains (surprise parties, mean words about other's appearance, sharing their thoughts during teaching time or when others are talking) but there are other secrets that they should never keep in their heads (someone hurting them or others, people touching them or others, etc.). If you believe the student may struggle to understand this concept, then slow down and develop other activities to teach good secrets vs. not good secrets.

Lesson 2. How Our Words Affect Another Person's Thinking

We all have moments when we say something that makes another person feel uncomfortable. Part of being in a social situation with others is being accountable to how our words and actions may impact what other people think and feel. Keep in mind that if you are working with a student individually, there are two people in the room who have thoughts and feelings.

Tools needed: Two thought bubbles and two speech bubbles, minimum. If you want to involve more students, you'll need more of the bubbles.

People involved: Two or more students (5th grade or older) to role play a situation. If there are not two students available for the role play, then the teacher and one student can do this together.

Dilemma: Similar to the lesson above, we are teaching that what we say or do can affect how someone else thinks and feels. In this lesson we are teaching this concept more deeply.

Lesson:

1. Encourage your students to hold their thought bubbles above their heads. Talk about how we all have thoughts about each other and it's common for us to have momentary thoughts about another person in the room. Those thoughts can be uncomfortable or comfortable or neutral, for example.
2. Begin by having each student in the group think a positive thought about another member of the group.
3. To introduce them to the thought bubbles and speech bubbles, have one kid at a time write their pro-social thought on the thought bubble and write down on the speech bubble how they would describe this thought to the other person.
4. Then have this student tell another student the pro-social thought.
5. Once the other student hears/receives the pro-social thought, then have that student write down, on their own thought bubble, how this comment makes them feel. Then also write down on the speech bubble what the student may say back to the original student about how these comments made them feel.
6. Discuss with students how people tend to feel better and react more positively when they hear positive comments versus negative comments that make people feel not as good.
7. Have each student in the room experience saying a pro-social comment to another student and then exploring each student's reaction to this type of comment. Talk about how we all have thoughts and when we say them aloud, the words can affect others positively or negatively.
8. Talk about the fact that people also may have negative thoughts but when those are directly stated, it makes them feel bad.

9. Give personal examples of how negative comments have made you think and feel. Define that “negative comments are those that might make the listener feel more negatively about themselves or others.”
10. Explain that it's okay to have negative thoughts about other people, as long as we know that most of the time these thoughts need to stay in our brain and not said out loud.
11. Have the students each write out something negative they have thought about another person (any person they can think of) on their thought bubbles. Have them keep their speech bubble blank.
12. Explain how having the thought does not negatively impact how that other person thinks and feels because it's not been shared.
13. Discuss what happens when people think a negative thought about one person and they share that thought with someone else. Discuss a scenario when they don't tell the negative thought to the person, but they do tell someone else the negative thought (This is called gossiping or “trash talking” and “talking behind someone's back.”). Discuss: What if a person tells others about your negative thought? Have the group talk about this type of negative sharing and how it might make the person being talked about think and feel if they found out. Explore with your group how they would feel if this happened to them.
14. Next explore the scenario where a person thinks a negative thought about a person and tells it to that person. How will that affect the person who hears this negative information? How will this person think about the person who said it? How will the person likely react? Use the thought and speech bubbles to have students write out this information and hold their thought bubbles over their heads and their speech bubbles next to their mouths.
15. Explore reactions. What if the student who was on the receiving end of the negative comment now responds by telling the other person that he's a “jerk” or the person tells other people how bad he was treated and by whom?
16. How does this type of situation end up? Do people build friendships from doing this or is this behavior what makes people upset? What if both people continue to say negative things? How can the situation escalate to even worse behavior?

Work with your students on strategies to help them realize that they have to keep control of the thoughts in their brain and be really careful about what they say. One strategy to teach is that in situations like this, we need to use what we call a “brain thought-to-talk filter.” Explain that we use our brain filters when we have less than positive thoughts and/or feelings about another person. We use a brain filter to make sure we don't say out loud what we are thinking in our brains.

- A filter traps things that you don't want to flow through. For instance, a coffee filter traps coffee grounds so people can enjoy coffee without it being ruined with bits of crushed up coffee beans in the cup. In a similar way, our brain filter traps the thoughts we don't want to allow through to our mouth to say out loud.

- If any student expresses a negative thought to someone else in the room, stop and re-explore the need to use the thought-to-talk filter. Have the student or adult who received the negative comment write down how the negative messages made him think and feel.
- Give more attention to the student who was hurt by the message than to the person who said it. Explore how the student who was hurt probably wants to say something non-complimentary back. Explore how this can just lead to more and more negative thinking (and talking) on everyone's part.
- If you are familiar with Social Situation Mapping, you can also connect the strategy of using a thought-to-talk brain filter to what we teach in the Social Behavior Mapping process.
- Continue to teach the cause and effect of brain filtering with how it makes others think and feel as a constant underlying lesson when teaching Social Thinking.

Lesson 3. Others Have Thoughts Even When We're Not Talking to One Another!

This lesson helps students better understand that even when they are silent, people notice one another and have thoughts!

Tools needed: Two thought bubbles and two speech bubbles (for a two-person group). Additional bubbles needed if more students are involved.

People needed: Two or more students plus a teacher.

Dilemma: Many of our quieter students think that if they're not talking (or no one is talking), people around them aren't having any thoughts. Sometimes people have reactions because the students aren't participating or contributing during a social encounter.

Lesson:

1. Select two students to role play a situation where they are spending some time together.
2. Student 1 stays silent, their speech bubble remains blank.
3. Student 2 isn't talking either, but notices that Student 1 doesn't say anything and begins to have confused or uncomfortable thoughts about why Student 1 doesn't talk.
4. Have Student 2 write out their thoughts on their thought bubble. (Student 2's speech bubble stays blank as well at this point.) Some examples:
 - "Student 1 must not like it here. Never ever talks."
 - "Student 1 must not like me."
5. Now have Student 1 go back and fill in their thought bubble. Even if silent, they are still noticing and having thoughts about the situation. For instance, Student 1 may be thinking:
 - "That person seems nice enough; I just don't know what to say!"
 - "What should I say? Why does this seem so easy for everyone else!"
6. Put both students' speech bubbles on the table for each to see so they realize that no one is saying anything.
7. Put both thought bubbles on the table and help students notice that each silent person is having a lot of thoughts, even though no one is talking.
8. Notice that Student 2 has uncomfortable thoughts about the situation or about what Student 1 was doing or saying (or not saying).
9. Encourage Student 1 to say something as simple as "hi" to demonstrate to Student 2 that they are at least thought of as friendly.

NOTE to adults: Keep talking about this idea with your students to help them understand that being silent doesn't mean others won't notice your presence or have no thoughts about what you do or

say. From there, you can begin to explore their social goals. What type of thoughts do you want others to have? How can you communicate with others in a manner that creates these thoughts?

As your students become more conscious of the thoughts and reactions they have based on what others do or say, make sure to teach from their perspective first before teaching about what others think about their actions or words. Then, you can take the teaching to a deeper level.

- How do you push yourself to use strategies you've learned in situations like this?
- How can we create a more positive inner coach that can encourage you to push through the anxiety and work on relating to others even when you're feeling stress?

Often you will find that at the heart of a pervasively silent student is a lot of anxiety—often social anxiety.

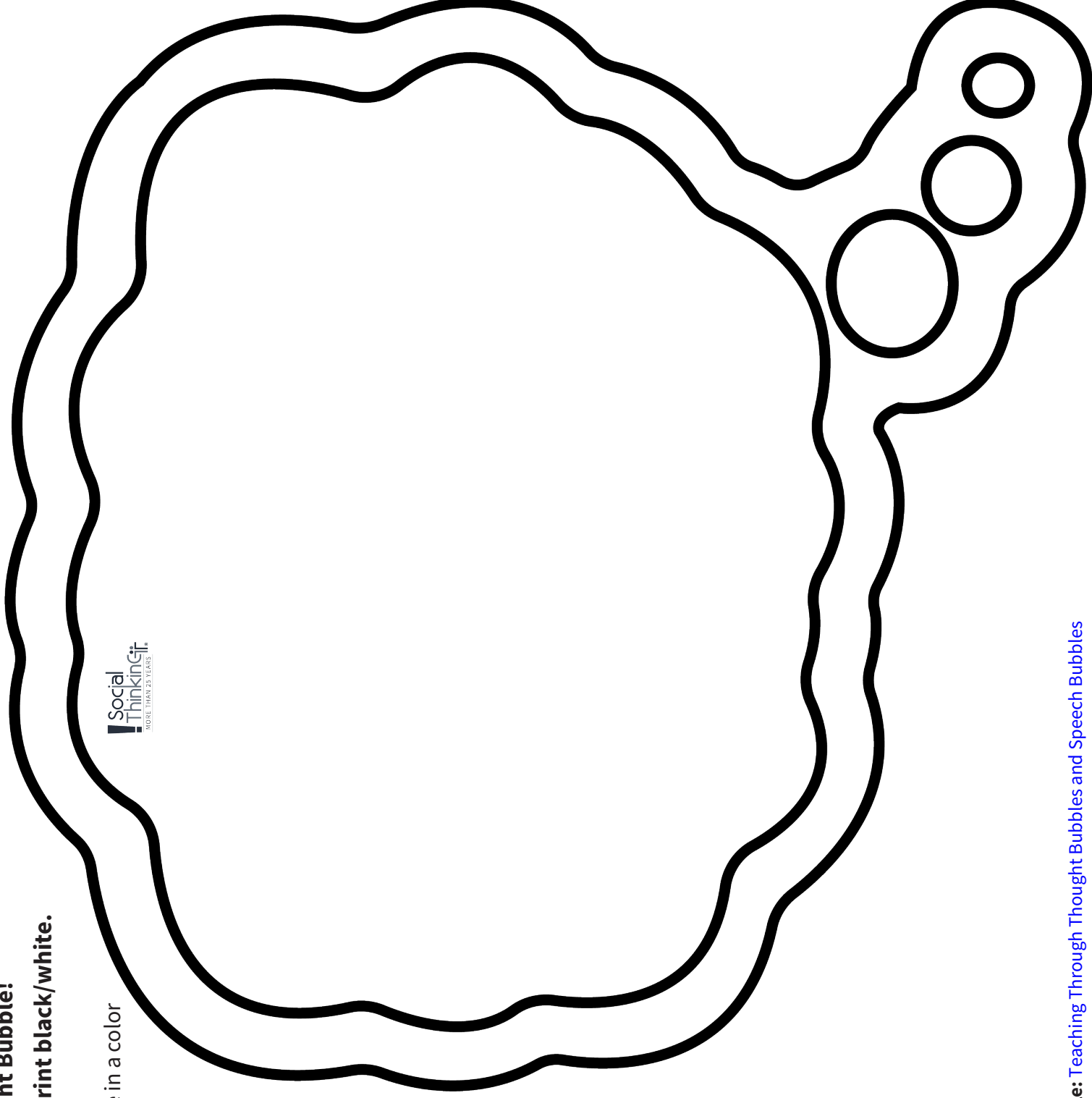
Make your own Thought Bubble!
Use this template to print black/white.

Step 1: Print

Step 2: Color in the frame in a color
of your choosing

Step 2: Cut

Step 3: Laminate



Check out the related article: [Teaching Through Thought Bubbles and Speech Bubbles](https://www.socialthinking.com/teaching-thought-bubbles-and-speech-bubbles)

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