

10 DOs and DON'Ts for Teaching Superflex

By Pamela Crooke and Michelle Garcia Winner

Superflex[®] has become super-popular! We have enjoyed hearing from so many people around the world about their love of Superflex and the Team of Unthinkables and Thinkables and the positive effect the Superflex curriculum has on helping individuals become better social thinkers and social problem solvers!

As with all Social Thinking products, our Superflex curriculum is a work in progress. Over the past six years of it being used near and far and being field tested by educators, clinicians and parents, we have learned a lot about how best to advise adults in using it. As you read the DOs and DON'Ts that follow, see how many align with your own experiences. If you're new to using Superflex, this guide will hopefully help you implement this engaging curriculum and its companion comic book.

Meanwhile, back in Social Town....

We hereby call to order this special Superflexible Town Hall Meeting for the adults of Social Town. On our agenda: Review and discuss the Dos and Don'ts for using the Superflex Curriculum.

Please review silently... (Watch out for Braineater!)

DO THIS

NOT THIS

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- 1** **DO** start by teaching how to be a social OBSERVER (Social Detective) before introducing them to their Superhero (Superflex).
- Superflex strategies rely on having an awareness of others and our own behaviors in order to self-regulate. Many of our kids lack basic social self-awareness. So, we always start by teaching our students to sharpen their own lens on the social world before asking them to change their behavior based on another's perspective. We begin by teaching them to be aware of the many different social expectations they have for others.

DON'T rush the concepts.

We know kids with social learning differences want to launch into learning about the Unthinkables and Thinkables, but learning core Social Thinking concepts is a slow and deep learning process. Kids often quickly learn the names of the Unthinkable characters without a deeper understanding.

HINT:

Skipping the process of teaching the core Social Thinking concept of becoming a Social Detective will almost always come back to haunt you. You'll find that you are "telling" students what they need to focus on rather

TIP:

We know kids love comics so we introduce social observation and socially based problem solving in *You are a Social Detective*. This will help you teach information starting with basic Social Thinking concepts.

- 2 DO** emphasize that Superflex isn't a comic book character that lives "outside" us all - SUPERFLEX IS YOU!

The Superflex in the curriculum and comic books we publish is an image of the main character's (Aiden) superhero. So in reading the book, make sure students understand this is Aiden's Superflex. All of us have a Superflex that looks exactly like us - not like Aiden's. The lessons in the curriculum are really only helpful if kids understand that they can *turn into* a Superhero and take on their own adventures!

TIP:

Have kids draw what their own Superflex might look like and encourage them to draw their personal core physical characteristics (e.g., gender, race, hair color, etc.). Feel free to put a skirt, leggings, shorts, or scarf on Superflex!

Ask your students "Where does Superflex live?" If they are unsure or if they say "he" lives with Batman or Spiderman or the like, then you should back up and teach that Superflex is in each of our brains. So, the correct answer is - "Superflex lives in my brain! I'm Superflex."

- 3 DO** empower kids to figure out their own team of Unthinkables and Thinkables. You'll have a greater level of buy-in if kids feel like

than teaching them how to figure it out on their own. Superflex should only be introduced after students understand basic Social Thinking concepts such as school smarts/social smarts, body/brain in the group, thinking with your eyes, expected/unexpected behavior, and being a Social Detective. Don't start with Superflex and the Unthinkables and avoid rushing to get to the Unthinkables!

DON'T use Superflex if students don't have a clear understanding of the difference between fantasy/pretend and reality.

CONSIDER THIS:

We are asking students to stretch their imaginations to *pretend* that tiny people or creatures live in their brains and guide their thinking and behavior. EEK! When you think about it like that, it's critical that kids understand that they don't literally have a rock in their brains or a Braineater octopus lurking in their heads!

Not all of our students have the ability to understand the difference between the real and the pretend world. If your student is echolalic, super literal and not easily tuned into the here and now, they likely are not ready for the use of Superflex during their 3-6th grade years.

However, as our more concrete thinking students age up into upper middle school, high school or young adulthood, they may find the concept of their Superflex appealing.

DON'T use UNTHINKABLE terms to describe the child. Avoid saying things like, "You're being a Glassman" or "Stop being such a

they are figuring out their own challenges and strengths (self awareness) and then a plan to overcome (behavior change).

TIP:

Kids love the Unthinkables, but can easily become overwhelmed if/when they realize that they may have many, if not ALL, of them!

Start by letting students know that YOU have your own Unthinkable team that you are working hard to defeat. Let them know that it's best to take on only one or two at a time. After all, that's all you can handle!

- 4 DO** link Superflex and the Unthinkables and Thinkables to academics and content standards.

TIP:

What better way to encourage learning than to wrap something as motivating as Superflex and the Unthinkables and Thinkables into literature!

The Common Core and State Standards focus on teaching—along with other easily connected targets—POINT of VIEW. You can use picture books, works of fiction, videos and real life playground examples to have students figure out which Thinkables or Unthinkables are in the brains of the characters in a story and when Superflex is showing up in a character's mind!

Rock Brain.”

TIP:

Instead, describe the actions that are part of the Unthinkable powers. For instance, "Looks like Braineater is here making your brain think about Minecraft" or "Watch out, I think Body Snatcher is trying to get your body out of the group!" This helps the students realize they have the power to bring their body back to the group or push their minds to focus on what is happening in the here and now.

Sometimes kids memorize the names of the characters without understanding their powers. Play games to show the connection between the characters and their powers. See video: [3 Ideas for Teaching Superflex](#) and related Thinksheet Unthinkable Mashup, and our game, *Superflex Superdecks*.

- DON'T** teach about the Unthinkable characters without teaching strategies to defeat them!

CONSIDER:

Put yourself in the child's shoes: You are the student and you "get it" that you have some challenges knowing how to filter and regulate and use your body and eyes in the same way as your peers. You are relieved and excited to learn that the Unthinkables in your brain are part of this and that YOU can become Superflex and overcome these pesky characters. But now what? How am I supposed to know what to do?

The first step toward helping create lessons involves reviewing the strategy ideas in *Superflex: A Social Thinking Superhero Curriculum*, and then expanding on strategies from there. Superflex and the Team of Unthinkables lack real teaching power without a student learning strategies

to defeat the powers of the Unthinkables!

- 5 DO** use the Social Detective and Superflex strategies with the general education population too!

The strategies are great, to some extent, for ALL kids and many schools have adopted the concepts into classrooms, school-wide and district-wide.

TIP:

Social Thinking strategies are designed for those students with average to way above average language and cognitive skills. So, it makes sense that the general population of students would be great candidates not only for *You are a Social Detective* and the *Superflex Curriculum*, but other Social Thinking concepts as well. One favorite among general education teachers (and exceptional education too) is called *Social Behavior Mapping*. Please find a free article about this concept on our website: www.socialthinking.com.

- 6 DO** be cautious of what outcomes you expect when using Superflex with younger students.

Superflex can be used with neurotypically developing younger children (K-2nd grade) because they can make sense of most concepts and even enjoy self-monitoring how they are keeping their Unthinkables at bay.

However, those younger students with social skill challenges typically lack the self-regulation to defeat their Unthinkables' powers. They enjoy learning about their Unthinkables, but they get frustrated very easily when they can't defeat them!

REMINDER: Superflex was designed for 3rd-5th graders with social learning challenges, but children in K-2nd can begin to learn

DON'T use the Superflex curriculum (as is) with students with limited verbal abilities or those who are just emerging into language (single words or short phrases).

WHY?

Superflex, along with most Social Thinking concepts and strategies, are designed to use LOTS of language to problem solve and understand the core teaching ideas. This is not to say that some educators haven't found creative ways of engaging their language limited students with the Thinkable and Unthinkable characters. BUT please be mindful that Social Thinking concepts were specifically designed for students with solid to strong language skills as all social concepts are taught with explicit language.

Let your common sense be your guide!

DON'T use Superflex concepts and strategies with preschoolers.

As mentioned above, Superflex focuses on self-awareness, self-regulation, and social problem solving. Preschoolers, especially those struggling to acquire social concepts, are just beginning to figure out that they are social beings.

Superflex is NOT developmentally appropriate for this age group—even those kids referred to as the "smartest!"

TIP:

Lay the groundwork for Superflex concepts by teaching Social Thinking Vocabulary using *The Incredible Flexible You*® curriculum we

about Superflex and the Unthinkables and Thinkables. However, do not push children of this age to figure out how to intentionally defeat their Unthinkables. Always start with concepts from *You are a Social Detective* first.

- 7 DO** link Superflex concepts to Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and Response to Intervention (RTI).

As many schools embrace the importance of SEL, PBIS, and RTI, Superflex and Social Detective concepts are excellent partners as they are part of the actual “interventions” tied to these initiatives.

TIP:

Looking for other curricula that support these initiatives and address self-regulation and social problem solving with a Social Thinking twist? Check out *The Zones of Regulation* and *The Incredible Flexible You* storybooks, music, and curriculum.

Also, take a look at casel.org to learn about social emotional learning and pbis.org for more information related to PBIS.

- 8 DO** take plenty of time to teach from many different angles.

Social Thinking strategies are complex and loaded with deep concepts. They aren't easily tackled in a short time. Also, consider that

publish.

This curriculum is designed for ages 4-7 (or 8+) and sets the stage for *You are a Social Detective* and Superflex materials, as they get a bit older.

DON'T turn Superflex concepts into a behavior plan or teach the concepts in a purely behavioral way.

Social Thinking concepts (including those in Social Detective and Superflex), were formulated to teach students to THINK and consider multiple factors to figure out how to problem solve which social skills to use in any given situation.

Behavioral teaching often strips the *thinking* part of the process and encourages students to memorize social behavior. While teaching scripts and memorization of social skills can be very helpful for younger or limited language students, this is not what Social Thinking is all about.

CONSIDER: This isn't a black-or-white argument because some students truly require a combination of behavioral teaching and what we refer to as Cognitive Behavior Therapy or CBT (Social Thinking is an example of a type of CBT). Please realize there is a difference and sometimes it's important to combine the two by teaching *why* we use certain social behaviors at certain times and reinforcing a child's use of different types of social problem solving rather than simply reinforcing *good behavior*.

DON'T rely on the Superflex handouts, the Superflex poster, and the Rock Brain comic book as your only tools to teach and build Superflex concepts.

HINT:

many core concepts can be included in PE, science, art, math and other subjects and environments.

TIP:

Be wary of trying to teach these complex concepts over a short period of time or only in one situation (e.g., therapy or treatment room). It's okay to have summer camps or semester long groups, but be realistic in your expectations given the short period of time with limited exposure across a variety of situations/environments.

REMEMBER:

Deeper learning and generalization is most likely to occur when we teach children the same concepts across more and more complex settings.

Learning about a concept almost always comes before the production of new skills. A student may be working on self-awareness, self-regulation and then self-control for quite a long time, just like we adults do! We can't make this learning quick just because an IEP encourages us to seek major behavior changes in a child within one year!

- 9 DO** involve parents/caregivers and make sure all know the vocabulary and are clear about expectations. Behavior change is often SLOW.

TIP:

Everyone should be on the same page in terms of what the expectations are for the child when using these materials.

Superflex was not developed to cure, fix, stop, eliminate, or extinguish behaviors. It was designed to boost awareness, give strategies for social problem solving, and empower students to be proactive in their own self-regulation and behavior change. This means the process is slow and not

The Superflex Curriculum Package comes in TWO parts, the Rock Brain comic book and the full Superflex Curriculum. This package of products routinely gets separated or a person in a school district, private practice, or a parent may have accidentally purchased the Rock Brain comic book thinking they didn't need the curriculum because teaching concepts were embedded in this initial comic book. They aren't.

This is also the case for those who have the Superflex poster. The Superflex and Rock Brain comic book and poster were designed to be supports for teaching - not the source!

Only teach these concepts if you are using the full curriculum.

The Thinkables are introduced in a companion teaching book in the Superflex series: *Social Town Citizens Discover 82 New Unthinkables for Superflex to Outsmart*.

DON'T let kids run away with the vocabulary in a way that reflects violence and STOP using if kids become obsessed with the negative behaviors of the Unthinkables.

It's a pretty easy leap for kids to go from "defeating" an Unthinkable to killing, maiming, mutilating, or destroying them. Nip this as soon as it emerges! We do not want kids to imagine violence in their brains or anyone else's.

TIPS:

We want to teach kids that we all **defeat** or lay the Unthinkables' powers to rest. They don't die and we don't kill them—they are always around ready to activate in our

magic.

Have students practice explaining how they might teach their parents/caregivers about Superflex and the Unthinkables and Thinkables. You'll see the holes in their understanding and then hopefully you can fill them with more explanation. Have the children try to figure out which Unthinkables get into adults' brains too.

Always share what you are teaching with parents/caregivers, teachers and other professionals.

10 DO have fun and be creative!

We've developed many fun characters in the form of 14 original Thinkables and Unthinkables, but there are so many more!

We asked kids to submit their ideas and they came up with over 500! We put together the top ones in our book, *Social Town Citizens Discover 82 New Unthinkables for Superflex to Outsmart*. In this book we focus on teaching 3-6th graders how Superflex got his/her power using the very cool Five-Step Power Plan! Also, check out the extra teaching tools we've developed for Superflex in the form of our game, *Superflex Superdecks*, and our teaching tool, *Unthinkable and Thinkable Double Decks*.

Most importantly, have fun and encourage your children or students to develop their own characters.

brains. If students have a hard time understanding this, then they probably aren't ready for Superflex quite yet!

Also, if kids seem to crave and become obsessed with the Unthinkables' behaviors, then stop using Superflex or shift to teaching Superflex ONLY with the Thinkables.

HOW?

Explain that their Unthinkables' powers are so strong that you consulted with the Social Town Committee and they advised enrolling in the Superflex Academy. Remove attention and access to the Unthinkables and focus on building the power of their Thinkables!

DON'T sell what you create!

Superflex, the Unthinkables, and Thinkables names, images, and the materials we've created surrounding them are all copyright protected. That means only we can create new products using them and make these products available for sale to others. While we want you to use what you create in your own classroom or home...please do not post and sell your version of our information anywhere!

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